

Montserrat College of Art - School had a waiting list for the first time

#1 for Art Colleges in Google; tons of PR and digital marketing helped rebrand this small school

Case Study Background

As a case study, Montserrat College of Art (MCA) represents a unique blend of SEO, social media, and public relations successes. First, consider that MCA, with only 400 students, is small. It has a history of relatively rapid president turnover and a student body with tuition funded, in a large part, by scholarships and grants. In the past, the college had issues filling classes, attracting out of state students, and gaining visibility online.

When McDougall Interactive began working with MCA, prospects, recruits, students, faculty, staff, and the general public were – as they continue to do – judging colleges by the quality of their website and presence in search and social media. Unfortunately, the MCA website was dated, there were no rankings other than branded search terms, and social profiles were weak, at best. In addition, public relations efforts had been largely for hyperlocal events attracting only hyperlocal media.

Before moving forward, McDougall met with Montserrat College of Art's president and marketing director, as well as a dozen other key people to make sure they truly understood the brand, business, and marketing needs. It quickly became evident that the brand message was unclear and suggested some brand strategy research by our partner agency, Arnold Advertising. McDougall performed interviews with faculty, staff, students, and parents, and then created a mission statement and a tagline (“See What You Can Do with an Art Degree”), which was presented to the board.

Challenges

Initially, the college had almost no visibility in the search engines (outside of branded organic search terms), no social media presence, no PPC, and no major public relations successes. More importantly, the college was not filling all of its classes and was only attracting regional students.

The goal was to not only increase visibility online and in the media, but to sign up more non-scholarship students and to reach more funders in the art world. Additionally, McDougall wanted to position MCA as a thought leader in the elite art community.

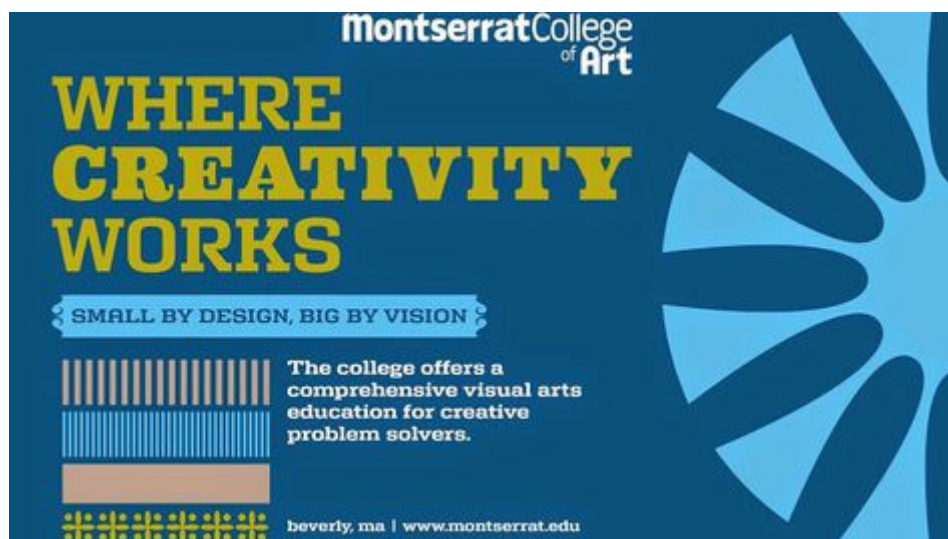
The College Marketing Strategy

The belief within McDougall Interactive is that Internet marketing is most powerful when businesses use a variety of integrated tactics that feed each other in a symbiotic way.

Branding

We wrote the college's new tagline to go with the idea that art and creativity lead to jobs in the creative economy.

"Where creativity works" is still in use almost ten years later.



SEO

The strategy started with SEO because, given the incredible number of searches for topics related to art, nationally and locally focused search engine optimization was an essential activity.

The steps included:

- Focusing on the site itself to ensure that it had clean URLs and search engine friendly site architecture.
- Attacking keywords ranging from art colleges and art schools to phrases related to majors and careers like animation colleges and graphic design careers.
- Optimized large volumes of individual course areas with local geo targeting (e.g., Beverly, MA, Massachusetts, etc.).
- Optimizing the long tail keywords in blog posts.

Social Media

Initially, McDougall redesigned the college's blog and transitioned it to an onsite URL at <http://www.montserrat.edu/blog/> to take advantage of the SEO boost and to grow the overall size of the website. The eventual goal was to release a series of blogs on various topics to attract links and social media attention.

The next step involved setting up MCA's Facebook brand page – which became a high priority action item after it was discovered that they were using the community page format. McDougall then embarked upon a course of content creation that included SEO-friendly blog posts, infographics, photos, and videos – all of which were shared on various social destinations to create a buzz.

Graphic Design

McDougall created a new look solely for the home page while a budget was created for a site redesign.

PR

Starting with the 2010 Annual Art Auction, McDougall provided information, materials, and access to all local (North Shore) media outlets, including daily and weekly newspapers. Only two weeks into the initiative, when the Auction was held, so much coverage had been generated that at least 150 people walked in who only knew about the event through publicity generated by McDougall Interactive.

By consistently pushing out news releases ranging from local events, thought leader segments like the Encaustic conference, and unusual pieces like Gorilla Girls, McDougall sought to gain traction in a wider variety of art communities nationally.

Throughout the next year, PR efforts were focused on exhibits in the college's gallery, and MCA had news repeatedly covered in the Boston Globe, the region's largest daily newspaper, as well as all local dailies and weeklies.

During this phase of the PR efforts, McDougall suggested that the college use the phrase "See What You Can Do with an Art Degree," positioning the school as an important avenue for young people to understand and join the "creative economy."

Conversion Optimization

The online applications and continuing education areas were optimized and new 'calls to action' on the home page were tested with Google Website Optimizer.

Paid Search and Facebook Ads

Google Adwords and Facebook Ads were effectively used in small, cost-effective doses to drive traffic to summer workshops.

The Results

For the first time in its 40-year history, MCA had a waiting list of applicants, and McDougall generated leads from states like Colorado, where the college has never had enrollment before.

"Montserrat College of Art in Beverly has a 28 percent increase in new students, and it's the first time in the school's history it has had a [waiting list](#)." Salem Evening News 2011

As a side note, we also had Gordon College top ranked for "Christian colleges" and "music colleges" at the time and were working on Endicott College's website interactive features. The same Salem Evening News Article mentions the great results those clients received that year as well. "Endicott and its Wenham neighbor, Gordon College, can both boast of a largest-ever freshmen class this fall." Salem Evening News 2011

Below are just a few of the media highlights we got for Montserrat:

- WGBH-TV, Boston and nationally
- Cover and features in ArtScope, Art New England and Art News
- Boston Business Journal
- The Associated Press
- Boston Globe (frequently for exhibitions) major FRONT PAGE coverage of "For The Record."



SEO results

There was a strong increase in visits to the MCA website and SERPs penetration for targeted keywords. Through SEO, there was a **1,454% increase in top 50 results of Google organic search engine results pages.**

Rankings in the first six months included **#1 in Google for the keyword “Art Colleges.”** For a local art college to beat RISD and the rest of the larger national schools, this was a phenomenal success.

Furthermore, PPC successfully drove a significant increase in enrollment. Google Analytics tracked all of the sources driving traffic to the application and summer workshop pages, as well as major increases in goal conversions.

The college’s essentially new Facebook page increased the number of likes by 69,900%. Below is a testimonial from Stephen Immerman, PhD, the president of Montserrat College of Art, regarding this college marketing case study.

<https://youtu.be/1wgQm-p3eo8>

Get more information about McDougall’s [college marketing services](#).