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Client research

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Overview:

Research is known to be one of the most initial components of the communications plan. Any research done in the right direction using the right methodologies can help towards achieving the set objectives. Being one of the best colleges in Canada, Centennial is one of the most renowned colleges in Ontario with a significant number of international student's ratio enrolling from various international countries- mainly from India, Jamaica, Philippines, etc. These students face countless rumors starting from their colleges to their funds and one of the main objectives to achieve from this research is to get the crucial rumors and or doubts the students have before coming here in Canada and in Centennial and the confusions they might have after coming here. The goal of this research is to focus on the areas of misinformation, tracking the sources, and coming up with communication strategies that nip the issues in the bud.

To help our client know its problems better, it becomes extremely important to conduct both primary and secondary research to increase the effectiveness of future messaging and to reach a wider audience. An effective use of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies would be required as our audience's needs are seen to be constantly evolving due to PEST factors.

As per the outline this paper would solely focus on the client research to delve deeper into understanding the client's vision and mission, identifying the major issues, its SWOT analysis, PEST analysis, and some insights on its financial statements and or annual reports, marketing and communication tools focusing majorly on its website and social media and its significance.

Vision:

Transforming lives and communities through learning.

To be more innovative and entrepreneurial, to further exploit the benefits of technology, to creatively engage our employees, to build more bridges with communities and employers, and to see their graduates do meaningful work and have meaningful lives. To be more innovative and entrepreneurial, to further exploit the benefits of technology, to creatively engage employees, build more bridges with communities and employers, and to see graduates do meaningful work and have meaningful lives.

Mission:

Educating students for career success.

Centennial's focus has always been on preparing graduates to enter the workforce while teaching their students to be leaders. The college strives to build lasting partnerships with local communities while preparing graduates to succeed globally.

Locally, Centennial continues to offer industry-recognized full-time and part-time programs at five Toronto campuses. Whether in classrooms, labs or the community, Centennial students experience the real world before they even graduate.

As a leader in internationalization, Centennial has done extensive work teaching international students. At the same time, they are enabling more Canadian learners to have an international adventure, be it completing a semester in Spain, an internship in South Africa or a Global Citizenship learning experience in the Amazon Basin.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

- **Strong presence-** Canada is a well-recognized country in the international education market. According to the IRCC, as of Dec. 31, 2022, the number of foreign students holding active study permits in Canada was 807,750, which marks a 31 per cent increase from the previous year's figure of just over 617,000. This strong presence in the market indicates that Canada is a popular choice among international students seeking to pursue a degree abroad and Centennial College is one of the top options.
- **Rising number of International Students-** The number of international students in Canada has been consistently increasing over the years. This can be due to multiple reasons including the high quality of education, the multicultural and welcoming environment, and the availability of post-grad work opportunities.
- **Diverse student community-** Canada is famous among international students for its diversity and multiculturalism. A diverse student community provides a welcoming and inclusive environment for non-Canadian students, which can help them ease into student life in Canada.

Weakness:

- **Communication channel-** Foreign students often rely on information available on the internet or other sources that lack credibility to get information about student life in Canada. The information provided is often too general without any personalization and it becomes difficult for students to get relevant and accurate information. This can lead to misconceptions or misunderstandings about studying in Canada.
- **Shortage of staff-** Centennial College's campuses do not have an equal level of accessibility to international advisors due to a potential shortage of staff, which can affect the quality of support offered to students. This can pose a particular challenge for non-Canadian students who may require additional assistance in adapting to the new environment.

Opportunities:

- **College counselling-** One of the major challenges that Centennial, as an institution faces, is the misinformation and rumors built up around the expectations and actions that needs attention of the students pursuing their international academic journey. By designing a whole new wing around counselling, Centennial can try and generate both revenue and reduce the misinformation for its students.
- **Connecting with the Alumni-** For new applicants, a practical understanding of student and work life in Canada can be delivered by the introduction of a new program where existing or graduate students can voluntarily assist new applicants of designated countries to clearly delineate the Canadian life in a more efficacious manner.

Threats:

- **Change in immigration policies-** An abrupt change in immigration policies by the Government of Canada could be a potential threat to the college with immediate effects on the admission structure, as all of the Centennial campuses are predominantly enrolled with international students.
- **Competition-** With the remarkable rise in the student immigration every year, competition among the colleges has also increased enormously. As several of the colleges in GTA-Toronto hold an exemplary stature and actively work to amplify their network in the host countries by means of trailblazing and providing virtual support.

PEST Analysis:

Political:

- **Immigration policies-** Canadian or domestic immigration policies of home countries can affect the influx of international students. Lax immigration policies will increase the flow of students to Canada, whereas stricter policies will discourage students from leaving their home countries and make it.
- **International Relations-** Canada's international relations will make or break ties with other nations. Strong ties with another country make for better policies to allow international students to study in Canada.
- **Domestic policies-** Factors such as political instability and changing political landscapes in home countries or in Canada may cause unforeseen issues that make it harder for students to immigrate to Canada.

Economic:

- **Tuition fees-** International students' decision to study in Canada is impacted by the tuition fees that they are to pay for the program they enroll in. Canada is known for its lower tuition fees compared to countries like the US, U.K. and Australia which may encourage students to choose Canada as their study destination.
- **Currency exchange rate-** The currency exchange rate will determine the purchasing power of international students in Canada. The higher the exchange rate, the more expensive it is for students to come and study in Canada.
- **Financial institutions-** A lot of international students take up education loans to come to Canada. The banks' interest rates, the amount financed and also the financial standing of the student and their family comes into consideration and are factors that influence the ability of a student to study in Canada.
- **Economic conditions-** Part-time and post-graduation employment opportunities available for students, inflation in the country and cost of living are all factors that influence the living conditions of students in Canada. If the conditions are less than ideal, students will not prefer living in such conditions.

Social:

- **Education-** The quality of education provided by Canada hugely impacts the international student enrolment in colleges and universities. Canada ranks amongst the top countries that offer industry-oriented learning. The number of international students pursuing higher studies in Canada has consistently risen over the past decade.
- **Social security-** Social factors like employment opportunities and healthcare drastically influence the market behavior, which in this case, is the international student market. Personal safety concerns such as crime rates in Canada or home countries will affect students' decisions to come here. Since Canada is one of the safest countries, it's the first choice for most students wishing to pursue their studies abroad.
- **Population-** Canada's population, along with that of other countries would impact the employment scenario and government assistance programs offered by the Canadian government. The influx of international students largely depends on factors like population growth, youth demographic and education levels.

Technological:

- **Virtual learning-** Post pandemic, most Canadian universities and colleges have adopted a virtual learning system. This includes Zoom classes, online submission of assignments, grading software, and maximum utilization of audio-visual teaching material. International students consider these factors before applying to educational institutes abroad.
- **Social media-** Having an active social media presence works in the favor of Canadian colleges since it can reach out to a wider target audience, i.e., potential, and existing international students. An interactive handle on Instagram and Facebook will encourage a communication flow between both ends, which will ultimately benefit everyone.
- **E-learning platforms-** E-learning is on the rise, and academic establishments, especially the ones in Canada, have adapted to it. Centennial's digital platform eCentennial has all the necessary tools and information structured on one portal. This one-stop-shop approach makes it easier for international students to navigate their academic paths.

Annual Reports:

According to the annual reports, there was an increase in domestic and international enrolment year over year with 44,930 enrolments in 2021-22. With 52,107 enrolments expected for 2022-23, Centennial College has returned to pre-COVID levels a full year ahead of original expectations. They achieved an institutional graduation rate of 76 per cent in 2020-21, representing a consistent increase over the last five years, particularly among international students. They also achieved a graduate employment rate in a related field of 65 per cent amid a precarious economy and labour market. They are striving toward stability for a return to pre-pandemic levels at 69 per cent. Centennial launched several digital learning opportunities, creating border-free global classrooms for educating global citizens for a global economy.

There was an increase in opportunities for students and alumni to connect with employers, particularly for students from historically marginalized populations through job fairs and a variety of networking sessions.

They developed communication and fundraising strategies to actively engage donors, alumni and the college community to remove financial barriers for students with an emphasis on establishing new resources for students from marginalized communities and ultimately awarding 923 donor funded scholarships and awards. Apart from this, they also directed \$600,000 of annual funding to enable learners experiencing financial hardship to enter and complete their program through a Student Access and Financial Hardship fund created through student ancillary fees and community donation.

The college attracted students from over 100 countries, diversifying their global reach and reducing the risk of dependency on a single market or country. During COVID, the College closed the year on March 31, 2022, with a deficit of \$7.4 million, compared to last year's surplus of \$0.9 million and a budgeted deficit of \$44.6 million. The total revenue increased by \$1 million to \$344.0 million compared to \$343.0 million in 2020-21 and the total expenditures were \$351.4 million, representing an increase of \$9.2 million or 2.7% compared to the previous year's total expenses of \$342.1 million.

Overview of Annual Reports:

In 2021-2022, Centennial College successfully navigated the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and reset the foundation for the launch of their 3-year strategy. The college has focused its efforts on improving pathways for marginalized and underserved populations and fostered a sense of community through engagement despite the challenges of remote and hybrid learning. It also made great strides towards academic and teaching excellence through learning innovation with new program offerings, platforms, applications, and teaching methodologies designed to improve the student experience.

As an activist College committed to social justice, Centennial lives out the values of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, doing and valuing in meaningful ways.

Marketing and Communications:

Website:

The website for Centennial college stands out to be one of the major online platforms that ties together the brand's image as a world class institution open to all. It proves to be a window into the Centennial brand that ties together an accessible interface with visually appealing imagery.

Gap: Moving onto the webpage directed at international students, however, is not very user-friendly. How so?

- There are just not enough resources, The first thing we see that grabs our attention are WEBINARS. While this is helpful in answering student's questions on the onboarding process, it is very generic. We need to keep in mind every student's situation is different, and so should be the advice offered.
- The myCentennial dashboard can be a bit confusing. It does not communicate the brand's personality through its unified colour scheme.

Social Media:

YouTube: With over 15.8k subscribers, the brand's YouTube channel seems to be booming. Content ranges from online learning, tips, and tricks on how to get hired and a lot of information relevant to student growth.

Gap: No curated content for International Students. Some ideas could revolve around: A tour through the different campuses, with three diverse campuses in Toronto itself, the brand doesn't give equal visibility to each campus in its posts leading to a weak brand placement. A detailed step-by-step guidance on navigating through the MyCentennial and eCentennial webpages.

Instagram: Centennial's Instagram boasts of an impressive follower count of 45.9 k followers and a high engagement rate. There are interactive posts with content useful for international students, such as how to get around campus, transit options, and must-visit cafes and restaurants.

Gap: The CCPR course itself has an Instagram page which is not very active, an aspect that can be worked on. Many institutes have social accounts dedicated exclusively to international students. This provides more clarity and facilitation inclusion and care.

CCSAI:

Centennial College Student Association (CCSA) is an organization that represents the interests of students enrolled at Centennial College. The CCSAI offers several student-driven services to help students in their journey at Centennial College, this even includes resources on places to live, financial aid, legal aid, and much more.

Gap: There is no mention of this organization on the International Students webpage. Like the myCentennial page, it does not communicate the brand's personality through its unified color scheme. The services offered are perfectly in line with what an international student would require, however the same is not communicated at all.

In a nutshell, what lacks is a coherent and well-structured format that all links to the main international student's webpage. A well-structured web page dedicated to international students should provide clear and concise information in an organized way. This means moving past the basic process of Program selection, Admissions, and logging into myCentennial. It should further divulge into-

- **Student life:** This section should provide an overview of the student experience on campus, including housing, dining, extracurricular activities, and support services available to international students.
- **Resources:** The web page should provide links to important resources for international students, such as visa information, financial aid, and health insurance.
- **Social media links:** Including social media links on the international student web page can be an effective way to help students connect with the institution and stay informed about news and events.
- **Encourage user-generated content:** Encourage international students to share their experiences and engage with the institution on social media by creating hashtags and holding contests or giveaways.
- **Provide assistance:** Offer assistance to students who have questions or concerns through social media messaging or support options.

Conclusion:

It is the client's opinion that international students need to be briefed about how things work in Canada, which would ultimately bridge the gap between perception and reality. This would also improve the quality of life for international students at Centennial College, without compromising on academic performance, career growth and personal well-being. To dig deeper to bridge this gap between the institution and students, it becomes very important to study the factors directly or indirectly impacting these expectations.

As an institution that caters to a majorly international student base, the brand needs to work on building a strong voice when it comes to diverse content and making sure the existence of the same is communicated to international students.