

Websites that Get Brand Right: How to Use Your Website to Tell Your School's Brand Story

INTRODUCTION

Here at Mission Minded, we like to say brand is just another word for reputation.

The signals you send to prospective families and others in your community will either validate or refute the reputation that they think you have. Your brand is your identity; it should infiltrate your school and inform your approach to all things. This means that brand is everyone's responsibility, not just your communications team.

Your Logo is Not Your Brand

Remember, also, that your logo is not your brand. Strong brands are often embodied by their logos, which signal ideas about the brand, but are not the brand itself.

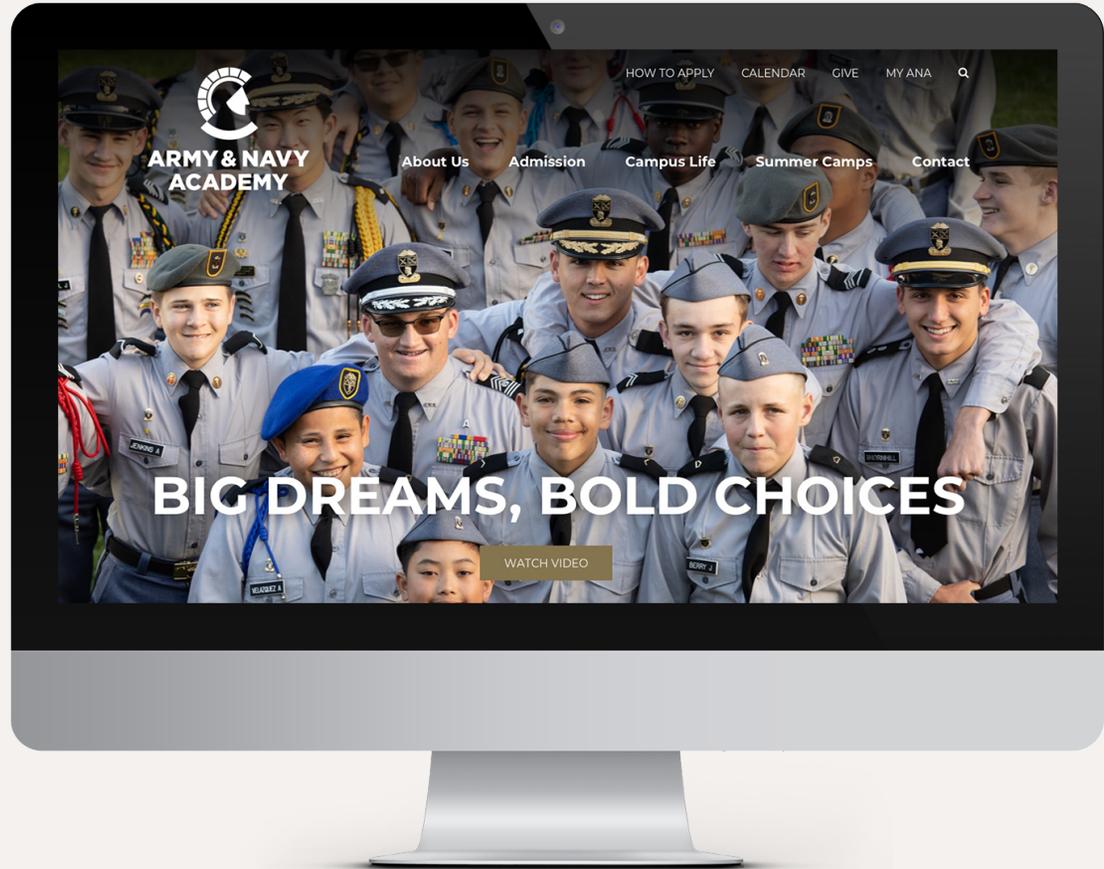
A strong brand creates a deeper relationship with your key audiences, is built on benefits instead of features, and minimizes competitive threats as it shows how you are unique among others in your space.

As powerful brand signals your website and other digital platforms should do the same thing. Although different segments of your audience may interact with certain platforms more than others, their experience with your brand should be cohesive, regardless of where they interact with you online. Whether they stumbled across your website via search engine or were sent one of your Instagram posts by a friend, their experiences with your school should be consistent and rooted in brand.

Bringing Your Brand to Life on Your Website

Websites, often, are an audience's first introduction to your school. In such a noisy digital world, there are many things competing for their attention. Your website must tell your brand's story, and it must do so quickly and concisely.

How you present information, which words you choose, and what visuals you show, are opportunities to reinforce your brand and what makes your school unique. Here is a guide for how you can leverage each of these elements to tell a cohesive brand story that immediately sets your school apart from its peers.



"There's nothing about this I don't like. From the words to the pictures, it perfectly conveys our brand equation, and it's amazing. Wow, just wow."

Arthur M. Bartell

Major General, United States Army (Retired)
as President, Army and Navy Academy

Organization

How you lead the viewer through your website is an opportunity to present who your school is and how you're unique. Information structure, hierarchy, and navigation choices can all help to bring your brand to the forefront of your website. Your homepage is often the first place users land, so it's important that the elements they see as they scroll down the page serve as a brand-centered introduction of your school.

- A** Your primary navigation, or the menu items that appear at the top of your website, serve as a roadmap to guide new users through the site. But navigation doesn't just serve a utility function; it should also convey key brand values. The structure of this navigation, paired with the words you choose for page titles, can instantly introduce new audiences to the key values that differentiate you from peers.
- B** Including elements such as "About Us" invites new audiences to get to know you.
- C** Thoughtful placement of admissions-related content shows prospective families the value that you add and how they can become a part of your community.
- D** Hub to explore more information organized around key areas of learning. This serves as a visual short cut for prospective students and families to immediately learn more about your school's approach to education, as well as your values and brand story.
- E** Bringing in community voices authentically shares what a day at your school is like, doubling down on your brand.

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Language

Words matter! What you say—and how you say it—leave a lasting first impression. Your website is an opportunity to introduce your school, and to show prospective families why they should want to join your community. Your brand communicates this directly, and can come to life in a few key ways in the language that you use on your website.

- A** The top section of your homepage, often called the hero, is where users' eyes go first when they land on your homepage. In addition to strong imagery, bold word choices can make your brand immediately accessible to your audiences.
- B** Strategic word choices matter. So too, does using simple, powerful language. Leveraging direct, active language empowers your audiences to visualize themselves at your school, and motivates them to want to take the next step in your admissions process. This can even be done with first person "I" language, directly addressing your audience in key places, such as call to action buttons.
- C** Key calls to action with strong, clear, button language guide users to the action you want them to take next, such as inquiring or applying.
- D** Showing a variety of content, from student/faculty spotlights to virtual tours of your campus, not only provides more content for new audiences to engage with, but also more opportunities for new audiences to see themselves in different aspects of your community, promoting inclusivity.
- E** The homepage hero might be large, but it's not the only section of your homepage that you should focus on. In the headings and descriptions that follow, create copy that is brand-focused and differentiates your school at every opportunity. Infographics provide visual variety in storytelling, reinforcing what makes your school unique.

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Visuals

It's been said that a photo is worth 1,000 words, and your school's website imagery is no different. The visuals you choose to show on your site are yet another opportunity to show how your school is unique, inviting prospective families to see themselves as a part of your community. This can show up in several ways on your website.

- A** Expressive photography and typography in key areas, such as your homepage hero image and other key landing pages, can authentically convey the emotion of your brand while also sharing a human-centered view of your campus, putting students at the forefront.
- B** Unique color choices and placement can evoke feelings that are rooted in brand, such as bold colors that evoke confidence, or curiosity.
- C** Background elements, such as solid color, are important in balancing white space. The choice of this color can also further communicate your brand.
- D** The shape of photography elements can also tell a brand story. For example, photography contained in unexpected shapes can feel more expressive, showing a deeper purpose, or creating wayfinding cues for your site users.
- E** In many website designs, white space is used intentionally and purposefully. For organizations wanting to convey a sense of balance, simplicity, etc., this can be key to communicating brand.

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Your Website is a Key Brand Storytelling Tool

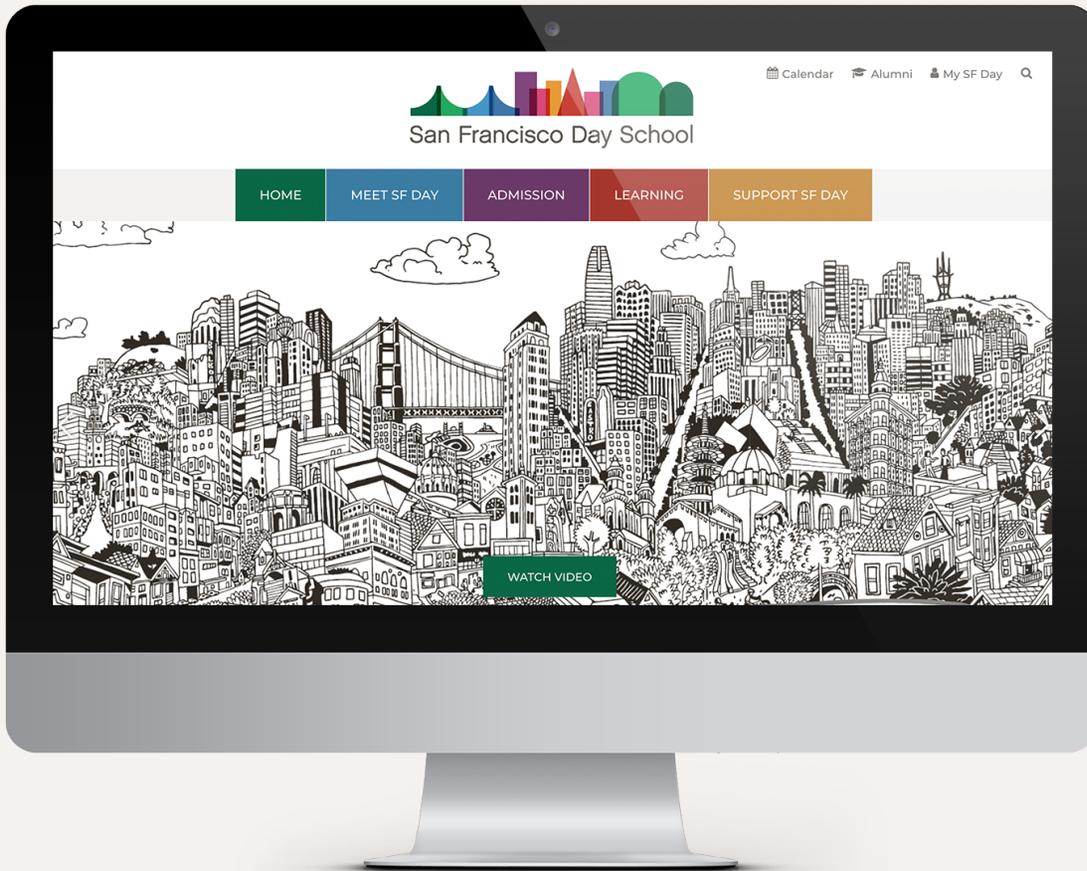
Your website is an important and powerful opportunity to communicate your brand, and why it is unique, to your target audiences. It serves as a key cornerstone in the interconnected web of your digital platforms, such as social media, and can draw audiences' attention in an otherwise noisy digital world. The more brand storytelling you can integrate into your website, the more opportunities you create to engage with prospective families and your community at-large.

Learn More

Mission Minded is a branding firm that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations and independent schools.

We believe that a brand that sets you apart is essential to a school's success. Everyday we guide our clients to uncover the big, bold idea that will attract more people to their work. Because in today's world, a worthy mission is not enough. You've got to communicate what makes you unique at every opportunity.

Our clients achieve their admissions and enrollment goals, 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.



“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