

CASE STUDY:

Career & Technical Education (CTE) Programs

BACKGROUND

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs provide students of all ages with the academic and technical skills, knowledge and training necessary to succeed in postsecondary education and future careers. In spite of the tremendous value these programs provide, there is a significant amount of stigma associated with CTE and the students who pursue this education pathway.

With the goal of eradicating the biases and changing the public views of CTE, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) engaged ASHLIN Management Group in an 18-month project to analyze the misperceptions of CTE programs and collect accurate information to disseminate more broadly in the market.

METHODOLOGY

ASHLIN conducted research to better understand CTE programs, the students who enroll in them, and their outcomes. Research included virtual focus groups with the following key stakeholders - both those with extensive CTE experience and those with no CTE experience - to examine the sources of stigma, evidence of successful outcomes, and opportunities to correct the misperceptions of CTE.

- EDUCATORS
- EMPLOYERS
- PARENTS
- STUDENTS

ASHLIN'S FINDINGS & REDEFINED STRATEGY

In conducting their research, ASHLIN determined that CTE suffered from more than just a lack of accurate information being disseminated and that the OCTAE's strategy of solely communicating the statistics about CTE and its value was insufficient. Instead, ASHLIN advised that in order to truly redefine the public perceptions of CTE and ultimately increase widespread acceptance and adoption, they needed to change the narrative that defines what their programs represent. In order to do so, ASHLIN recommended using an identity-based approach to create a brand architecture as a tool to both facilitate message discipline and create a new narrative consistent with reality through stories. Excited by this strategy, the Department of Education changed direction to focus on ASHLIN's defined brand architecture, as outlined in the next section.



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(EM)POWERED BY CTE BRAND ARCHITECTURE

ASHLIN's research culminated in the development of a brand architecture to contextualize efforts to reshape how CTE is perceived, remove the stigma, and provide a new identify framework to define CTE.

IDENTITY PROPOSITION	<p>CTE students are highly focused, highly engaged, and embrace a more active, real-world learning pathway.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Cultivates a unique blend of job-ready skills combined with a collaborative academic experience.■ Students are ready to transform their communities through economic empowerment and increased intellectual capital.
ROLE	<p>CTE helps drive economic growth by producing a skilled labor force.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ CTE students are well prepared to progress in their careers, through additional levels of academic and technical study, leading to baccalaureate degrees and fulfilling careers.
PRIMARY TARGET AUDIENCE	<p>Independent, self-defined, collaborative oriented, goal-driven thinkers & "doers".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ View education as offering more than just one viable pathway to career success, community building, and life fulfillment.
SUPPORTING THEMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ CTE prepares students to explore a vast array of career options.■ CTE can enhance the academic experience through active learning techniques.■ CTE is a pathway to better prepare students to attend college by including strong academic preparation.
POTENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Develop toolkits for high school counselors to reach out to local businesses to connect them to school CTE initiatives.■ Create informational videos with testimonials from community members talking about how CTE has made a positive impact.■ Share stories from former CTE students about the opportunities CTE provided for them to be successful in college and/or careers.

CHANGING THE PERCEPTION

"CTE prepares students for minimum wage jobs...I remember when slow learners and trouble makers went to CTE programs."

"CTE students are highly focused, highly engaged, and embrace a more active, real-world learning pathway."

"CTE programs are a distraction from college preparation."

"CTE addresses the needs of high-growth industries by matching a community of independent thinkers and doers to their passions in those industries."

"CTE is an alternative, not an asset to college preparation."

"CTE is the best kept secret in education."