

NAIA-ADA



@NAIAADA



Jon Hart

Dakota Wesleyan University

Athletics Director

During my time at Dakota Wesleyan University (DWU), branding has been at the heart of many projects, improvements and initiatives within our athletics department. For this generation, a brand is so much more than a logo or a mascot – it should proudly represent your organization's culture, history and identity. As many colleges fight for enrollment growth, we can't overlook the importance of first impressions and, oftentimes, your brand is the welcome mat.

At DWU, we have undergone several branding changes in recent years within our athletics department that continually promote our product at a high level. One of the most important undertakings was the complete redesign of the athletics website and the unveiling of a new athletics logo. Both of these initiatives heightened excitement for both students and supporters, which helped us

garner record growth in enrollment and fundraising in the years that immediately followed.

Each of us also has the luxury of promoting our brand at very cost-effective ways through the web and numerous social media platforms. Whether we like it or not, taking full advantage of those opportunities can be a critical element in satisfying students and building engagement with internal and external constituents. Fan apps, social media, graphic design and attention to detail have all been areas of major emphasis for us in order to stay relevant. More often than not, people expect to have everything at the touch of their fingertips.

We have also emphasized the importance of cosmetic updates that have revitalized some of our oldest spaces on campus. Fresh coats of paint, new wall and window graphics, TV and digital displays, lighting and repurposing have been some very cost-effective initiatives that have helped transform outdated facilities into shining, updated spaces. Anytime you have an opportunity to enhance facilities or square footage that experience heavy foot traffic, seize it.

Establishing a multifaceted style guide for users and maintaining a unified relationship with your marketing team is also imperative, an overarching component in reaching the maximum potential for brand success and exposure.

When you are on the road, pay attention to the details of how peer schools and businesses promote their brands. What grabs your attention and what doesn't? Some of your best ideas can be influenced by external sources. The constant evaluation of your brand is crucial for staying competitive and attracting the eye of new generations. Focusing on these areas and more will help invigorate students, staff, fans and alumni.

NATYCAA



@NATYCAA2



Kristen Schuth

Genesee Community College

Assistant VP of Student Engagement and Inclusion/
Director of Athletics

In the current junior college sports world, branding and fundraising have become more of a necessity rather than supplemental for many athletics departments. Athletics departments have had to persist and move forward to reset to what the "new normal" looks like following the pandemic. This included how to return to play and manage the ever-increasing costs of running an athletics program. Enrollment at many institutions has been decreasing which has led to decreased athletics budgets. This is especially true at the community college level. Two areas that I feel have been the biggest factors in Genesee's success are increased technology and our community impact.

Over the past two years, technology has become even more of a resource in areas of our profession, including the fundraising efforts of our athletics teams. Unlike larger Division I universities, many of the college programs at the two-year level have minimal staff with many

of them serving in multiple roles. Technology has been the key contributor in assisting low staffed athletics departments, especially when seeking donations and sponsorships.

Vice President for External Affairs & Development for the NJCAA Brian Luckett states, "With advances in technology, athletics departments and administrators can elevate the two-year college's brand and fundraising to a comparable level of a four-year school, even with less resources." Many did not see the reality of this statement until the pandemic hit and colleges were forced to implement it.

At Genesee Community College, our coaches have raised thousands of dollars through the use of different programs and platforms, but found through our evaluation process that we needed more of a personal touch and connection with our community. Currently, each athlete or staff member that asks for and receives a donation now follows up with a personal letter or an invitation to see our next home game. This ensures that our athletics teams, as well as our department, continue to grow relationships with those that support us.

Another unfortunate result from the pandemic was our sports programs strayed away from in-person events. Our focus for the spring and

summer of 2022 was to increase camps, clinics and community presence. This allowed our student-athletes to use their leadership skills to positively impact the youth in our area and re-establish our connection to our community, all while promoting Genesee athletics. This helped to broaden our brand recognition and secure fundraising. In doing so, this not only supported the community but reinvigorated our athletics staff.

When you think of institutions that are successful in fundraising, they also have a solid brand. The brand can come from past or current success, as well as what athletics departments do internally. As athletics administrators, we need to have a mindset to convey what we want our brand to be and to consistently work towards meeting that goal. It is not just a hashtag or a social media campaign that happens once a year, it is something that needs to be expanded upon day in and day out. Finding ways to encourage alumni, faculty, staff, and the community to invest in your institution can really boost a solid brand, one that student-athletes are proud of. When speaking about fundraising, branding or anything else that sets an institution apart from others, we always need to keep the most important thing in mind – the student-athlete and their experience.