

## 'Be Boulder': CU eyes new marketing campaign to combat party-school image

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The University of Colorado is trying to shake off its party-school image once and for all, focusing the public's perception instead on the school's researchers, astronauts and entrepreneurs with a new marketing campaign called "Be Boulder."

The branding effort, which formally launches in December, will attempt to influence how people who don't know much about the university perceive it, said Jon Leslie, CU's director of strategic marketing and web communication.

Leslie said he hopes the campaign will help streamline branding across all departments and schools on the Boulder campus and increase alumni participation. CU's current 8-percent alumni participation rate ranks the university in the bottom of the Pac-12 Conference.

"This is a unique moment of buy-in across the campus for an umbrella message with the potential to shift perceptions of CU-Boulder and drive positive affinity for the University of Colorado as a whole," Leslie said.

CU hired international design firm Pentagram earlier this year after internally developed campaigns fell short in focus groups. The firm has worked with schools such as the University of Michigan and the University of Southern California.

The campus spent nearly \$68,000 to develop the new campaign, and another \$55,000 to test "Be Boulder" with in-person and online focus groups, said Frances Draper, CU's vice chancellor for strategic relations. CU will spend another \$50,000 in the coming months to finish work on the campaign.

Draper said the campus as a whole hadn't hired an outside firm for design or marketing work in five years.

CU has a budget for social media and some advertising at Denver International Airport, money Draper said the campus instead used to pay for the development of the "Be Boulder" campaign.

### 'On our own terms'

The Boulder campus branding effort comes after the university spent \$780,000 in 2011 in systemwide rebranding efforts, which included streamlining CU's logo across the four campuses. Draper said the CU-Boulder campaign builds on those systemwide rebranding efforts.

During a Boulder Faculty Assembly meeting last week, Leslie showed CU faculty members an example of a poster using the new campaign.

On the poster, CU alumnus and astronaut Steve Swanson floats in space with the words "Be courageous. Be visionary. Be daring." along the top of the poster. The words "Be Boulder" were featured in a larger font along the bottom.

In focus groups to test the posters, one respondent said the campaign showed how CU can help her reach her potential without simply touting the university's accomplishments, Leslie said.

"We really want to use this to help define ourselves on our own terms and talk about the opportunities that the university enables for people," Draper said.

### **'Reinforce the positive'**

In initial focus groups, CU officials asked participants what celebrity they most associated with the university. Leslie said they got responses such as Charlie Sheen and Lindsay Lohan, with a few astronauts mixed in.

The celebrities reinforced what marketing officials already knew -- that CU is associated heavily with partying.

The Boulder campus -- once host to a massive 4/20 gathering that attracted more than 10,000 pot smokers in recent years -- was ranked No. 3 on Playboy's list of Top 10 party schools in 2013, and topped that list in 2011.

After showing the same participants images from the "Be Boulder" campaign and asking the same question, Leslie said campus officials received very different responses, including Einstein, Jane Goodall, Bill Gates and Mahatma Gandhi.

During the Boulder Faculty Assembly meeting, one faculty member spoke up and joked that parody posters will be made with phrases such as "Be stoned. Be drunk. Be happy." Draper acknowledged that possibility, but added that the best way to combat CU's party-school image is by starting an entirely new conversation.

"You don't go out and argue against the negative, you reinforce the positive," Draper said.

To measure the new campaign's success, CU marketing officials will track changes in the public's perception of CU over time.

This week, CU officials are hosting a casting call to hear from students, faculty and staff for possible future "Be Boulder" themes.

"We hope to face the perception of Boulder head on and provide real people who demonstrate the values we represent," Leslie said.

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