

Telling the distinct stories of independent schools.



The Opportunity

Despite an increasingly competitive market, independent K-12 institutions around the United States are seeing an uptick in enrollment — and a greater opportunity to stand out in a fresh way. Recently, Ologie has been working with a number of them to tell their stories.

21% increase in enrollment between 2021 and 2022*

4.7 million students from grades K-12 are enrolled in private institutions†

30,492 private or independent institutions for K-12 students‡

* <https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-school/fall-2022/5-independent-school-market-trends-to-watch-in-2022-2023/>

† Fall 2021 data. National Center for Education Statistics, 2024. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgc>.

‡ Data from 2019-2020 academic year. National Center for Education Statistics, 2023. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_105.50.asp

The Similarities to Higher Ed

These K-12 schools have a lot in common with their higher education counterparts. They have enrollment cycles and admissions marketing. They have alumni and donors. They have to compete with public institutions whose offers are often comparable to their own. Some have religious affiliations; some have military connections; some are for all boys or all girls; some are boarding schools with dorms. And all of them are starting to have a conversation about communicating their value.

The Unique Challenges

Unlike colleges and universities, however, K-12 institutions are engaging with Generation Alpha right now. Students at younger ages are taking more control of the education conversation within their families. The internal marketing teams at these schools are small, and many of them have never tried launching a comprehensive branding initiative.

The Landscape

In the post-COVID educational landscape, independent K-12 institutions are seeing growth as families spend more on education, and sooner. Enrollment across the board has rebounded, and now exceeds pre-pandemic levels. This point in time is a prime opportunity for these schools to make a statement.

Located on a 600-acre working dairy farm in picturesque southeastern Vermont, The Putney School was founded as a place for progressive education for grades 9 through 12. With a philosophy centered on experience and self-direction, Putney has 220 students who focus their learning on a wide variety of issues, skills, challenges, and concepts, all fueled by their passions and interests.

The Challenge

With a formal grading system that doesn't begin till a student's junior year, and a curriculum that prioritizes self-exploration at the intersection of community and creativity, Putney has always defined itself in opposition to the traditional education model. In addition, Putney faced the challenge of appealing to a new generation of parents, some of whom held misconceptions about both boarding schools in general and Putney specifically. And the school needed a clear, compelling story to make the case that this experience is worth investing in.

The Solution

A refreshed brand platform, grounded in insights from our research, was able to shine a light on Putney's true strengths: the unique elements of the school's culture and experience that it could proudly claim as its own.



The Putney School

Private coeducational
boarding and day school

220 students

Grades 9–12

Putney, Vermont

putneyschool.org





◀ The messaging strategy directly addressed some misconceptions that we uncovered in our research and drew on a deeper understanding of key audiences' needs.

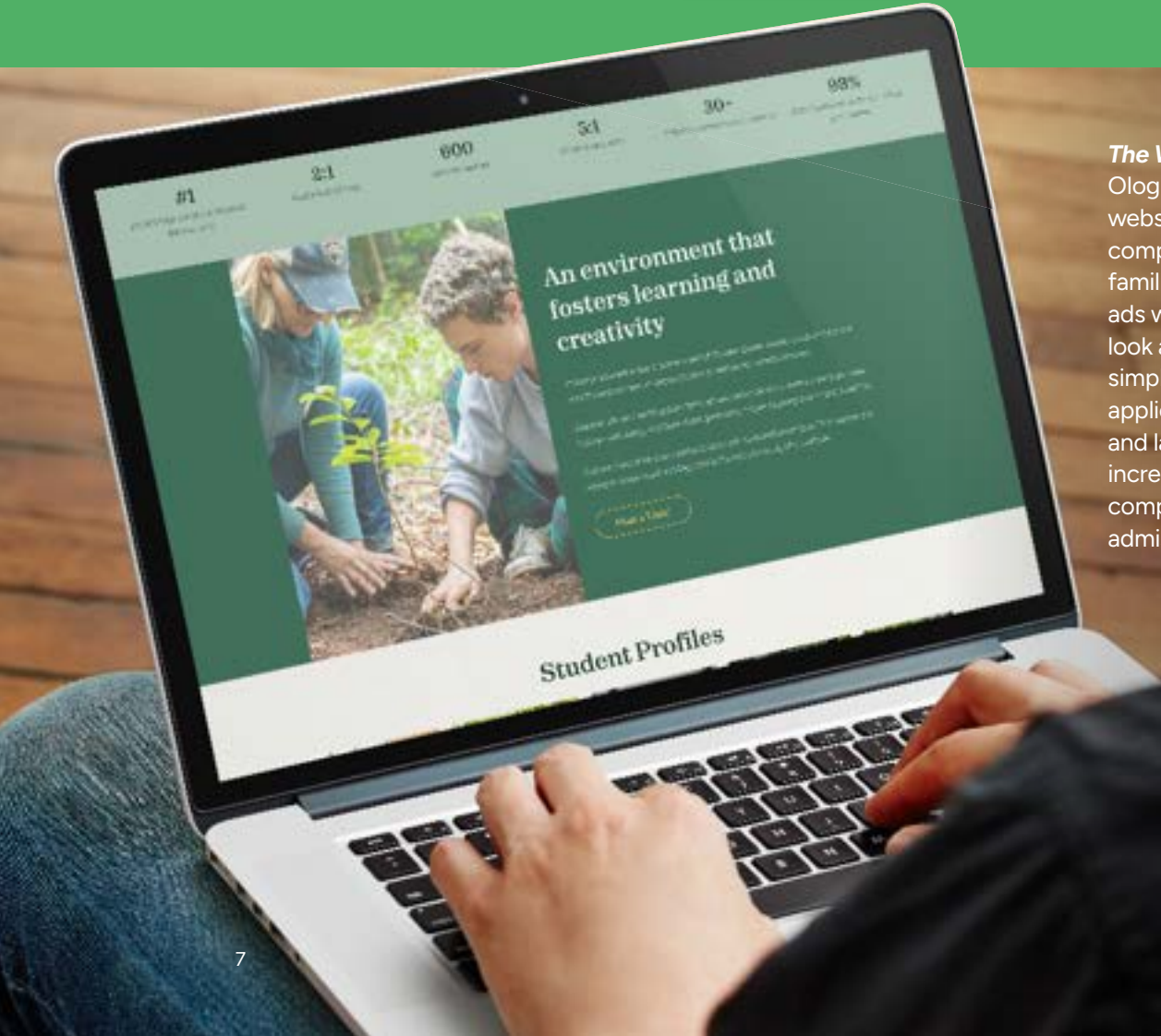
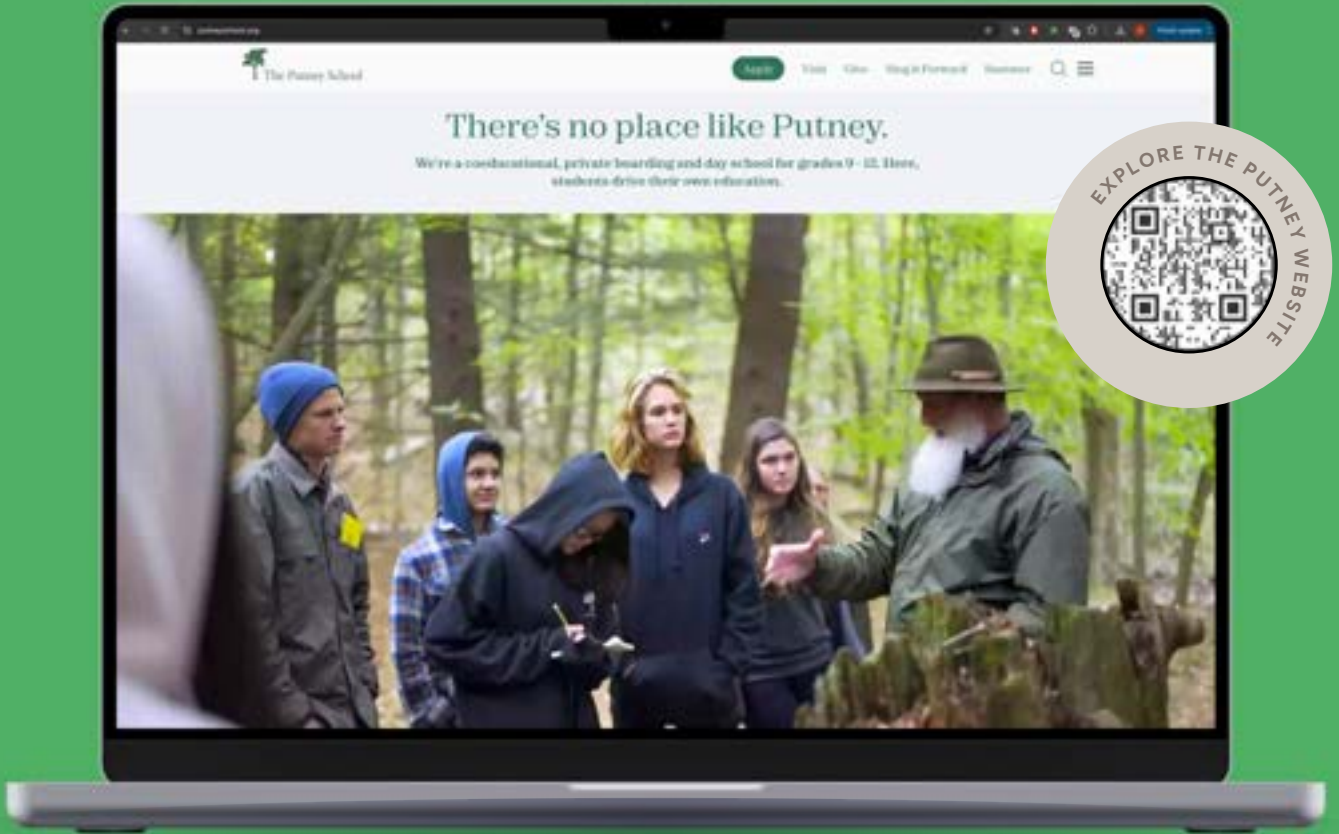
▶ The brand's expression was built to reflect Putney's personality, values, and physical environment. We then applied it in a new viewbook (shown here), other admissions materials, an evolved website, and a media campaign.



The Media Campaign

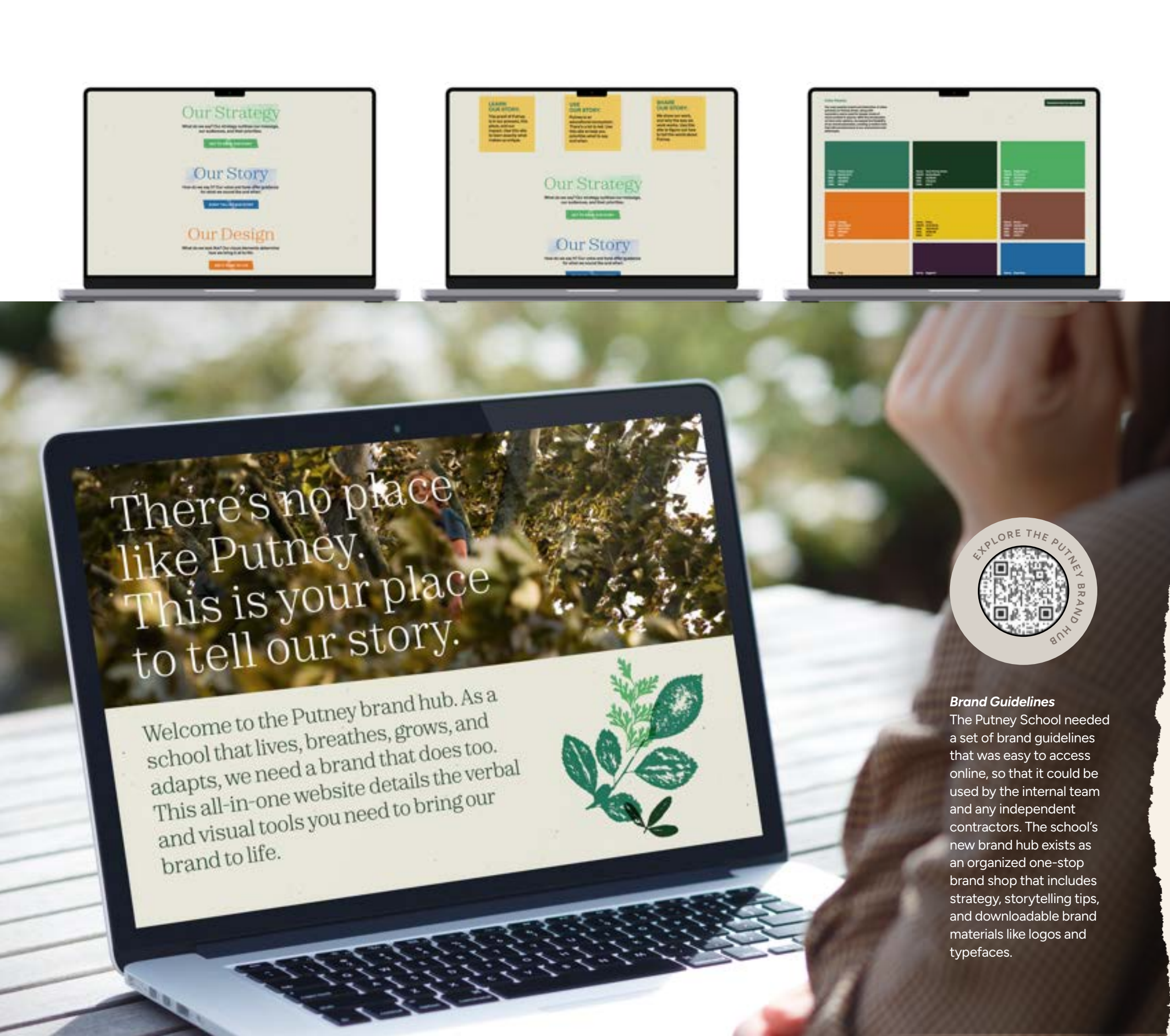
The paid campaign targeted specific audiences through device-ID and display ads, some in certain locations and income brackets.

This included geofencing campaigns that took place around events for education consultants — an important audience for Putney to engage with, since families often use these consultants to help them find potential private schools for their students.



The Website

Ologie helped rework Putney's website using existing components, so that prospective families coming from the new ads would encounter a similar look and feel. The update simplified the navigation and applied the new brand visuals and language, all with an increased emphasis on form completions throughout the admissions funnel.



**DARRY
MADDEN**

Director of Communications
and Marketing

The biggest charge of this brand work was to address market misperceptions of Putney. How did this work authentically capture the school's spirit and story, and how have people responded?

Ologie's work authentically captured the spirit and then some. The conclusions we arrived at through the research made good, logical sense, based on our own working knowledge of the school. But the visual elements of our new brand and especially the writing were so strong. One of our new tags — "Why Putney works" — consistently outperforms other calls to action online.

One of the first extensions of the new brand was a media buy. How important was it to get this new look and message out to your audiences? And what difference has it made so far?

We rolled out the new brand mid-cycle, but the impact we saw on conversions was impressive. The inquiry-to-applicant conversion rate was up 11 percent, and we met and exceeded the number of completed applications from the year prior, despite the top of the funnel being down.

The online brand hub was a very intentional request from Putney. How have you been using it?

I would recommend a brand hub to anyone. It's useful in a hundred ways, but especially to help new staff and internal audiences understand our story and messages.



Culver Academies was founded as a military academy for boys in 1894, and has since added a girls’ academy, summer schools, and camps. Long known for its unique approach to secondary education, Culver is focused on developing the whole person, with a curriculum structured around experiential opportunities that forge character and global citizenship, while equipping students with leadership qualities.

The Challenge

Culver’s leaders reached out to Ologie because they wanted to tell the school’s story in a bold, new way. In a crowded marketplace where many institutions are reading from the same “leadership and character” script, Culver needed to clearly delineate its own educational approach, which is defined by structure. Rather than feeling constrictive, however, this structure gives students the space to concentrate on the meaningful pursuits and purposeful values that will guide them throughout their lives.

The Solution

The story that took shape zeroed in on the advantages of this educational framework. Through service and lived experiences, Culver students discover who they are and define their own place in the world. It’s a process that creates exceptional leaders, driven from within to help others. And it’s rooted in time-tested traditions that cultivate the kind of thoughtful and conscientious citizens the world needs most. This personal evolution became the idea at the core of the story, summed up by the phrase “Culver in the Making.” This message inspires families to imagine who their student might become as the result of a Culver education.



Military, coeducational,
residential experience

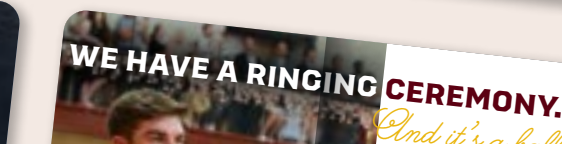
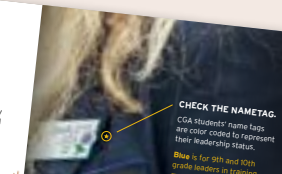
830 students

Grades 9–12

Culver, Indiana

culver.org

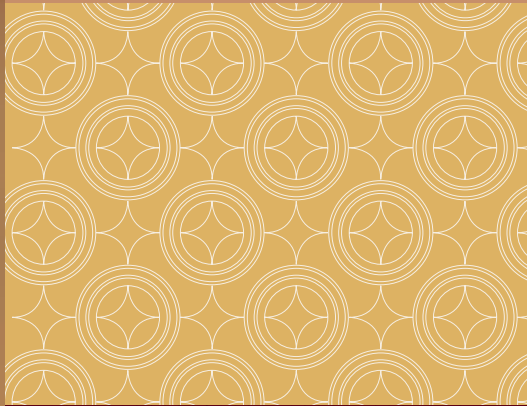
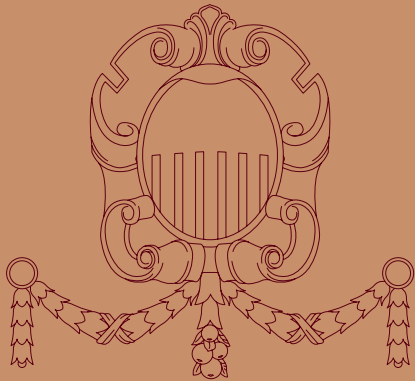






Brand Guidelines

To bring the story to life, we developed visuals that humanize the educational process — putting students at the forefront, showcasing the experience with evocative photography, and grounding it all with classic design elements and typography. And we leaned into language that highlights Culver's principles: the values and virtues that form the foundation of ethical leadership, empowering students to find balance, make informed decisions, and do what's right.



CHARACTER ISN'T
BORN OVERNIGHT.

IT'S CREATED
EVERY DAY.

LEADERSHIP ISN'T A
STATIC QUALITY.

IT'S A STEADFAST
COMMITMENT.

One of your most important audiences is parents. How has this new brand helped communicate the story (and value) of a Culver education to prospective families?

The new brand highlights the unique aspects of a Culver Academies education by focusing on the process of cultivating character, citizenship, and leadership. The beautiful visual elements and compelling narrative constantly receive high marks from both incoming and returning families.

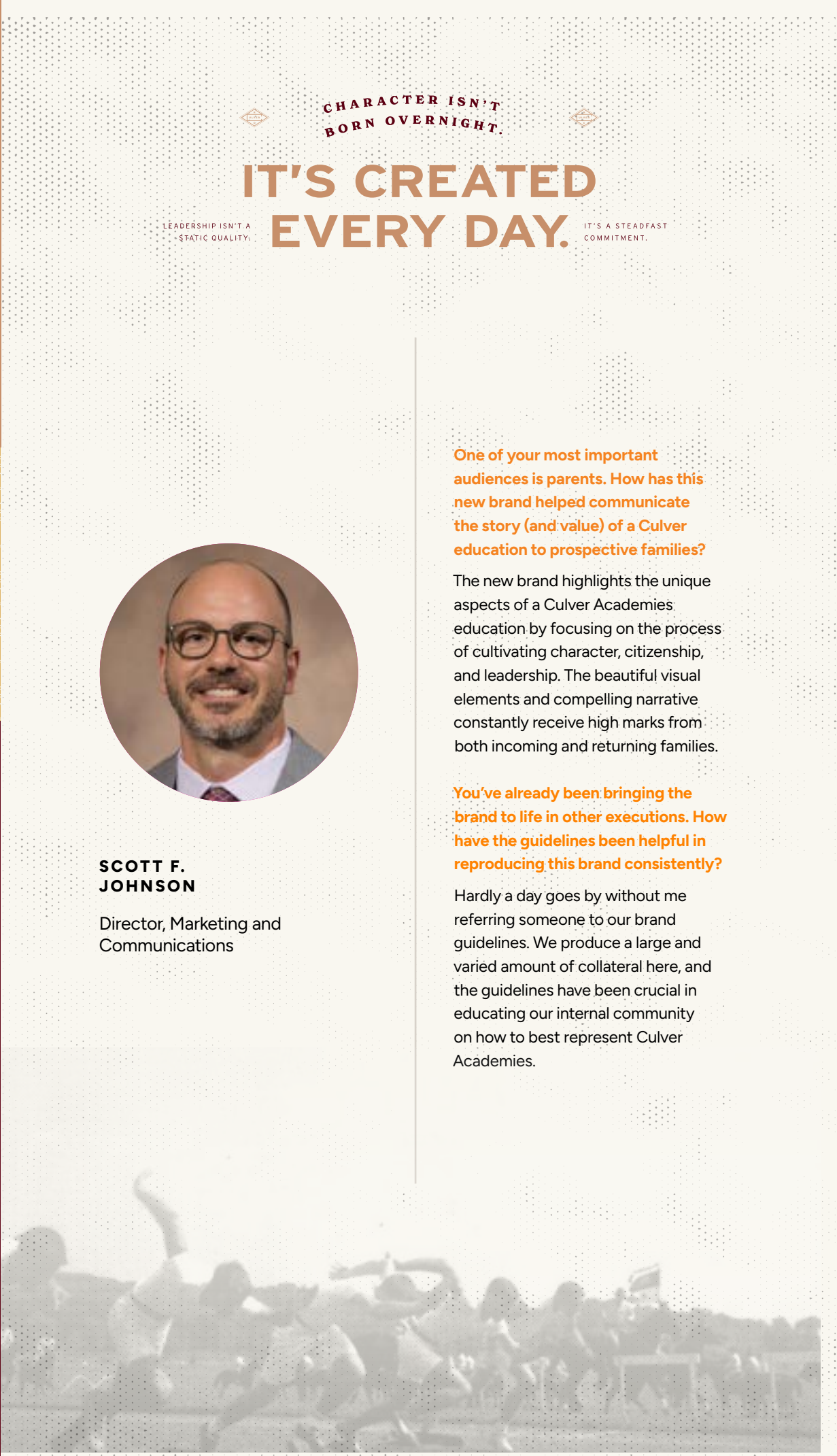


SCOTT F. JOHNSON

Director, Marketing and Communications

You've already been bringing the brand to life in other executions. How have the guidelines been helpful in reproducing this brand consistently?

Hardly a day goes by without me referring someone to our brand guidelines. We produce a large and varied amount of collateral here, and the guidelines have been crucial in educating our internal community on how to best represent Culver Academies.



Immaculate Heart is a Catholic, independent, college-preparatory school for young women in grades 6 to 12. It was founded in 1906 by the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, on the same hillside in Los Angeles where the school still resides — and the student body is a representation of the religious, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of that city.

The Challenge

As Immaculate Heart continued to evolve to better serve young women in the Los Angeles community, the school found itself preparing both for major upcoming philanthropic campaigns and for ongoing recruitment. That’s when it sought Ologie’s help in developing a fresh brand story. This story needed to speak to the school’s authentic spirit and true differentiators in the market, build overall reputation and awareness, and help in the recruitment of talented young women.

The Solution

We developed a brand platform that centers on the phrase “Where we stand.” The word “where” speaks to Immaculate Heart’s location, and to the hearts and minds of its students and staff. “We” refers to the school’s longstanding community of strong women. And “stand” puts a stake in the ground with confidence and conviction. Taken together, these ideas communicate that Immaculate Heart is a place of empowerment, where you can embrace your authentic self.



**IMMACULATE
HEART**

Catholic, independent, college-
preparatory school

687 students

Grades 6–12

Los Angeles, California

immaculateheart.org



Brand Narrative
Inspired by the rebellious and revolutionary spirit of the school's founding sisters.

We walk in the footsteps of giants. By giants, of course, we mean these ladies. Our founders. Fearless firebrands who had the courage to fight for their convictions. Not as a radical act of rebellion. But simply **standing firm in their mission to educate the women who will shape tomorrow.**

Time may pass. Trends may change. But our core values will always endure. Acceptance over exclusion. Compassion over condemnation. Empowerment over indoctrination. Hope over fear.

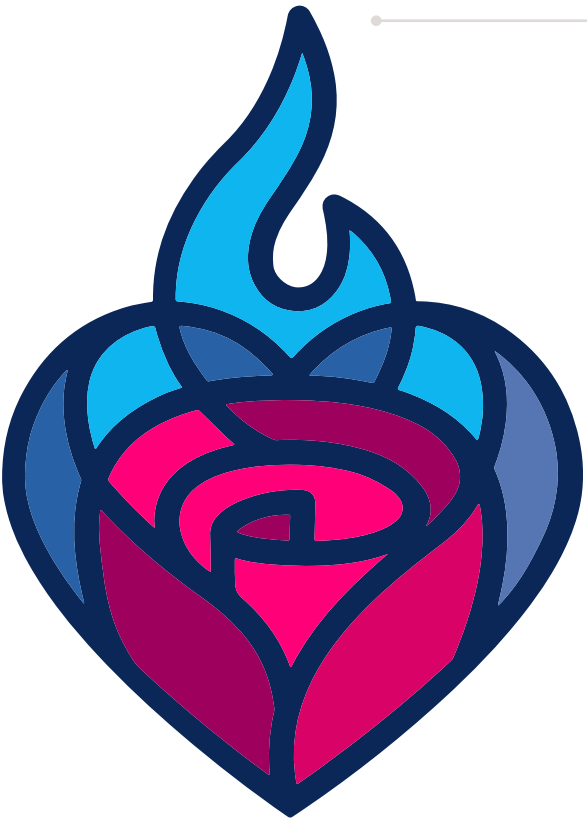
Standing up for what's right. Never backing down.
At Immaculate Heart, we embark on a formative journey to find our true purpose and passion. We discover our strength. Raise our voices. And take up space.

Headstrong and heart open, steadfast and sharp-minded, we proudly step into the future. **Standing confident in all that we are, and all that we'll become.**

And when the world challenges us to define our position and defend our perspective? We tell them: Boldly. Powerfully. Assertively.
This is where we stand.



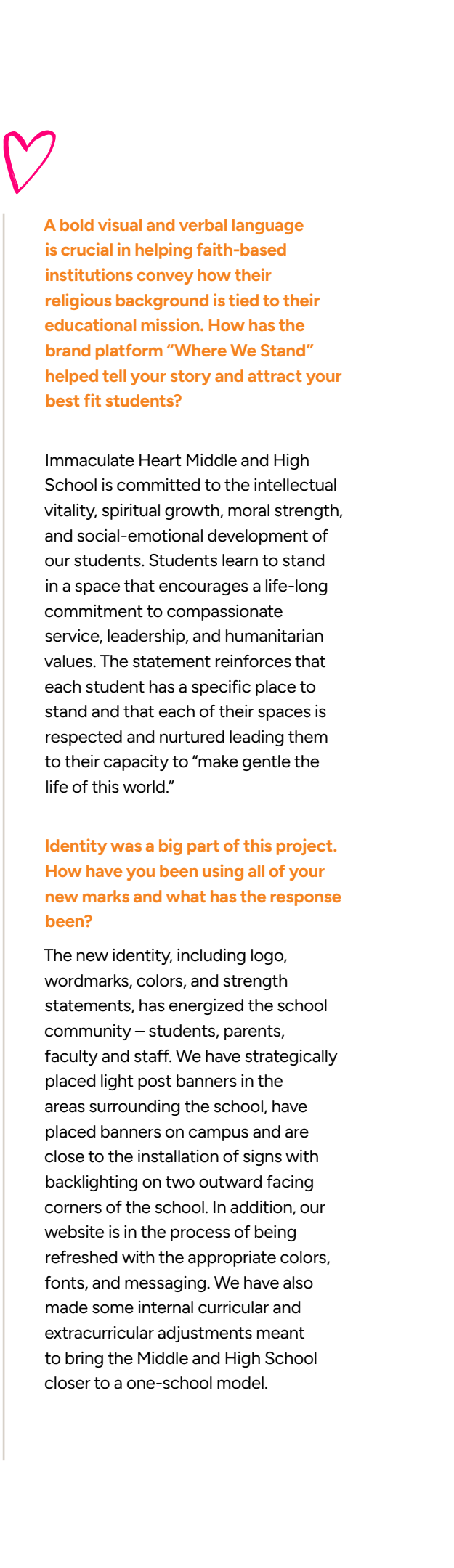
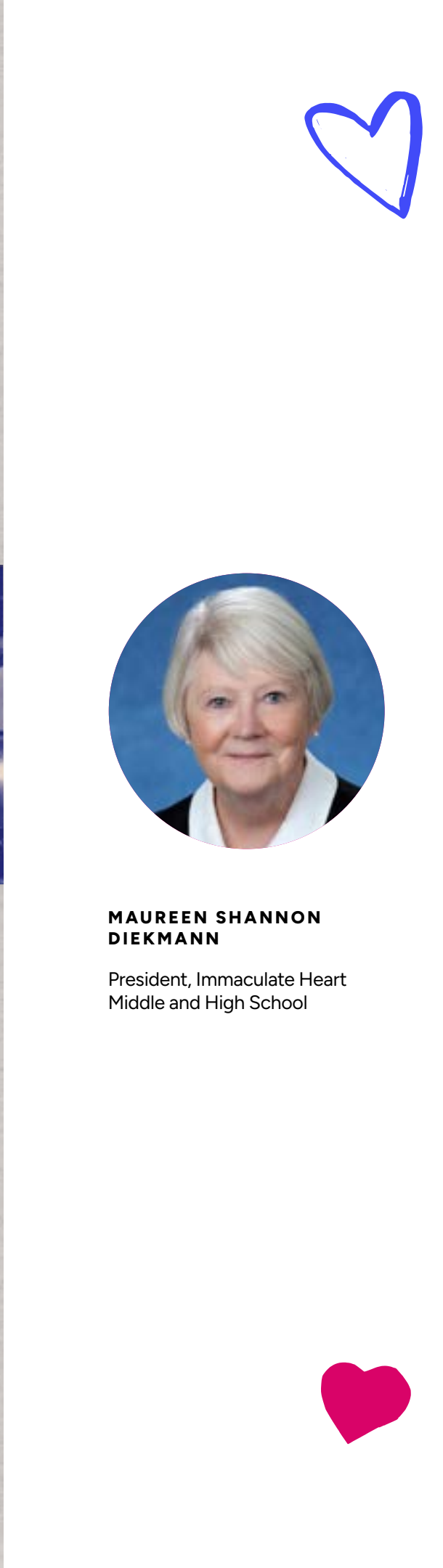
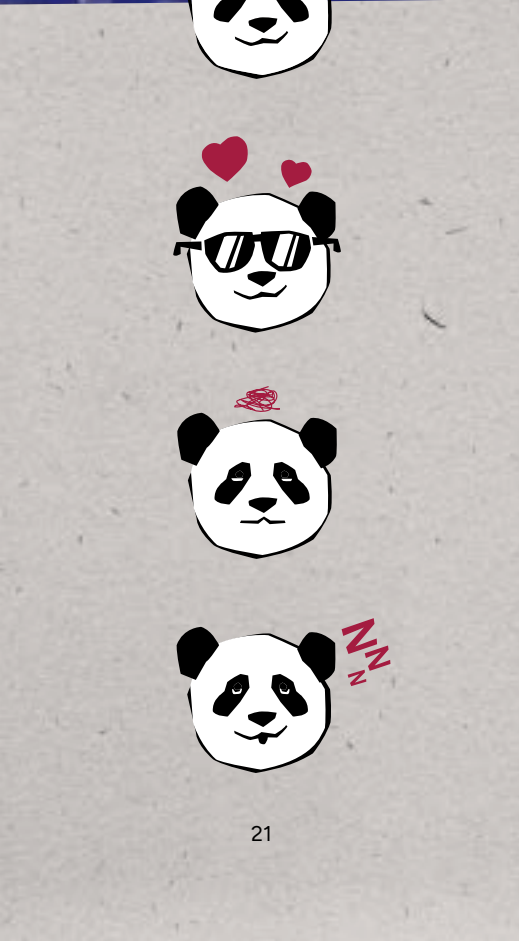
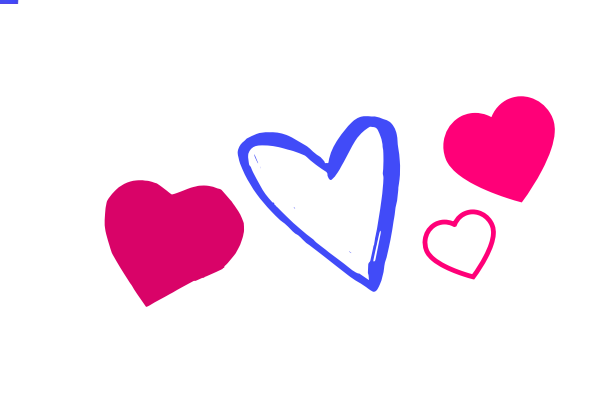
Identity
In addition to a fresh brand, Ologie worked with Immaculate Heart on an expanded family of new identity marks. This included a vibrant primary logo, a set of secondary logos for tighter spaces, an "IH" monogram, and a toolkit of emoji-like illustrations of the school's panda mascot.



The flame represents Mary's intense love for Jesus, and our intense passion for educating our students.

The heart within a heart represents our heart within Mary's: hers encompassing ours, as she is the heart of the Catholic faith that guides us with compassion and grace.

The rose is a nod to the white flowers of our seal, but this one is brightly colored to signify our bold, vibrant spirit.



A bold visual and verbal language is crucial in helping faith-based institutions convey how their religious background is tied to their educational mission. How has the brand platform “Where We Stand” helped tell your story and attract your best fit students?

Immaculate Heart Middle and High School is committed to the intellectual vitality, spiritual growth, moral strength, and social-emotional development of our students. Students learn to stand in a space that encourages a life-long commitment to compassionate service, leadership, and humanitarian values. The statement reinforces that each student has a specific place to stand and that each of their spaces is respected and nurtured leading them to their capacity to “make gentle the life of this world.”

Identity was a big part of this project. How have you been using all of your new marks and what has the response been?

The new identity, including logo, wordmarks, colors, and strength statements, has energized the school community – students, parents, faculty and staff. We have strategically placed light post banners in the areas surrounding the school, have placed banners on campus and are close to the installation of signs with backlighting on two outward facing corners of the school. In addition, our website is in the process of being refreshed with the appropriate colors, fonts, and messaging. We have also made some internal curricular and extracurricular adjustments meant to bring the Middle and High School closer to a one-school model.

MAUREEN SHANNON
DIEKMANN

President, Immaculate Heart
Middle and High School



Ologie is a branding and marketing agency focused on education. We help organizations build their reputations, recruit new students, and gain philanthropic support. By building distinctive brands and campaigns, we create breakthrough work that moves people to take action.

ologie®

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ologie.com