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Re-branding: The Case of Southern Miss Athletics

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ABSTRACT

In late July 2011, administrative trademark judges in the US Patent and Trademark Office ruled, in a 2-1 decision, that the University of Southern Mississippi would have to discontinue the use of its Golden Eagle logo because it was too similar in appearance to the University of Iowa Hawkeye (Hinton, 2011). Administrative trademark judge David Bucher wrote in his majority opinion that he backed Iowa's claim that there would be "the likelihood of confusion" in merchandise sales between the schools and the "the overall similarity in appearance of the marks on the goods, particularly in light of the use of identical color schemes, creates virtually identical commercial impressions" (Hinton, 2011).

The purpose of this presentation is not to debate the merits of the legal hearing. Rather, the case describes how university administrators, students, alumni, faculty, and other constituents turned a seemingly negative judicial ruling into a positive opportunity to upgrade and improve the university's brand. An outline of this inclusive process began to emerge when then-President Martha Saunders stated, "You can change the way a product looks, repackage it, put a new wrapper on it, but to brand an organization requires people." USM engaged a local consulting firm to assist with its rebranding effort, and the importance of focusing on several traditional factors was evident.

The present study looks at how the character, pride, authenticity, and strength of the athletic department were incorporated into the new logo and ultimately the university's identity. Other issues to be addressed are:

- 1) The timeline for revealing the new logo
- 2) How other institutions handled similar roll-outs of new logos

- 3) Logistic issues in using the new logo
- 4) Costs of implementing the new logo

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

R. Douglas Manning, Ph.D., received his doctorate from the University of New Mexico and is currently an Assistant Professor of Sport Management in the College of Business at the University of Southern Mississippi. In addition to 2015 presentations at the Sport Marketing Association, Sport and Recreation Law Association, Southern Sport Management Association, and MAHPERD, recent manuscripts accepted for publication include submissions to QUEST and the Journal of Contemporary Athletics.

Dennis Phillips earned a P.E.D. at Springfield College and has been an Assistant Director of the School of HP&R, and now Sport Management Coordinator in the College of Business at The University of Southern Mississippi for the past 23 years. Dr. Phillips has been the Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) for the past ten years, and has taught a Sport Global Studies class in London and Edinburgh five times.

R. Brian Crow, MBA, Ed.D, is Professor of Sport Management at Slippery Rock University, was the Editor-in-Chief of the Sport Marketing Quarterly, was the President of the North American Society for Sport Management, and is the Founding Principal of GameDay Consulting.

Dallas Branch, Jr., Ph.D. is an Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Graduate Sport Management Program at West Virginia University. He started the Sport Marketing Quarterly (SMQ) Journal and was one of the Founding Members of the Sport Marketing Association (SMA).

Dr. Ronald Dick is an Associate Professor of Sport Marketing at Duquesne University in the School of Business and previously was an Assistant Professor in Sport Management at James Madison University and an Associate Professor at the University of New Haven. He worked for 15 years with the Philadelphia 76ers and New Jersey Nets, and was the Director of Athletics at Marian College (WI) and Assistant Athletic Director for Ticket Operations at the University of Houston.