18 CAMPAIGNS, 1 BRAND FAMILY: THE CASE FOR 'UNIFIED DIFFERENTIATION'



ENTRY SUMMARY

During the 2019–2020 recruitment cycle, the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business Office of Marketing and Communications launched a comprehensive set of lead generation advertising campaigns in support of nearly 15 degree and executive education programs. One of the college's lead generation challenges in recent years had been a result of its weak brand recognition in the market—the college was formed in 2016 as Cornell merged its three AACSB-accredited business schools into one entity. Single-program and single-channel advertising campaigns (which were the per-merger norm) didn't have the now-required "Cornell business" brand emphasis, and media buying was split per program, limiting purchase power. By 2019, some programs that never had an advertising budget now did, but lacked a strong value proposition message.

This year, an in-house team designed multiple ad campaigns that included both brand-awareness and program-specific strategies. Each campaign asset, of which there are easily hundreds, is designed as part of the same brand family (both its messaging and visual identity) and fits into a holistic strategy that combines display advertising, paid social media, email marketing, web and landing pages, third-party content, sponsored content, print ads, earned media, search engine marketing, and more. The campaigns use engagement tracking to move visitors through four stages: awareness, consideration, contemplation, and action, serving them a different set of messages at each stage. What makes this entry stand out is its immense cohesion across an enormous quantity of deliverables and its implementation process (research, design, launch, retarget)—not to mention evidence of year-over-year improvements in data.

METHODOLOGY & STRATEGY

Goals

The SC Johnson College's Office of Marketing and Communications is responsible for generating high-quality leads (or, serious hand-raisers) for the college's admissions teams to nurture through application completion and eventual matriculation. Before the hand-off to admissions occurs, prospects move through four strategic stages (awareness, consideration, contemplation, and action) each with its own set of key performance indicators (KPIs).

Because the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business comprises three schools with 15+ programs (including some that are co-branded, adding an additional layer of complexity), our integrated campaigns needed very clear brand alignment, value propositions, and calls to action.

In an effort to demonstrate quantity, here is comprehensive list of our 18 campaigns for the 2019–2020 recruitment season.

Goals of the campaign: To deliver strong brand and program messages directly targeted to prospects throughout the lead-generation funnel, encouraging them to take the next step in their application journey

Secondary goal: To unite all campaign deliverables visually and with tight messaging, reducing program and brand confusion in the market

Brand awareness campaigns:

- 1. Cornell MBA
- 2. Cornell Executive MBA
- 3. Cornell Specialized Master's Program
- 4. Cornell Executive Education

Programmatic campaigns:

- 1. One-Year Accelerated MBA
- 2. Two-Year MBA
- 3. Johnson Cornell Tech MBA
- 4. Executive MBA Americas
- 5. Executive MBA Metro NY
- 6. Executive MBA/MS in Healthcare Leadership
- 7. MPS in Management
- 8. MPS in Management Accounting Specialization
- 9. Master of Management in Hospitality
- 10. MPS in Real Estate
- 11. MPS in Applied Economics and Management
- 12. MPS in Applied Economics and Management with CEMS Master in International Management
- 13. Professional Development Program
- 14. General Managers Program

METHODOLOGY & STRATEGY: KEY COMPONENTS

#1. Collaborations

The college's Marketing and Communications team handled a great deal of the campaign creation and measurement in house (see Resources section). However, the internal team relied on two agencies to help execute, track, and optimize ongoing campaigns.

In-house: Described further in the Resources section, the in-house group worked across project teams (creative, integrated marketing, communications, and operations)—this effort required input from a majority of team members in the college's Office of Marketing and Communications.

Media agency: This agency was responsible for executing all 18 media campaigns, which included negotiating all pricing, securing tactical placement, and project managing asset delivery to vendors. The agency also worked to ensure tracking (as defined by our internal analytics team), deliver reports/recommendations, and deploy real-time optimizations. They also applied animation to some static creative assets that were developed by the in-house team.

Digital agency: This agency was responsible for managing all paid social activity, including sponsored content remarketing, LinkedIn InMail, and various post types on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

#2. Research and planning

The college's agency partners conducted digital platform and outlet research, evaluated keywords, and defined audience targets before launching the campaigns. This included the following:

- Evaluating opportunities within the entire digital advertising landscape
- Identifying search engines, display networks, and social platforms that offered the best combination of search relevance, audience reach, pricing, brand exposure, and competitive positioning
- Testing and analyzing each channel to focus on strategies that yielded the highest quality traffic at the lowest possible cost
- Reviewing the college's provided keywords and building keyword lists based on search volume, relevance, costs, and website traffic goals
- Optimizing paid search, display, and retargeting efforts based on historical keyword performance, which was provided by the in-house team
- Developing an audience targeting strategy based on campaign goals and considering user browser behavior, demographics, interests, device type, and location; the in-house team provided audience definitions as a baseline
- Segmenting audiences based on a mix of search, display, social, and retargeting platforms to leverage a combination of text and image ads

#3. Content development

Messaging: The college secured a short, two-month engagement with a freelance content creator who met with key members from our in-house project team and each academic program (admissions, career management, student services, and program directors). As a result of these conversations, the writer developed a one-page messaging document to inform each campaign. Each document included a program/suite overview, target audience, one-sentence teaser, and differentiators with supporting information. This distinct messaging was used in different ways across ad and email platforms, but was continuously helpful in all programmatic communications throughout the recruitment cycle.

Content/editorial development: The in-house team used these messaging documents to create copy for each phase of the funnel: awareness, consideration, contemplation, and action. This included display advertising, emails, lead capture landing pages, strategically placed website CTAs, sponsored podcast titles and summaries, and radio and print advertisements. Taking funnel stages into consideration and a variety of platforms, this resulted in hundreds of variations of headlines, subheads, and body copy across all 18 campaigns.

METHODOLOGY & STRATEGY: KEY COMPONENTS

#4. Stakeholder engagement

Executing these campaigns at a high volume required careful stakeholder engagement and communication. The in-house team served as the connection between admissions/program stakeholders and our agency executors. We were sure to clearly define roles and responsibilities, which included who would review what and at which times. With hundreds of ads, emails, social posts and other deliverables, it would be impossible for the program directors and admissions teams to review each one.

Before launching any campaigns, the in-house project team reviewed the following with stakeholders and received approval:

- Messaging documents per program
- Creative approach for photography and design

With approvals on each of these aspects secured, the messaging and design was therefore acceptable in different forms as the in-house team and agency developed ads, secured media placement, sent lead generation emails to list purchases, created social media content, and more. This clearly separated subject-matter-expert contributions from marketing/communications expertise.

Program teams are informed of marketing activity and data following each admission round.

#5. Creative/visual consistency

The college's creative team was responsible for designing all creative elements. By executing the design in-house, we were able to ensure brand consistency across programs and create visual identifiers to match per-program differentiators. The team created a design construct that included logo placement (which sometimes required challenging dual branding), typography, visual identifiers, color differentiators, program names, and photography. Several examples are shown in the entry.

Of note is the photography that was used across designs. The college's creative director led photo shoots to collect brand imagery for each program. Not only have these photos been used in advertising campaigns, but also for website improvements and organic social media. Additionally, the students featured in each ad are actual program students! Anecdotal feedback has confirmed that this attention to detail matters to students and alumni who appreciate accurate representation in photos.

#6. Platform integration

The messaging documents per campaign and the fluid design concepts helped the in-house team easily adapt text and images across multiple platforms. As shown in the examples, each campaign required various ad sizes, email headers, social media posts, landing pages, etc.

The college previously lacked brand cohesion across programs, but for the 2019–2020 cycle, the creative approach united 18 campaigns as part of one family. The numbers below show the volume of varied deliverables for a selected group of platforms in the FY20 cycle:

- 400 display ads
- 250 retargeting ads
- 33 social media graphics
- 75 lead generation emails (purchased lists)
- 70 third-party email blasts
- 18 Google dashboards
- 31 direct-buy published
- 250+ programmatic publishers
- 20 landing pages for campaign activity

METHODOLOGY & STRATEGY: KEY COMPONENTS

#7. Targeting user journeys

For each campaign, we chose to target (and retarget) users who have engaged with our sites in different ways. Each phase required a different call to action (CTA) and was related to funnel status and application deadlines. Display ads changed over time for users, and our emails ran in drip campaigns, encouraging prospects to attend different events or engage in new ways. Throughout each campaign phase, we maintained consistency of overarching message/value proposition and visuals as shown in the examples.

Phase 1—Awareness: This includes targeted advertising and is measured by site visits, impressions, and clickthrough-rates

Phase 2—Consideration: Focuses on generating interest and engagement for a program and its owned website and third-party content; this is measured by traffic to lead-capture and event pages and clicks on call-to-action buttons like "learn more" and "request information"

Phase 3—Contemplation/Activation: This includes registering for an event or scheduling a class visit or online chat

Phase 4—Action: Defined by a tangible interaction that moved an individual to lead-nurture activity, which would include submitting a pre-assessment or eligibility check or starting an application for a program

#8. Mapping and optimization

Our agency collaborators managed tactical delivery of paid content and allowed for real-time data and adjustment throughout.

Each campaign was designed to target prospects in a way that aligned with paid placements and owned content to achieve a specific goal in each phase of the journey (campaign mapping). In turn, audiences could be grouped together for strategic delivery, budget, reporting, and analysis. Once the campaigns launched, the agency was able to provide data such as impressions, clicks, and click-through-rate for each piece of creative (type and size), and then optimize future placements.

#9. Reporting

The analytics team in the college's Office of Marketing and Communications was able to create a centralized reporting system in Google Data Studio that pulled data points from multiple systems (like Google Analytics, Ad Roll, Google Ads, and Search Console). This allowed us to collaborate with both agencies and pull insights from multiple third-party tools in one location. This real-time solution helped us to keep a pulse on KPIs like campaign traffic, goal completions (nurture submits, pre-assessments, app starts/submits) and provide both campaign performance results to our college partners and optimization recommendations for our budget. These insights were program-specific and featured hundreds of data points and charts/graphs, allowing us to analyze both year-over-year and year-to-date campaign trends. Each report featured around 10 pages of insights ranging from campaign overviews to specific insights on ad spend by channel, demographics, engagement, and geographic location.

RESOURCES

External support

This budget figure is allocated to support vendors (photography and writers), media placement and paid performance reporting, some content/asset development, and mid-campaign optimization. Of this entry's total budget, 85% was allocated toward media buys and placement while 15% was used for agency services and minor production costs.

In-house team

Campaign strategy was driven by the college's in-house integrated marketing team. Creative direction was led by the college's creative (visual) and communications (editorial) teams. The operations and analytics team was responsible for developing reporting standards and developing and deploying email drip campaigns. We also had a project manager help connect the project's many dots. This effort included around 15 team members; more than half of the college's entire Communications and Marketing team.

DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES

In-house expertise

Unlike many ad campaigns, about 90% of the conceptual work and asset creation was done in-house, where vendors' roles and contributions centered on media buying, placement, and optimization. This let our internal teams showcase their expertise when it came to messaging, brand cohesion, streamlined execution, and developing reporting standards.

Results: Data and anecdotes

Although our campaigns are still active, we are seeing positive data, especially across the four brand awareness campaigns, which are new this year. For most programs, traffic and quality lead volume has improved. We continue to hear positive feedback about how our ads and other deliverables look and read.

Real-time optimization

With the help of our agency partners, we were about to adjust spend mid-campaign and gain insights on creative components. We will be able to use these insights to make better-informed decisions in FY21.

Effective collaborations

This season's recruitment efforts relied on agency partnerships that highlight media buying and data-driven optimization. While we could focus other campaign components in-house, this is not where we had expertise or purchase power. The collaboration worked in our favor.

Aligned stakeholder management

Across these 18 campaigns, there were around 50+ stakeholders who required various levels of approvals. By setting expectations early, we were able to minimize "analysis paralysis" and launch campaigns without too many cooks in the kitchen; or, with the most experienced cooks leading the way.

Incredible quantity

The number of deliverables required to support 18 campaigns easily surpassed 1,000 items. Our incredible in-house designers, producers, and writers supported this Herculean task among other projects and priorities to support the college.

Brand continuity, differentiated

Our messaging and design packages clearly connected each campaign as being of the same family. Targeting and retargeting helped the right audiences see the best ads at the lowest cost.

EXAMPLE #1: ONE-YEAR ACCELERATED MBA

Program-specific campaign

Audience targeting

The One-Year MBA program in Ithaca is designed for business professionals who have a master's degree in a technical, scientific, or other rigorous quantitative field, strong quantitative skills, and high leadership potential. This program features a condensed academic core paired with real client projects. Successful graduates have clearly defined career paths and often return to their previous industry to work on the business side of technical or scientific specialties.

Outcomes

- 316% YOY increase in website traffic volumes
- 81% YOY increase in pageviews
- 30% YOY increase in leads
- Display advertising features a 0.70% CTR with a low CPC of \$0.26

Top drivers of users: Display, Organic Search, Paid Social, Direct, Paid Search, Email

Top drivers of engagement: Email, Organic Search, Paid Search, Paid Social, and Direct

ONE-YEAR ACCELERATED MBA MESSAGING

One-Year Accelerated MBA



Overview:

The Johnson One-Year accelerated MBA is an intense, flexible, full-time program for professionals who seek to complement their advanced degree or certification with an exceptional management education that prepares them for leadership roles. Participants leverage the vast opportunities on Cornell's Ithaca campus as well as the Cornell Tech campus in NYC to transition from business learner to business leader.

Target audience:

Career enhancers who want to transition from a sole contributor role to a leadership role. Ideal candidates are seeking to fast-track their education, hold (or are concurrently obtaining) a master's degree or professional certification, and are pursuing a career that does not require a summer internship for recruitment success.

The one-sentence "what":

This accelerated One-Year MBA enables professionals to complement their advanced standing with an exceptional management education that efficiently prepares them for key leadership roles with minimal career interruption.

Differentiators:

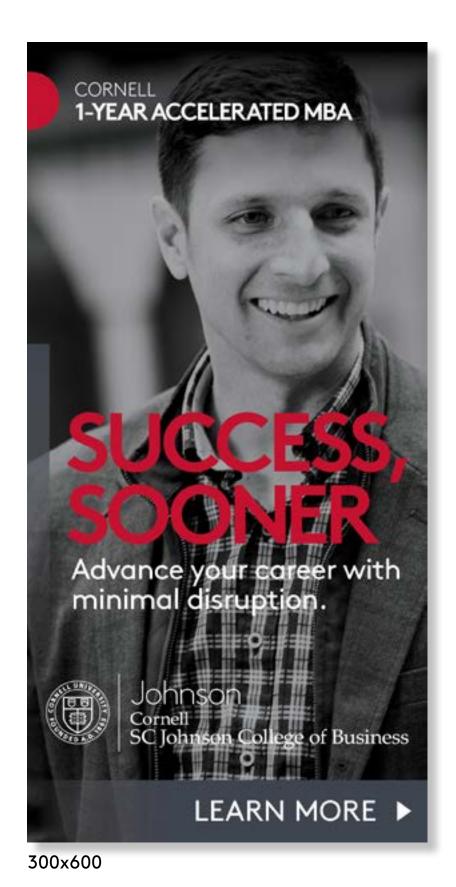
Time to market. This program's one-year business curriculum is fast-tracked and rigorous, enabling maximum career acceleration with minimal career disruption.

Inventively advanced. Students learn new business skills that complement their advanced standing with cutting-edge curriculum on Cornell's Ithaca campus and the Cornell Tech campus, which enables them to construct a unique MBA experience that advances their individual career goals.

Hands-on experience. Students work with faculty members and advisors who possess management consulting experience as they tackle real-world consulting projects and engage with industry leaders.

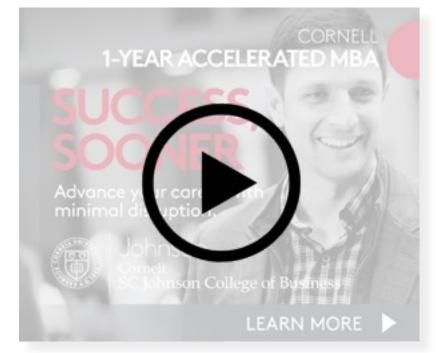
ONE-YEAR ACCELERATED MBA ASSETS

DYNAMIC ADS



The eyes of Texas are upon you: Oklahoma motorists get bills for years-old toll road charges
by Stas Allen | September 13, 2014

320x50



300x250 ANIMATED

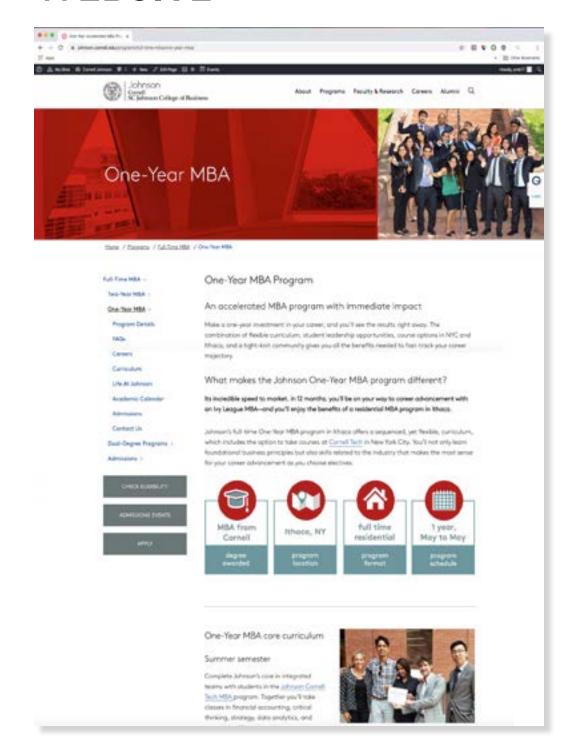


300x250

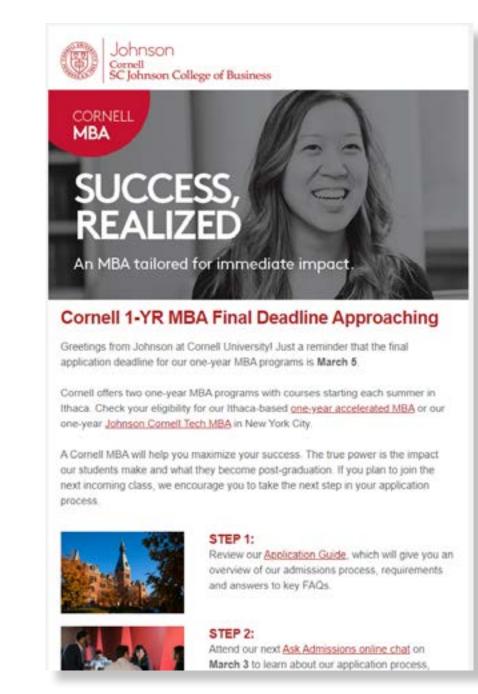




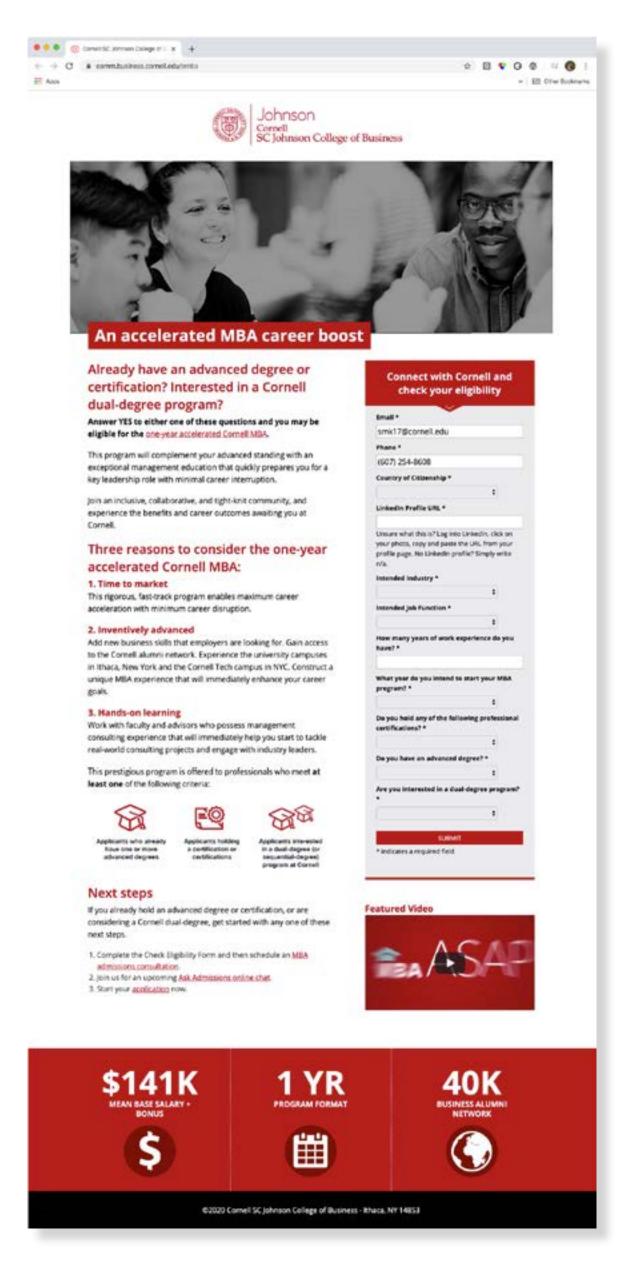
WEBSITE



EMAIL

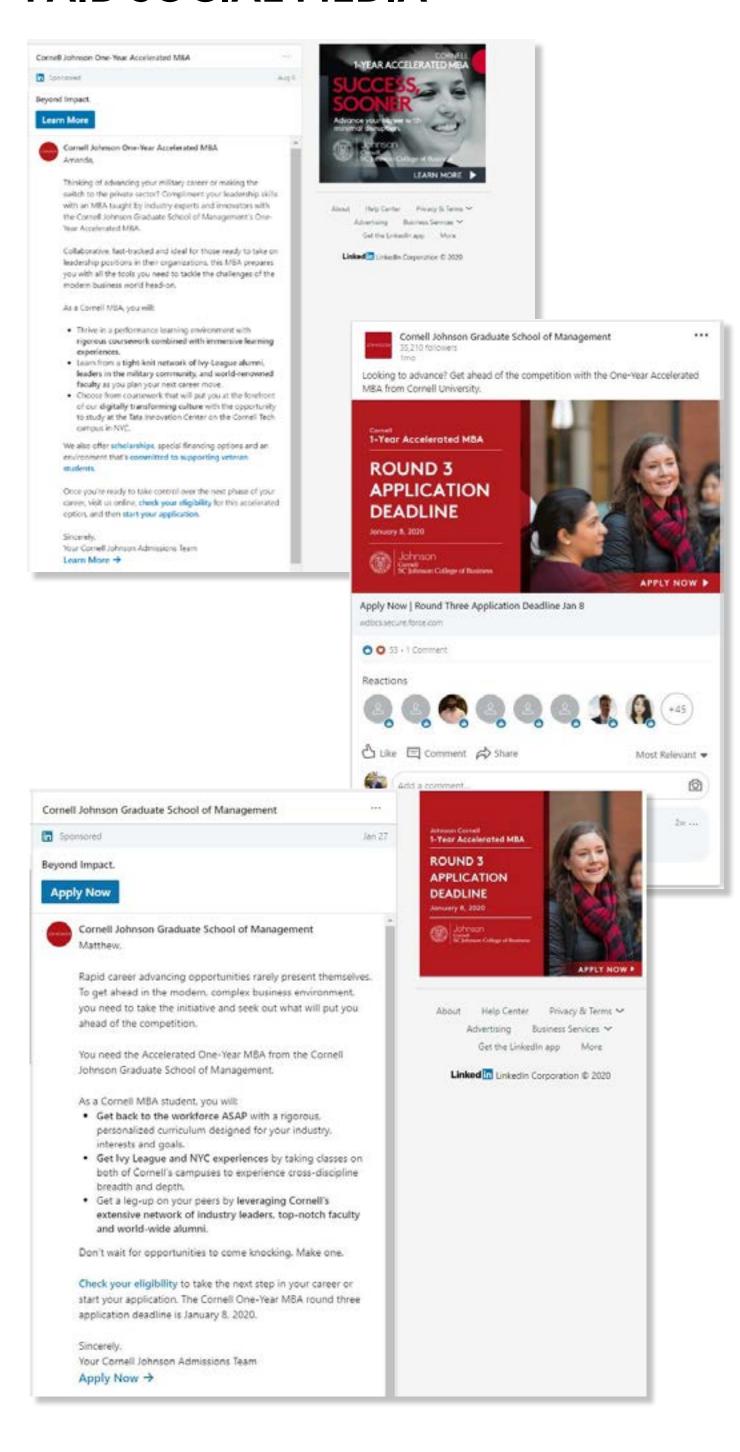


LANDING PAGE



ONE-YEAR ACCELERATED MBA ASSETS

PAID SOCIAL MEDIA



DIGITAL RETARGETING ADS





APPLYING EARLY ACTION?

TWO WEEKS LEFT!



ORGANIC SOCIAL MEDIA





EXAMPLE #2: CORNELL EXECUTIVE MBA

Brand awareness campaign

Audience targeting

The Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management has three Executive MBA programs. While the programs feature different formats, they share the same target demographic and approach to management education. Candidates for these programs are mid-career managers and professionals with an average of 10 to15 years of post-graduate work experience. Candidates come from a variety of backgrounds including banking, marketing, engineering, IT, healthcare, and law, among others. Candidates are based primarily in North America (Americas program) and the New York City area (Metro NY and EMBA/MS in Healthcare Leadership programs).

Outcomes

This is new campaign, so we do not have YOY data. However, we secured:

- +15k audience targeted users
- +24k Pageviews
- +126 leads for the three EMBA programs

Top drivers of users: Display, Paid Social and Paid Search

Top drivers of engagement: Paid Search, Direct and Paid Social

This brand awareness campaign further supported our EMBA programmatic campaigns (right).

Year-over-year data per program

EMBA/MS in Healthcare Leadership program:

- +35% leads
- +25% pre-assessments
- +50% app starts
- +34% app submits
- +75% website traffic
- +30% pageviews

EMBA Metro NY program:

- +17% leads
- +35% app starts
- +37% app submits
- +5% website traffic
- +2.3% pageviews

EMBA Americas program:

- +10%leads
- +37% app starts
- +12% app submits
- +29% website traffic
- +17% pageviews

CORNELL EXECUTIVE MBA MESSAGING

Executive MBA



Overview:

Cornell's executive MBA programs are designed for working professionals seeking to advance their skills in leadership, management, and innovation without career interruption. Each offers a unique experience, from the Executive MBA Metro NY program that draws from a diverse range of industries and functions to create an exceptional cohort in New York City, the Executive MBA/MS in Healthcare Leadership program focuses on the intersection of business and healthcare, equipping professionals to successfully navigate and drive the evolution of the healthcare industry. The Executive MBA Americas program features networked classes, connecting a diverse group of global peers, and all of Johnson's executive MBA programs include residential components for immersive coursework and valuable networking opportunities.

Target audience:

The Cornell Executive MBA programs are best suited for ambitious working professionals looking to advance their careers and add value to their organizations without interrupting their careers.

The one-sentence "what":

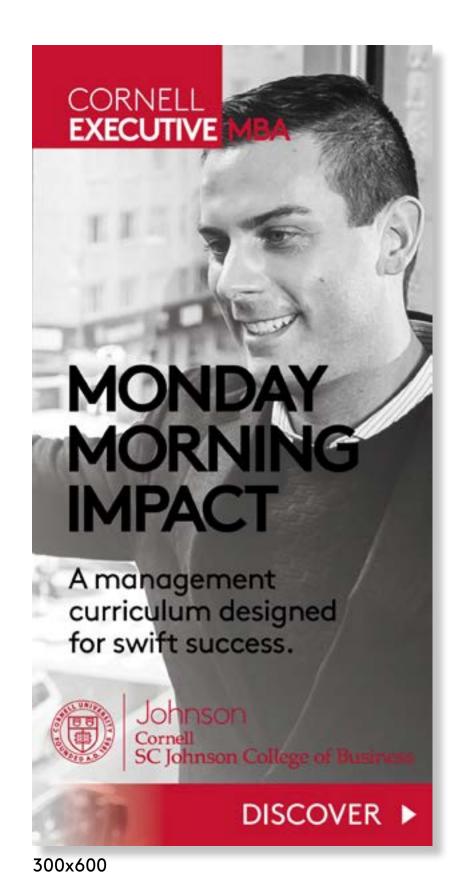
With a highly interactive management curriculum, Cornell's executive MBA programs accelerate career advancement without interrupting career progression.

Differentiator:

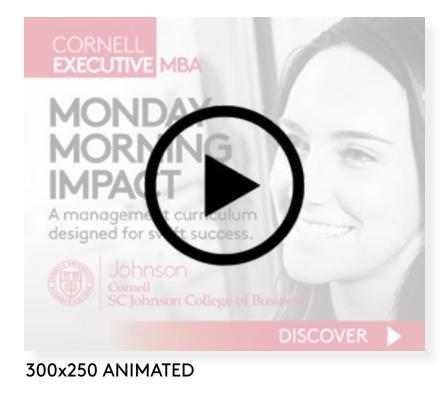
Cornell's executive MBA programs offer access to extensive resources across the Johnson Graduate School and Cornell University, personalized support, a diverse network of experienced professionals, and a global perspective. The convenient Saturday/ Sunday schedule, coupled with residential sessions, provides an immersive experience without sacrificing career standing. A Cornell executive MBA provides uninterrupted career advancement, incomparable peer connections, and a delivery format that is truly accessible for working professionals.

CORNELL EXECUTIVE MBA ASSETS

DYNAMIC ADS







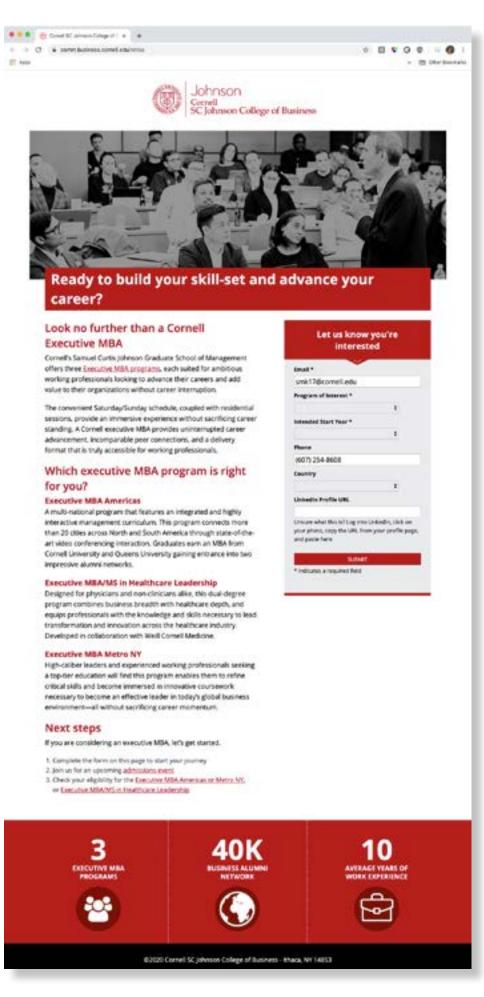


300x250





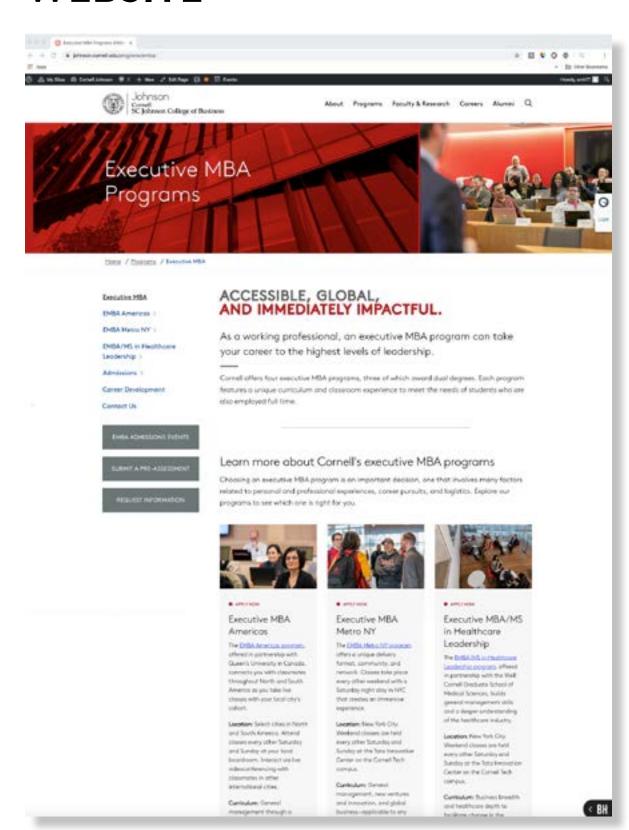
LANDING PAGE



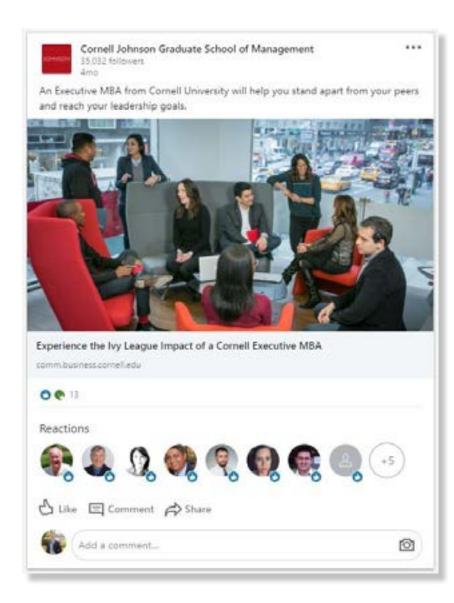
PRINT ADS



WEBSITE



PAID SOCIAL



970x250

CORNELL EXECUTIVE MBA ASSETS

ORGANIC SOCIAL MEDIA

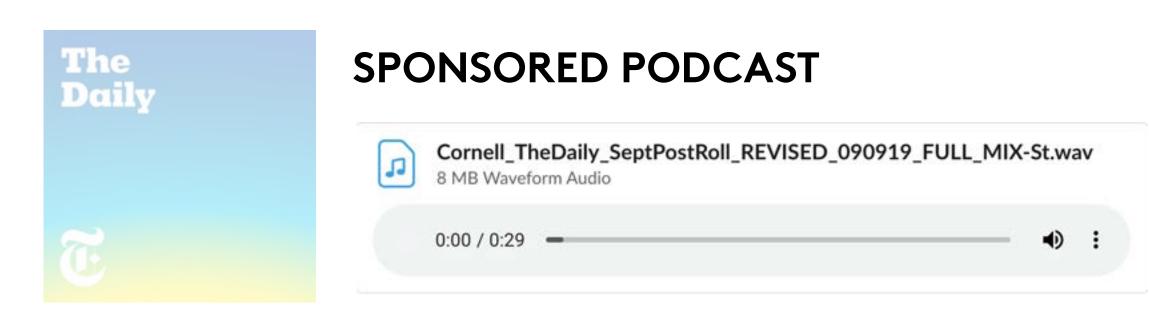


SELECTED PUBLISHERS









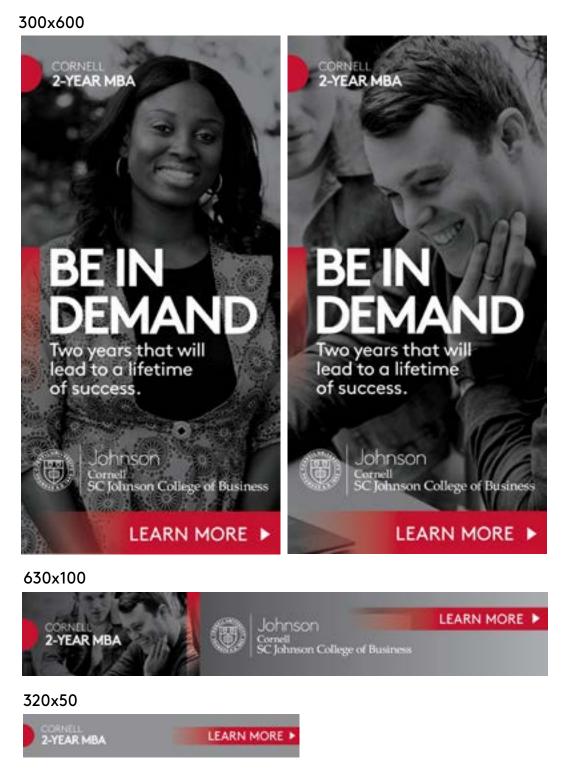




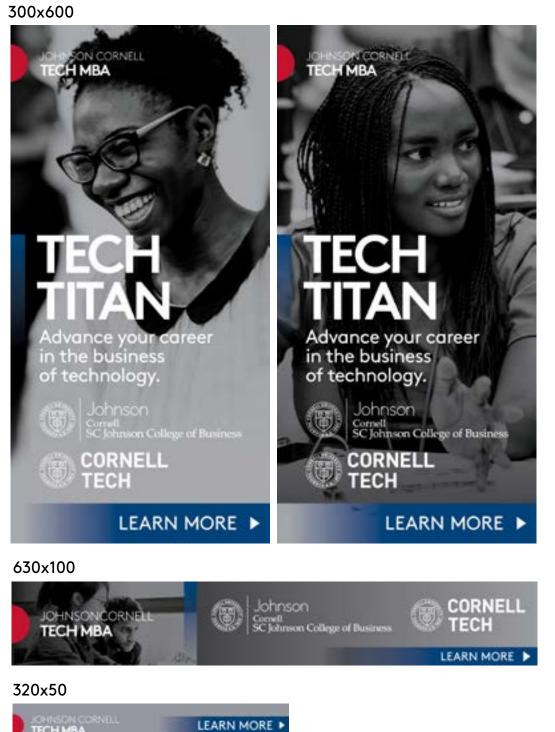












TECH MBA

970x250

EXECUTIVE MBA/MS IN HEALTHCARE LEADERSHII

DUAL

IMPACT

EXECUTIVE MBA/MS IN

DUAL

728x90

300x250

EXECUTIVE MBA/MS IN HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP

DUAL

IMPACT

Bridge business breadth and healthcare depth.

LEARN MORE

IMPACT

Bridge business breadth and healthcare depth.

AD SAMPLING OF ALL BRAND AWARENESS (4) AND PROGRAMMATIC CAMPAIGNS (14)

Every campaign including the following ad sizes: 300x250, 320x50, 300x600, 970x250 and 728x90. All ads were dynamic (animated) in nature.



Weill Cornell

Weill Cornell

LEARN MORE >

Cornell SC Johnson College of Business

DUAL

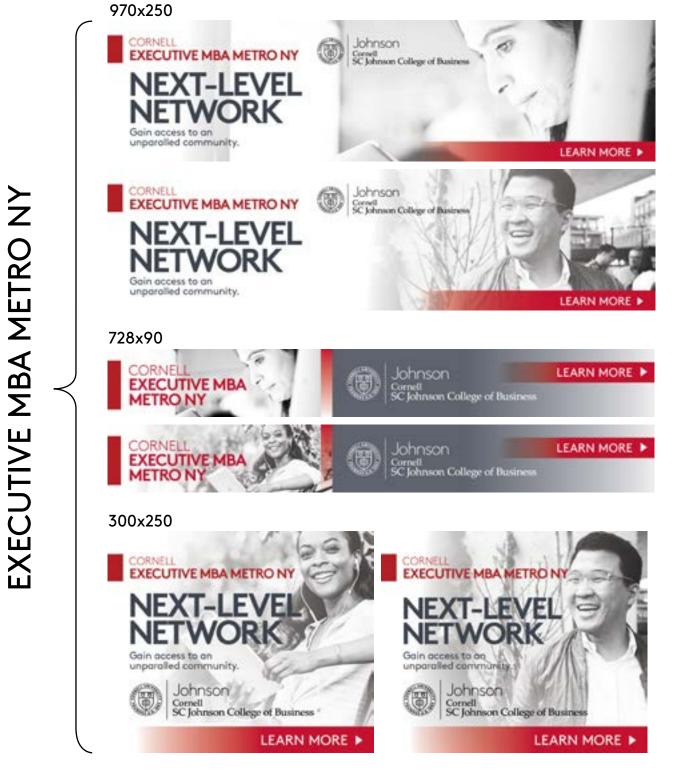
IMPACT

Bridge business breadth and healthcare depth.





300x600





970x250

SPECIALIZED MASTER'S

SPECIALIZED MASTER'S

CIALIZED MASTER'S

SPECIALIZED MASTER'S

BE CPA

READY

Johnson

Accounting paired with

graduate-level management skills.

SC Johnson College of Business

728x90

300x250

ACCOUNTING OF MANAGEMENT?

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING

Johnson Cornell SC Johnson Co

Corneil SC Johnson College of Business

CCOUNTING

or MANAGEMENT?

specialize your studies and broaden your success in one year.

SPECIALIZED

DISCOVER

AD SAMPLING OF ALL BRAND AWARENESS (4) AND PROGRAMMATIC CAMPAIGNS (14)

Every campaign including the following ad sizes: 300x250, 320x50, 300x600, 970x250 and 728x90. All ads were dynamic (animated) in nature.

ESTATE

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MPS



DISCOVER >

SPECIALIZED

LEARN MORE

MASTER'S











AD SAMPLING OF ALL BRAND AWARENESS (4) AND PROGRAMMATIC CAMPAIGNS (14)

Every campaign including the following ad sizes: 300x250, 320x50, 300x600, 970x250 and 728x90. All ads were dynamic (animated) in nature.

The Hotel School

Correll
SC Johnson College of Business

JOIN US >



JOIN US >

EDUCATION BRAND

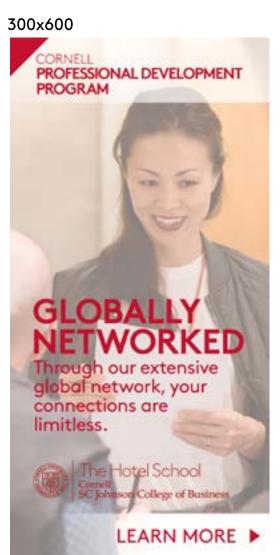
EXECUTIVE

GRAM

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRC







300x600 970x250 CORNELL The Hotel School SPECIALIZED Cornell SC Johnson College of Business MASTER'S TRANSFORMATION GENERAL MANAGERS PROGRAM 728x90 The Hotel School Cornell SC Johnson College of Business FIVE-STAR 630x100 **POWER** Learn from the best in the hospitality industry—bar none. Experiential learning from The Hotel School
Cornell
SC Johnson College of Business top hospitality experts. The Hotel School The Hotel School 320x50 Cornell SC Johnson College of Business 300x250 GENERAL MANAGERS LEARN MORE ▶ DISCOVER > 10-DAY TRANSFORMATION The future you is in high demand. Uncover your full leadership potential.