

MARKETING GUIDE

Beyond Your School Colors Make Your Website Unique

INTRODUCTION

Your school's website is a vital gateway to both your community and your brand. A hallmark of your communications, your website should present the best, most cohesive, compelling version of your school.

Many independent schools work with website hosting platforms that are highly functional for the school's needs, but have defined parameters and limitations on design. Yet just because you work within a specific platform that defines many of your parameters doesn't mean your website can't reflect the personality and values of your school. The powerful tools these platforms contain for efficiently building community can be made even more powerful with a strategic, focused approach to the design of your site.

Beyond simply matching navigation headers to school colors and highlighting pictures from last year's best events, there are better ways for a school to ensure existing and prospective families clearly understand its unique brand and value.

We've worked with dozens of schools and gleaned powerful insights about applying brand strategy to bring a school's individuality to life on its website, regardless of how fixed the platform.

Here are three tips for making your school's website feel as exciting, vibrant, and true as a walk through campus.

1 Recognize that your website is a chance for someone to experience your community, not just a place to access information.

Marin Academy believes that educational excellence should push the boundaries of what is known today in order to prepare students for a world they can't even imagine tomorrow. Dedicated to fostering meaningful engagement and active curiosity in their community, their website uses the editorial theme “Everything is a Question” to demonstrate their commitment to progressive education. So their website had to feel as inquisitive as the school experience itself. Here's how we did it:

Language

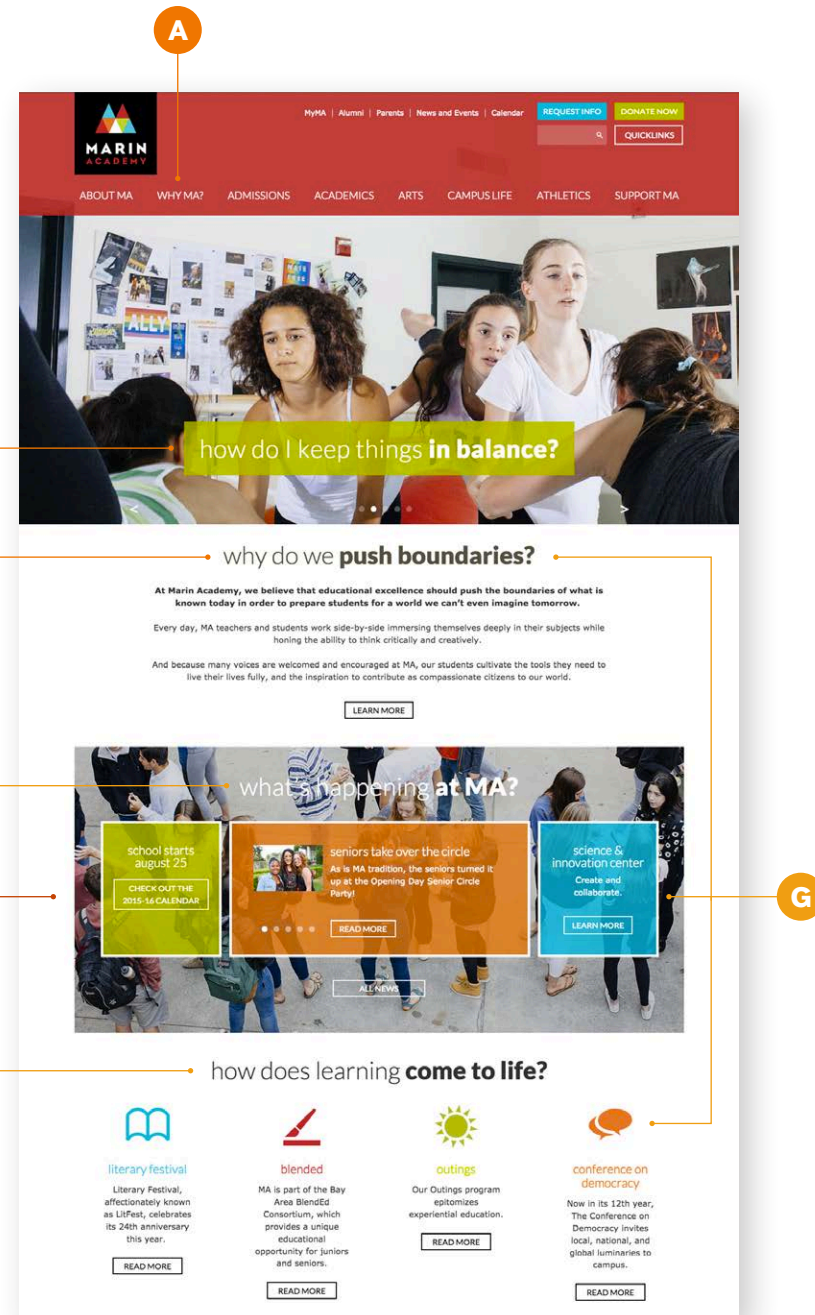
- A** “Why MA?” lives strategically in the navigation, inviting the reader to first learn about MA, then explore what makes MA distinctive.
- B** The use of questions as headlines and page anchors represents a confident and curious community, and reinforces the idea of actively engaged students who are eager to dig deeper.
- C** “Why do we push boundaries?” draws the user's eye to a clear, concise message that provides a comprehensive summary of MA's differentiating approach to education.

Visuals

- D** The color palette, photography, and icons—all joyful, confident, creative, bold—are representations of the diverse points of view and the dynamic environment at MA.

Organization

- E** The events profiles make it apparent to the user that learning also happens outside the classroom and extends beyond the students to include teachers, parents, and the larger community.
- F** “How does learning come to life?” reinforces that at MA, creative expression, diverse perspectives, and compassionate behavior encourage students to apply what they learn.
- G** A variety of entry points—icons, images, and carousels—allow the site to connect with users through both graphics and words or phrases.



2 Don't think your homepage has to say everything. Keep it as streamlined as possible.

Vistamar School has a globally focused curriculum based on the leading practices of successful international programs. Their site needed to convey that they provide a best-in-class global education, without misrepresenting them as an international school. Their site is comprised of elements that are easy to digest, providing a sense of who Vistamar School is without overcomplicated language or images.

Language

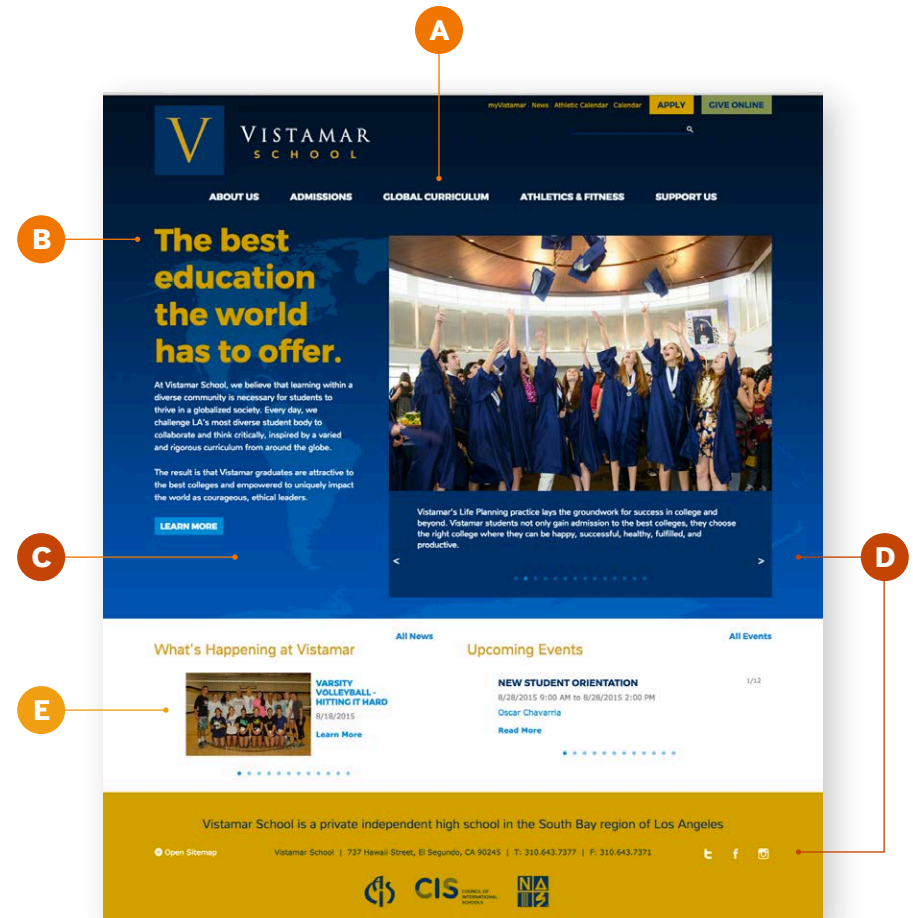
- A** Using simple, basic language in navigation can be powerful, and strategic word choices matter. Positioning the word “Global” in the navigation defines Vistamar School’s focus immediately. The “Athletics and Fitness” header differentiates how Vistamar School views athletics from most other schools. This header demonstrates an understanding of what athletics really teach kids, and why that matters outside of competition and school spirit.
- B** A compelling, concise message prioritized on the left side in large text and bright colors gives the user a high-level overview of Vistamar School.

Visuals

- C** The watermark treatment of the globe is shown from an aerial view—making the site feel expansive and global.
- D** The dominant use of blue speaks to Vistamar School’s intellectual, worldly, mature, and sophisticated nature. The gold balances the deep blue for contrast, invoking Vistamar’s belief in balance and inclusivity.

Organization

- E** The “What’s Happening at Vistamar” and “Upcoming Events” sections use carousels to highlight one piece of information at a time. In this way, these sections are simple and streamlined, while still presenting critical, detailed information in a dynamic way.



3 Let your personality shine.

Drew School's key, defining tenant is their dedication to individuality. They believe that high school shouldn't be a race to college, and they know that all learners are diverse learners, and a student's success can be defined in a wide variety of ways. Their website had to reflect their celebratory spirit and respect for the idea that no two teenagers are the same.

Language

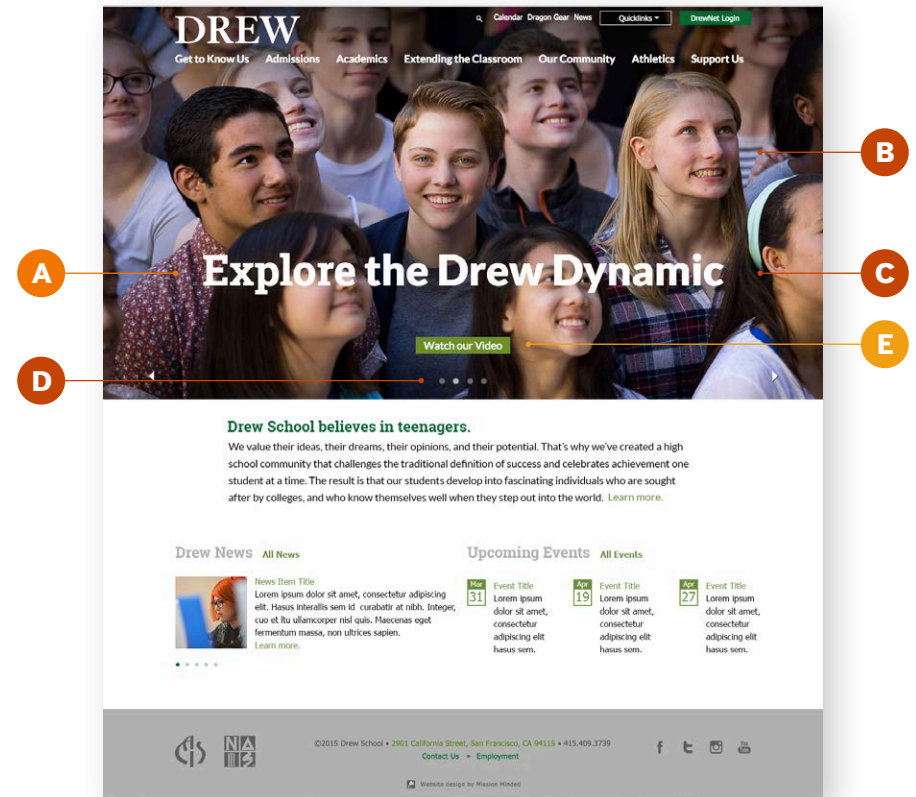
- A** Prominent messages such as "Explore the Drew Dynamic" encompass the essence of Drew, encouraging and welcoming participation with the site.

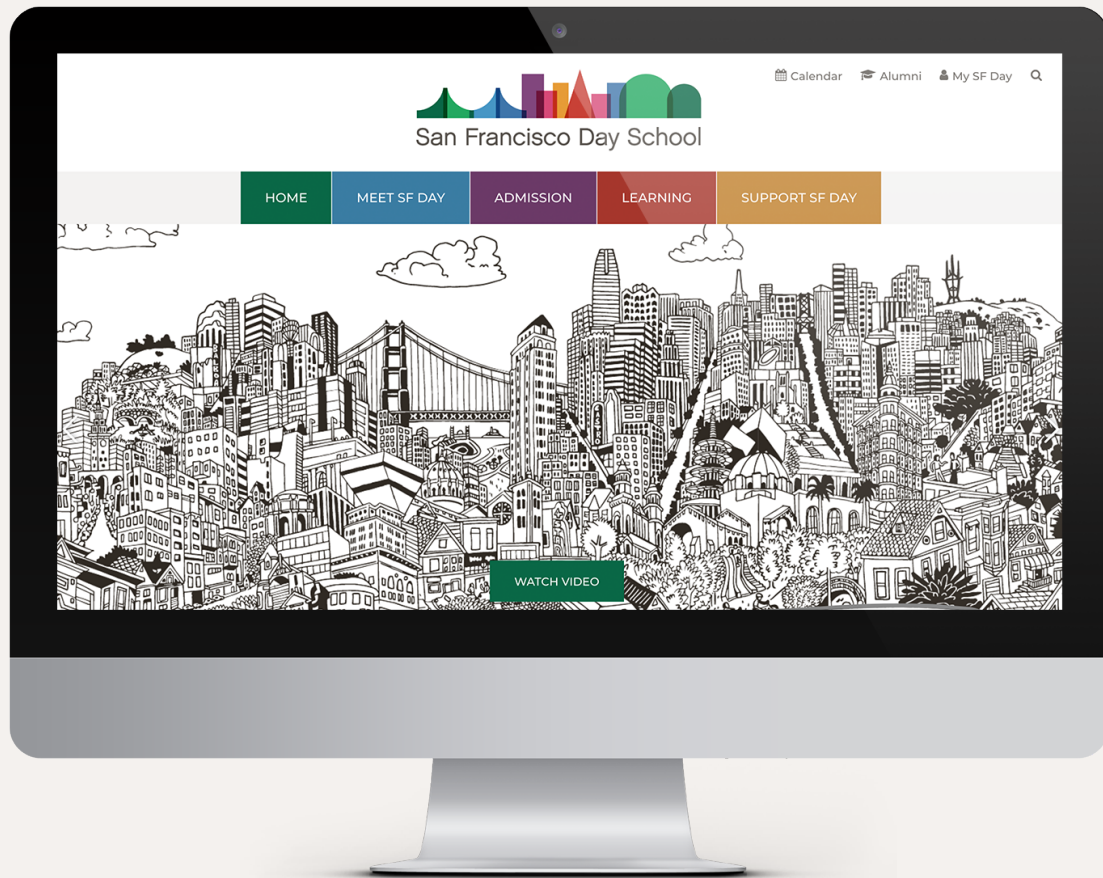
Visuals

- B** With photography that is unique to Drew's personality, portraiture conveys Drew's drive to meet each student where they are.
- C** A mixture of serif and sans serif typography is a key visual trigger to demonstrate how Drew is both creative and bold.
- D** The natural progression of photography rotating through the carousel on the homepage reinforces that Drew is a second home for teenagers—a place where individuals are encouraged to be themselves, and they thrive as a result.

Organization

- E** A video we developed for Drew allows visitors to experience an active expression of what makes Drew School unique. A fantastic representation of who they are, the video lives prominently on the site, in the center of the homepage, and is easily accessible with a one-click button.





“We are very pleased with and excited...you captured the instructional essence of the school, and beautifully expressed our aspirations. Great process, product, and outcome.”

Michael Walker, Ed.d

Head of School
San Francisco Day School

Make it Count

You need more than a beautiful site. You need a site that will help you strategically reach your goals as a school. A strong, cohesive web presence that brings your brand to life is one of the best tools in your communications arsenal. How you present information, what images you show, and which words you choose are opportunities to reinforce what makes your school so unique.

Your website is a critical opportunity to connect with prospective families, employees, and more. Don't miss the chance to make your website represent you as authentically as possible.

Learn More

Mission-Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofits, independent schools, and foundations. We believe you only reach your highest potential if people understand the importance of your work—not just what you do, but why it matters.

Every day we partner with clients like Marin Academy, Crane Country Day School, Crystal Springs Uplands School, and Prospect Sierra School to help them determine the brand—or reputation—for which they want to be known. Then we help them bring that brand to life with key messages, admissions campaigns, capital campaigns, web design, videos, and more.

As a result, our clients successfully raise more money and attract the support they need to achieve their goals. To find out how Mission-Minded can help your school, call us today at 415.990.9360.