

# bestinclass { best practices }

BY PIET LEVY//STAFF WRITER

## CLASS IN PROGRESS

PURDUE UNIVERSITY'S MARKETING TEAM WAS SCATTERED AND OPERATED WITH LITTLE CENTRAL OVERSIGHT UNTIL A CORPORATE MARKETING VETERAN TURNED IT AROUND

**WHO:** Purdue University, a public university founded in 1869, located in West Lafayette, Ind. Current enrollment is 39,697. Purdue is ranked 61<sup>st</sup> among national universities by *U.S. News & World Report*.

**WHAT:** When Teri Lucie Thompson, a presenter at this month's **American Marketing Association's** Symposium for the Marketing of Higher Education in Boston, became Purdue's vice president of marketing and media in August 2008, she inherited a marketing department she says really wasn't.

One, many of the marketers were primarily public relations specialists. Two, they reported to deans at their schools and created marketing collateral with little central oversight. Three, there was no marketing dashboard tracking successes and failures.

"I saw a manifestation everywhere I looked of a wonderful brand, but a brand that was not focused on marketing," Thompson says. "Nobody was responsible for the brand. Nobody was responsible for online. I didn't have anybody who was managing relationships [among the colleges and handling strategic marketing [at the university level]."

Thompson was brought in to fix these problems and to do so within the confines of the university's \$10 million annual marketing budget. Purdue's leaders wanted an integrated marketing plan that was bold and different. And Thompson's previous no-nonsense corporate experience as vice

president of marketing for Safeco Insurance and director of multicultural marketing for State Farm Insurance made her the right candidate for the job.

"Most universities typically recruit exclusively from academia, but Purdue from the very beginning wanted to be open-minded," says Jody Cooper, the former executive recruiter from Korn/Ferry International who assisted Purdue in its search. "I think in this particular case, no academic [marketing] background was seen as a strength. ... What Teri represented was she was a very strategic thinker that understood lots of different approaches and was really going to challenge the way Purdue had done marketing in the past."

**HOW:** Through November 2008, Thompson assessed Purdue's marketing staff and, working with agency partners Publicis Groupe, MS&L Worldwide and Zócalo



### Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders for a Changing World

Gebisa Ejeta grew up in a one-room thatched hut in a rural Ethiopian village and walked 20 kilometers each way to school. His dedication proved fruitful — in 2009, the Distinguished Professor of Agronomy at Purdue was awarded the World Food Prize for his work on sorghum hybrids that have enhanced the food supply of hundreds of millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa. Discover the possibilities at Purdue.

strategic marketing. She created director-level positions for research and multicultural marketing. She demoted some employees and reduced some salaries.

She conducted monthly all-staff meetings and created an e-newsletter to keep the team abreast of ongoing changes and ensure transparency. Close to 50% of the team moved into different positions, Thompson says, and the new marketing infrastructure became fully operational by early March.

"As a scientist and leader, I appreciate the way Teri approached the restructuring," says Purdue President France Córdoba. "She was thorough in her SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats] analysis, made good use of data and leveraged external experts, all the while building understanding and relationships with internal partners."

"Organizational structure is the biggest barrier to integrated marketing and branding on college campuses," says Elizabeth Scar-

borough, CEO of SimpsonScarborough, a Washington-based higher education marketing agency, and chair of the 2009 **AMA** higher education symposium committee. "There are marketing people in every college, and on most college campuses they are operating completely uncoordinated. It's like herding cats. ... But Teri centralized the university marketing department and helped people understand that one Purdue is better than many Purdues. ... And to turn over an office in nine months is unheard of."

Group, ordered audits on the university's media, advertising and online presence. In December, Thompson started laying out the new organization, checking in with all internal stakeholders along the way. For instance, the College of Engineering had 13 marketers working strictly for the school, so Thompson negotiated to move the marketers and budget into the university team in exchange for more marketing spend allotted for the college channel.

Thompson established new departments dedicated to brand and advertising, online experience and emerging technology, and

**PURDUE**  
UNIVERSITY.



SCHOOL	PURDUE UNIVERSITY
LOCATION	WEST LAFAYETTE, IND.
STRATEGY	REASSIGNED 50% OF THE MARKETING STAFF; CREATED THREE MARKETING DEPARTMENTS; ENHANCED THE WEB SITE; REVISED PRESS MATERIAL CONTENT; ESTABLISHED SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE; EXPRESSED UNIFORM MESSAGING
ACCOMPLISHMENTS	WEB PRESENCE INCREASED BY 23% YEAR OVER YEAR FROM APRIL 2008 TO APRIL 2009; ANNUAL PURDUE NEWS SERVICE HITS ON TRACK TO OUTPACE 2008 NUMBERS
BUDGET	\$10 MILLION
MARKETING STAFF SIZE	98

Source: Purdue University

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The reorganized staff began addressing issues found in the audits. The new ad department ensured all advertisements now exhibited one of three common messaging platforms: Launching Tomorrow’s Leaders, Discovery with Delivery and Meeting Global Challenges.

A disconnect between the language used in press releases and by the media was fixed so Purdue’s writers now issue more reporter-optimized releases that have a greater chance for media pick-up. Marketing added an interactive photo banner on Purdue’s home page linking visitors to top press releases in one click where previously it took up to seven clicks. In 2008, there were 12.4 million views of Purdue’s news service pages. As of September 2009, there were already

11.8 million views, and by year’s end, there should be at least 15.5 million, Thompson says.

Marketing enhanced the university’s online presence through more attentive keyword tagging, contributing to a 23% increase in Purdue.com hits year over year from April 2008 to April 2009, Thompson says. Also contributing was a marketing-produced video of Purdue’s “Compliment Guys,” two students who compliment passers-by between classes; it gained viral traction via YouTube, with 57,887 YouTube views as of late September, and the guys have been featured in *The New York Times*, on *Today* and through a Kodak-sponsored national compliment-giving tour. Marketing also created an official Twitter account,

LifeAtPurdue, with 2,362 followers as of late September.

The work continues. A new communications council meets quarterly to discuss developing areas such as social media. Following a recently wrapped multicultural analysis, marketing is exploring ways to boost campus visits by African-Americans. But as things stand now, Thompson’s efforts are earning accolades, even from a Purdue rival.

“One of the things I greatly admire about what Teri has done is to take such a professional view of marketing and apply it to a university setting,” says Jan Botz, vice president of public affairs and communication at the University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, Ind. “She has a professional team that has a great opportunity ahead.” **m**

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