

CASSIES 2011 Cases

Brand/Case: Algoma University - Distance

Winner: Not for Profit—Bronze

Client Credits: Algoma University

Deborah Loosemore – Director of Advancement and External Relations

Agency Credits: McDonnell Haynes Advertising and Design

Anita Dong – President and Partner
Allen Massey – Chairman and Strategist
Alison Stewart – Account Supervisor
Brooke Clark – Copywriter
Amy Patterson – Art Director

Crossover Notes: All winning cases contain lessons that cross over from one case to another. David Rutherford has been identifying these as Crossover Notes since CASSIES1997. The full set for CASSIES 2011 can be downloaded from the Case Library section at www.cassies.ca

- Crossover Note 6.** Should the product be improved?.
- Crossover Note 10.** Conventional Wisdom—should it be challenged?
- Crossover Note 16.** When a campaign stumbles.
- Crossover Note 17.** Turning a liability into a strength.

To see creative, go to the Case Library Index and click on the additional links beside the case.

Section I — BASIC INFORMATION

Business Results Period (Consecutive Months):	September 2009 – June 2010
Start of Advertising/Communication Effort:	September 14, 2009
Base Period as a Benchmark:	Previous School Years
Geographic Area Covered:	Southern Ontario
Annual Budget Range:	Under \$500,000

Section II — SITUATION ANALYSIS

a) Overall Assessment

Sault Ste. Marie was a boomtown in the 60s and 70s, driven by mining and forestry. In recent years, as these sectors have dwindled, so has population and economic prosperity. To rebuild, more people needed to acquire university schooling. However, while Algoma is quickly becoming the first choice for local students, there are not enough of them to support and sustain the University's "per student" funding requirements.

For 2009/10 and beyond, the university needed to attract students from southern Ontario. However, Algoma had none of the key deciding factors working to its advantage.

Algoma University is far from home: 70% of all graduating high school students will choose a university close to home. Of those who choose a university away from home, the acceptable distance is within four hours of travel time. If it is greater, there needs to be a strongly supported reason for going that distance, such as a unique program. Algoma University, for students from southern Ontario, is a good eight to twelve hour drive away.

Algoma's reputation is non-existent: It was only in June 08 that Algoma University was established as a stand-alone university. Therefore, even though it arguably has the most potential to grow, it does not yet have a marketable reputation, particularly outside of Sault Ste. Marie.

Algoma offers the same programs: The overall quality of the academic offering is on par with other universities at the undergraduate level and the programs do not differ significantly from what is available elsewhere. **Crossover Note 6.**

Competition is fierce: All other schools are aggressively advertising in southern Ontario. Many have new products that combine specialized degrees and diplomas. Students must rely on guidance counselors, family and peers to help them sift through the options. However, these advisors often dismissed Algoma given its size and recent arrival.

It would take a bold and unconventional approach to convince students from southern Ontario to choose Algoma University. **Crossover Note 10.**

b) Resulting Business Objectives

- Increase Algoma University's name recognition outside of Sault St. Marie
- Entice prospects to visit Algoma University's website
- Increase applications from Grade 12 students (vs. mature/transfer students)
- Improve Algoma University's first choice ranking as measured by submissions through Ontario University Applications Center (OUAC)

Section III — STRATEGIC THINKING

a) Analysis and Insight

Algoma University is not for most people. It schools fewer students than most high schools and its professors develop individual learning assignments in addition to the regular class assignments. The University is housed on an intimate campus and is located in a remote city that can be challenging to get to.

It became clear after the first year's marketing efforts that Algoma University's distance from southern Ontario was its biggest obstacle. **Crossover Note 16.** While other universities in northern Ontario tried to overcome the issue by playing up the allure of the region's landscape, we decided for 2009/2010 **to make distance the advantage.** **Crossover Note 17.**

This came from a deep understanding of what motivates the kinds of students who flourish at Algoma University. By working closely with the University's recruitment teams, talking to and observing current students, analyzing those who had enquired, applied and accepted offers to attend the University, and talking to students from southern Ontario in focus groups, we identified our target.

They value self-definition and are more attracted to possibilities than end-goals. They embrace a supportive family environment, yet are eager to gain their independence. Often, their parents did not go to university, at least a Canadian university. They tend to believe they will surpass their parent's standards of living. They also appreciate advertising for what it is—a tool to get attention and motivate them to find out more.

b) Communication Strategy

To stand out from conventional approaches, we made three critical decisions.

- Focus the advertising on *name recognition*.
- Not worry too much about what this advertising said about the Algoma University brand. (There would be an opportunity to build the brand at the later touch points such as the website, visits with recruitment teams, and the academic calendars.)
- Be unique to the category.

So, with competitors fighting for the expected high ground of success, employability and self-discovery, we decided to focus on something decidedly non-academic:

The desire for independence and relief from parental badgering.

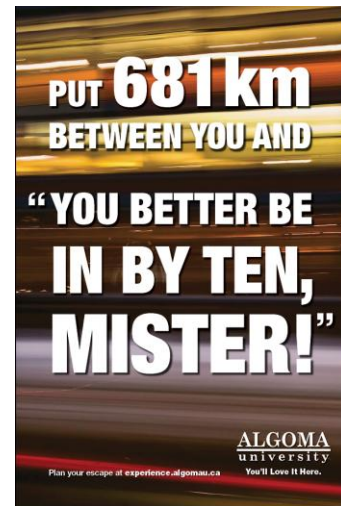
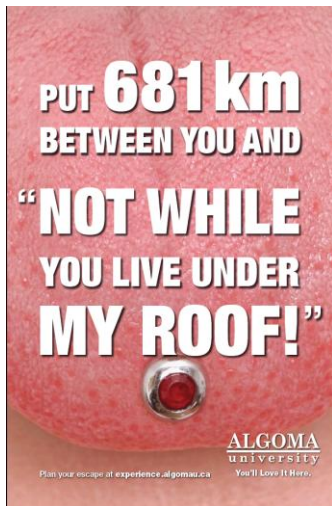
Section IV — KEY EXECUTIONAL ELEMENTS

a) Media Used

Radio, Transit Shelters, Bus Bumpers, Online Banners, Print

b) Creative Discussion

Bus Shelters – used in key suburban markets, along transit routes most likely to be taken by the target. (Suburban markets also provided strong media cost efficiencies.)



Radio – used to provide base support across the Toronto region:

Algoma University. Radio x 30 seconds. Spot #1. “Nature Noises”

Anncr: These are some of the sounds you’ll hear if you live at home while attending university.

Voice 1: (Woman) Have you got your homework done?

Voice 2: (Man) Better be in by 10 Mister.

Voice 3: (Woman) Turn that awful music down.

Voice 4: (Woman) Are you still on the phone?

Voice 5: (Man) You are not going out in that.

Anncr: Yes, well. Then there’s the sounds you’ll hear when you go to Algoma.

Birds chirping, crickets cricking, frogs frogging, wind rustling leaves, etc.

Anncr: Algoma University puts 681 kilometres between you and,

Voice 6: (Man) Not as long as you live under my roof.

Anncr: Plan your escape to Algoma University. You’re gonna love it here.

Check us out at experience.algomau.ca to learn more.

Algoma University. Radio x 30 seconds. Spot #2. “Blah, blah, blah.”

A cacophony of different voices, mothers and fathers all saying the sorts of things kids can’t stand to hear.

Voice1: You are not going out in that.
 Voice2: Turn that awful noise down!
 Voice3: Is your homework done?
 Voice4: Not while you live in my house!
 Voice5: You’d better be in by ten, mister!
 Voice6: Are you still on the phone?

As the voices speak, the sound gradually decreases as if someone were turning down the volume, until there are a couple of seconds of silence.

Anncr: Algoma University, mercifully 681 kilometres away from all that.
 Voice8: As long as you live under my roof, you’ll live by my rules.
 Anncr.: Plan your escape to Algoma University. You’re gonna love it here.
 Check us out at experience.algomau.ca to learn more.

The creative was risky. It did not focus on academics. It emphasized what for most students was Algoma University’s disadvantage. And, it paid off.

Through focus groups (later supported by business results) we knew our target viewed the creative as an engaging, unexpected and refreshing departure from the stereotypical “shiny, happy, successful people” other institutions were featuring. Our prospects understood the advertising for what it was; an attempt to break through the competitive clutter cleverly enough to entice them to find out more about the University.

The corresponding recognition of the Algoma University name proved to be exceptional. The campaign helped keep Algoma University top of mind a full five months after the advertising ended.

c) Media Discussion

The advertising ran from mid September 2009 until the first week in January 2010.

The media plan needed to build awareness of the Algoma University name within two weeks of key recruitment events (such as the Ontario University Fair in Toronto at the end of September) and cost-effectively drive traffic to the website.

We used a flighted combination of radio (to provide broad coverage across the Toronto region and build frequency), with transit shelters and bus bumpers in locations where our prospects were most likely to go, along with online banners and print advertising that would complement their media consumption.

Section V — BUSINESS RESULTS

Applications from Graduating Grade 12 students

- Applications from Sault Ste. Marie grew 6.3% VYA
- Applications from southern Ontario grew 14.3% VYA
- Total applications across both regions grew 11.5% VYA

This compares to total applications by graduating Grade 12 students to all Ontario universities, which only grew 2.8% VYA.

Top Choice Applications

There was a dramatic increase in top choice applications, especially as 1st choice.

Choice	2009	2010	% Change
First Choice	19.2%	27.2%	57.8%
Second Choice	12.9%	15.2%	31.0%
Third Choice	17.0%	19.8%	28.9%
Fourth Choice	30.7%	37.8%	37.0%

Website traffic

The truest indicator of the fact that Algoma University's name recognition grew is the 81% VYA increase in visits to the website – something that could not have been possible without recalling and typing in “Algoma U”.

Total “Stealth” Applications

Applications by students who had been introduced to Algoma University solely through the advertising and the website grew 132.5% VYA

Overall Significance

These results are particularly important for two reasons. First, they helped Algoma University meet its admission requirements and secure its funding for F' 2010. Second, we were able to realize a more efficient ROI by getting the most appropriate prospective students to self-identify, thereby helping to stretch very limited marketing resources.

Section VI —CAUSE & EFFECT BETWEEN ADVERTISING AND RESULTS

a) General Discussion

Limited budgets did not allow for tracking studies. However, there are strong indicators that the business results are attributable to the advertising:

- The only variable in the 2009/2010 marketing mix versus 2008/2009 was the advertising creative and the reallocation of some transit advertising dollar to radio. Budget level and all other marketing initiatives were comparable.
- Advertising's primary goal was to drive traffic to the website, which saw an 81% increase in new visits during the period that the advertising ran. Only advertising could be attributed to driving traffic to the site.

b) Excluding Other Factors

- The recession would not explain the increase in applications from students in southern Ontario.
- Algoma University's academic acceptance average is 77% and therefore it is not "easier" to get accepted.
- Algoma is a mid-priced university, and finding work while going to school is much easier outside of Sault Ste. Marie. There are therefore no tuition cost and/or cost of living and/or work advantages to choosing Algoma University.

END