

## FCS ADA | CORNER

When I was approached about crafting an article as part of the FCS ADA Corner, it was my goal to submit something that would hopefully resonate with a broad scope of FCS institutions and serve as beneficial food for thought with your respective programs. I believe we all share a common objective to provide our student-athletes with a positive educational experience, the challenges of generating financial resources, keeping pace with the facility arms race and implementing effective marketing plans. In my view, the critical factor in establishing a successful marketing campaign is the creation of an effective and appealing brand identity.



Paul Schlickmann



On Aug. 10, we launched a new era of Blue Devil Athletics at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU), with the unveiling of our rebranding initiative. This day marked the culmination of an extensive process, a significant investment of time and resources and an end result of which we are extremely proud.

Now that we have come to fruition with the primary phase of this endeavor, I offer these helpful hints to anyone who may engage in the process.

1. Take the time to hire the correct professionals who match their process and skill set with your needs.
2. Be thorough, inclusive and patient in the process.
3. Attempt to have the brand be respectful of your history as well as a fitting representation of who you are and who you aspire to be.
4. Maximize the impact of the launch/unveiling.
5. Address the macro items that will be most visible in year one and understand that it may not be feasible to implement changes across the board immediately.

When I arrived as director of athletics at CCSU more than a year ago, I solicited input from a broad scope of constituents regarding our strengths and areas for improvement as an athletics program. A common theme amongst our athletics and university family was the desire to reassess our logos and our marks. In my own view, it became clear that we needed a new brand identity that was consistent, modern and bold.

Our rebranding process was a year-long effort with the assistance of Rickabaugh Graphics, an Ohio based company with extensive experience in intercollegiate athletics branding. We chose Eric Rickabaugh (owner and president) and his company because he displayed the ability to conduct a creative, comprehensive and inclusive process, and yield a superior product.

“When I first arrived at CCSU, it was quickly apparent that everyone on campus had tremendous pride for their university. In addition, the athletics programs boasted a rich history and a future full of great promise,” said Rickabaugh. “Our staff realized the new look for CCSU athletics must portray that same pride, history and promise. There

needed to be a new athletics brand that matched the quality of athletics that were part of the Blue Devil legacy and future. This was a careful and conscientious undertaking and as a result, the final athletics brand is without a doubt one of the best we have created.”

The first drafts featured unique marks designed to reflect the philosophy and input of the CCSU athletics family and selected campus leaders. Following the initial stages of development, Rickabaugh conducted focus groups to gather feedback on several potential concepts. The groups totaled 200 in number and included student-athletes, coaches, the campus community, alumni, season ticket holders, donors and corporate partners. Information from these sessions was critical in putting the final touches on the new Blue Devil logo. The final product includes 11 marks and a unique CCSU font.

In addition to the primary task of designing the brand, we became acutely aware of the magnitude of a requisite punch list in order to be fully prepared for an effective launch day. We re-designed our website, created and delivered a new mascot uniform, and worked extensively with our bookstore and the staff at Licensing Resource Group to stock our shelves and our online store. On launch day, we held a VIP luncheon for members of our athletics family to offer them a sneak preview, and blanketed the campus community, our alumni network and our fans with an invitation to the press conference. We welcomed more than 300 people to a main event where we displayed cutouts of all 11 marks, introduced our new mascot and shared some celebratory cake. As a marketing tool to maintain the momentum of the day, we also announced a contest to name our new Blue Devil mascot with a plan to announce the winner at the first home football game.

While the new logo, font and mascot have been completed, the implementation process will continue this fall and throughout the year. We are in the final stages of securing an all-department apparel contract with an exclusive manufacturer that will lend consistency and enhance the notoriety of our CCSU brand in the short and long term. Our football helmet will feature a new mark while both Arute Field and Detrick Gymnasium will be repainted with a new logo at mid-field/court.

It was an exciting day that celebrated the exemplary work of many people and a watershed moment in our athletics history. The visible results and appeal of the new marks speak for themselves. They are representative of our core values; our competitiveness, our pride and our passion. The less visible, but most meaningful aspect of this process is the unifying and galvanizing impact that our new Blue Devil brand logo will have on the spirit, pride and identity amongst all members of the CCSU athletics and university family.

Paul Schlickmann is the director of athletics at Central Connecticut State University and a member of the FCS ADA Executive Committee.