

Monthly Musings



courtesy of Fletcher Consulting

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SMART BRANDING:

Abilene Christian Monetizes March Madness

High school juniors, seniors and parents are googling "Abilene Christian University" (ACU) in far greater numbers than ever before. The reason? The school's men's basketball team defeated the highly touted University of Texas Longhorns, 53-52, on Saturday, March 20, in the NCAA men's basketball tournament—more commonly known as **March Madness**.

High school juniors, seniors and parents are Googling "Abilene Christian"

It was yet another case of **David slaying Goliath**. In this case, it was a ten-fold behemoth since U.T.'s enrollment (**52,000**) is more than ten times greater than Abilene Christian's (**5,145**).

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Star-Telegram sports columnist Mac Engel deemed the small university from Abilene the **2021 ROI national champion**, stating that the school has already received well over \$120 million in free publicity—and that was more than a week ago. That number is likely well over \$150 million by now.

... the publicity touches more than just athletics: It transcends into academics...

Participating in March Madness has been a bonanza for ACU since the team reached the "Big Dance" in 2019. Despite a 35-point blowout loss that year to the traditional blueblood Kentucky Wildcats, the Abilene campus received the equivalent of \$70 million of publicity.

University President Phil Schubert attributes much of the university's upward enrollment trend to the positive PR from two years ago, and he anticipates an even larger bump following a win over the state's flagship university.

To quote Schubert from the article, "There are other places a university can make significant steps, but I'd say nothing compares to the level of visibility and market value that comes with men's basketball, at least for us. There is no way we can afford the type of investment return we get here. It shows you what an incredible



opportunity these situations bring."

He adds that the publicity touches more than just athletics: "It transcends into academics. It's a shot across the bow that we do not ever settle for mediocrity. It gave us confidence." ACU had been experiencing an enrollment decline, but that trend has been reversed the past two years.

Head basketball coach Joe Golding had a choice: go through the motions against a far superior team (on paper, at least), or play to win and hope for the best. It's safe to say he went with the right plan.

Parents and prospective students realize that if a small university can compete with, and even beat, a legendary university with one of the country's three largest athletic budgets—and with student athletes who never received scholarship offers from ANY of the Big 12's member schools—then it's quite likely that the smaller university's degree programs are competitive, as well.

Consider that graduates of ACU include Christian author **Max Lucado**, former Continental Airlines chairman **Ted Bethune**, country music star **Ronnie Dunn**, former radio personality **Jody Dean**, and the university's current president, **Phil Schubert**.

It's been said that a rising tide lifts all ships. The success of Abilene Christian University's basketball team is likely to have a positive impact on small faith-based universities in the surrounding area.

Hardin-Simmons University, a fellow Abilene institution, counts among its former students **Fess Parker** (the star of TV's "Davy Crockett"), **Dr. Paige Patterson** (former president of the Southern Baptist Convention), and **Sid W. Richardson** (oil tycoon and philanthropist).

Meanwhile, less than 80 miles away, Howard Payne University is proud of the achievements of Grammy Award-winning American gospel singer **Cynthia Clawson** and evangelist/author **Beth Moore**. HPU's current president, **Dr. Cory Hines**, is a graduate of his alma mater.

And by the way, as applications have increased, so have donations to both the athletic and academic departments at Abilene Christian.

Every now and then, David sneaks up on Goliath and turns the world upside down. *It happens more frequently than you think!*

SMART RESEARCH:

David Beats Goliath Again!

Sometimes the least impressive speaker by job title actually becomes the most memorable and valuable of them all.

I recall attending a small business marketing seminar about 15 years ago, and one of the speakers was the then-owner of what is now Westlake Ace Arlington Hardware Store. My first temptation was to work on my weekly “to do” list during his presentation. After all, what could the owner of a hardware store teach me?

Apparently, quite a lot.

He began by promising two tips that would transform our way of thinking about marketing, particularly against category giants. That got my attention.

Tip #1: Research the competition.

He recounted how he was almost scared to death when a **Home Depot** was scheduled to pop up just two miles from his store. Just what he needed—a category killer in his own backyard.

Rather than throw in the towel, he began researching Home Depot and, in particular, its grand opening events. To his surprise, he discovered that each store featured **the exact same circular with the exact same prices**, no matter the location.



This brilliant gentleman ran a double-truck ad in the *Star-Telegram* on the day of the Home Depot grand opening with a simple, compelling message: *“Check our prices against everyone and you’ll see we are your dependable low-price leader.”*

He had heavily reduced the price of EVERY item **Home Depot** was promoting in their circular by 10% and gave the impression that his prices would be consistently lower than his new big box competitor. Of course, he made up the losses on non-promoted items, as retailers normally do.

So, how’d it go? As it turns out, his Ace Hardware reported the **LARGEST** weekend in history – DURING the Home Depot grand opening!

Tip #2: Be hyper-local.

He negotiated with the **Interlochen Homeowners Association** to be the exclusive supplier of lightbulbs for the Interlochen Christmas light tour. That’s no small feat, as Interlochen is one of North Texas’ most popular Christmas light displays every year.

This man beat Home Depot at its own game and continued to thrive against that giant and again when Lowe’s opened just two miles away in the other direction.

Small and nimble often beats big and slow. **Yet again, David emerged victorious against Goliath!**

SMART PROMOTION:

Doughnut Wars

[FoxNews.com reports](#) that while there may be no such thing as a free lunch, doughnuts are apparently a different story.

Imagine being a Dunkin’ marketer about to launch a “Free Wednesdays” offer for reward members—entitling them to one free doughnut on Wednesdays with a qualifying beverage purchase—for a limited time through April 21. The campaign would run four weeks in total.

Get your COVID-19 vaccine? Krispy Kreme will give you a free glazed doughnut every day this year



Now, imagine reading that your competitor, Krispy Kreme, [beat you to market by two days](#) and had a far superior offer, to boot: **One free doughnut EVERY DAY for the rest of 2021 when the customer shows their COVID-19 vaccination record card.**

Beyond that customer offer, Krispy Kreme is giving workers up to four hours of paid time off (PTO) to get vaccinated, themselves.

Our doughnut brands continue to be among our most brilliant marketers. Here’s a good rule of thumb: **Never bet against Krispy Kreme!**

THE Tiebreaker To Infinity & Beyond

Another one of our most inspiring marketers is **Southwest Airlines**. Their focus on satisfying customers is built into the company’s culture.

The Davis family from Elk Grove, California, was distraught after their toddler son, Hagan, left his **Buzz Lightyear** action figure on a flight that landed in Little Rock, Arkansas.

They felt that Buzz would be traveling to infinity, but without their son in tow to make lasting memories.

They were fortunate, however, because the parents had inscribed Hagan’s name on the bottom of Buzz’s boot. A compassionate Southwest employee made it his mission to return Buzz to Hagan in a fun and clever manner. [Read all the details here](#), and be thankful that we live in a world where people still care about making toddlers smile.

Buzz Lightyear went to Little Rock and THEN to infinity and beyond, all thanks to Southwest Airlines!

