



CULVERHOUSE IS ON A MISSION

THE BAR IS BEING RAISED, AND DEAN HARDIN'S
CULVERHOUSE IS BECOMING A FORMIDABLE FORCE IN
21ST CENTURY BUSINESS EDUCATION

BY KYLE FONDREN

For years, business schools have produced a work force for the existing landscape. The mentality of “today” is no longer sufficient. Graduates must now be prepared to succeed in a world where business is moving faster than ever before, and the foundation of relevance shifts forward every day.

To compete with other top-tier schools, Culverhouse must be in the business of tomorrow.

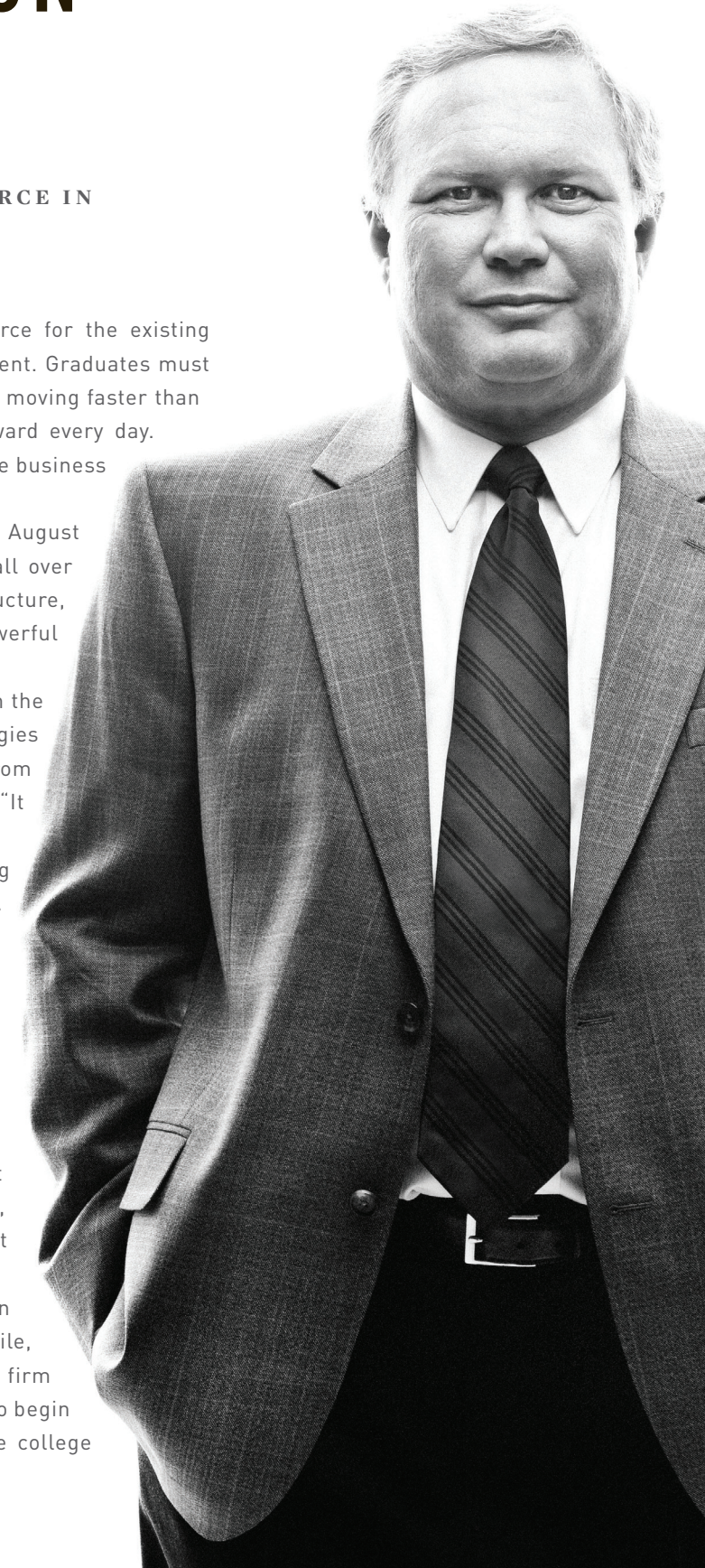
When Dr. Michael Hardin was appointed dean at Culverhouse in August of 2011, he found himself facing the same problem that CEOs all over the world are now dealing with: an aging, inefficient website structure, a dated brand identity, and the advent of mobile devices as a powerful force in brand discovery and web standards.

“We found ourselves at a fork in the road that presented us with the options of, for lack of a better term, duct-taping new technologies and branding on the old website; or having the courage to start from scratch and embrace the new web and a new identity,” Hardin said. “It takes a lot of courage to make that call.”

Hardin's five-year goal for the college hinges on bringing Culverhouse into the top 25 public business schools in the nation. After an in-depth study by Dr. Bruce Barrett, professor of Statistics at Culverhouse, it was determined that the college's weakest areas in ranking criteria were in the more subjective areas of recruiter perception, peer perception and visibility. To begin to address the misconception, the college needed a new, bold way of presenting to the world its culture of innovation, relevance, and rigor in its curriculum and programs.

“We needed an identity that mirrored our principles here at Culverhouse. It must be true to our tradition, tasteful, elegant, iconic and, at the same time, deliver that message in a way that speaks to the 21st century,” Hardin said.

In early December, the college got in touch with Red Square Agency, a Mobile, Ala.-based creative and advertising firm led by UA alumnus Rich Sullivan Jr., to begin preliminary work on redesigning the college website and branding.



“We’ve worked with Culverhouse for many years, so I’m familiar with the college,” said Sullivan. “It’s world class, and I feel very fortunate to work with Dean Hardin. My first impression is that he is very, very intelligent. He’s a rocket scientist, right? But what’s unexpected is how approachable he is. He’s easy and fun to speak with because he possesses an innate curiosity that makes him interested and conversant in just about anything. And he’s got a defined vision for the future of Culverhouse.

“Our initiative seeks first to clearly articulate Dean Hardin’s vision, then state a single-minded creative strategy based upon this vision,” Sullivan continued. “The design and executions are governed such that we will avoid any sort of rogue materials that don’t support

our strategy and guidelines. We’ve attended to the most minute details.”

In order to define a digital-age brand, Hardin, Red Square and the Culverhouse media team had to make sure that the new website reflected and championed the new direction in design, function and structure. The first challenge was evaluating the information architecture of the previous site and determining where to start cutting pages and making navigation more efficient.

The old website structure was built in a very “Web 1.0” manner, when the general consensus on web design and content management was to put everything out there and let the user have a vast landscape to explore. But today, the web is moving in a direction where brevity in content, calls-to-action and

smaller site footprints have been shown to increase the value a user receives from an experience with just about any website.

The project saw the Culverhouse site map shrink from over 1,600 individual pages to 52.

In addition to the streamlined homepage and navigation, the college launched a state-of-the-art mobile site that mimics an “app experience” for phone and tablet web browsers. Users on mobile devices will find an even further simplified site structure offering easy access to news, events and faculty profiles with tap-to-call and tap-to-email functionality.

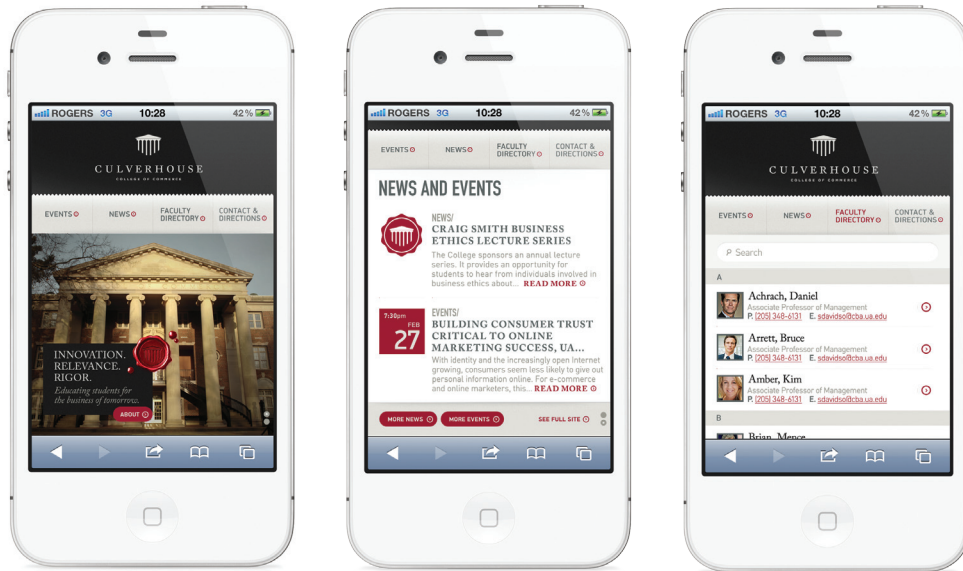
The theme of simplicity is also at the core of the overall branding strategy.



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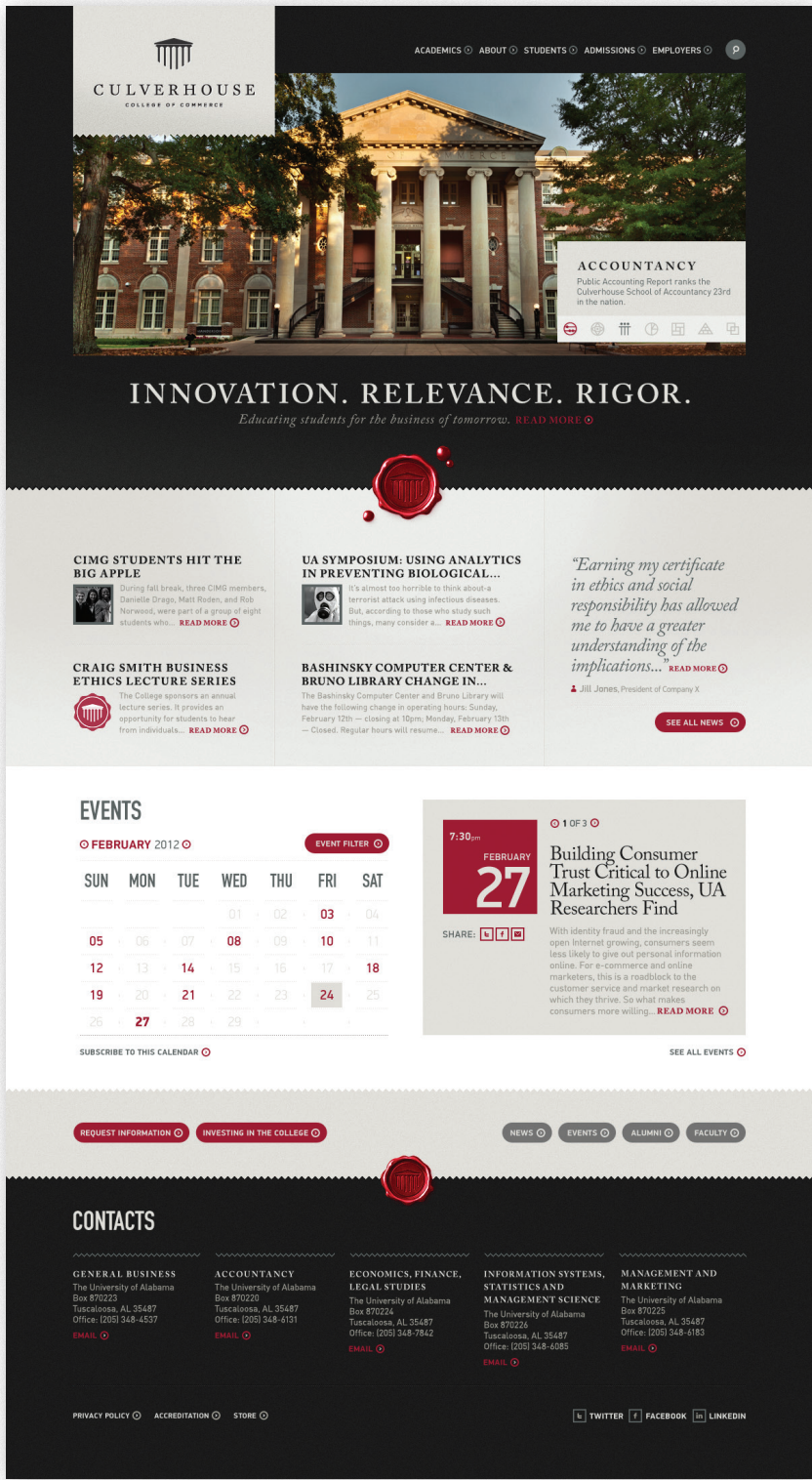
HARDIN’S FIVE-YEAR GOAL FOR THE COLLEGE HINGES ON BRINGING CULVERHOUSE INTO THE TOP 25 PUBLIC BUSINESS SCHOOLS IN THE NATION.



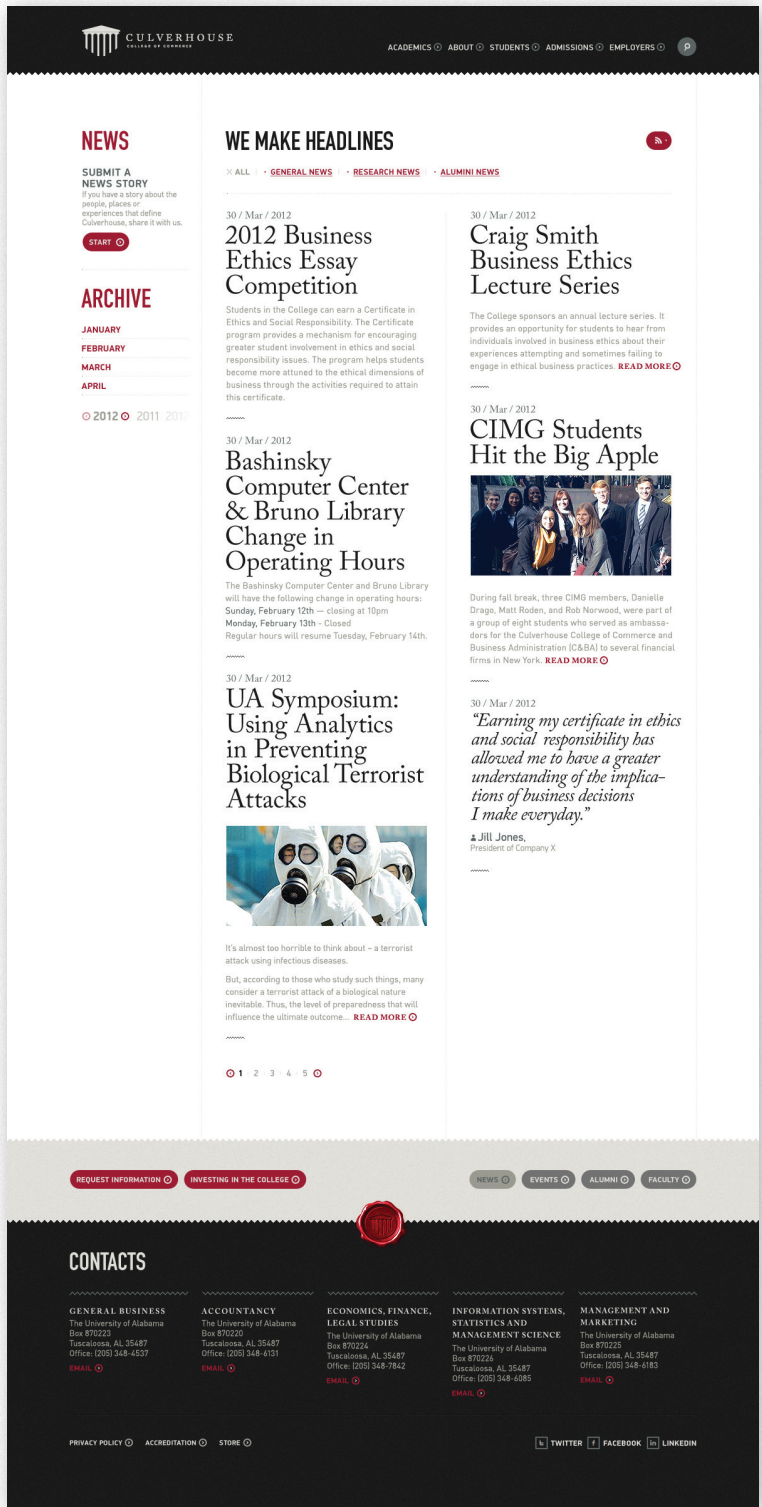
Focusing on the architecture of Bidgood, a graphic interpretation of the building’s facade becomes the cornerstone of the brand. The typographic treatment conveys sophistication by combining a classic serif typeface with a contemporary sans serif.



- 1.) If you truly want to be serious about the future, you build an optimized version of your website for mobile devices. And that’s certainly the case here, with streamlined access to Culverhouse information.
- 2.) More and more, students and business people are getting their news through mobile, so it was crucial that this was featured on the Culverhouse mobile site.
- 3.) Faculty members are all about connecting, both to students and the business world. There is no more effective and immediate method than through mobile—calling and emailing are a single touch away.



The Culverhouse website epitomizes what it means to be in the business of tomorrow—streamlined, fluid and intuitive with a modern look. Call it a hub, a dashboard or a command center—the new homepage gives users quick reads and simple access to the core information on the site. 1) Recent news, 2) Upcoming events, 3) Department overviews.



Business news just evolved to an entirely new level. Users can collectively share articles right on the site, creating a potent news source for everyone involved. 1) News categories, 2) Article archive, 3) News RSS feed, 4) Quick glance at articles.

“Simplicity is the result of ‘thoughtful reduction,’” Sullivan said. “It is not easy deciding what stays and what goes. My biggest role in all of the design was pushing our teams to continually take away the unnecessary in the hopes of arriving at design and architecture that is simple, beautiful and intuitive. For example, on the logo itself, we started with the old mark and its very literal icon of Bidgood Hall. Our firm designed this several years ago. We decided to stick with Bidgood as the icon for the logo, but pared it way, way back. This left a mark that is equally modern and traditional. That’s thoughtful reduction.”

Another example of the simple, forward-thinking web and branding practices in action is the set of glyphs designed for academic departments to identify themselves within the brand style. On the website, the glyphs serve

as a visual navigation cue to academic content and a reminder of what section of the site a user is in. On campus, students can be seen donning t-shirts with their academic glyphs, and each professor’s door name plate now indicates their specialty.

The glyphs, in concert with the new logo, are designed to produce a powerful iconography that can be easily identified as Culverhouse.

“The college has a solid foundation and a tremendous history. Now, with Dean Hardin guiding the school, I think we’re going to compete consistently at a higher level. There exists a mission and a sense of urgency about it. In five years, Culverhouse will be in the national conversation regularly, an established educational thought leader and ranked appropriately,” Sullivan said.

Rankings and image are important

parts of Hardin’s strategy, but the heart of the effort lies in providing the best possible education and placement opportunities for The University of Alabama’s students.

“The branding and website fit together as a system. Having these new methods will help to improve our rankings, attract new employers to begin relationships with us, and help our students get better jobs and be more satisfied with their experiences here. This feeds back into our rankings and attracts competitive students to consider The University of Alabama. It all works together to improve every aspect of what we do,” Hardin said.

The bar is being raised, and the Culverhouse College of Commerce is becoming a formidable force in 21st century business education.

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A system of hieroglyphics gives each degree program within Culverhouse its own identity. The illustration style of these symbols is in keeping with the overall design of the Culverhouse logo, and each one visually represents aspects of its corresponding program.

