San Bernardino Community College District

Brand Assessment Report

December 13, 2017

CERRELL

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To: Chancellor Bruce Baron and SBCCD Board of Trustees

From: Cerrell Associates

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Subject: SBCCD Brand Assessment & Recommendations

Executive Summary

In January 2017, the San Bernardino Community College District (SBCCD) Board of Trustees approved a five-year strategic plan to guide the District's efforts to advance its mission of increasing access to affordable, high-quality higher education for Inland Southern California residents. To do so, the plan prioritized strengthening the District's profile to attract and maintain students, talented faculty and staff, as well as enhance business and community partnerships.

It's clear that SBCCD, with its four different entities throughout the Inland Empire, has the foundation in place to be seen as the region's leading provider, advocate and resource of affordable, accessible and high-quality education and life-long learning programs. To do this, the District is seeking to strengthen its overall brand and marketing standards, including considering a re-branding program. Before launching that program, the District needed to assess how internal and external stakeholders perceive its brand, and if its brand effectively unifies and enhances its four entities.

Working in collaboration with public affairs firm Cerrell Associates (Cerrell), SBCCD began this comprehensive assessment process in August 2017. The program sought to solicit input from students, faculty, staff, alumni and community stakeholders to identify current perceptions about the District, and how the District can improve the effectiveness of its internal and external communications efforts and its overall reputation.

This assessment program is the first phase of a larger effort to help SBCCD establish a cohesive and potent brand that achieves the following communications goals:

1) Distinguish SBCCD as a vital community resource and the region's leading provider of affordable and accessible education.

2) Attract and retain a diverse student population and talented faculty and staff.

3) Reinforce SBCCD's history in the region and its legacy providing high quality educational services.

4) Strengthen the brand and positioning of each SBCCD entity, and bolsters their ability to attract and serve students and the community.

5) Increase awareness among key audiences to reinforce partnerships with communities and businesses and increase support among opinion leaders and public officials, all of which leads to increased enrollment and support for SBCCD and its entities.

Methodology

To assess awareness of and enthusiasm for SBCCD's brand, Cerrell designed a two-phased engagement program: a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the District using its main communications channels and compare the District's performance against its competitors, and direct interactions / conversations with relevant stakeholders and community leaders regarding their perceptions of the District.

Since the start of the brand assessment program, SBCCD and Cerrell have gathered input from more than 200 students, faculty, staff, elected officials and community stakeholders.

Key Findings

Using the extensive feedback gathered, and after conducting an analysis of the District's main communications channels – electronic communications, internal communications, direct community interactions – we identified a clear understanding of the District-wide brand's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Overall, SBCCD is viewed positively by those that are aware of the District itself, but tremendous opportunities exist to strengthen its brand for the benefit of the students, faculty and communities it serves. If a brand enhancement program commences following the assessment phase, the ultimate result will be stronger and more positive perceptions built through expanded communications.

Our findings include:

1) The distinguishing features and unique characteristics of each SBCCD entity are among the District's greatest strengths. SBCCD's educational programs provide students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to further their education through transfer or enter immediately into the workforce upon completion of the program.

2) Such strong reputations surrounding the District's individual entities present an ongoing challenge to the District's ability to communicate its collective value to the region and contributions to the local economy, the workforce, jobs, and lives of Inland Southern California community members.

3) Current positioning of the District and its entities does not fully communicate what it offers to students, and does not adequately relay the benefits of enrolling at a

community college. SBCCD's current brand does not create meaningful connections with key audiences, or sufficiently differentiate it from competing community colleges, private and for-profit institutions.

4) Results demonstrate that awareness of the District among prospective students, current students, parents, community members, and other stakeholders are low. Findings also show the collective impact of SBCCD on community members and the regional economy is not well understood.

5) The District's namesake, San Bernardino Community College, is not representative of the vast region it serves and is frequently confused for one of its entities: San Bernardino Valley College.

Strategic Recommendations
Using data from the assessment and with special attention on key audiences, Cerrell recommends implementing the following tactics to strengthen the District-wide brand:

1) Update brand and brand identity:
    a. Consider changing the District's name to be more representative of the area it serves.
    b. Update logo, mission statement, tagline, key messages, etc.
    c. Update digital assets: website, social media, etc.
    d. Develop and implement marketing guidelines and standards.

2) Update and refine internal/external communications channels and marketing efforts:
    a. Enhance District-wide marketing and communications plan.
        i. Determine appropriate engagement/communications strategy for key audiences.
        ii. Establish external communication channels and workflow.
        iii. Establish communication with alumni.
        iv. Enhance relationships with external stakeholders.
    b. Establish internal communication channels and workflow.
    c. Implement brand adoption plan; give internal staff tools to discuss District-wide brand.
    d. Maintain proactive media relations.

3) Develop annual communications plan and corresponding template:
    a. Develop editorial calendar with themed monthly communications.
    b. Identify top story ideas and themes.
    c. Promote web-based calendar.
    d. Develop Speaker's Bureau.
    e. Determine metrics to measure results.

The following report outlines key strategies and recommendations, an implementation timeline, and suggested benchmarking tools for evaluating results.

Introduction & Background

In an increasingly competitive, complex, and fast-paced world, how people feel about an organization in terms of trust, satisfaction, and loyalty is vital to its overall health and performance. Organizations must develop brands that build and nurture relationships based on their shared values with key audiences. This is especially true for educational institutions – with many schools offering top-notch academic programs, a brand represents an institution's opportunity to distinguish it from a crowded landscape of options. It's the most identifiable feature and the first thing students, faculty, staff, and community members will recognize.

What is a Brand and Why is it Important?

A brand is more than just a memorable logo. Strong branding increases the value of an organization, provides employees with direction and motivation, and makes recruiting students easier. A brand represents the sum of everything an organization does to present itself to the public. It includes both visual and verbal components.

While it's common to think only of a visual identity when discussing brand, branding also includes the language an organization uses to describe itself and the tone it uses to say it.

So why is this important? And how can a strong brand impact an organization? We can summarize the answers here:

1) Branding improves recognition: people gravitate towards organizations they are familiar with. If branding is consistent and easy to recognize, it can help people feel more at ease when choosing an organization's services.

2) Branding creates trust: a brand that is consistent and clear generates trust amongst its consumers because they know what to expect every time they experience or interact with the brand.

3) Branding distinguishes an organization from its competition: branding helps position an organization's unique offerings and sets it apart from competition.

4) Branding generates revenue: branding can increase referrals and encourage people to invest in an organization's services.

5) Branding motivates employees: branding can attract talented employees and keep them motivated and inspired to carry an organization's mission and vision forward.

A strong brand can permeate an entire organization and enhance its ability to deliver on its promises.

Methodology

To assess awareness of and enthusiasm for SBCCD's brand, Cerrell designed a two-phased approach: a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the District using its main communications channels and measured the District's performance against its competitors, and direct engagement / conversations with relevant stakeholders and community leaders regarding their perceptions of the District.

During each phase of the program, Cerrell sought to understand the types of positioning that would drive enrollment at the colleges, and facilitate legislative and financial support of the District and its entities. This entailed an examination of what the District's stakeholders value and if the District offers these things, as well as if there are opportunities to bring value as a whole without diluting the individual brands of SBCCD's entities.

Since the start of the brand assessment program, SBCCD and Cerrell have gathered input from students, faculty, staff and community members. Below is a summary of these outreach efforts:

- 1,551: Number of SBVC, CHC, EDCT, KVCR, and SBCCD faculty and staff who have received an invitation to participate in an online survey regarding their opinions of the District-wide brand.

- 27: Number of SBVC, CHC, EDCT, KVCR, SBCCD faculty and staff who participated in a two-hour, in-person stakeholder forum.

- 54: Number of aggregated hours SBCCD faculty and staff gave on October 13, 2017 to provide their opinions of the District-wide brand.

- 15: Number of SBVC and CHC students who participated in a two-hour, in-person stakeholder forum.

- 30: Number of aggregated hours students gave on September 15, 2017 to share their opinions of the District-wide brand.

- 12: Number of aggregated hours SBCCD Board of Trustees gave on October 26, 2017 to share their opinions of the District-wide brand.

- 14: Number of aggregated hours Chancellor's Cabinet members gave on September 15, 2017 to provide their opinions of the District-wide brand.

- 3: Number of major community partners who participated in a two-hour, in-person stakeholder forum: City of San Bernardino, California State University San Bernardino, and University of California Riverside.

- 37: Number of K-12 leaders who have received an email invitation to participate in an online survey regarding their opinions of the District-wide brand.

- 96: Number of business and community leaders who have received an email invitation to participate in an online survey regarding their opinions of the District-wide brand.

- 2,875: Number of potential students and community members who have seen digital advertising regarding the online survey; the geographic reach of the ads span Banning, Beaumont, Big Bear, Bloomington, Calimesa, Colton, Crestline, Grand Terrace, Highland, Lake Arrowhead, Loma Linda, Lytle Creek, Moreno Valley, Muscoy, Redlands, Rialto, Riverside, San Bernardino and Yucaipa.

- 3: Number of meetings with civic leaders: City of Yucaipa City Manager Ray Casey, San Bernardino County Supervisor James Ramos, former Mayor of City of San Bernardino Judith Valles.

Situational Analysis

Situational Overview

With increasing tuition and student debt negatively impacting the reputations of four-year colleges and universities, community colleges have emerged as a viable alternative for high-quality and affordable education. Yet, enrollment numbers do not reflect this change of public perception.

Recognition of the important role community colleges play in creating career pathways and quality educational opportunities has never been higher. A 2015 Gallup study showed Americans are about as likely to rate the quality of education that community colleges offer as "excellent" or "good" (66%) as they are to rate four-year colleges using the same terms (70%).

But overall enrollment in community colleges has seen a steady decline since 2011. It's difficult to pinpoint the cause of such a decline but experts suggest that in an improved economy, more people are employed and the short-term urgency to get new educational credentials or a degree is no longer as potent. Many prospective students can't justify the opportunity cost of going to school, or see how it's worth their while. Additionally, some experts suggest inter-institutional competition has contributed to this decline as more colleges fight for a shrinking number of students.

In California, declining enrollment numbers stands in contrast to another stark reality: the state needs 1.1 million more workers with college degrees by 2030 to keep up with economic demand. This creates a significant opportunity for the Inland Empire as one of the three regions in the state which could help close more than half of the statewide skills gap by improving college attainment, according to a June 2017 Public Policy Institute of California report. (The other regions are Los Angeles County and San Joaquin Valley.)

This has significant implications for the San Bernardino Community College District – as one of the largest providers of affordable education and workforce development programs across the

Inland Southern California region, it is primed to be a driving force closing California's skills gap over the next decade.

But first the District must identify ways to increase enrollment numbers. One way to do so is to establish a strong brand that meaningfully connects with all community members.

So how can SBCCD do this?

It starts with examining its value proposition. One strength of community college districts including SBCCD is the perception that they offer something to everyone. But this also represents a significant challenge in facilitating a strong brand. Rather than appeal to a select demographic, the District's brand identity and communications efforts must appeal to audiences of all ages and backgrounds, from high school students to mid-career professionals looking to build specific skill sets.

Additionally, community college districts compete in a crowded landscape of academic institutions, and a prospective student population that may not understand what programs they offer. Finally, community colleges sometimes face a negative perception that they are a "last resort" compared to a four-year college or university.

Though these challenges exist, an examination of SBCCD's strengths and opportunities, as well as threats and challenges to its brand demonstrate it has an immediate chance to improve its communications and overall brand.

SWOT ANALYSIS
The SWOT Analysis is a high-level look at how SBCCD can build on current successes and where it should focus resources to improve current weaknesses and address threats. The goal of the SWOT analysis is to uncover areas where the District can develop a competitive advantage and exploit new opportunities to achieve its strategic communications goals.

After soliciting feedback from a diverse group of internal and external stakeholders and analyzing the District's communications channels, SBCCD's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats can be summarized as follows:

Strengths & Opportunities
SBCCD and its entities have many great stories to tell, but such stories are not told often enough nor to all of the District's key audiences. This presents an opportunity to enhance and expand the District's communications program so as to demonstrate its valuable contributions to the vitality and growth of its community.

Stakeholders repeatedly confirmed SBCCD has a wealth of existing, positive attributes and emerging opportunities that lend itself to proactive communications. These include:

1) <u>SBCCD Entities / Educational Programs</u>: SBCCD's educational programs provide students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to further their education through transfer or enter immediately into the workforce upon completion of the program. Stakeholder interviews and survey results demonstrate a high degree of confidence in the quality of SBCCD's academic programs as well as the variety of courses offered. Particularly popular and revered programs are the Public Safety and Services (Emergency Medical Services / Fire Technology) programs at Crafton Hills College and the Nursing program at San Bernardino Valley College.

2) <u>Dedicated Faculty and Staff</u>: Stakeholder forums and survey results demonstrate a high level of employee engagement and interest in the success of the District and its students. While some frustrations and issues exist that should be addressed, for the most part, employees expressed concerns in a positive manner with an interest toward getting problems resolved. Most importantly, employees expressed important core values and understanding of what the core mission of the District involved and how the organization should function.

3) <u>Accessibility and Inclusivity</u>: SBCCD was repeatedly described as a welcoming learning environment for all community members, regardless of their backgrounds or personal circumstances. Often referred to as a stepping stone, SBCCD creates pathways for students, faculty and staff towards successful careers.

4) <u>KVCR</u>: Not only does this entity provide reliable news and public information to the District's entire service area, but it makes SBCCD the only community college district in Inland Southern California that has its own public radio and TV station.

5) <u>Affordability/Value Proposition</u>: SBCCD offers the best access to achievement of a quality degree, academic credits or the acquisition of skills/certification that will set up students to achieve their goals, in the most cost-effective way, when compared to private trade schools, the California State University system and the University of California system.

6) <u>Diversity of the Student Body</u>: Many stakeholders referred to SBCCD's diverse student body as an important strength. The District comprises students and faculty representing many languages and ages and an enormous variety of cultures, religions, sexual orientation and socioeconomic backgrounds. Not only does this diversity adequately reflect the demographics of the District's service area, but it gives students real-life experience in succeeding in today's diverse societies.

7) <u>Economic Force / Workforce Development</u>: An economic impact study conducted in 2016 concluded that in FY 2013-2014, SBCCD's total impact in the local economy was $621.8 million in added income, equal to 0.5% of the region's GRP. Additionally, the effect of former SBCCD students on the regional economy amounted to $528 million in added income.

The District faces some challenges that affect its ability to consistently deliver positive messaging to its key audiences. These include:

1) <u>Brand Awareness and Understanding</u>: Stakeholder feedback indicated community members have little awareness that the District exists, and furthermore, that it is the administrator of its four entities: SBVC, CHC, EDCT, and KVCR. Often, stakeholders used San Bernardino Valley College's name interchangeably when referring to the District, and had difficulty understanding the distinction between the entities. Furthermore, while SBVC, CHC, and KVCR all enjoy strong and easily recognizable individual reputations, the majority of stakeholders had no knowledge of the EDCT entity and its value to the community.

2) <u>Name</u>: The name San Bernardino Community College District is awkward, and for that reason alone, audiences avoid using it. The shortened version, SBCCD, is almost as awkward, and it is hard to say. Most importantly, its name is not representative of the vast region it serves and is frequently confused for one of its entities: San Bernardino Valley College. It communicates very little, and thus understanding of what the District is remains very low.

3) <u>Dated Logo Elements</u>: While the existing SBCCD logo is recognizable, it has a particularly dated tone. This tone is incongruent with a high-achieving educational institution that aims to prepare students for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

4) <u>Brand Inconsistencies in Communication</u>: The many visuals and publications of the District and its entities are not aligned. Current materials lack cohesion in brand style and consistency in the use of visual brand elements. Inconsistency in presentation – such as color choices, font styles, image styles, and formatting – dilute marketing effectiveness across all media, channels and audiences. This results in increased investment of time, effort and marketing budget, while reducing effectiveness and trust of the SBCCD brand.

5) <u>Message Match Effectiveness</u>: Information reviewed by Cerrell demonstrates a lack of clarity and consistency regarding the District's unique value proposition. Many of the currently published materials are missing a clear, value-based message to position the brand. When a positional statement is present, it can vary from item to item and audience to audience.

6) <u>Ineffectively Communicate Value, Milestones and Progress</u>: SBCCD accomplishes outstanding work every day by changing lives and preparing students for success. Unfortunately, many of its successes and important milestones are not understood and recognized by the District's stakeholders. Partly a symptom of brand confusion and low familiarity, this also can be attributed to missed opportunities to communicate the District's achievements to external audiences. It's increasingly difficult to reach busy,

distracted audiences in today's media climate, but sharing milestones and progress in meaningful ways will highlight the value SBCCD brings to its students and community.

7) <u>Internal Communications and Workflow</u>: Inside audiences – including faculty, staff, administrators and others – know the District for its governance and oversight responsibilities, but not enough for the potential to be an advocate, collaborating with and promoting the entities as they compete in the higher education marketplace. Additionally, communications processes throughout the District are not uniform, and staff indicated a need for increased collaboration across the District and its entities regarding communications efforts.

8) <u>Connections are to Individual Schools</u>: While the District's greatest strengths are the entities themselves, this presents a challenge to the District's ability to communicate its collective value to the region and contributions to the local economy, the workforce, jobs and lives of Inland Southern California community members. Students and alumni are connected to their individual college, and business and community leaders have local perspectives of the impact of each entity.

9) <u>Increased Higher Education Options</u>: The District is faced with increasing competition from many universities and colleges, specifically from the proprietary sector. Many of these proprietary schools have focused resources dedicated to marketing, outreach and enrollment of students and provide easy avenues for accessing programs, including assistance with obtaining financial aid.

10) <u>Relationship with the Media</u>: The District has a relatively small media footprint, and does not receive the same amount of coverage as both San Bernardino Valley College and Crafton Hills College. This indicates the District has an opportunity to be more aggressive in presenting story ideas to promote its strengths.

11) <u>Media Perception of the San Bernardino</u>: Following a string of tragic events, from a terror attack to a bankruptcy, San Bernardino has suffered primarily negative media coverage over the last few years. It has been coined, the "2nd-Poorest Large City in the U.S.," "California's Most Dangerous City," and even a "Broken City." Though the area has many positive attributes, outside perception of it has been significantly shaped by media connecting it with pervasive poverty and a debilitating crime problem. While these perceptions are not associated with the District itself, the term "San Bernardino" carries with it a concerning tone and poor reputation that SBCCD must overcome when communicating with its key audiences.

Key Research Implications

Overall, SBCCD is viewed positively by those who are aware of the District itself, but tremendous opportunities exist to strengthen its brand for the benefit of the students and communities it serves.

If a brand enhancement program commences following the assessment phase, the District has compelling benefits to highlight: accessibility, dynamic workforce development and preparation programs for people at all stages of their career, and its ability to meet a range of community needs.

Additionally, stakeholders indicated the most important attributes that should be associated with the District are:

1) Academic excellence
2) Affordability
3) Accessibility
4) Community College
5) Safety
6) Local
7) Innovation
8) Diversity

After compiling feedback from stakeholders and assessing the District's existing communications and messaging, Cerrell recommends the District adopt the following positioning statement and key message themes to more effectively communicate with its key audiences.

Positioning Statement:

The San Bernardino Community College District is the leading resource for people throughout the communities of Inland Southern California to advance their career. The District is a network of leading academic institutions and educational programs that offer degrees and certificates to prepare all students for real-world success and high-achieving jobs, no matter their background, educational level, or stage of life.

Key Message Themes:

1) SBCCD offers educational excellence at an affordable price to everyone, no matter their background, educational level, or stage of life.

2) SBCCD provides practical pathways to student success, leveraging partnerships with government, businesses, schools and civic organizations.

3) SBCCD prioritizes diversity of perspectives and experiences, and our focus on inclusion creates a friendly and welcoming environment for all.

4) SBCCD faculty and staff bring a unique mix of academic and real-world experience that sets up students for success beyond the classroom.

5) SBCCD embraces innovation and continuously invests in programs and technology to prepare students for sustainable, dynamic, and in-demand careers.

Through a brand enhancement program, the District has the opportunity to become better known as a supporter, promoter and leader of accessible, quality education. Enhancing the brand must focus on messaging that unites its entities around their common goal of serving the community through outstanding, accessible education. The ultimate result will be stronger and more positive perceptions built through strategic communications and marketing.

Strategic Recommendations
After evaluating key research implications, Cerrell recommends the District implement a brand enhancement program that will:

1) Increase its visibility and public awareness of the opportunity it provides for a quality, affordable, higher education.

2) Further develop strategic alignment amongst the District's entities and cultivate new organizational partnerships.

3) Accurately reflect the socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural diversity of those who live, work and play within its service area.

Such a brand enhancement program should involve a three-pronged approach:

1) Updating SBCCD's brand and brand identity.

2) Updating and refining internal/external communications channels and marketing efforts.

3) Determining annual communications priorities and developing a corresponding plan.

This approach will lead the District to a more thoughtful and compelling communications program that ultimately supports its overall strategic priorities.

Target Audiences
By nature, a community college serves a diverse set of audiences in its service area. Students and prospective students range from recent high school graduates to the working professional returning to complete a degree or change careers.

Additionally, the District serves audiences beyond its students; they include influencers of prospective students (e.g. parents, family, high school guidance counselors, etc.), alumni,

community members, elected and appointed officials, potential employers, four-year colleges and universities, faculty and staff, and donors.

For this reason, it is challenging to identify a short-list of target audiences. And while it is important to ensure the District's brand, communications and marketing efforts appeal to each of the aforementioned groups, feedback from stakeholder engagement indicates the following audiences are particularly important targets for the District:

1) Prospective and traditional undergraduate students: This group primarily consists of teens and young adults (ages 16 to 24), and includes high school students and recent graduates, as well as current community college students.

2) Non-traditional undergraduate students: This group is adults (including veterans) with an emphasis on those that are unemployed or underemployed, want to enhance their skills, or perhaps are considering a career change.

3) Business/Labor Industry/Employers: Includes local business owners, workforce development boards, economic development agencies, labor groups, etc.

4) Influencers/Stakeholders: Influencers include parents, family members, guidance counselors (high school and community college), community leaders and elected officials.

5) Donors: Includes potential funders to the District (state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations and foundations, philanthropists).

6) Current and prospective SBCCD faculty and staff: This is an important audience to reach to increase employee retention and decrease turnover, recruit talent, and additionally help disseminate Districtwide messaging.

7) Alumni: This group includes graduates and former students of the District.

8) Local media: Another important group that can amplify the District's achievements.

Outreach to key audiences must reflect the diversity of the District's service area, and should include specific plans to reach Latinos, African Americans, Asian Pacific Islanders, and others. This diversity should be reflected in all outreach strategies, paid media, and program materials and should not only include translation, but should ensure information is culturally and linguistically sensitive and relevant.

Strategic Recommendations: Updating SBCCD's Brand and Brand Identity
A critical component of Cerrell's recommended brand enhancement program focuses on updating SBCCD's current brand and brand identity. Cerrell recommends the District take the following steps to strengthen its brand and positioning:

1) <u>Strategically plan SBCCD brand position</u>: SBCCD's brand position must be one that unites its entities around their common goal of providing outstanding, accessible education and contributing to the growth and vitality of its surrounding communities. The brand position should:

   a. Articulate the collective benefits of SBCCD's entities across key audiences and consistently communicate these benefits to support each of the entities.

   b. Create additional value while supporting the strengths and identities of each entity's brand.

2) <u>Consider a name change</u>: Consider changing the name of the District to better reflect its service area and changing the name of the Economic Development and Corporate Training entity to more effectively communicate what it is. While Cerrell's research explored how stakeholders would perceive a name change, as well as some alternative name options, further research and stakeholder engagement should be conducted to determine what current names should be changed to.

3) <u>Strengthen brand visuals and identity</u>: Update and unify SBCCD brand assets to modern versions, fonts, colors, etc. Cerrell recommends the creation of a new logo and standard tagline for the District that will build awareness of its collective benefits among all audiences and streamline opportunities for joint communications with its entities. Additionally, Cerrell recommends updating the San Bernardino Valley College logo as stakeholder feedback indicated it looks outdated; we also recommend updating the Economic Development & Corporate Training logo as stakeholder feedback indicated it was unrecognizable. Both Crafton Hills College and KVCR brand visuals were recognizable and viewed positively by stakeholders.

4) <u>Update digital assets</u>: Consider a realignment of the District's digital assets to ensure a seamless and mobile friendly user experience. Digital assets should be easy to use and easy to view in all devices (mobile, tablet, and desktop), as well as quick to load and easy to navigate. The District's digital assets should become the foundation of all its marketing efforts, as the use of internet for educational and community information continues to grow rapidly. Specific areas of focus for enhancing the District's digital assets should be:

   a. <u>Website Updates</u>: SBCCD's website can be improved with some structural changes, content revisions, and additions. Changes should include a Home Page that incorporates large and compelling photographs, a navigation bar at the top that includes links to the entities' websites, student-centric information about SBCCD (e.g. degrees and certificates, financial aid, calendars, student support services, applications and registration), and widgets that display the District's social media feed and latest news. Additionally, the website should incorporate

information about the communities the District serves, and the benefits of living in the District's service area (e.g. its proximity to popular hiking and skiing areas, as well as to large Southern California cities Los Angeles and San Diego). The District should also consider establishing an application and registration portal; this would allow prospective students to apply for SBVC, CHC, and EDCT using the same application, and current students could register for classes using a District-wide system that lets them see course availability and schedules at each of the entities.

b. <u>E-newsletters/E-blasts</u>: While the District has the capability to communicate with large listservs of various stakeholders and does so occasionally, there are no forms of regularly scheduled e-communications. Cerrell recommends the District utilize regularly scheduled e-newsletters and e-blasts to have frequent contact with target audiences. Such forms of communication are an excellent channel to provide news, updates, new opportunities and calendars of events.

c. <u>Maximize search engine optimization</u>: Search engine optimization (SEO) is becoming increasingly sophisticated and it's important that the District's website remains at the top of search hierarchy. Search engines use complicated algorithms that are constantly changing to assign relevance to web pages for web searches. The way content is written can impact SEO, as well as the linkages a website has with other websites. To fully maximize SEO, it's important to keep the District's website up to date, and to constantly increase its linkages with other websites. Furthermore, understanding how the District's website is used, how long a visitor stays on its site, what pages are being viewed, and the key words that bring visitors to the site will shed light on what messages resonate most with key audiences. Because SEO is a rapidly growing and changing discipline, Cerrell recommends the District engage the services of a webmaster who can manage this process and recommend SEO software and strategies for composing web pages that will help the District achieve higher search engine ranks.

d. <u>Enhance social media presence</u>: The growing popularity of social media sites provides a valuable opportunity for the District to develop its brand and to drive traffic to its website. These social networking sites provide audience selection tools that can help the District target its core audiences by geographic location, demographics, interests, interest and behaviors and connect with them relevant information about class offerings, financial aid and scholarship opportunities, campus news, and achievements. The District can enhance its social media presence by broadening content topics, engaging in trending topics, and promoting posts financially. Additionally, Cerrell recommends the District create an Instagram account to complement its presence on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Below are some suggested guidelines the District should employ to bolster its social media presence:

   i. Content:
1. When possible, include images/photos in posts.
2. Tag people, organizations, and companies when referenced in content.
3. Post shareable and engaging posts for a broad range of people (students, faculty, public, etc.)
4. Incorporate URLs to District's and entities' websites.
5. Use hashtags when appropriate.

  ii. Frequency:
1. Post 4-5 times a week (ideally once a day).
2. Vary the timing of the posts, but primarily post during the morning or lunchtime.

 iii. Management:
1. Develop a social media calendar.
2. Use the SBCCD academic calendar and deadlines to schedule posts ahead of time and keep followers informed.
3. Follow industry influencers as well as other institutions in higher education and network when posting to all social media sites.

5) <u>Develop and implement SBCCD brand style guide</u>: Create a district-wide brand style document that includes guidelines for logo use, colors, fonts, sizes, etc. Implement the style guide as widely as possible to create a uniform brand experience.

6) <u>Develop branded templates for key communication pieces</u>: Provide internal and external agents copies of the brand guide along with key communication template file they can use to easily create the most commonly needed communication pieces.

To implement the aforementioned component of the brand enhancement program, Cerrell recommends the District retain a marketing and design agency.

Strategic Recommendations: Update and refine internal/external communications channels and marketing efforts.

Equally as important as updating the District's brand and brand identity will be the process of improving communications structures and use of resources to drive effective messaging. For this component of the brand enhancement program, Cerrell recommends the District take the following steps:

1) <u>Enhance district-wide marketing and community outreach plan</u>: The District has developed a clear and concise framework for communicating with the school community

and its key audiences. Though the plan has clearly defined goals and is fully integrated with the District's strategic plan, Cerrell recommends further developing this plan to include the following:

    a. Key messages highlighting the District, its five-year strategic plan and success stories from the District and each of its entities.

    b. Key District spokespeople and their respective topic areas.

    c. Appropriate outreach and engagement strategy for each of the District's target audiences (e.g. key messages and primary communications channels for prospective students vs. key messages and engagement channels for community stakeholders).

    d. Detailed processes for implementing external communications (e.g. who must approve districtwide communications? How can one disseminate a message through Districtwide communications channels?).

    e. Primary channels for external communications efforts (e.g. electronic communications, printed communications, broadcast communications, media relations, etc.). Note this effort will require the District to create new communications channels for particular key audiences:

        i. Alumni: Currently, the District has no formal method for contacting alumni or former students. Cerrell recommends working with each of the appropriate departments at each entity to create an alumni database and email listserv that can be used for recruiting and news distribution.

        ii. Community Leaders, Elected and Appointed Officials: Cerrell recommends creating a database and email listserv of local community leaders and influencers, as well as elected and appointed officials that can be used for legislative efforts and news distribution.

Once finalized, Cerrell recommends disseminating this plan to department heads and Marketing-Communications employees at each of the District's entities.

2) <u>Refine internal communication channels and workflow</u>: Cerrell recommends developing a system-wide plan that details internal communications processes and channels. This would enable the District to increase development and distribution of relevant content, and improve the efficacy of its external communications efforts. Such a plan should focus on the following tactics:

    a. Develop and distribute a key message document highlighting the District, its five-year strategic plan, success stories from the District and each of its entities to all

department heads and District spokespersons to ensure consistency in communication of key positioning statements.

b. Create a SBCCD information kit for all new employees (both of the District and its entities). Materials should include all department organizational charts and contact information, District goals and objectives, a document summarized the District's five-year plan, the district-wide communications plan and brand identity standards / guidelines.

c. Establish a mechanism/tool to immediately notify all major department leaders and management of breaking news that impacts the District and its entities so that this news is evenly distributed.

d. Improve process for sharing media coverage of the District and its entities to ensure everyone is aware of key messages and ongoing media climate. Consider disseminating a weekly or monthly coverage report of stories about the District and its entities, as well as stories that will impact the District and its entities.

3) <u>Implement a brand adoption plan</u>: As the District begins to update its brand and brand identity, and after it has refined its internal/external communications channels and workflow, it should consider implementing a planned process to infuse the District's updated brand both internally and externally. This includes discussion of who enforces and monitors brand use and a process for resolving issues. This may include any of the following:

a. Brand anthem: A brief video that captures the spirit and emotion of the brand.

b. Brand guidebook: A printed or digital collateral piece that fully captures the language of the brand and provides recommendations/examples of some of the more common uses of phrases about the brand.

c. Brand training: A training session on the new brand and its use for employees and others who may use the brand.

d. Short-term brand application: Design and production of communications and collateral materials with a one-year or less life cycle; this includes updating/redoing the website, school catalogs, email signatures, business cards, presentation templates, letterhead forms, etc.

e. Long-term brand application plan: A district-wide plan for applying the brand to places that require significant investment, such as building signage, vehicle fleet graphics, etc.

f. Advertising: development of an external campaign to introduce and jumpstart awareness for the new brand (possibly timed with the start of a new school year).

4) <u>Maintain proactive media relations</u>: The District should proactively pitch and promote stories regarding the achievements of its students, faculty, staff and administrators. Below are some ideas the District should consider when determining a media relations plan:

a. Institutionalize regular meetings with select faculty and staff to determine story ideas or events that can demonstrate the high-quality, accessible education that the District provides or the positive economic and social benefits the District creates in the surrounding communities.

b. Coordinate outreach and news announcements with each entity and community partners (e.g. local businesses, Chambers of Commerce, non-profit organizations, etc.).

c. Develop and submit content, op-eds or guest columns to local newspapers; feed the news items proactively, instead of waiting for media calls.

d. Explore the possibility of securing a regular segment or update on KCVCR (e.g. a weekly or monthly state of education update provided by District spokespeople regarding news in education; can be focused on the District's service area, or broadened to include updates about the educational landscape in California and across the United States).

e. Increase the frequency of story pitches to regional media (print, broadcast and electronic) for coverage of District events, key initiatives and other milestones. Support story pitches with press releases or media advisories.

f. Distribute releases/advisories via the District's social media feeds, in addition to direct e-mails and follow-up phone calls to media contacts. Reach to media via social media channels to encourage assignment editors, reporters, and other media contacts to follow the District's social media feeds.

g. Ensure all news items are added to the District's website in a timely matter.

h. Cultivate media relationships by conducting one-on-one meetings with selected media to increase their familiarity with the District and its entities. Target media would include not only education reporters at local outlets, but business and economic-development-oriented media with local and regional news outlets, editors and editorial boards, and assignment editors from broadcast stations.

<ol type="i" start="9">
Conduct media training for District spokespeople.
Review and update target media list; expand targets more broadly across the region, while also keeping track of local opportunities.
Consider outsourcing external communications duties to a third-party public relations firm to manage proactive and consistent messaging for the District and its entities.

Strategic Recommendations: Determine annual communications plan, and develop corresponding template.

After updating the District's brand and brand identity, and refining communications channels and workflow processes, the District should develop a template for an annual communications plan that lays out its strategic priorities and goals each year. Cerrell recommends the District incorporate the following items into its annual communications plans:

1) <u>Develop editorial calendar with themed monthly communications</u>: Maintain a communications plan and fresh editorial calendar of themed monthly communications, aligned with the District's key messages and schedule of events, and emphasize each month's theme across all communications channels. A potential editorial calendar might be similar to the following:

<ol type="a">
January: Looking Ahead (focus on District and entity initiatives / goals for the new year, etc.).
February: Meeting Community Needs.
March: Workforce Development.
April: Pathways / Accelerated Learning.
June: Recreation (focus on local events, parks, etc.).
July: Leadership (focus on Board, Chancellor, College Presidents, etc.).
August: Student Experience.
September: Economic Impact (focus on how the District and its entities create a positive economic impact in the region and state, etc.)
October: Innovation.

  j. November: Faculty & Staff.

  k. December: "Best of SBCCD" (Celebration of the previous year, etc.).

2) <u>Identify top stories and themes</u>: Meet with select faculty and staff to determine the highest priority themes and stories about the District that the communications team should pitch to local and regional media outlets.

3) <u>Create and promote a web-based calendar</u>: Create a calendar for the year that provides visibility of upcoming District events, and promote it on the SBCDD website. Each entity and department should be encouraged to contribute and all events to the calendar, including annual events, student events and faculty events.

4) <u>Determine "Speakers Bureau"</u>: Create and maintain a list of SBCCD faculty and staff who are prepared to speak on various topics for outside venues; distribute list to media and local organizations.

5) <u>Determine metrics to measure results</u>: The District should establish and employ benchmarks to measure the success of its annual communications plans. While these benchmarks and goals will remain relatively similar from year to year, they should be re-evaluated annually to ensure they are aligned with the District's strategic priorities. Some suggested measures are listed below:

  a. Quantity of materials generated by District communications team or other staff.

  b. Frequency of communications-related meetings with institutional partners.

  c. District staff awareness of brand and brand identity, as well as its key issues and messages.

  d. Growth in subscriber base for online communications.

  e. Amount of relationships with target media.

Implementation Considerations

Cerrell recognizes the aforementioned strategic recommendations will require a great deal of work. For that reason, we recommend the brand enhancement program use a phased approach to allow for stakeholder buy in, incorporation of key learnings and flexibility to make plan adjustments as necessary. A phased approach might include:

1) Phase 1:
  a. Strategically plan SBCCD's brand position.
  b. Consider name changes.
  c. Strengthen brand visuals and identity.

d. Update digital assets.
   e. Develop and implement SBCCD brand style guide.
   f. Develop branded templates for key communications pieces.
   g. Enhance district-wide marketing and communications plan.
   h. Refine internal communications channels and workflow.
2) Phase 2:
   a. Determine annual communications plan and develop template.
   b. Implement brand adoption plan.
3) Phase 3:
   a. Implement annual communications plan.
   b. Maintain proactive media relations.

Of course, a phrased approach is not mandatory, but might provide the most realistic framework for Cerrell's recommended brand enhancement program.

Conclusion

SBCCD has an opportunity elevate its visibility and brand among students, faculty, staff, prospective students, community members and other key audiences. Enhancing its current brand and effectively communicating its story is a critical component of this process and the above recommendations are designed to help the District accomplish its strategic goals.

Cerrell has enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with the District providing counsel and support as it refocuses the way it communicates and brands itself.

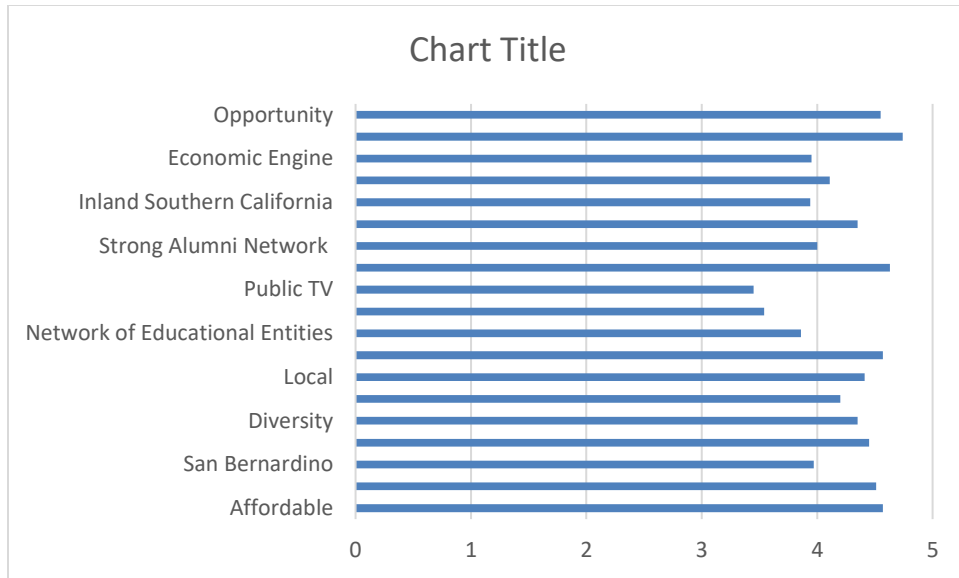# APPENDIX

Appendix: Key Stakeholder Feedback

<u>Strengths & Opportunities</u>:

Forum Feedback:

- "Branding is one of the most important activities for SBCCD/SBVC/CHC/EDCT/KVCR to engage in. By building a strong and recognizable brand, [we] will help students connect with our institutions. Branding is not just about logos, it's about authenticity of the message we give out to the community. I believe we can always enhance and improve our brand." – SBCCD staff

- "Education is a bright star for this region's future and I think the District has the opportunity to be seen as major player here in the landscape of higher education." – Community member

- "Affordable but high quality." – SBCCD student

- "Provides practical, real-world education." – SBCCD student

Survey Feedback:

- A strong majority of survey respondents (66%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "SBCCD prepares students to be successful at four-year universities," while about one quarter (23%) had no opinion or were unsure, and about one tenth (11%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- A strong majority of survey respondents (67%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "SBCCD prepares students to be successful in the workplace," while about one quarter 23% had no opinion or were unsure, and about one tenth (11%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- A strong majority of survey respondents (74%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "It is important for my school to be part of a larger network of educational entities," while about 15% had no opinion or were unsure, and about a tenth (11%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- A strong majority of survey respondents (85%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "It is important for my school to have a unique brand that highlights its individual strengths," while 8% had no opinion or were unsure, and about one tenth (8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- When asked which attributes were most important for the District to be associated with, survey respondents ranked as follows:

Chart Title

(Bar chart with the following categories from top to bottom: Opportunity, Economic Engine, Inland Southern California, Strong Alumni Network, Public TV, Network of Educational Entities, Local, Diversity, San Bernardino, Affordable. X-axis ranges from 0 to 5.)

Challenges & Threats:

Survey Feedback:

- About one quarter of survey respondents (27%) were unaware that the District was a network of four entities before taking the online survey.

- About half of survey respondents (55%) had heard of Economic Development & Corporate Training before taking the online survey.

- Of the SBCCD students and alumni who responded to the online survey, only 62% were aware that they were enrolling in a district of community colleges at the time they enrolled.

- For survey respondents who applied to an SBCCD entity but chose not to enroll, nearly 20% said they chose not to enroll because the process was too confusing or they had no access to a live staff member who could answer their questions.

Forum Feedback:

- "[The District-wide] brand is antiquated. Not cohesive." – SBCCD staff

- "I had no idea I could take classes at Crafton Hills College." – SBCCD student

- "The current brand is pretty weak and doesn't relate to the community we serve." – SBCCD staff

- "As a whole, I believe the District-wide brand is weak. If we talk about the entities separately, they will typically stand on their own in their communities, such as Crafton is fairly well-known in Yucaipa, but not so much in Rialto." – Community member

<u>Logos</u>:

SBCCD Logo:
- Only 39% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I like this logo," while nearly 20% had no opinion or were unsure, and 43% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- 61% of survey respondents said they see the logo regularly used.

- 54% of survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "The logo feels current and modern," while 18% had no opinion or were unsure, and 27% agreed or strongly agreed.

- 44% of survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "The logo accurately represents the District," while nearly 21% had no opinion or were unsure, and 30% agreed or strongly agreed.

CHC Logo:
- 75% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I like this logo," while 19% had no opinion or were unsure, and only 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- 80% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am familiar with this logo," while 9% had no opinion or were unsure, and 12% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

SBVC Logo:
- 64% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I like this logo," while 17% had no opinion or were unsure, and 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- 92% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am familiar with this logo," while 4% had no opinion or were unsure, and 4% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

EDCT Logo:
- 38% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I like this logo," while 26% had no opinion or were unsure, and 38% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- 30% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am familiar with this logo," while 12% had no opinion or were unsure, and 58% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

KVCR Logo:

- 57% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I like this logo," while 19% had no opinion or were unsure, and 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

- 43% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am familiar with this logo," while 21% had no opinion or were unsure, and 36% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Name:

When asked what name best reflects the cities / communities the District serves, 46% liked the current name, and 54% liked other options. The responses broke down as follows:

- Current name: 46%
- Inland Community College District: 26%
- Other: 15%
- Inland College District: 13%