

Marketing Plan

Introduction

Vermont Tech provides a high quality education with exceptional outcomes for its graduates. Its programs are well aligned with growing industries of the state and region, and graduates are the backbone of Vermont's workforce in healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, emergency services, and business. The school's historic foundation is built on 150 years of providing students with practical higher educations that lead to job placement and career success.

Vermont Tech faces challenges – some unique and some shared across higher education – including:

- Increased competition as institutions focus on practical, applied learning to improve students' return on investment (Vermont Tech's core strength)
- Changing demographics
- A deferred maintenance backlog
- Low net promoter rates
- Weak alumni engagement / support of the institution
- Perceptions of Vermont Tech as an "advanced tech high school"
- Low State support

Vermont Tech will be undergoing a major organizational change from "majors" to "schools" during this planning cycle. The Academic Dean's Office and Faculty Chairs will also be expanding the number of programs offered in flexible delivery formats, increasing access for new audiences. Marketing will be tasked with leveraging the advantages of this new organizational and product structures to drive interest, application and matriculation from prospective students.

Goals

The marketing goals for the next five years are:

1. Increase inquiry and applications rates by 2% each year

Leverage Vermont Tech's job placement record, applied academic excellence, the change to a "schools" organization, and the programs supporting goals #2 and #3 to add vitality to Vermont Tech overall.
2. Increase net promoter score by at least 100% over the course of five years

Strengthen understanding of, and affiliation with, the meaning of being a Vermont Tech'er among students, faculty, staff, alumni and parents, and what the Vermont Tech experience provides.

Build a strong internal identity for Vermont Tech that will lead to greater current and future evangelizing on behalf of Vermont Tech.
3. Increase the Marshall Marketing Survey (a regional consumer-preferences research study) score after the first year by 2%, and by some margin established in subsequent years based on first year's results (benchmark: 75% awareness in 2018 survey results)

Add deeper research questions to the survey to study the market's understanding of what Vermont Tech does and its value to the region.

Strengthen messaging to clarify, and seat more strongly, the role Vermont Tech plays / has played in the success and vitality of lives of individuals and the economy and society of Vermont among key Influencers.

Build perceptions of Vermont Tech as one of Vermont's premier educational assets – akin to the respect given to UVM, Middlebury (but within its own genre).

Target audiences include:

- Prospective students
- Guidance personnel, VSAC, and independent college placement advisors
- Alumni
- Employers
- Government
- Media
- Veterans

4. Support academic changes as the programs become more flexible in their delivery format and available to more post-traditional audiences, keeping or catching up with industry standards.

Strategies: To accomplish these goals, our strategies will be:

For goal #1: Increase inquiry and application rates by 2%

Strategy 1: It's about our people

The best way to combat misperceptions of Vermont Tech, and demonstrate our benefits is through our people.

The stories of our students, the transformation Vermont Tech brings to their lives, the contributions they make to Vermont industry / health care etc., and the citizens they become are honest, compelling and deeply inspirational.

Our strategy will be to employ our people – students, faculty and staff and alumni as the “reasons to believe” in the value and difference of a Vermont Tech education.

We will feature them in our advertising and promotion, take them with us when we recruit, and feature them when we tell the story of how we help them succeed to the public, government officials, and the press.

Strategy 2: It's about our outcomes

The best way to demonstrate the value of Vermont Tech to the state and region is through its employer partners.

The stories of our graduates playing key roles at Vermont and regional employers, helping fulfill the workforce needs of critical industries are authentic, diverse and far-reaching.

Our strategy will be to enable the employers to espouse the vital role Vermont Tech plays in supporting the economy. They will highlight reasons for Vermonters to stay and visitors to transplant to align with growth in the state.

We will feature them in our advertising and promotion, take their stories with us when we recruit and feature them when we tell the story of how we help Vermont succeed to the public, government officials, and the press.

Strategy 3: Message Refinement

Vermont Tech is valued for:

- Getting people jobs
- Offering hands-on education
- Variety of career options
- Closeness with / peer-like respect from faculty
- Sense of place in Vermont and on its Randolph campus

What Vermont Tech is not currently valued for, and where there is an opportunity, is to clearly articulate the school's 150-year history of doing what it does for people and for the state. How Vermont Tech serves the state is misunderstood and underleveraged.

Strategy 3 will be to determine and apply the best combination and emphasis of Vermont Tech's characteristics and benefits to create a compelling campaign for the school

Strategy 4: Leveraging the Schools Reorganization

Reorganizing the college into schools was tested with a stakeholder audience in late 2017. The findings were promising that it would raise the prestige of the institution and improve perceptions of the college as innovative and for students who are highly focused.

Strategy 4 will be to evolve the branding of the college and integrate schools into marketing as the implementation of the Schools reorganization progresses.

For goal #2: Strengthen understanding of, and affiliation with, the meaning of being a Vermont Tech'er, and what the Vermont Tech experience provides among its internal audiences. Build a strong internal identity for Vermont Tech that will lead to greater current and future evangelizing on behalf of Vermont Tech.

Strategy 1: Provide Promotional Support for the Pride in Place Initiative

- An effort has been initiated for the college (faculty, staff, and administration) to take ownership in, and create a well-coordinated schedule of, events and

traditions that will build affiliation among students, employees, alumni and parents with Vermont Tech

- Marketing will provide support for this effort by promoting the activities before, during and after to generate excitement, participation and accessible memories
- The support will include traditional and electronic media resources

For goal #3: Strengthen messaging to clarify, and seat more strongly, the role Vermont Tech plays / has played in the success and vitality of lives of individuals and the economy and society of Vermont.

Strategy 1: Insights Generation

- To better understand / help build the relationship between Vermont Tech and the outside world (alumni, employers, government, etc.), marketing will undertake research to explore awareness, involvement and perceptions of Vermont Tech among those audiences.

Strategy 2: Cross-functional sharing and plan development

- With the insights in hand, marketing will work with other Vermont Tech functions to:
 - Refine our messaging to the outside audiences (part of goal #1, above).
 - Work with other Vermont Tech functions to design and support execution of outreach plans to each audience.

For goal #4: Support the academic innovation that will expand programs available for a working student.

Strategy #1: Create centralized marketing strategies

- Group flexible programs by audience to identify underlying commonalities and overarching personas.
- Develop marketing messages, materials, and tactics by audience, promoting programs as a portfolio where possible.

Strategy #2: Brand Vermont Tech as a post-traditional-friendly college

- Create campaigns that promote Vermont Tech as a resource for educational attainment while balancing life, family, and work.

Strategy #3: Partner with CEWD and VtSBDC to reach and provide value-added experiences to a post-traditional audience

- Work to articulate a seamless path with on ramps and off ramps between offerings of various units, including undergraduate/graduate studies and professional development.
- If programs of CEWD and VtSBDC integrate with degree programs, articulate them as value-added for working students