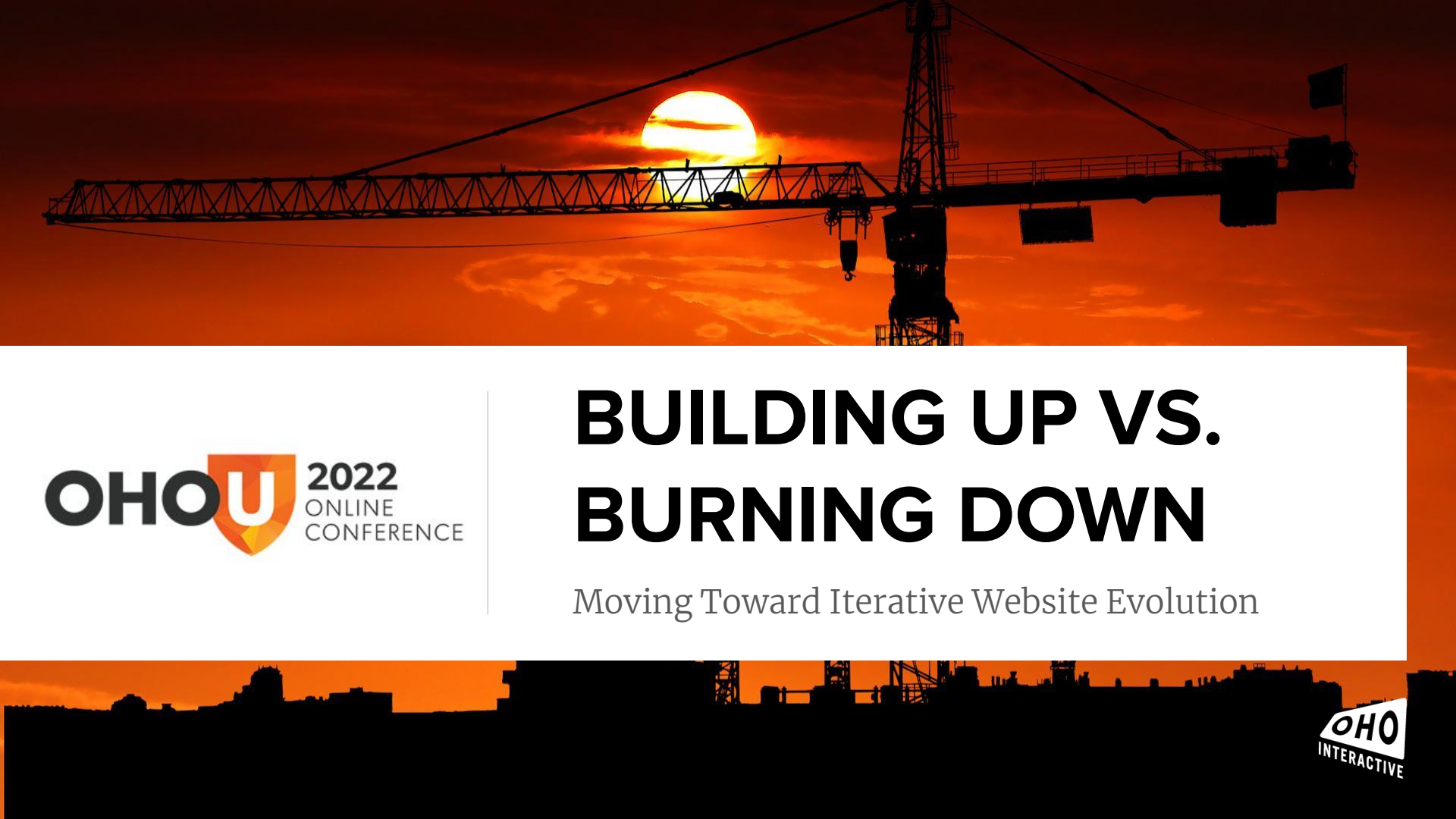


OHOU 2022 ONLINE CONFERENCE

BUILDING UP VS. BURNING DOWN

Moving Toward Iterative Website Evolution

OHO INTERACTIVE

The Pitch

In the past: To evolve, higher education websites needed to be burned down with each iteration — largely because the design, content and technology were so closely intertwined, and to adapt to mobile.

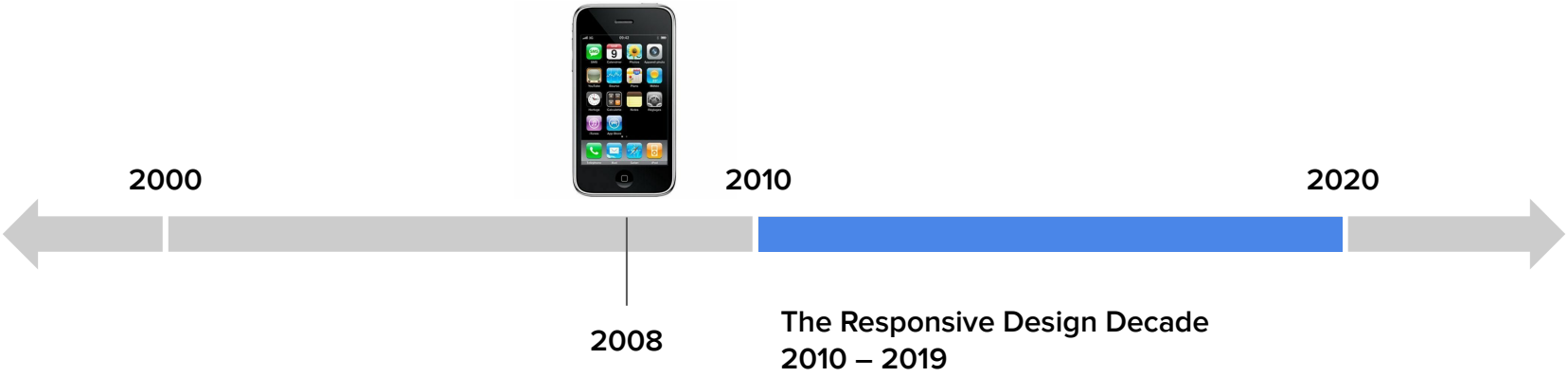
Today: The separation of content, design, and technology makes it possible to establish a firm foundation and move the site forward to achieve the institutional objectives. In addition, external changes in content delivery have stabilized.

The opportunity: If a solid website foundation is established, your school can shift from burning down your website with each iteration to building on top of it.

Let’s Look Back

Mobile Design

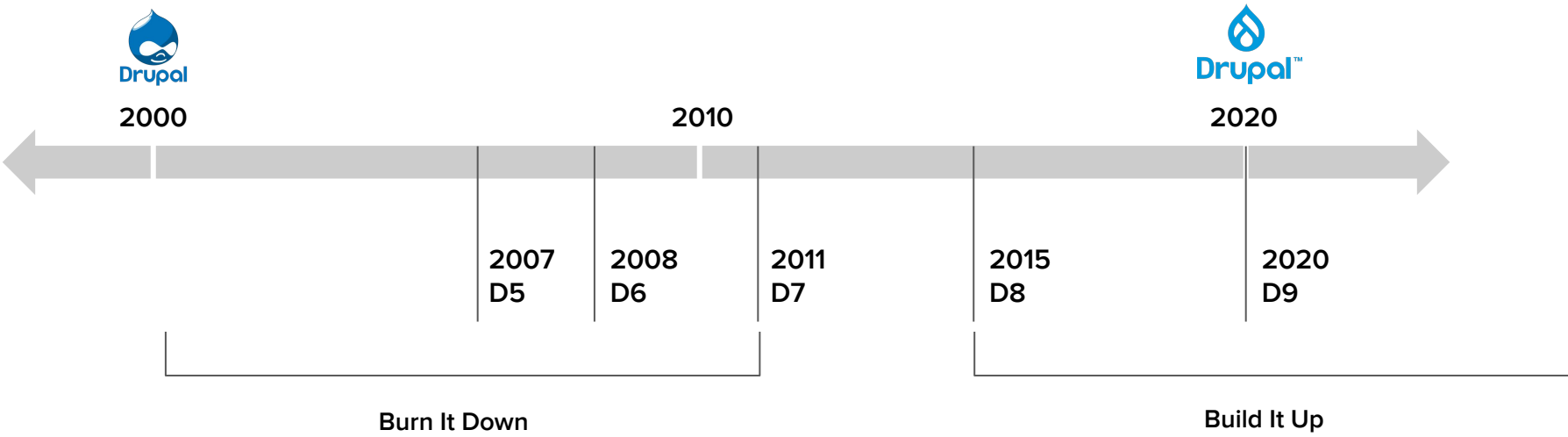
2008 iPhone 3G launches, pushing the need for websites designed for the mobile web and forcing full-scale rethinking of web design and content presentation. Burn down those websites.



Evolving CMS Platforms

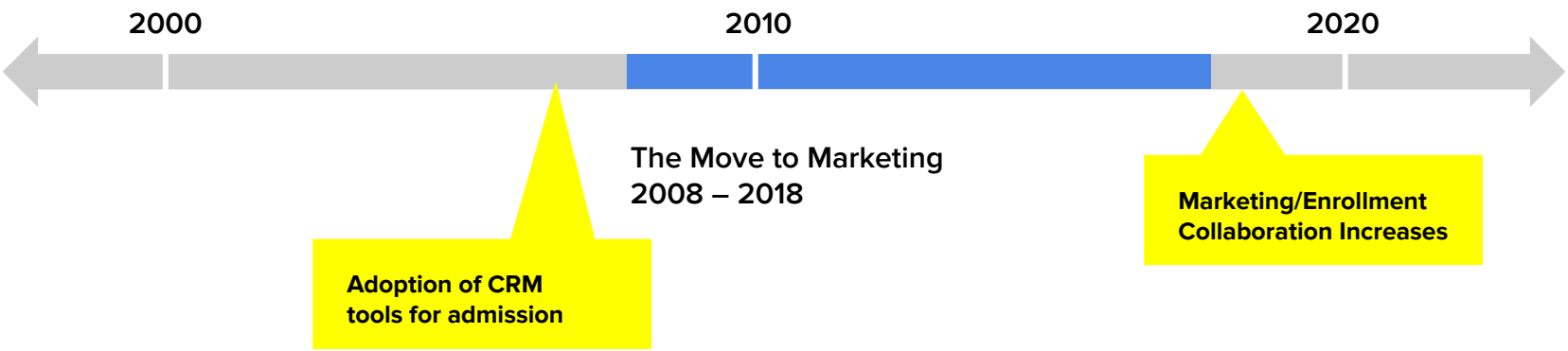
2015 Before 2015, all Drupal sites needed to be rebuilt with every redesign.

After 2015, the core can be updated to maintain the content structures.

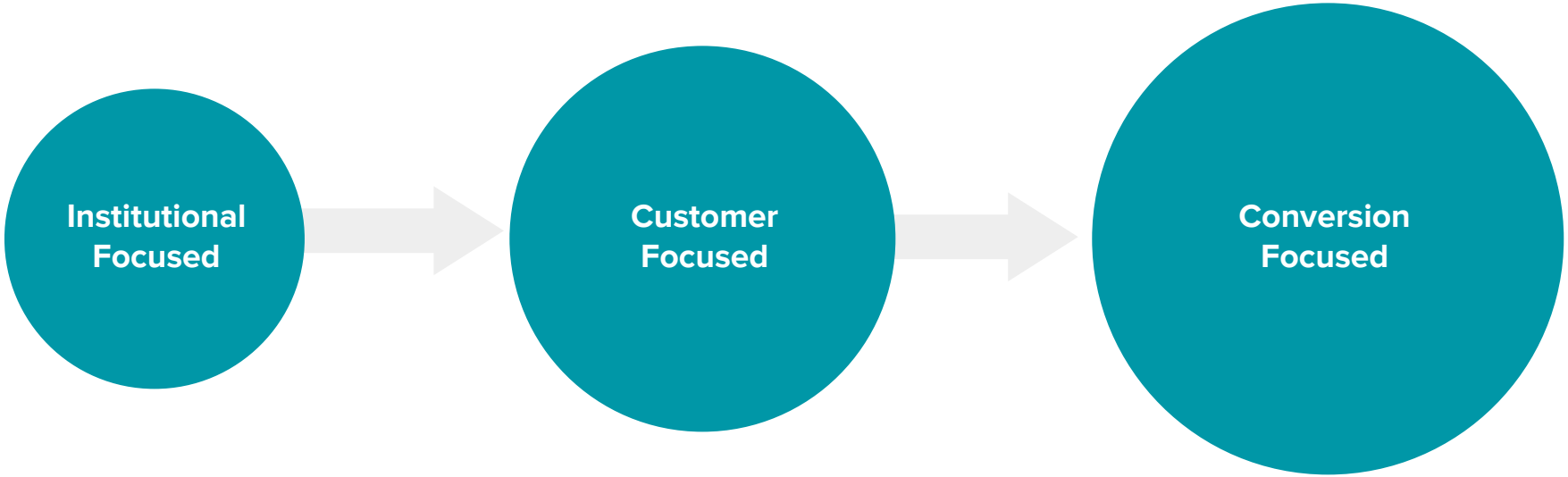


Website Moves from IT to Marketing

2008 The move from the website being a “technical” project to a “marketing” project occurs with the expansion of more specialized marketing tools.



Website Evolution



Site reflects the internal hierarchy of the school

"Webmaster" posts content

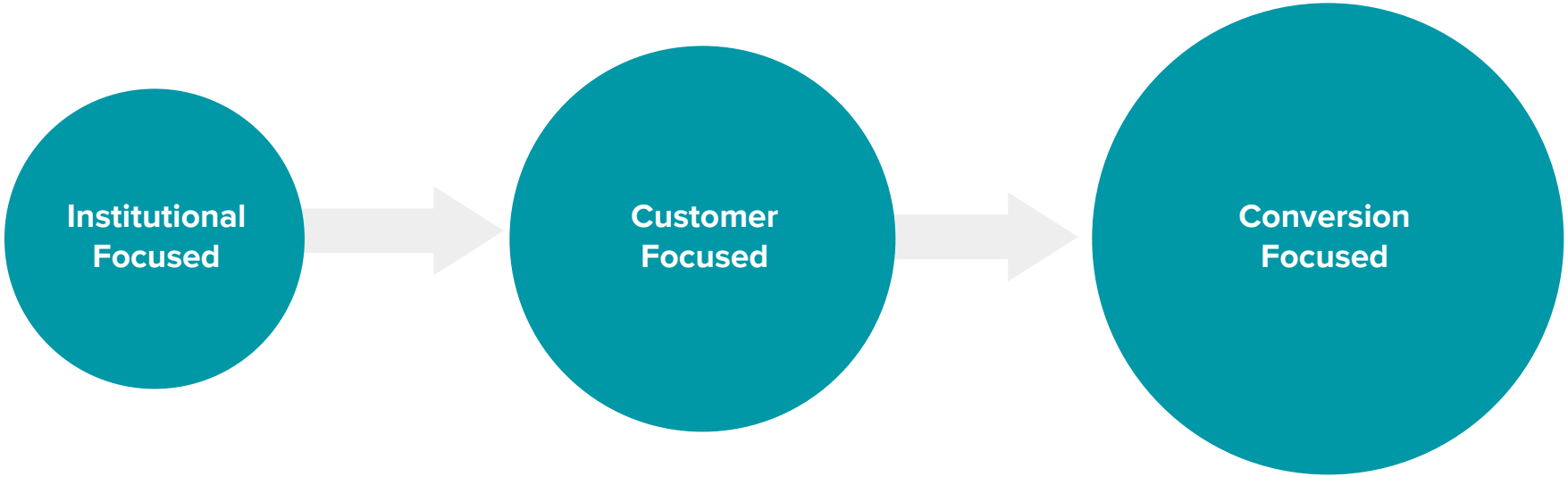
Site aligned to the needs of external audiences

Team of 2-3 people manages the site within governance

Site is further optimized and revised to drive conversion

Team of 5-6 monitor, measure, and evolve — content, conversion, enrollment, analytics

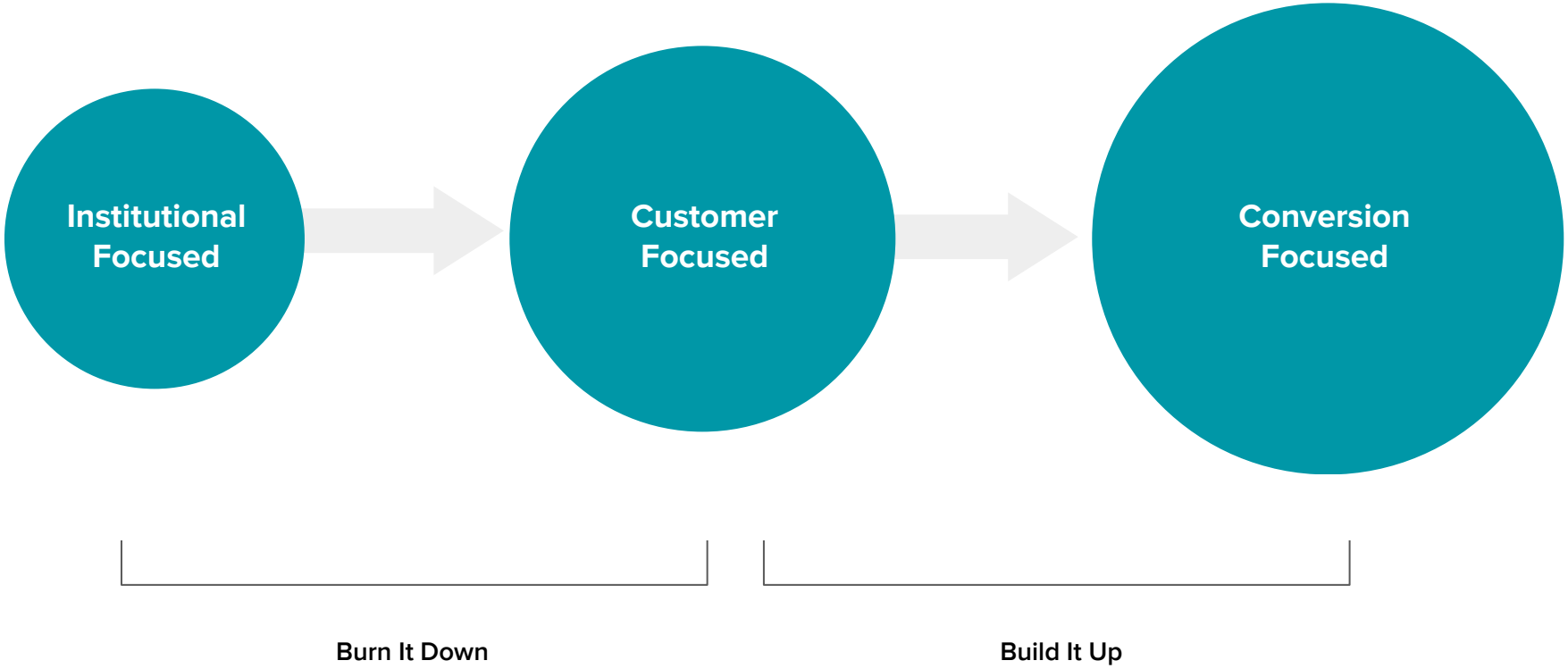
Website Evolution



Resumé of the school.

Achieves the business goals of the school.

Website Evolution



Poll Question

Which stage is your college or university website?

Setting the Foundation

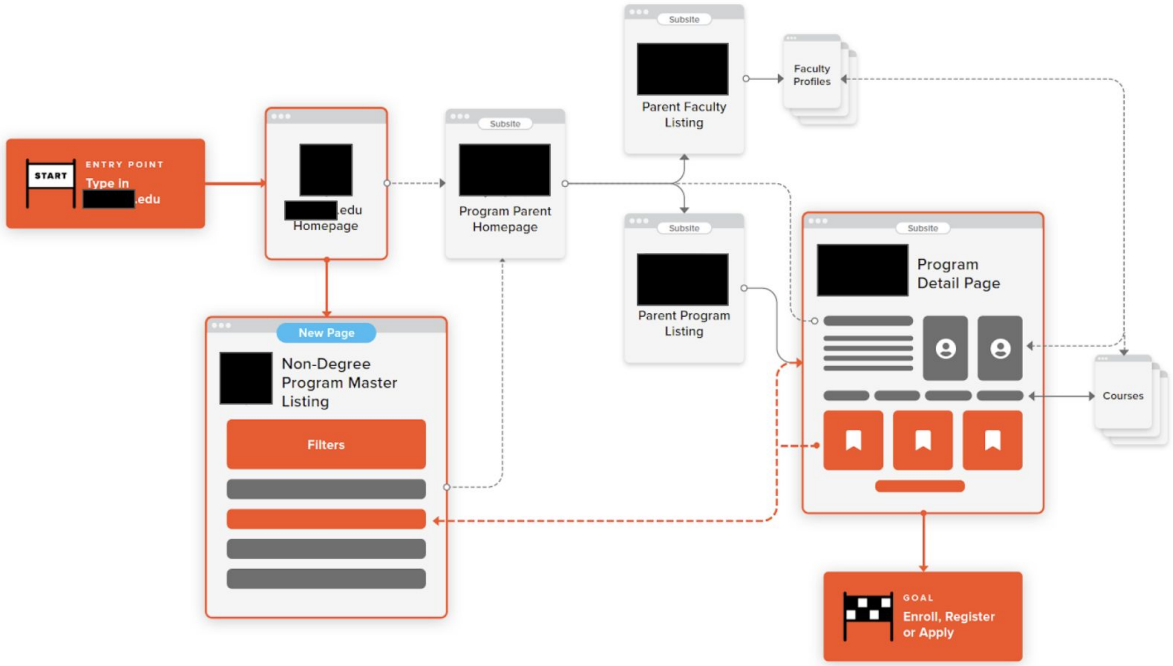
Building a Solid Foundation

- A user-centered website focused on audience needs (not institutional needs)
- A digital content strategy
- A governance strategy to maintain site quality
- Component-driven design
- CMS that is able to evolve and be upgraded without having to rebuild
- A site that you can edit and publish without the help of a developer
- The staff to support and execute on the strategy

User-Centric Website

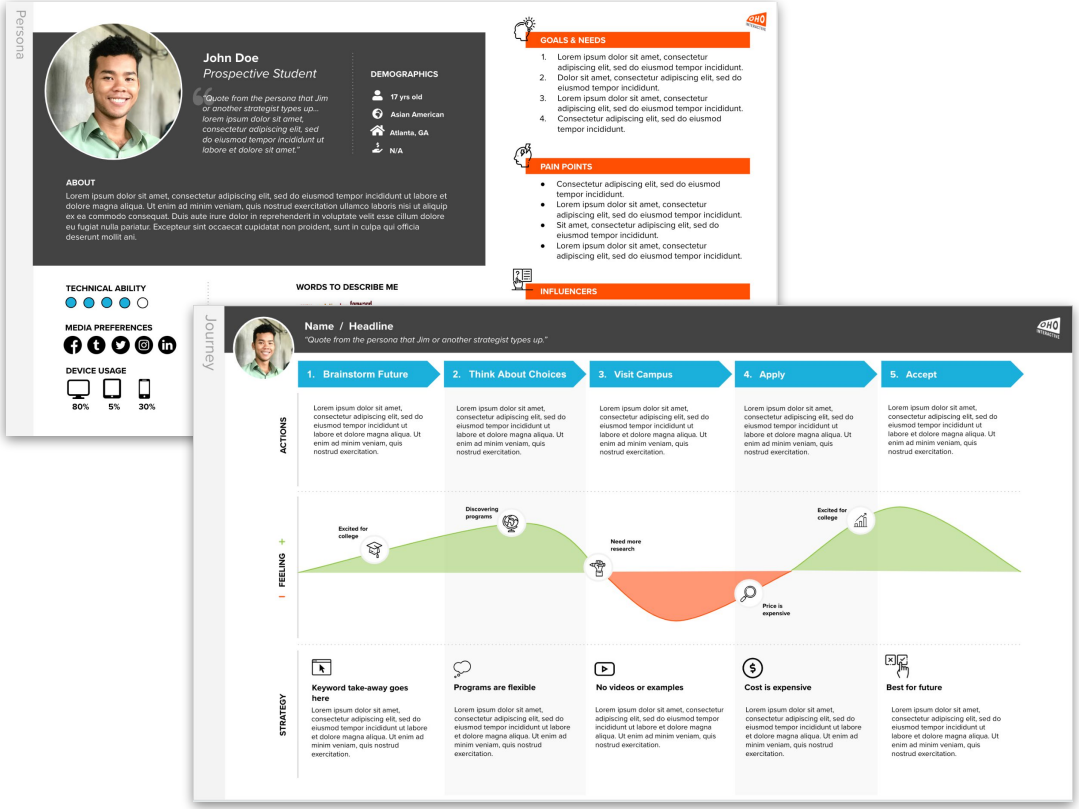
By rooting site navigation in key user flows — not your institutional structure — you extend the relevance and value of the website.

As user needs change, site flows can evolve, with changes confirmed by user testing.



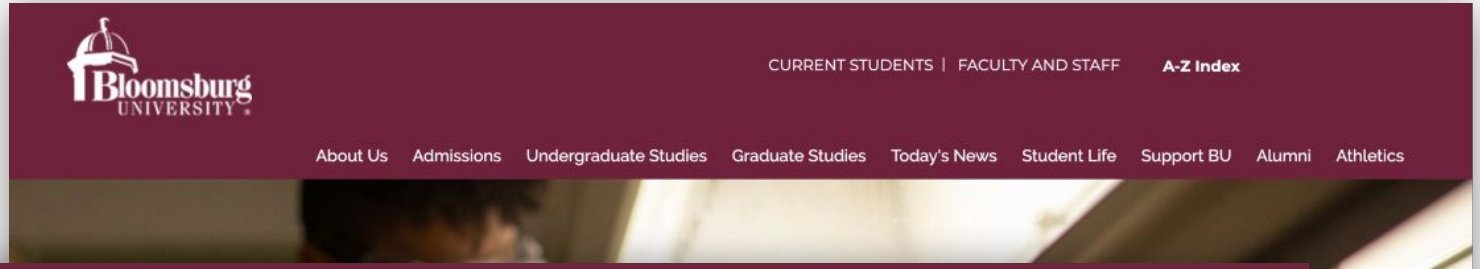
User-Centric Website

The more you can learn and understand about what your audience's preferences and behaviors, the better you'll be able to engage and convert them. User needs heavily influence navigation, nomenclature, and content.

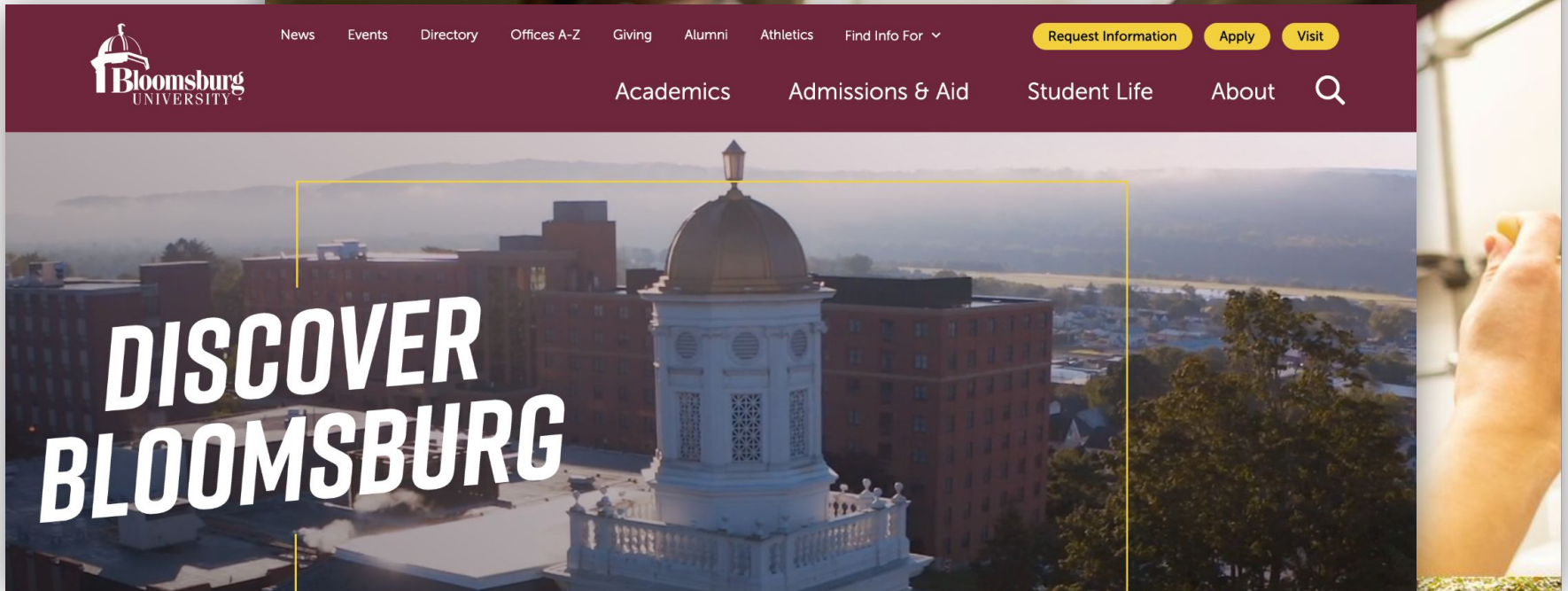


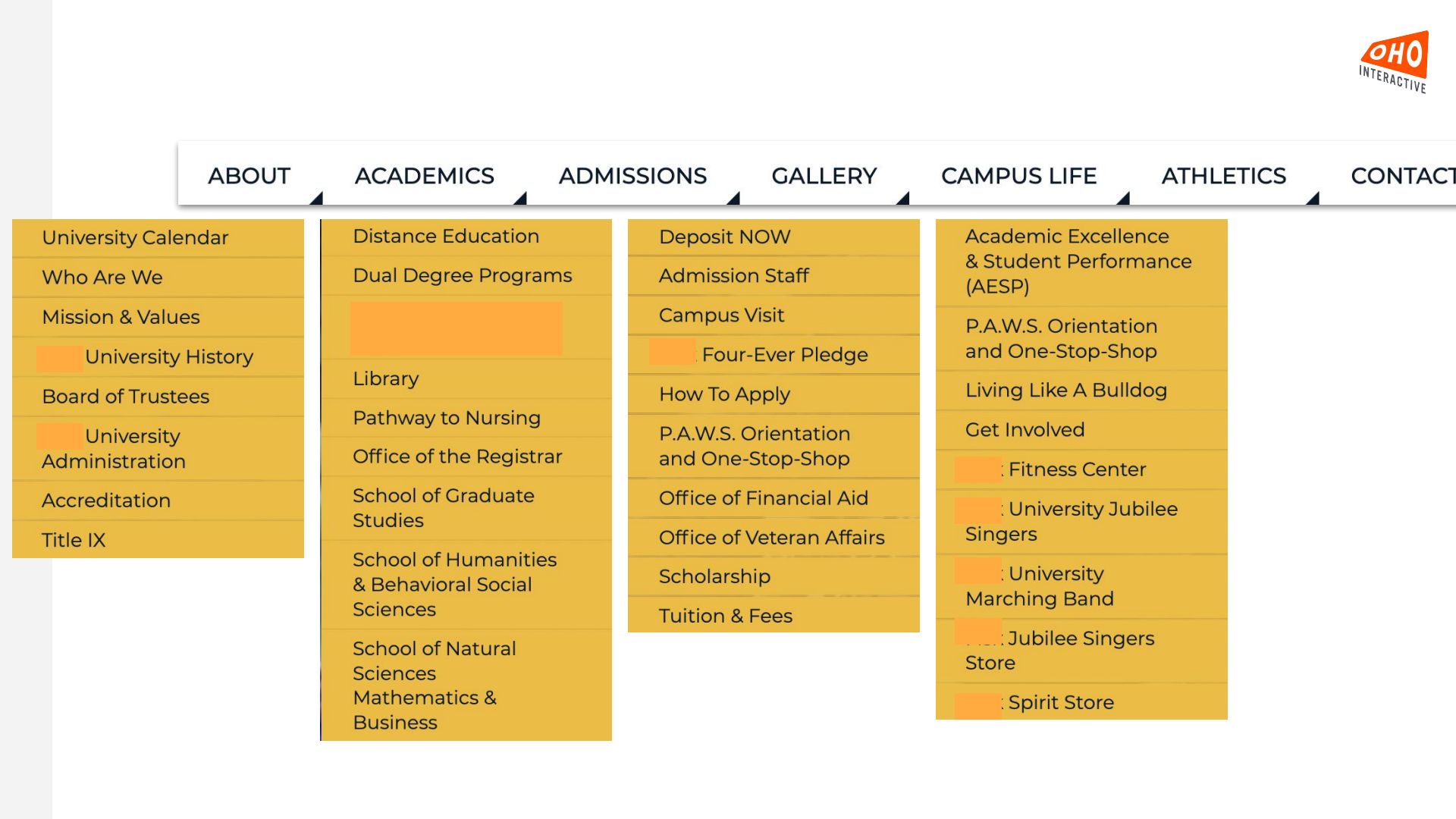
Build A Solid Foundation

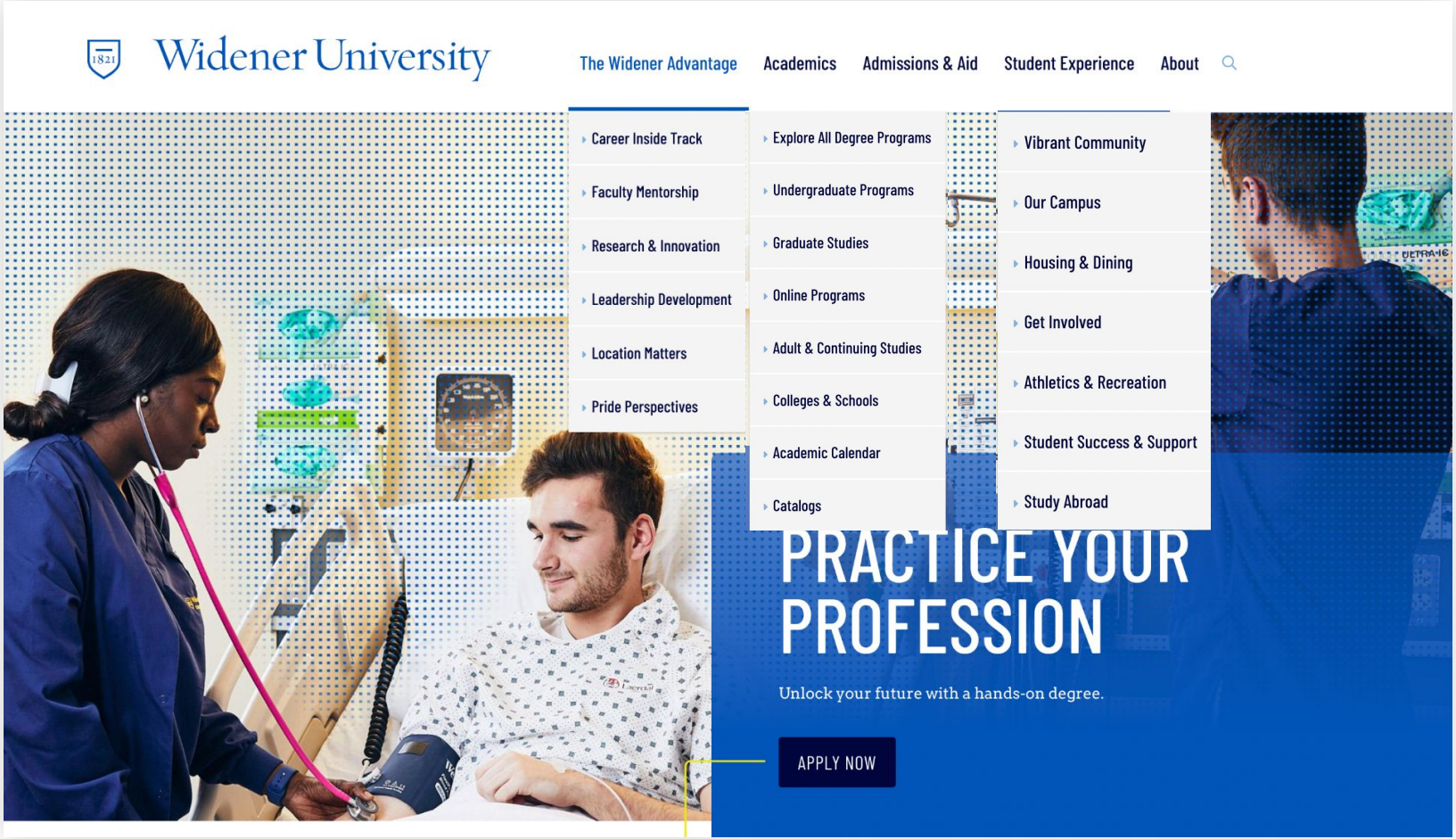
Before



After




ABOUT
ACADEMICS
ADMISSIONS
GALLERY
CAMPUS LIFE
ATHLETICS
CONTACT
University Calendar
Who Are We
Mission & Values
University History
Board of Trustees
University Administration
Accreditation
Title IX
Distance Education
Dual Degree Programs
Library
Pathway to Nursing
Office of the Registrar
School of Graduate Studies
School of Humanities & Behavioral Social Sciences
School of Natural Sciences Mathematics & Business
Deposit NOW
Admission Staff
Campus Visit
Four-Ever Pledge
How To Apply
P.A.W.S. Orientation and One-Stop-Shop
Office of Financial Aid
Office of Veteran Affairs
Scholarship
Tuition & Fees
Academic Excellence & Student Performance (AESP)
P.A.W.S. Orientation and One-Stop-Shop
Living Like A Bulldog
Get Involved
Fitness Center
University Jubilee Singers
University Marching Band
Jubilee Singers Store
Spirit Store


Widener University
The Widener Advantage
Academics
Admissions & Aid
Student Experience
About
Career Inside Track
Faculty Mentorship
Research & Innovation
Leadership Development
Location Matters
Pride Perspectives
Explore All Degree Programs
Undergraduate Programs
Graduate Studies
Online Programs
Adult & Continuing Studies
Colleges & Schools
Academic Calendar
Catalogs
Vibrant Community
Our Campus
Housing & Dining
Get Involved
Athletics & Recreation
Student Success & Support
Study Abroad
PRACTICE YOUR PROFESSION
Unlock your future with a hands-on degree.
APPLY NOW

Content Strategy

Ensure purposeful publishing through an editorial process that helps align ongoing content efforts to overarching strategy, extending the value of website.

		DEADLINES			KEY MESSAGES			AUDIENCE			ASSIGNMENTS			CONTENT NEEDS			PLATFORMS				TAXONOMY		
STORY TITLE	STATUS	PUBLISH	DRAFT	REVIEW	THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	WRITER	PHOTO/VIDEO	EDITOR	MEDIA	SOURCE	CROSS PROMO	WEBSITE	NEWSLETTER	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	TAG 1	TAG 2	TAG 3
Lorem ipsum dolor sit ame	published	4/15/2021	4/12/2021	4/13/21	TRUE			TRUE	TRUE		Jane	Rob	Barbara	portrait	n/a	n/a	TRUE		TRUE		TRUE		
Consectetur adipiscing elit	published	4/16/2021	4/13/2021	4/14/21		TRUE			TRUE		Alicia	Matt	Barbara	portrait	n/a	department	TRUE		TRUE	TRUE		TRUE	
Sed do eiusmod tempor	published	4/17/2021	4/14/2021	4/15/21			TRUE	TRUE		TRUE	Fred	Courtney	Kimiko	portrait and candids	Wall Street Journal	major	TRUE	TRUE					TRUE
Incididunt ut labore	ready	4/18/2021	4/15/2021	4/16/21					TRUE		Alicia	Courtney	Fred	video	n/a	major	TRUE			TRUE		TRUE	
Dolore magna aliqua	ready	4/19/2021	4/16/2021	4/17/21	TRUE			TRUE			Fred	Matt	Barbara	subject to provide	n/a	n/a	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE		
Ut enim ad minim veniam	review	4/20/2021	4/17/2021	4/18/21		TRUE				TRUE	Jane	n/a	Fred	candids	n/a	n/a	TRUE					TRUE	
Duis aute irure dolor	review	4/21/2021	4/18/2021	4/19/21	TRUE			TRUE			Jane	Rob	Kimiko	subject to provide	n/a	n/a	TRUE						
Excepteur sint occaecat	review	4/22/2021	4/19/2021	4/20/21		TRUE			TRUE		Fred	n/a	Barbara	candids, video	n/a	center	TRUE	TRUE		TRUE	TRUE		TRUE
Sed ut perspiciatis unde om	draft	4/23/2021	4/20/2021	4/21/21			TRUE		TRUE		Jane	Courtney	Alicia	archival video	n/a	giving opp			TRUE	TRUE			
Neque porro quisquam	draft	4/24/2021	4/21/2021	4/22/21			TRUE			TRUE	Barbara	Courtney	Barbara	portrait and candids	n/a	previous story	TRUE	TRUE				TRUE	
Ut enim ad minima veniam	assigned	4/25/2021	4/22/2021	4/23/21	TRUE		TRUE	TRUE			Kimiko	Matt	Barbara	subject to provide	n/a	previous story	TRUE					TRUE	
Quis autem eum	assigned	4/26/2021	4/23/2021	4/24/21	TRUE			TRUE			Will	Rob	Fred	portrait	n/a	center	TRUE			TRUE			

TITLE/TOPIC

STATUS

WORKFLOW DEADLINES

BRAND MESSAGES

AUDIENCES

TEAM ASSIGNMENTS

CONTENT/MEDIA NEEDS AND/OR SOURCE

CROSS-PROMOTION OPPORTUNITY

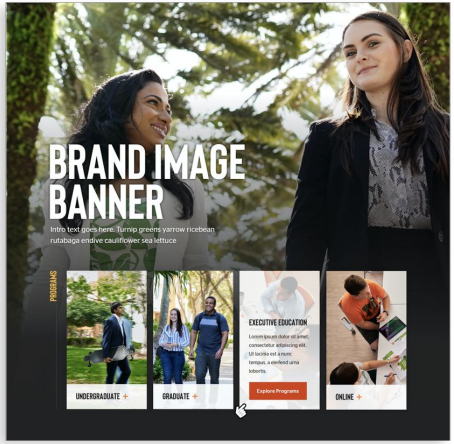
PLATFORMS

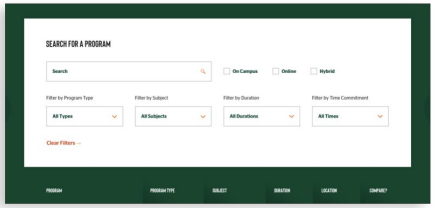
TAXONOMY TAGS

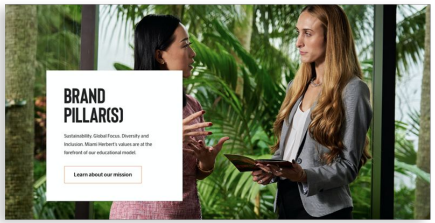
Component-Driven Design System

Creating a modular design system, existing separately from the site structure, can refresh and evolve as new needs and requirements emerge.

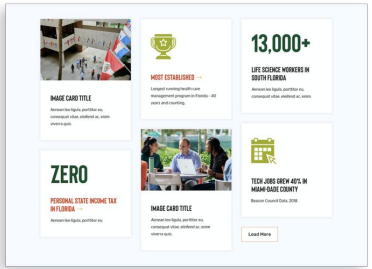
UNIQUE

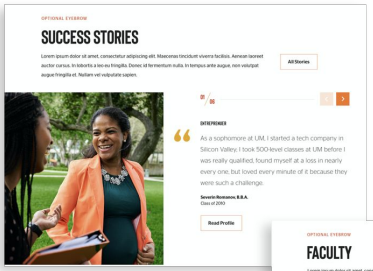


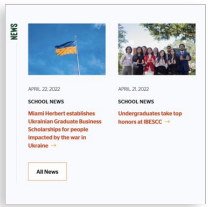


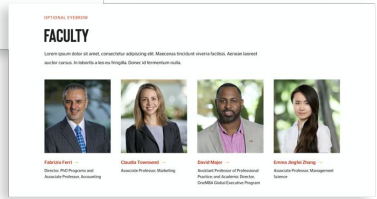


RECURRING

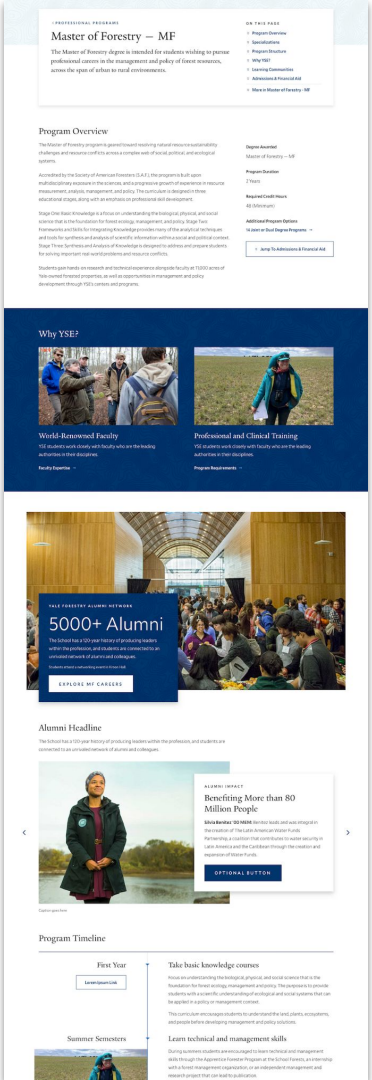


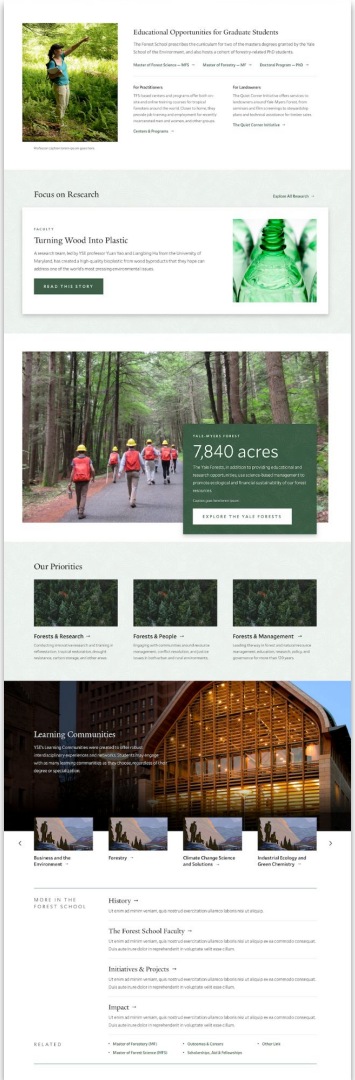


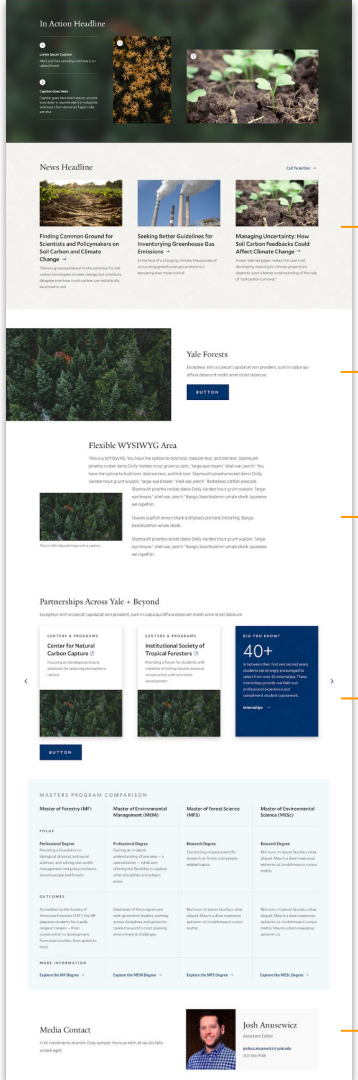




Build A Solid Foundation







News

Checkerboard

WYSIWYG

Stories

Bios

OHO INTERACTIVE

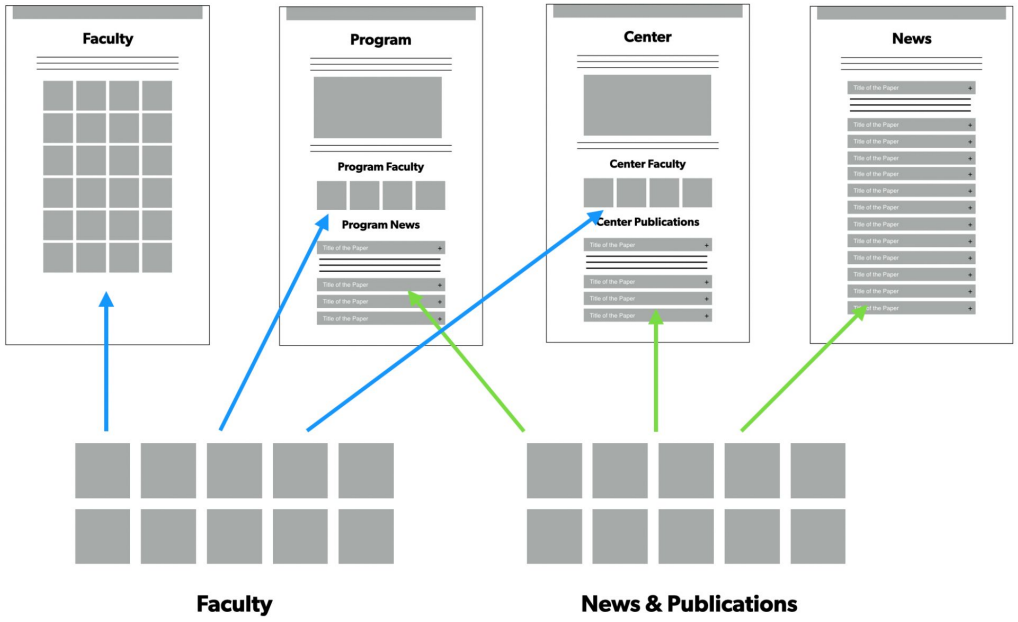
Website Governance Process

Governance is an insurance policy for the investment you make in your digital platforms, ensuring ongoing maintenance of site quality and alignment to strategy via process and support.

Flexible Technology Platform

Key requirements include:

- Ease of upgrade and iterative evolution without major overhaul
- Ability to manage content day-to-day without developer support
- Ongoing documentation of functional spec as site evolves



Staffing & Resource Plan

Invest in growing the skill set of your team

- Digital strategy
- Content strategy and writing
- SEO best practice
- User testing
- Understanding analytics

Find partners to complement your team with key functions

- Web development
- Digital marketing
- User research
- SEO strategy

Poll Question

Which area do you need to build up the foundation of your website?

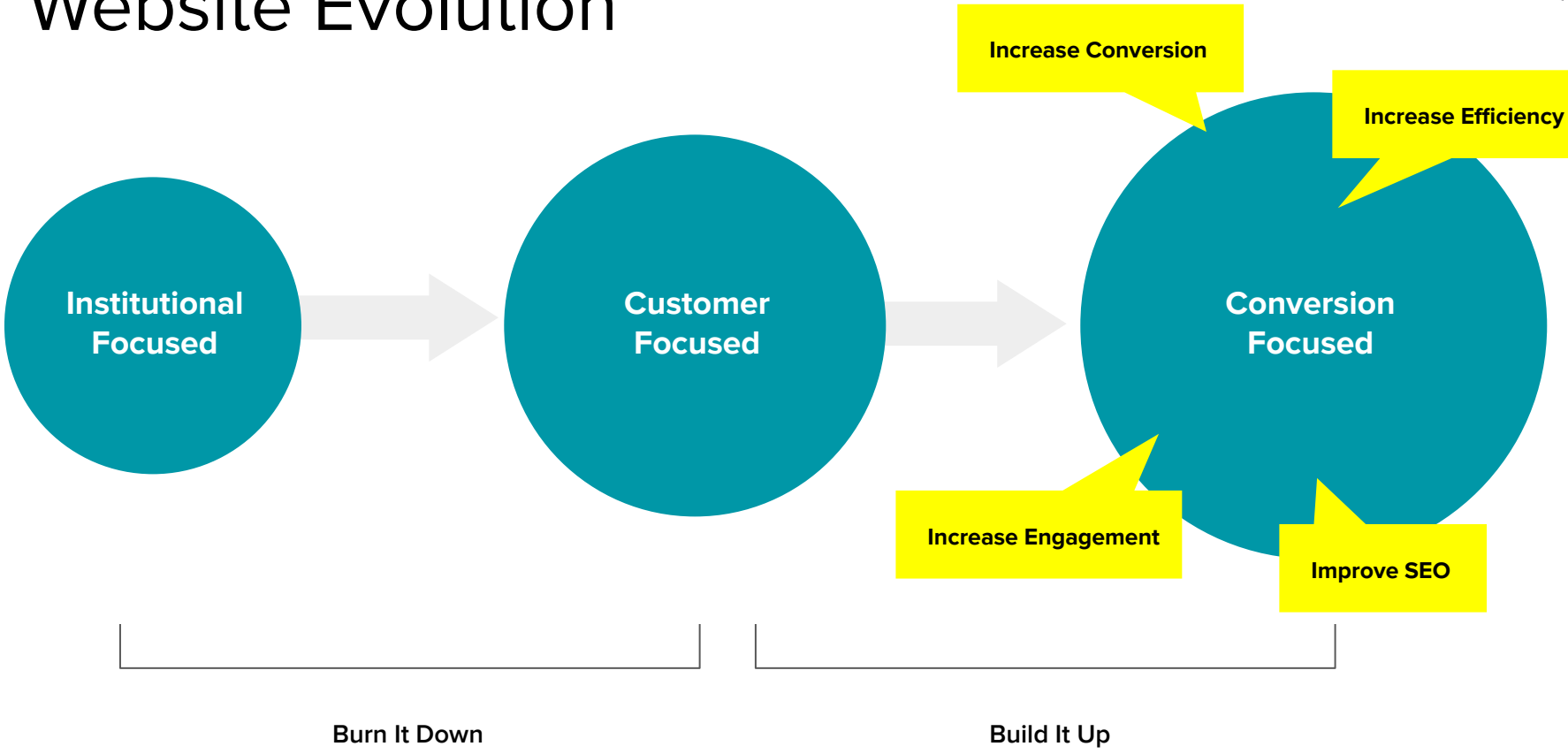
Poll Question

What is the biggest barrier to evolving your website?

Build It Up

Your Foundation Is Set. What Does Building Look Like?

Website Evolution



Your New Identity

Shift your thinking from “webmaster” mindset to “digital expert” and “lead investigator” — you’re looking to always be measuring, learning, and improving.

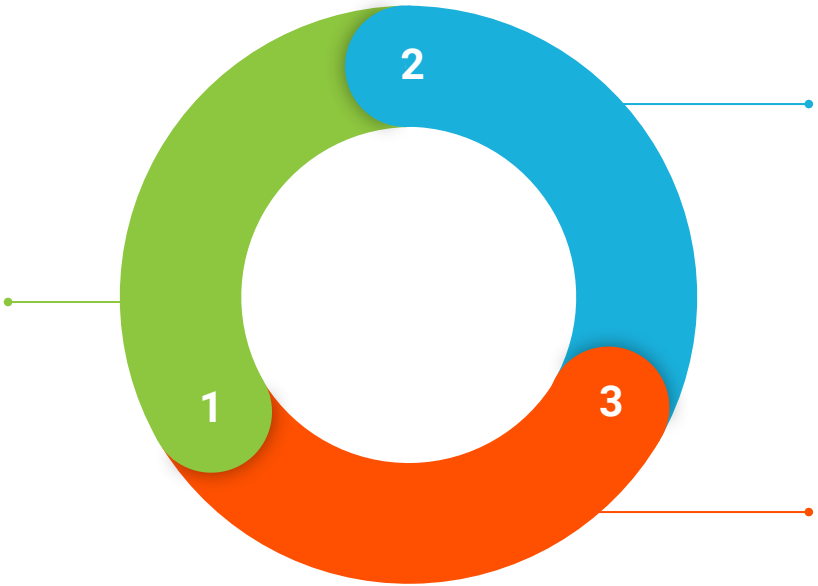
Conversion Rate Optimization

A shift from thinking about the website in basic health and publishing terms to thinking about the site in terms of reaching the business goals of the organization:
make money, save money, increase brand awareness.

Improvement Cycle

Step 1: Focus on Goals & Conversions

Tie your site activity to the business goals of your school.



Step 2: Develop and Test a Hypothesis

What's working? What's not working? Where and why are conversions happening? How can I best get more information?

Step 3: Make Updates Based on Findings

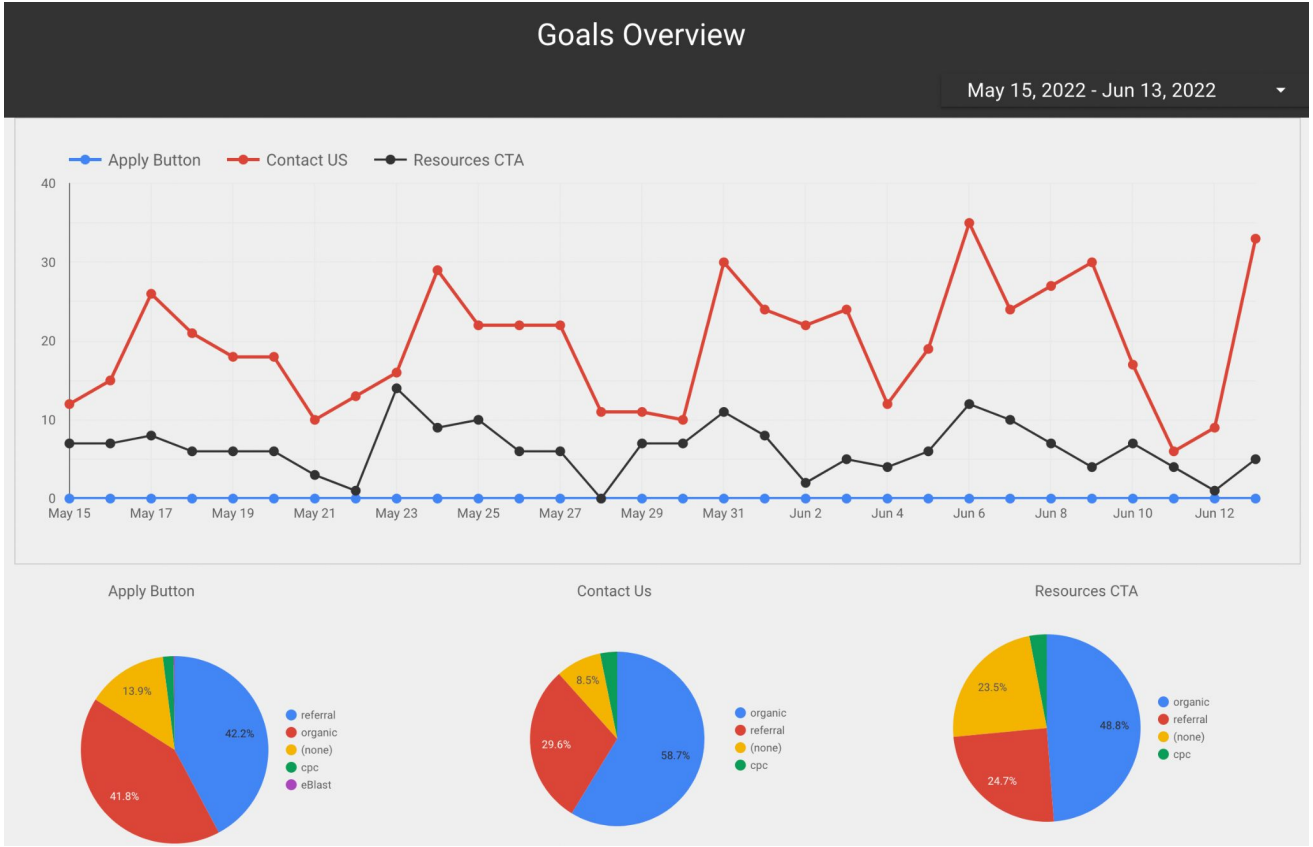
Make UX, design or content updates to solve the problem and increase conversions. Measure your results.

Step 1: Focus on Goals

Report on Conversion & Goals

Change the Conversation

Establish and report on conversions and demonstrate how the website is increasing conversions.



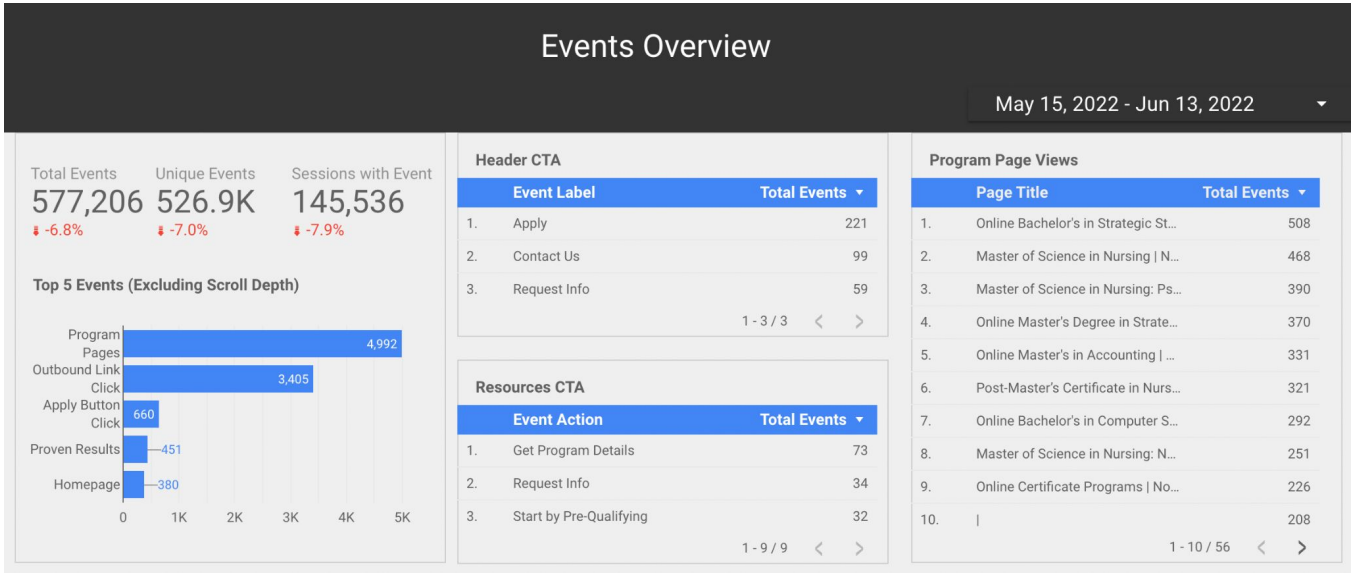
Step 1: Focus on Goals

Gather Ideas from Analytics

Where are people converting?

Understand which parts of the site are working well. Set up events to track content engagement.

Review analytics with a conversion mindset.



The Measurement & Testing Cycle

Testing Cycles. Pick the proper test to collect input, to answer the questions that you have, or to test a hypothesis that you think will help increase conversions or increase your brand.

- A/B testing
- Focus groups and 1:1 sessions
- Think aloud user testing
- Heatmaps
- Analytics
- Navigation treejacking

Example: Focus Group & One-on-One

Get Immediate Feedback. Get a quick reaction to concepts or collect additional information through exercises and workshops.

Task: # [ ] [ ]

Start: [ ] : [ ]

Complete: [ ] : [ ]

Abandon: [ ] : [ ]

Duration: [ ] : [ ]

How easy was this task to complete?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Impossible **Extremely Easy**

Success Rating

Complete: [ ]

Partial: [ ]

Failure: [ ]

Trouble Spots:

[ ] : [ ]

[ ] : [ ]

[ ] : [ ]

Which parts were difficult?

Which parts were easy?

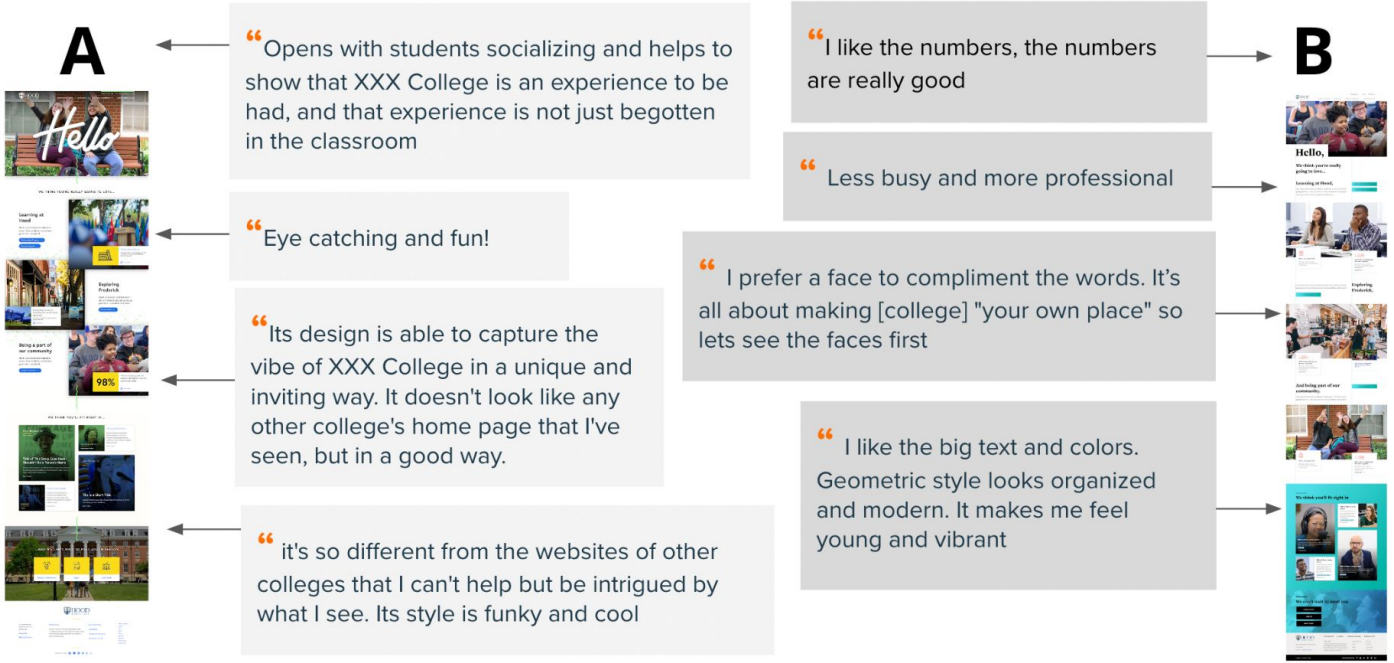
What is missing from the prototype?

How would you improve the prototype?

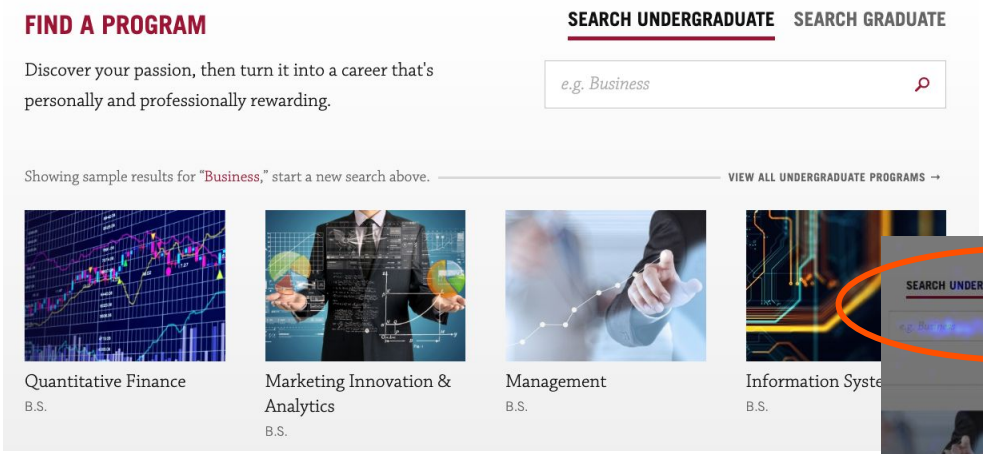
Moderator notes:

Example: A/B Testing

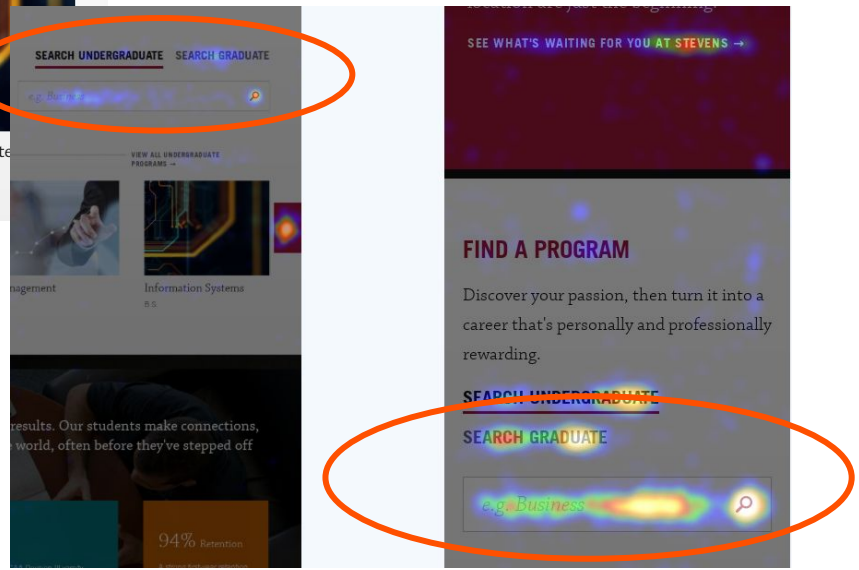
Good for Design or Content Feedback. Use A/B tests to gather an impression of current or proposed designs or content updates.



Example: User Test with Heat Maps

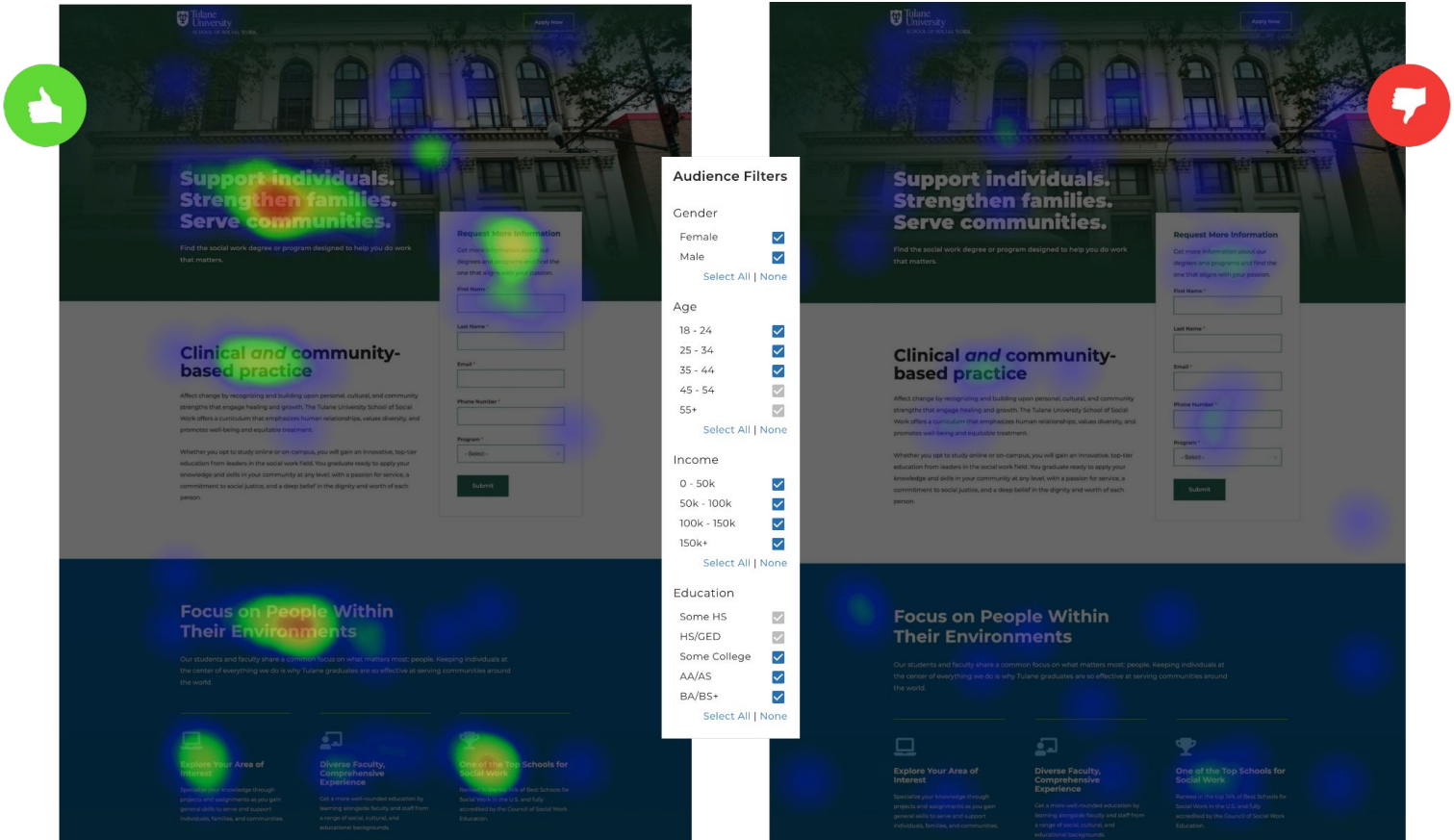


Desktop users overlook the toggle between degree level

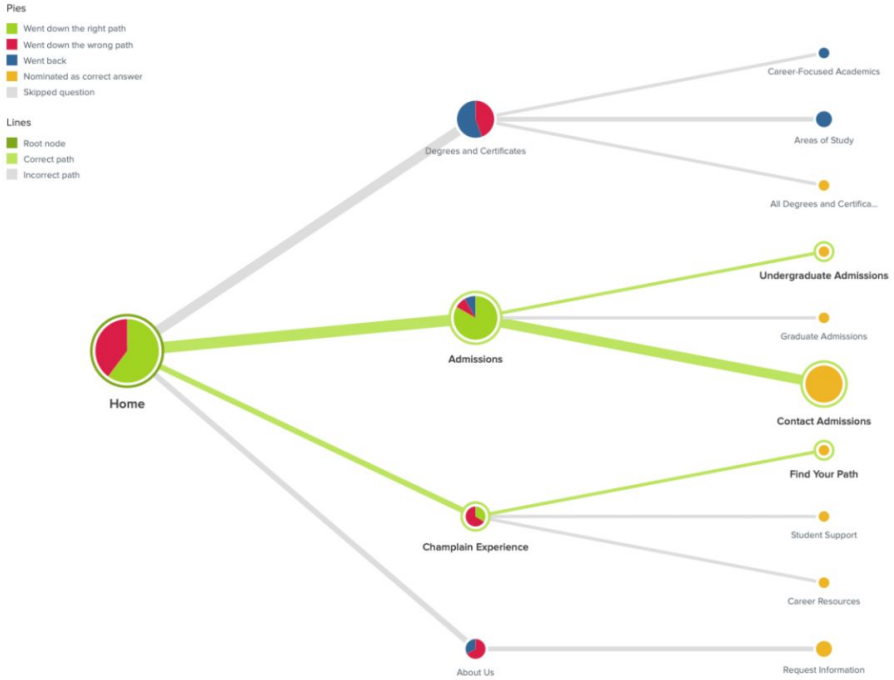


- 1.9% of users who visited the page engaged with any feature of the program finder on desktop
- 10.6% of mobile users engaged with the finder

Example: User Test with Heat Maps



Example: Navigation Structure



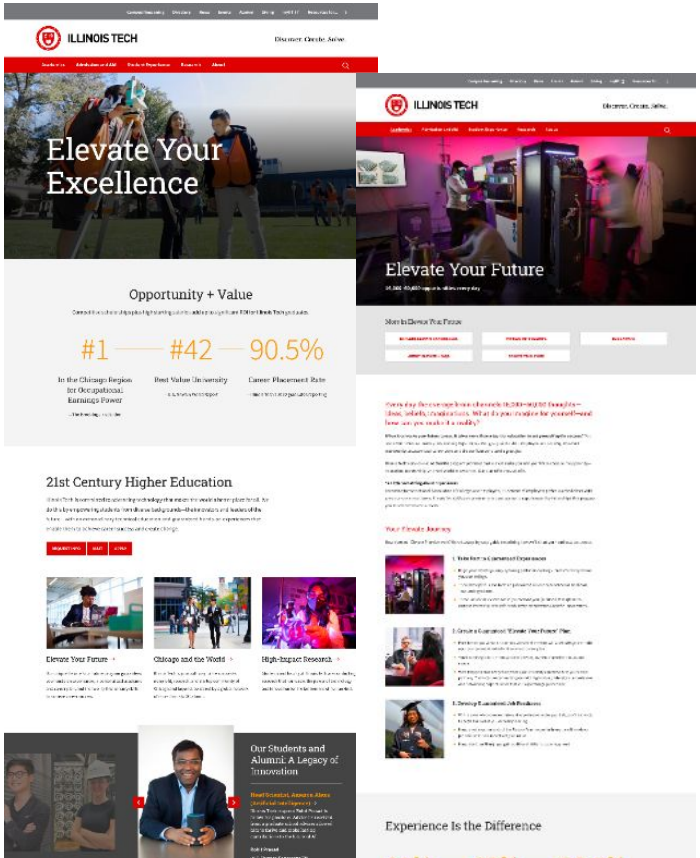
- ✓ Admissions > Undergraduate Admissions
- ✓ Admissions > Contact Admissions
- ✓ Champlain Experience > Find Your Path

- Successes:
  - 9 **Contact Admissions**
  - 1 **Undergraduate Admissions**
  - 1 **Find Your Path**
- Failures:
  - 2 **Request Information**
  - 1 **All Degrees & Certificates**
  - 1 **Graduate Admissions**
  - 1 **Student Support**
  - 1 **Career Resources**

What Does Evolution Look Like

Make Data-Informed Decisions

UX changes, language, content, images, new components, improve mobile or desktop experience.



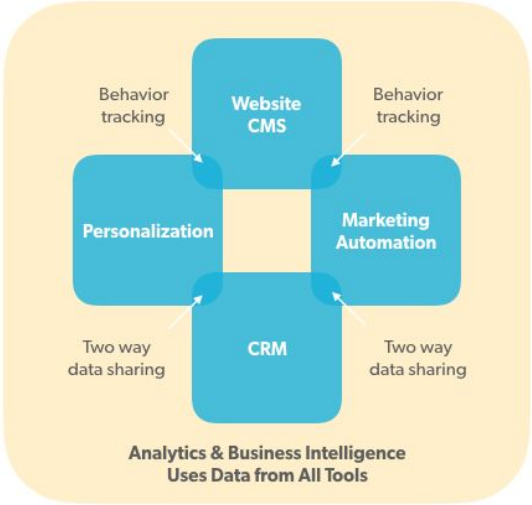
Increase Efficiency & Engagement

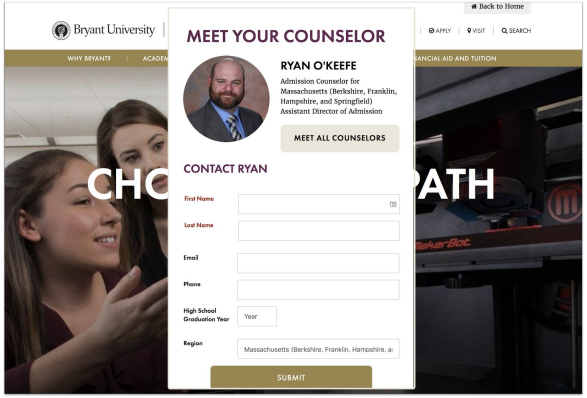
Connect with Data Sources

Integrate the site with the marketing stack to improve the user experience.

Test New Marketing Tools

Using chat or personalized calls to action to increase conversions.



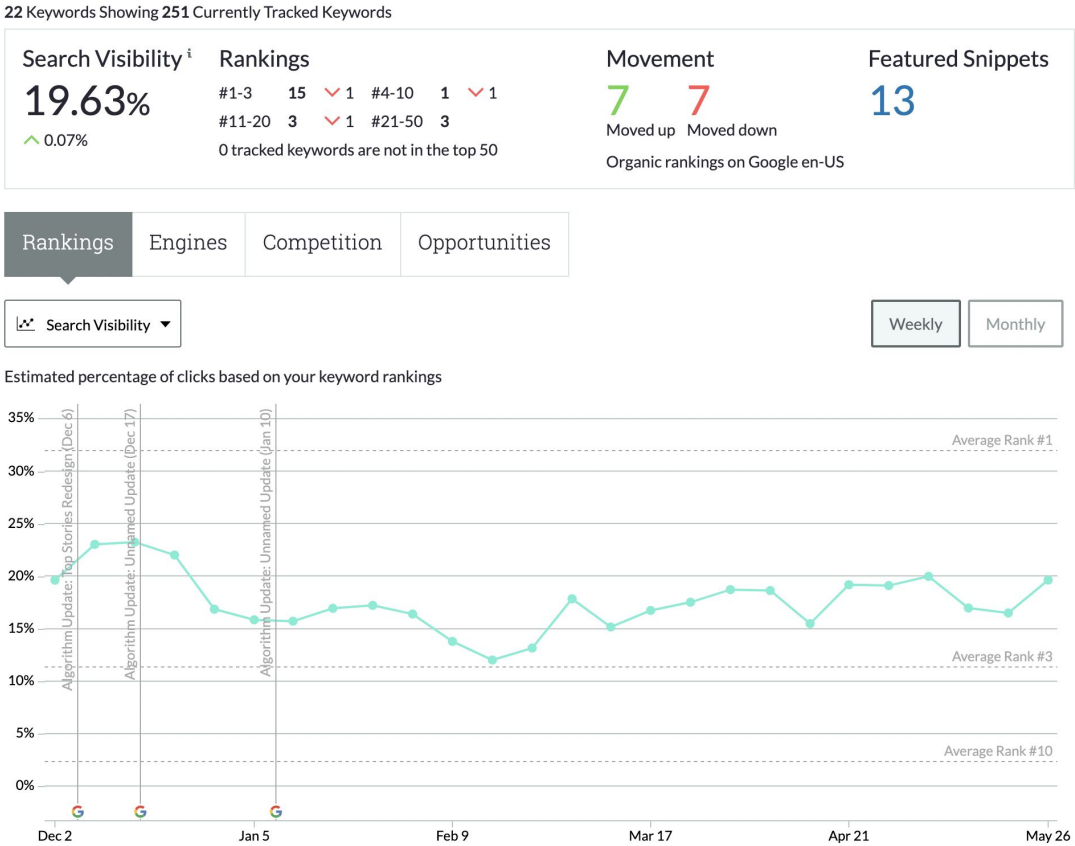


Improve SEO & Social

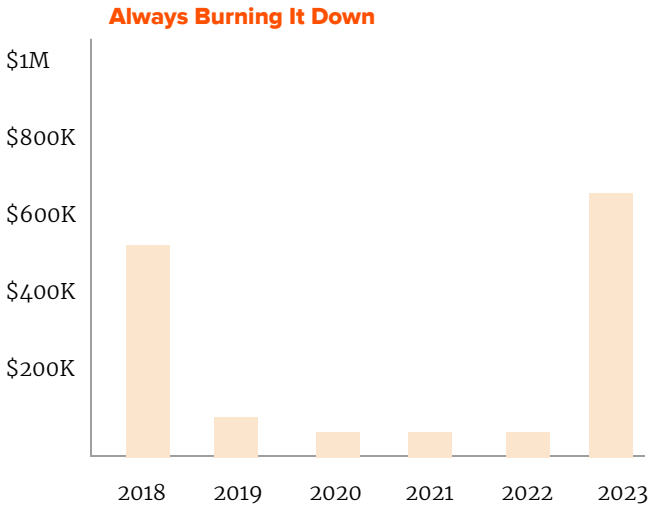
Show How Small Changes Make an Impact

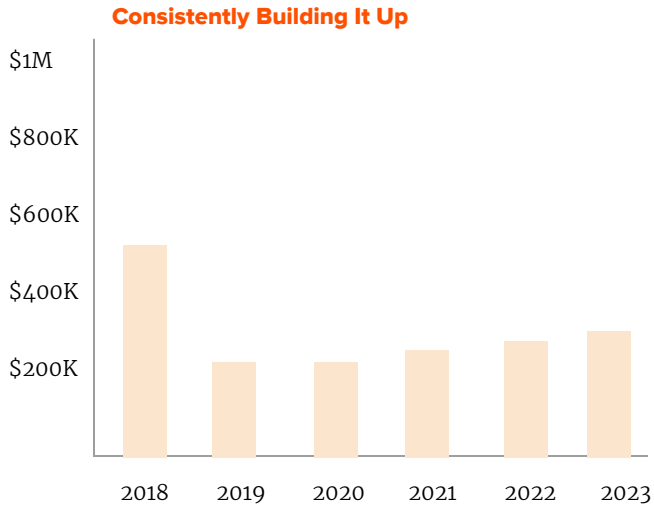
Track how SEO and social media lead to website engagement.

Demonstrate increases in search visibility and website traffic.



Budget Planning





An ongoing annual investment vs. a major investment every 4-6 years

Challenge: Making the case for what you'll need to spend every year

Staffing & Resource Plan

This stage requires different skill sets or partners:

- Online marketing — Conversion Rate Optimization
- Content strategy and writing
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Testing skills
- Web Analytics, Marketing Analyst — focused on conversions

Even with a foundation, when might I need to burn it down?

Controlled Burn

- Significant overhaul in the “product” offers or “delivery” mode — online course or adding lots of campus locations
- Drastic new brand or visual designs
    - Should be able to reuse existing assets (news, events, faculty)
    - May require just homepage or adding new components
- Major strategic shift — combining two universities together

Next steps

Questions to Consider

- Is your site Institutional, Customer-Focused, Conversion Focused?
- Have you moved out of the “webmaster” mindset?
- Do you have clear business goals and a defined way to track?
- Do you have ongoing practices in place for assessing site effectiveness?
- Do you understand your audiences, and does your site meet their needs?
- Is your team staffed and skilled for tomorrow, or yesterday?
- Do you have the processes, documentation, and support in place to empower effective and efficient website stewardship?
- Can your design system and CMS flexibly accommodate change?
- Are digital resources a fixed budget priority or an infrequent special request?

Thank You!