

Jessica Vodden



Professional Summary

Enterprise marketing and communications executive with more than 20 years of experience leading brand strategy, institutional narrative, and public trust in complex, decentralized environments. Currently serving as the inaugural Vice President for Marketing and Communications at a public doctoral-granting university with an Academic Health Sciences Center and Division 1 athletics. Trusted cabinet-level advisor recognized for modernizing brands, completing large-scale web and digital transformations, advancing enrollment growth, and repositioning marketing and communications from a service function into a strategic enterprise system.

Deeply grounded in public service and shared governance, with a strong record of measurable outcomes in reputation, engagement, enrollment, and organizational culture across higher education, government, healthcare-adjacent organizations, and mission-driven enterprises. Known for designing systems from the ground up where none exist and scaling them responsibly within complex public institutions.

Core Areas of Leadership

- Enterprise Marketing & Communications Leadership
- Brand Strategy & Modernization
- Institutional Narrative & Reputation Strategy
- Digital Marketing, SEO/GEO/SEM, Paid Media & Marketing Automation
- Web Governance, UX, Accessibility & Platform Modernization
- Enrollment & Audience Growth
- Crisis Communications & Issues Management
- Executive, Cabinet-Level & Internal Communications
- Change Management & Organizational Transformation
- Analytics & Performance Measurement

Professional Experience

East Tennessee State University

Public doctoral-granting university with an Academic Health Sciences Center, regional clinical enterprise, Carnegie Community Engagement classification, and D1 athletics.

Vice President for Marketing and Communications | 2021 – Present

- **Inaugural Vice President** and member of the President's Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team, providing enterprise-level leadership across brand strategy, integrated marketing, digital governance, internal and external communications, crisis response, and public affairs.
- Rebuilt a traditional public relations office into a **modern, integrated marketing and communications enterprise** aligned with the university's strategic plan and institutional priorities.
- Led integrated communications and external engagement strategies aligned with enrollment goals, advancement objectives, policy priorities, and institutional mission, contributing to **record-breaking enrollment, increased annual giving, and historic state investment**.
- Led a comprehensive modernization of the university's brand, expanding beyond trademark management to include purpose, values, positioning, messaging architecture, and an **experiential brand marketing strategy**.
- Developed brand toolkits and a brand advocacy program to **empower campus partners to share and amplify the university's story**.
- **Transitioned enterprise website governance from IT to Marketing and Communications**, establishing institution-wide standards for user experience, accessibility, content strategy, analytics, and performance.
- **Directed a large-scale website and digital ecosystem overhaul** focused on prospective students, conversion optimization, accessibility compliance, and SEO/GEO.
- **Advanced data-informed digital marketing strategies**—including paid media, geofencing, CRM integration, marketing automation, and analytics—to support enrollment growth, institutional reputation, fundraising, and brand visibility.
- Served as a lead architect of the institution's five-year strategic enrollment management plan, supporting recruitment of the **largest incoming class in the institution's history (Fall 2025) and expansion into new targeted markets**.
- Built and sustained **partnerships with municipal, regional, state, and federal stakeholders**, positioning the university as an anchor institution in health sciences, workforce development, and community engagement.
- Led crisis communications strategy and coordinated the university's **community outreach response following the regional devastation caused by Hurricane Helene**.

- Led a high-profile 18-month national campaign surrounding the university's appearance in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, generating more than **\$300,000 in fundraising, \$10.5M in ad equivalency value and an estimated 1.14B impressions**, including national broadcast coverage on *NBC Nightly News*.
- Led internal communications and **change management during a period of significant institutional change**, including:
 - Academic restructuring
 - General education redesign
 - Budget model redesign
 - Classification and compensation redesign
 - ERP implementation
 - Quality Enhancement Plan development and implementation focused on community-engaged learning

These efforts contributed to ETSU being named a *Great College to Work For* by The Chronicle of Higher Education for the first time ever in 2024 and again in 2025.

- Developed **enterprise-level crisis communications frameworks** to ensure rapid, coordinated response across leadership, operations, and public channels.
- Led marketing and communications strategy supporting the **expansion of the university's Academic Health Sciences Center** and clinical enterprise.
- Developed positioning that **elevated the institution as a premier health sciences university** serving underserved communities.
- Supported successful state funding advocacy efforts for academic programs and facilities, including **first-time state funding** for the College of Pharmacy.

VLS

Behavioral design, marketing and communications advisory practice supporting universities, government agencies, and mission-driven organizations.

Founder and President | 2020–2021; Advisor | 2021–2024

- Founded and led a multidisciplinary advisory practice supporting higher education systems, public agencies, national and international nonprofits, and for-profit businesses.
- Advised senior leaders on crisis communications, organizational change, digital transformation, and narrative strategy.
- Developed more than 30 hours of online professional training in design thinking, storytelling, and communications strategy for national higher education audiences.
- Supported the launch of *Black by God*, a community-centered journalism and media network focused on the stories of Black West Virginians.

Savage Grant

Impact investment firm with a portfolio of companies focused on economic, workforce, and infrastructure development.

Chief Marketing Officer; Interim CEO (Portfolio Company) | 2017–2020

- Led brand strategy, digital marketing, and communications across a portfolio of B2B companies in technology, professional services, and manufacturing.
- Served as Interim CEO of a technology startup following an unexpected leadership transition, scaling the organization from 6 to more than 50 employees.
- Led digital transformation initiatives, go-to-market execution, and stakeholder communications across public-private workforce development initiatives.

West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

State-level government agency guiding public higher education institutions.

Senior Director of Communications | 2016–2017; Progressive Roles | 2008–2016

- Served as chief communications officer and primary spokesperson.
- Led system-wide public affairs, policy communications, and outreach initiatives.
- Developed and institutionalized state-level policies and programs including a college access initiative recognized nationally by the Obama administration.
- Engaged a wide range of community stakeholders to support cultural and structural change.
- Co-authored and administered more than \$22 million in external funding supporting college access and student success programs.

A complete work history is available upon request.

Community Leadership

Created and co-led *All Kinds Are Welcome Here*, a statewide grassroots community engagement initiative responding to proposed legislation that would have permitted discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. Built a broad coalition of educators, faith leaders, businesses, and community organizations, securing public support from more than 1,000 organizations across the state of West Virginia. The initiative contributed to the withdrawal of the bill and was recognized with the Power of One Award for community leadership.

Education

Master of Public Administration, Nonprofit Management

University of Colorado Denver

Bachelor of Arts, Public Relations

Marshall University

Additional coursework: Oxford University; Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (Chile)

Certifications

- Google Analytics IQ
 - Salesforce Administrator I
 - HubSpot Inbound Marketing
 - PRSA Crisis Communications
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Selected Honors and Affiliations

- National CASE Circle of Excellence Awards (Gold): Advancement Campaign
- Tennessee Colleges Public Relations Association (Best of Show): Crisis Communications Campaign
- 40 Under 40 Honoree: Business Journal
- Innovator of the Year: West Virginia Association of Student Personnel Administrators
- Leadership Tennessee NEXT: Class V
- Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), Council on Strategic Communications