

Cheryl Broom [00:00:03]:

Hi, I'm Cheryl Broom, CEO of GradComm and host of Higher Ed conversations sponsored by EdTech Connect. Today I have the pleasure of having Dr. Tina King, President of San Diego College of Continuing Education, on the podcast. Dr. King worked with Bradcomb in 2023 on a full college rebrand. We had the amazing opportunity to get to know her college and, and learn about really the groundbreaking, incredible things that they are doing to uplift and support their community right here in San Diego. Our brand project had us looking at college colors, the college tagline, design elements, communication touch points, themes that we recommended that they communicate better to the community. I mean, we just really dove into everything and what came out of it was really something special and something that the college has embraced and has used to better communicate the great work, really the life changing work that they do each and every day.

Cheryl Broom [00:01:16]:

If you are into branding, if you've ever thought of doing a brand or coming up with a tagline or simplifying your color palette, you're going to want to hear about this project. And I think you're especially going to want to hear the amazing amount of wisdom that Dr. King brings in her marketing and branding approach. I hope you enjoy the conversation. All right, Dr. King, thank you so much for making the time to join me on the podcast today.

Tina King [00:01:49]:

Thank you so much, Cheryl, for having me. I'm really excited to be here with Gradcom to talk about San Diego College of Continuing Education.

Cheryl Broom [00:01:57]:

So we have listeners from all over the United States and in fact, we even have some international listeners to this podcast. San Diego College of Continuing Education is a really unique institution. So before we dive into branding, I'd love for you to explain who you are, what you do, and what makes the college so special.

Tina King [00:02:19]:

Yeah. So San Diego College of Continuing Education, it really is a unique institution. It's among the longest standing and largest noncredit institution in the nation. San Diego College of Continuing Education is only one of two, two standalone non credit adult education institutions within the California Community College system. And our college is really about empowering our residents with the workforce and academic skills to really. The way I like to think about our college is it was designed to eliminate and alleviate poverty in the region and really in the state. Our student population is among the most diverse educationally, economically and culturally students that you'll come encounter with within the California Community College system. We provide a high quality education and career training to a diverse community of learners.

Tina King [00:03:09]:

A large number of our students are undocumented students, immigrants, refugees, those that are seeking asylum And I'll talk a little more about that when we get to another part of the

podcast. And so what sets SDCCE apart is its comprehensive range of programs tailored to meet the needs of adult learners, including certificate programs, skills development courses, personal enrichment classes. And SDCCE is also known for its commitment to accessibility, offering flexible scheduling. A lot of our students take varying learning formats and modalities to accommodate their needs and the different challenges that they may face. So we have a large number of our students who are online, a large number of our students who come face to face, and a large number of our students who have a mix of that. So high flex. And I'll talk more about that as well. And so the college's focus on practical real world skills and its strong partnership with local industries to ensure that students gain relevant job ready expertise.

Cheryl Broom [00:04:13]:

What I particularly loved about working with SCCCE is we do a lot of work with adult education and non credit. And I always feel, or I get the feeling from those clients that they feel like they're second class or stepchildren to credit. But we never got that feel from your college. I mean, there is just so much pride. And the fact that you're standalone just makes it so unique and special for students and for people who work there.

Tina King [00:04:42]:

I mean, you're exactly right. The beauty of San Diego College of Continuing Education is that we truly celebrate the beauty, the diversity of our students. And like I said, a lot of our students are, well, our students are adult learners and many of them come to our college. Number one, all of our programs are 100% free. There is no cost to our students, unlike the credit colleges where they go because they're aspiring to receive a advanced degree like an associate's degree or maybe even going to get their baccalaureate degree. Our students come to us because it's short term, it's free. It allows them to go into a field where they don't have to spend two to four years. They can go into a short term certificate program and then enter into the workforce.

Tina King [00:05:27]:

And they feel so much pride because these are individuals who some folks have disabled, counted and counted out. And we actually celebrate that they are interested in a very different model right now. The wave of the future, I truly believe it is the skilled and technical trades programs. The students that we are now serving to this day, right now and this day after the pandemic, they've had a shift in the way one, they want to be educated and taking the autonomy of what they want for their educational aspirations. And so we value that and we celebrate our students unique lived experiences, their culture, their identity, entities and really what they want to study in their field now.

Cheryl Broom [00:06:07]:

So this is so, so wonderful, such a great way to discuss, to start a discussion around branding because you clearly know what you do and what you're good at and why you're there. And those are some questions that some colleges can't answer. So we'll come to work with colleges and we'll ask what makes you special, what makes you different? And sometimes they can't, they can't be answered. They sound like every other place. So we were really fortunate to work with you on your brand because you as a president, but also your faculty and your students

really understood what makes you a unique institution. So that first of all, for those of you out there going like, oh, I wish I had a brand, this is where it starts, is knowing who you are. And then it makes the rest of the project a lot, a lot better, a lot smoother.

Tina King [00:06:58]:

Yeah, no, you're right. We chose as a college to embark on a branding project for many reasons. San Diego College of Continuing Education. I like to say it is a hidden secret. It's the best kept secret. But unfortunately we don't want to be a secret. We shouldn't want to hold education from anyone, especially education that is free, and that it can change the trajectory of the communities and the students that we serve. And so we see this work that we do as liberating.

Tina King [00:07:24]:

And we wanted to make sure that everyone knew about the, this opportunity right here in their backyards, in their community. And so it was really important to us that we embark on a branding project to enhance our visibility and better communicate the value of our programs to current and prospective students. When I came on board as the president of San Diego College of Continuing Education In July of 2022, this was my third year of my presidency, there were about 27 different colors that represented San Diego College of Continuing Education. So we really did not have a visible identity that clear to folks that this was San Diego College of Continuing Education. So as the landscape of continuing education evolves, we felt that it was crucial for us to distinguish ourselves and highlight the unique benefits we offer. So oftentimes folks try to, you know, those that are offering non credit or adult education, they want to fit into this box like the credit colleges. And I was like, this is an opportunity to highlight the unique benefits that we offer. We're free there, there is no charge.

Tina King [00:08:26]:

Right. So we looked at this as an opportunity to create a refreshed that would Allow us to present a unified, compelling image that resonates with our diverse audience and fosters pride among our students and employees. And ultimately that it supports our mission to expand access to free, quality education. And I also want to note that working with Gradcom, it was so awesome because one thing that I never want to lose sight of is the communities that we serve. And so it was very important to me that we did not come in and create something new, but rather we focus on highlighting the beauty that existed here and that we were just going to elevate the people, the people and the community of the San Diego College of Continuing Education. And that's what we did. We elevated the history and came to a uniform branding project that really helps us resonate with our history, but also the future of San Diego College of Continuing Education.

Cheryl Broom [00:09:24]:

Yeah. And speaking of the community, so I wanted to ask you about what you found surprising. And I want to actually start because one of the things I found surprising. So when we do brands, we always love to do surveys of students and alumni and faculty and staff and focus groups. But when there's budget, it's especially helpful to go out to the community. So we were able to do

that with you. And one of the things we do is ask unaided recall. So when you think of a local college, what local college comes to mind? San Diego College of Continuing Education was named by more people in San Diego than San Diego City College or even other colleges in your district.

Cheryl Broom [00:10:05]:

It was really surprising to us. We had anticipated you not being known, but not only were you known, you were like beloved by the community. So it was such a great so that helped us when we thought about your brand, knowing we don't have any obstacles or barriers in terms of negative thoughts that people have. Everything the community said was so positive. So we were like, this is great. President knows who the college is. The community knows who the colleges. Now we just need to get everybody on the same page.

Cheryl Broom [00:10:40]:

So any other aha moments for you and that initial discovery?

Tina King [00:10:44]:

I think, you know, one of the surprising discoveries was the extent to which our existing brand elements were not fully aligned with the true essence of the programs in the community. So an aha moment came when we realized that while we have strong individual programs like our ESL program, it is a model program in the state. We also realized that we lacked a cohesive narrative that tied all of these beautiful 70 plus programs together. And so the insight underscored the importance of a unified brand that not only reflects the diverse offerings of the college, but also resonates with the personal and professional aspirations of our students. You know, we went from essentially, you know, I talked about this having over 20 colors down to one identifying or primary color of this beautiful, regal, royal purple, based on the students and the community's input. So while we had all these beautiful programs, it was like, ah, we need to do something that folks will when they see or even, you know, I wanted it to be an image that we're loved, we're beloved. But when you see this purple, I don't care where you are, you think about San Diego College of Continuing Education. And that's what we want it.

Tina King [00:11:56]:

We strived for.

Cheryl Broom [00:11:58]:

And in fact, the purple has become so synonymous with your brand. When you came on screen today, I thought, where's the purple? Where's your purple?

Tina King [00:12:08]:

I always wear purple. It's so funny. True story. Folks always say, the president is always wearing purple. So that's my signature color, because I think it's important, but I always wear purple. The team wears purple. So we're so proud of the color that we now have.

Cheryl Broom [00:12:21]:

Yeah, it's funny. And I think I ran into you somewhere at a conference or something, and you're like, yeah, whenever I don't wear purple, people are like, where's the purple?

Tina King [00:12:31]:  
That's right.

Cheryl Broom [00:12:33]:  
So, yeah, speaking of colors, one of the things that's a little bit behind the scenes for those listening who are marketing directors or in marketing or designers, we love to choose colors that actually mean something or at least have a story behind them. So one of the things that we found in our research was just how important San Diego College of Continuing Education is with the civil rights movements and continual civil rights pushes within San Diego. So there's, you know, I think you were part of the first King March, so a lot of rich history around civil rights. So we did. We, like, looked through, did a comm audit, and we're like, wow, this college has more colors. Every possible color you could use, they're using. How do we tie this. This rich history of civil rights into the college's brand? And we were able to do that through color.

Cheryl Broom [00:13:27]:  
So we took a lot of inspiration from artwork from the civil rights period in the 60s. What colors were used? And they were vibrant colors. They were purples and reds and oranges and just these really deep, rich colors. And so we decided to use. To recommend those to symbolize that history that you have with civil rights. And I think when we presented it, people were like, wow, that makes sense. We're not just making brand decisions because we Think purple's pretty? It has a meaning.

Tina King [00:13:59]:  
Yeah, exactly what you said. A lot of folks don't know that San Diego College of Continuing Education has seven large campuses that are coterminous in the San Diego county region. And one of the campuses which folks oftentimes say it is our main campus, I, I cannot say that as a president, one of our seven campuses, but it's our educational culture complex campus. And this campus, to your point, has a lot of rich history and advocacy. In fact, this is the campus where Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, as it was commissioned for a federal holiday. A lot of organization was done here at SBCC campus. And so it was truly used as a secret mission.

Tina King [00:14:41]:  
And when his birthday was actually commemorated as a federal holiday, his late wife, Coretta Scott King, hosted his first birthday celebration here at our ECC campus. So we have a lot of photos of her and we had Stevie Wonder, Muhammad Ali, we've had Maya Angelou and many other civil rights activists with a lot of culture and history here. And so I like to thank the ECC and San Diego College of Continuing Education as the roots of history and legacy right here at our campus. And so to us, the brand represents so much more than a logo. It truly embodies our identity, our values, the mission, the history. I always tell folks when they host an event here how lucky we are to truly stand on the shoulders of the ancestors who paved the way for us. And so the color, the logo, it really creates this unified community and it showcases how

effectively we communicate our commitment to the work that we do here. And so the brand is a reflection of our core values, the innovation, the equity and accessibility.

Tina King [00:15:55]:

And it serves as a tool to really connect our history to our current day students, our partners, our stakeholders on a deeper level. And so for us, it's a strategic asset that truly drives our messaging and enhances our engagement with the community. Because there are a lot of folks here that always say to me, my mother took classes here. I remember in 1970 when you all were on the cusp of creating, when this building was gifted to the district. And so the brand truly brought us forward together. And it has been beautiful to see our community a part of this work. The history not forgotten, but also us saying, we're going to utilize this to move us forward together.

Cheryl Broom [00:16:35]:

So a, I think every marketing director out there is probably like, man, I wish she was my college president. You're probably going to get calls from marketing directors. Are you looking for a job? Because you get it, you understand how it all works together and why it's important. But I also want to talk to you about the tagline, which you dropped in your answer. So before we get to that, let's take a quick break and listen to our sponsor, and then we'll be right back.

Cheryl Broom [00:16:59]:

How do higher education decision makers find the right solution when technology evolves at light speed? Well, we usually start with our network. EdTechConnect is the network that's democratizing the higher ed technology conversation. EdTechConnect is free, so anyone with a edu email address can sign up and list the software and services they use in their role at their school. Once you're in, you can find out what solutions similar schools are doing all over the country. Whether you're looking to find the hot new AI tool or maybe learn options, you have to upgrade your campus search engine or even get to your short list of marketing solution vendors. EdTechConnect is the place to go. So visit [EdTechConnect.com](https://EdTechConnect.com) and set up your free profile to get a pulse for what's happening with higher ed technology today.

Cheryl Broom [00:17:50]:

All right, thank you. So we're back. So before the break, we were talking about just the brand and what it means and the components of it. And one of the things that we like to give colleges as part of our brand process is a tagline that encompasses who they are, almost like a motto or an abbreviated mission statement. And that tagline can then help help them build out messages for marketing and communications. So for San Diego college and continuing education, I don't know if you know this, Dr. King, but what we do is we take all the research, everything we've looked at over months, and my entire team gets together. So sometimes that's like over 20 people.

Cheryl Broom [00:18:31]:

Everybody is asked to read this, to think about it, and to come up with taglines. Well, I had seen something you, I think, had written in a report, and I was like, that's the tag. We don't even come up with anything.

Tina King [00:18:45]:  
Yeah.

Cheryl Broom [00:18:45]:  
Creative director's like, we can't give them what they've already done.

Tina King [00:18:49]:  
I'm like, why?

Cheryl Broom [00:18:50]:  
It's right there. So we actually is the only time in my whole career that I've given a client something that they'd already written.

Tina King [00:19:01]:  
Yeah, yeah. So it's exactly that. So funny you say that. In my first year of my presidency, as I came on together, I wanted to create a theme that would really tie us together so that they could. So that I could work with the constituents of my college inclusively, but also talk about how we move us forward. And the first year, you know, I came up with this four together theme. And so it was after me wrapping up my six months, I did a video to the community. And at the end I said, forward together.

Tina King [00:19:31]:  
We created all these cool lapel pins and didn't think that it would catch on to the way it did. And then Gradcom, you all came on and I was like, folks are loving this. Forward together. You know, every interview that you were doing, folks would say at the end, forward together.

Cheryl Broom [00:19:46]:  
Right.

Tina King [00:19:47]:  
Other people in the college were hashtagging forward together. And it kind of just took, you know, wings of its own. And so I don't think you all repurposed it. I think you all relived it and gave it back to us in a way that we didn't even realize what we had created and that there was so much value in what had already been done. Right. It was just us moving. And so it gave us an opportunity to stop and process. Like, there's something already beautiful here.

Tina King [00:20:10]:  
Why do we need to change it? And so I actually have on my forward together lapel, you know, and it is, it's now such a beautiful saying. Everyone says, forward together. Forward together. So yeah, it's our tagline and we love it.

Cheryl Broom [00:20:24]:

Yeah. And it just fits, it fits so well with what we knew about your college because like you said when we first started talking, you are such a place for people to be elevated, to learn new skills, to build their lives, to look towards the future. And what we found in our research is that students loved the community, the support from faculty. So this togetherness was so important to students. So when we saw that in your video, we were like, oh, we're done. Our work is done.

Tina King [00:20:54]:

And to your point, that's exactly what it is. Right. And for together is the students come to us because we have something that they need and they can utilize and it will help them, but they can't do it if we don't do it together. So I see it as twofold. One is to support our students and then also as the college as a whole, how do we create buy in? How do we do this work together and not lose sight of the mission of our students? And it's forward together.

Cheryl Broom [00:21:22]:

So the tagline is beautiful and I love seeing it on LinkedIn. So lots of you, you do a lot of great work on LinkedIn and I'm always seeing the tags and it's, it's been executed really well. Have you had any buy in challenges? What was that like? When we unveiled. So we unveiled at leave. So I'm always like, what happens after we leave?

Tina King [00:21:43]:

So, you know, one of the things I'll say is I don't feel like we had as many challenges as folks may have thought. Right. We came from 20 colors to one primary color. And I think it was because I will say, you all did your due diligence. You did right by the community and the people that we serve. And what I mean by that, there were a lot of phone calls that happened. There was a lot of data. You all were meeting with so many of our different constituent groups.

Tina King [00:22:12]:

So our faculty, our staff, our administrators, our students were at the center of this work. I thought it was really unique that there was a task force built of the constituents that were a part of this process who represented these different areas. And so ensuring buy in was crucial. And so we engaged you all, engaged the key stakeholders that would really be the champions. And because they were trusted sources of. And I want to be clear, these individuals were not just folks who worked at the college, they were also the historians who. Who have been in the community for a very long time. Right.

Tina King [00:22:45]:

And so having that level of buy in was very, very important. And it was through the workshops, the surveys, all of those meetings that helped us. This collaborative approach, I think, helped us gather a lot of input. And so there was times, if anyone who questioned how it came about, they had someone sit next to them and say, oh, I was a part of that committee. And so it fostered a sense of ownership, enthusiasm for the new brand. And one challenge I think that we did face was addressing at times the diverse opinions and expectation of different groups. But through,



you know, open dialogue and, you know, iterative feedback, we were able to create a brand that reflect our collective vision while still meeting our individual needs, if that makes sense. Right.

Tina King [00:23:36]:

And so we were very intentional of making sure that while we couldn't engage our 26,000 students, our almost 1,000 employees, and then all of these communities, because we're located in seven different places throughout San Diego, we made sure that there was enough representation from these constituent bodies that they would be able to show up and give input for the larger body.

Cheryl Broom [00:23:58]:

Right. Yeah. I remember one faculty member, when we showcased the work, he said, said, I've never felt more proud than I do of our college than I do right now. And we're like, okay, I think we've got the right direction going if that's the feedback of a faculty member. But that's what a good brand does, though, is that it doesn't reinvent your college. It takes what makes you unique and special and shows it to people so that they can see it. And so, yeah, when we got that feedback from the task force, we're like, all right, we're going to hit a home run with this.

Tina King [00:24:34]:

Yes, yes, absolutely.

Cheryl Broom [00:24:36]:

Any advice you'd have to another college or another college president who's looking to do the same thing.

Tina King [00:24:43]:

Yeah. What advice that I would give to other colleges or other college presidents? I would advise that the other college leaders start with a thorough understanding of their institution, strengths, values and unique offerings. But most importantly to me, it's about understanding who we serve. Who are your students, who is your community? Right. So making sure that we don't just think that we have to create something that supports the students that are at our classes, that are taking our classes, our courses are enrolled in our programs. That the larger community is important too, because while some of them may not be students at this time, they may have history with the college or their prospective students. So I think that's a big piece of it. You know, engaging a broad range of stakeholders to gather diverse perspectives and foster buy in from the onset is important.

Tina King [00:25:39]:

And finally, you know, view the branding project as a strategic investment in your institution, in your institution's future, with the potential to enhance visibility, strengthen community connections, and to drive long term success for the college and for the students. For us, it's a year later and we are still rolling out the innovative ways to utilize the hashtag for together or even the purple. But what I will say is that it's been such an amazing opportunity just to see how creating a brand and marketing identity has elevated the college. I initially took this on. This was

me coming in as a president saying, we need an identity that's representative. And I think for me, it was like, I want to create something where San Diego College of Continuing Education. And now stepping back, I'm like, wow, there's so much power in what we've done. I see it builds camaraderie.

Tina King [00:26:33]:

People are so proud to wear this color. Everywhere I go, people have on their purple. And now people are creating this new beautiful swag, be it sweaters, you know, scarves, wearing these cool tennis shoes that. And there's so much pride in that. And so it's connecting folks together that may have never had that connection. Because I see you when you wear that purple, I see you. I know that you represent something larger. Which is San Diego College of Continuing Education.

Cheryl Broom [00:26:59]:

Well, it was such a wonderful project and we loved working with you in the college. And I really appreciate you taking the time out of your crazy, busy schedule to give us your reflections as well. For those of you listening to the podcast, I'm going to put a link to some of the materials from our research into the notes so you can see the approach that we took. And we actually made. Mocked up a billboard with a student who had purple hair, which is up to my date. One of my favorite things we've done. She's even got her hair dyed purple.

Tina King [00:27:31]:

On the big billboard that we got a chance to see the schematic. It was perfect. Exactly.

Cheryl Broom [00:27:36]:

Yeah, it was a lot of fun. So, as we wrap up, any closing thoughts, anything else you'd like to share that we didn't touch on?

Tina King [00:27:44]:

No, I think we touched on it. I think the last thing I would say is I just want to center the students in the community when doing this work that creating a visible identity for the college, it cannot be done successfully without centering our students and our community. Also want to thank you, Cheryl, for working with us. Gradcom was great. There was a lot of us going back and forth, but the best part about it is I felt really like we were being heard and we were the customers and that you all understood the bigger picture was beyond, you know, this moment in time. It had to suffice 20 years from now. And so it was a great project to work with you all. And thank you so much for having me on today's podcast.

Cheryl Broom [00:28:21]:

And thank you.

Cheryl Broom [00:28:23]:

And that wraps up this episode of the Higher Education Conversations podcast. I'm host and Gradcomm CEO Cheryl Broom. A big thank you to our sponsor, EdTechConnect. EdTech

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Cheryl Broom [00:29:03]:  
Until next time.