Better Together

Our Journey Toward a Unified Brand and Website with our OPM

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Goals

- Share the challenges we faced related to brand confusion, search engine cannibalization, and poor UX in our web strategy with our OPM and the solutions we developed
- Provide things to think about and approaches to try to bring more unity to an OPM partnership

An OP- what?

OPM = Online Program Management Companies

- Third-party organizations that work with colleges and universities to take their academic programs online
- Often offer comprehensive recruitment, enrollment, course design and technology support
- Partnership often based on a "tuition revenue share" or fee-for-service model
- Insulated ecosystem of services and technology

How it started:
The honeymoon...

- When we began partnering with our OPM in 2008, they launched a brand and website called *RossierOnline* and the domain ***rossieronline.usc.edu***
- Over time they accumulated four online programs that they managed on our behalf. At that time, USC Rossier did not manage any online programs internally.

Relationship status: "It's complicated"

- By 2018, we had two internally-managed online programs and were preparing to launch a third program
- Information on our internally-managed online programs were primarily located on our main site *rossier.usc.edu*
- One of the programs our OPM managed was an EdD program. The third online program we launched in 2018 was another online EdD program.

The challenges

#1 Brand confusion and scattered program portfolio

- The RossierOnline brand and URL created the expectation that information for *all* our online programs could be found on this website
- Inability to compare programs across our portfolio
- Market acceptance of online programs improved, causing us to question the siloed marketing approach for online programs

The challenges

#2 Terrible User Experience

- On the RossierOnline site:
  - Internally-managed programs weren't on the inquiry form
  - With different application systems, you couldn't apply to internally-managed programs using the "apply" button
  - You couldn't "request info" about any internally-managed online programs using the form
  - You couldn't find any of our internally-managed events on this website's events calendar
  - You shouldn't call the listed phone number to learn about any internally-managed online programs

The challenges

#3 Search Engine Optimization Issues

- OPM pages consistently outranked school program pages in SERP
  - OPM ran ads on non-online specific keywords
  - OPM ranked above our pages in organic search

Search term: "usc edd online"

Search result

1. EdD in Organizational Change and Leadership - USC Rossier ... **Rossieronline**
   https://rossieronline.usc.edu/academics/edd/ ▼

2. EdD in Organizational Change and Leadership online | USC...
   https://rossieronline.usc.edu/doctorate/edd-online/ ▼

   ▸ 3 site links

3. Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership online - USC **Online.usc**
   https://online.usc.edu/programs/educational-leadership/ ▼

4. OCL online Tuition & Financial Aid | USC Rossier
   https://rossieronline.usc.edu/doctorate/edd-online/tuition-financial-aid/ ▼

5. Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership (online) - USC **Rossier.usc**
   https://rossier.usc.edu/programs/doctoral/ed-leadership-online/ ▼

The challenges

#3 Search Engine Optimization Issues

- Potential cannibalization: Google's domain diversity algorithm update
- Lost opportunity for combined link authority

The challenges

**#5 Sustainability of our long term web presence**

- What happens to our web properties, link equity, etc. when our contract with our OPM ends?

Solutions: Phase 1

- Discontinued the RossierOnline brand (logo, social media channels, etc)
- Revised language across the website and communications to present RossierOnline as part of one unified USC Rossier admission team
- Implemented temporary solution to address program portfolio issues

Temporary Solution

- Included all programs on the main website - with external links jumping out to the appropriate website for the program
- Included *all* online programs on the RossierOnline website
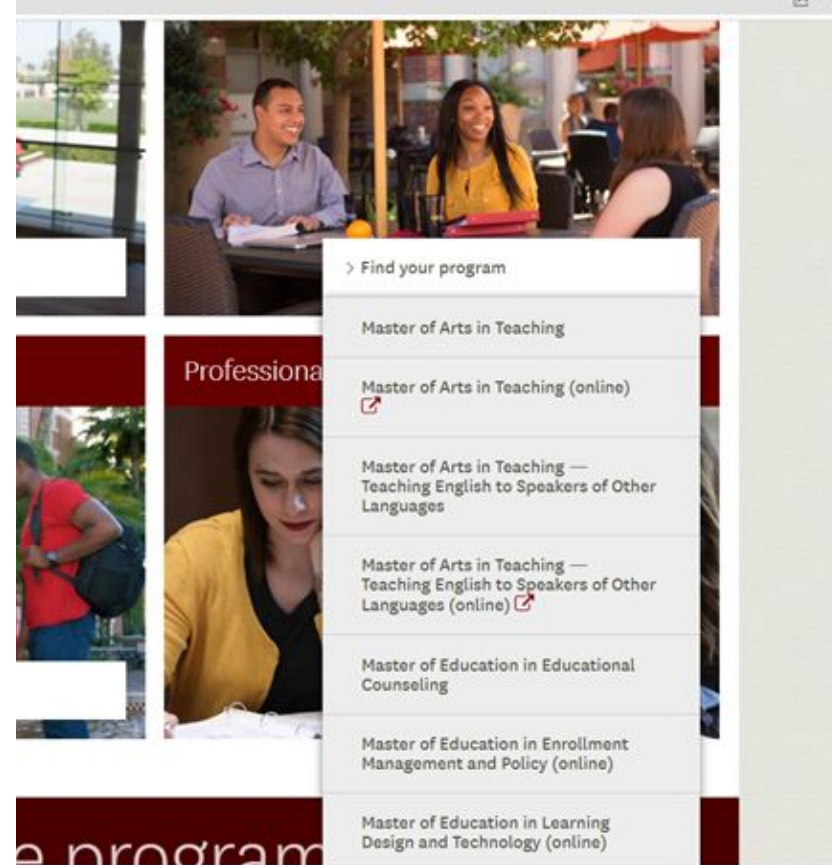
The Search for a Longer-Term Solution

**Project goals (in order of priority)**

1. Best user experience (information architecture, brand clarity)
2. Best search engine optimization strategy *for the school overall*
3. Long term sustainability

The Search for a Longer-Term Solution

- Hired an external consultant to advise on the ideal domain structure
- Consultant recommended that a **consolidated domain** would be the best approach. Anticipated results were:
  - Combined site link authority
  - Seamless user experience and consistent look, feel, and branding for all programs
  - Centralized program portfolio; improved convenience when comparing programs and modalities
- Informed OPM of our intention to migrate RossierOnline domain into main rossier.usc.edu
- Planned to provide OPM with CMS access to maintain content for the programs they managed

Issues to solve

- Different approaches to marketing (lead generation vs. overall brand/relationship building)
- Different content management systems/hosting environments
- Different applications to apply for programs
- Different CRMs
- Different admission teams
- Different legal obligations/privacy policies
  - California AB- 375
- Data collection and ownership
- Site access security and credentials
- Website governance
- Digital marketing coordination (pixels, retargeting etc.)
- Keyword targeting coordination
- Access to site analytics
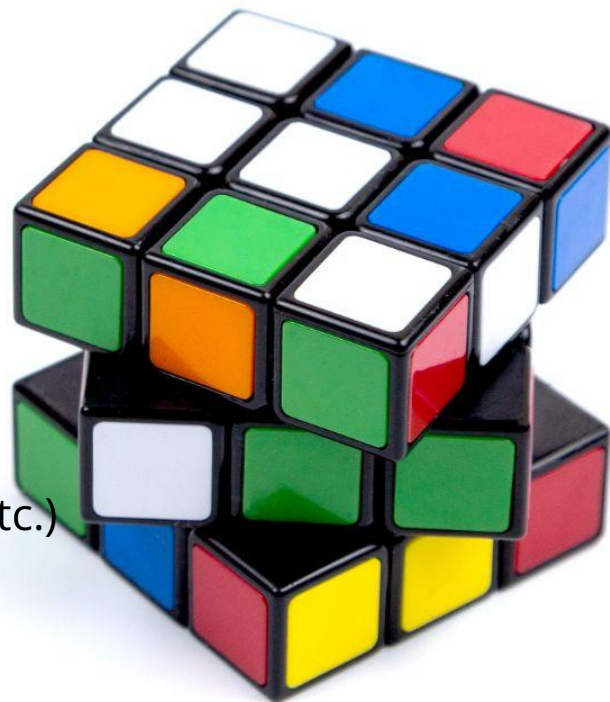
(Real-life) excuses you shouldn't take from your OPM

- This is how we do it with all our university partners
- We don't have the technology to {improve this situation}
- At least your users will be on a university site of some kind

My advice

- Keep the user's needs front and center, regardless of the internal challenges
- Trust your instincts and do not be intimidated
- Invite others into the conversation
    - Other schools within your university that are partnering with the OPM
    - Other universities that partner with the OPM
    - External consultants
- Website management is both an art and a science
- Negotiating 101: ask for more than you want

How it's going

- Scheduled to launch a consolidated website with our OPM this month
  - OPM will migrate a significant amount of content to our main site
  - Newly launched website will have centralized program portfolio
  - All events will appear on main web calendar

USC Rossier
School of Education

Programs   Faculty & Research   News & Insights   About   🔍

Programs / Find and Compare Programs

Find and Compare Programs

Intro text goes here. Use this space to introduce page's purpose for users. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur.

Helpful Tips

Understand the difference between a MAT degree vs. MEd degree

Read the Blog Post →

Understand the difference between a PhD degree vs. EdD degree

Read the Blog Post →

Filter and Search Programs

Search

| Search All Programs... | Go → |

Program Level

All Program Levels ⌄

Degree Awarded

All Degrees ⌄

Area of Interest

All Areas of Interest ⌄

Modality

All Modalities ⌄

Career Path

All Career Paths ⌄

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

	PROGRAM	LEVEL	DEGREE	MODALITY	COMPARE
A	AASA-USC Urban Superintendents Academy →	Professional Development	Certificate	Hybrid	☐ Compare
E	Educational Counseling →	Master's	MEd	On Campus	☐ Compare

Active Filters [Professional Development ✕]   Clear All ✕

	PROGRAM	LEVEL	DEGREE	MODALITY	COMPARE
A	AASA-USC Urban Superintendents Academy →	Professional Development	Certificate	Hybrid	☐ Compare
S	School Business Management →	Professional Development	Certificate	Hybrid	☐ Compare
	Summer Leadership Academy →	Professional Development	Credential	Online	✕ Compare

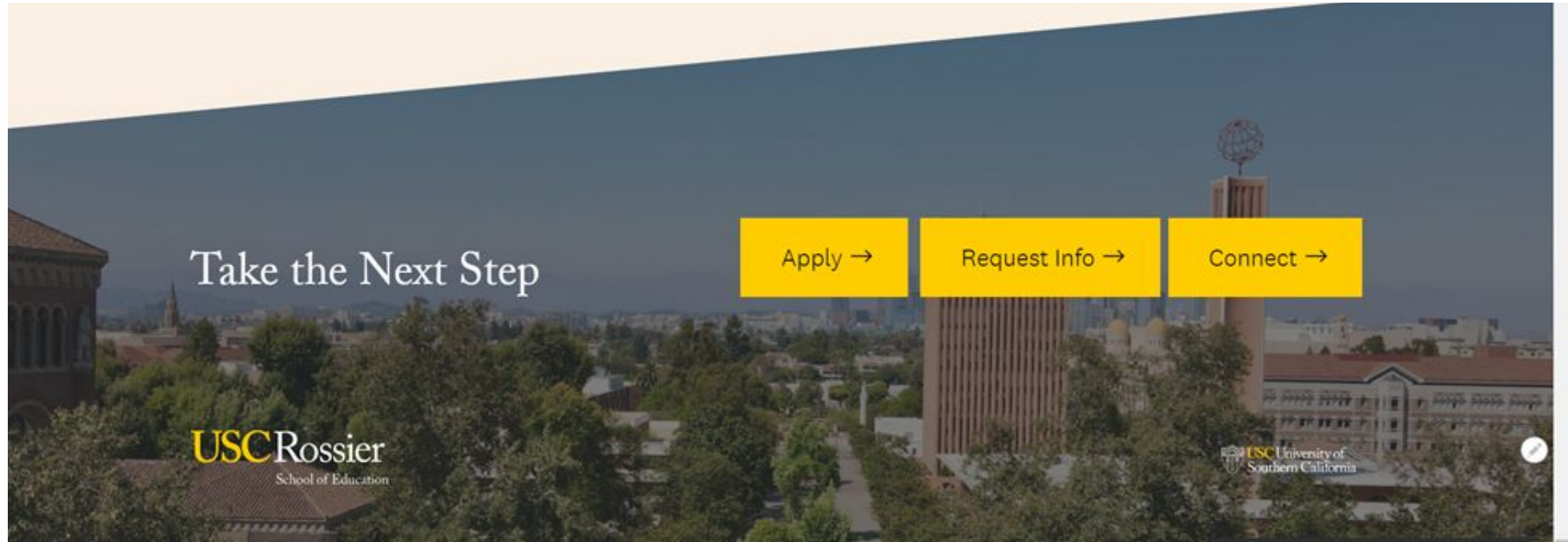| Summer Leadership Academy ✕ | Program 2 of 3 | Program 3 of 3 | Compare → |

How it's going

- Our OPM will still manage a slimmed down website that is *unable to be found by search engines*
- We are still hammering out a content governance strategy
- It's better, but the infrastructure of the partnership continues to have fundamental challenges

Routing Solutions

Apply to USC Rossier

What type of applicant are you?

Doctoral

ON-CAMPUS PROGRAMS

Apply to our on-campus PhD and EdD programs

Apply Now ↗

ONLINE/HYBRID PROGRAMS

- Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership (online) ↗
- Doctor of Education in Organizational Change in Leadership ↗ (online) ↗
- Global Executive Doctor of Education ↗

Master's

ON-CAMPUS PROGRAMS

Apply to our on-campus Master's programs

Apply Now ↗

ONLINE PROGRAMS

- Master of Arts in Teaching (online) ↗
- Master of Arts in Teaching — Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages ↗(online) ↗
- Master of Education in Learning Design and Technology ↗(online) ↗
- Master of Education in Enrollment

Professional Development

Apply to our professional development programs

- School Leadership Academy Preliminary Services Credential ↗
- School Business Management Certificate ↗
- AASA-USC Urban Superintendents Academy ↗
- Summer Gifted Institute Workshop ↗
- Equity Educators Certificate ↗
- Project CHANGE ↗
- Innovative District Leadership Academy ↗

Undergraduate

MINORS

Apply to our undergraduate minor programs

Apply Now ↗

PROGRESSIVE DEGREES

Apply to our progressive degree programs

Apply Now ↓

We Fight On

- The USC Rossier team will continue to pursue:
  - Sunsetting the RossierOnline domain entirely
  - Embedding OPM forms on our main site
  - A more cohesive website governance strategy