

Converse College Request for Proposal Website Redesign

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Purpose of RFP

Converse College is in the process of redesigning its website, converse.edu, in order to achieve its goals as outlined in the "Converse College Strategic Plan 2012" (document and PowerPoint available at converse.edu/strategicplan).

This Request for Proposals aims to find a partner that will help redesign the site in order to

1. Increase application and enrollment from high caliber students
2. Increase alumnae/i as donor interaction with the College
3. Help position Converse as a nationally recognized master's university, acclaimed as a center for creative thinking and learning and a community that produces engaged citizens who effect positive change.

Converse expects the contracted agency to strategically guide the redesign process, to implement and help maintain the redesigned site and to suggest more creative and efficient solutions than those requested, when beneficial. The rest of the document intends to describe the overall desired scope of the proposed execution with further discussion and modifications anticipated as necessary.

About Converse College

Converse is located in the heart of Spartanburg, South Carolina – home to six colleges and 14,000 college students. Founded in 1889 upon the conviction that "the well-being of any country depends much upon the culture of her women" and compelled by the vision to "enable students to see clearly, decide wisely and act justly," Converse has been a pioneer in women's education for more than a century. Throughout her history, the College has offered a liberal arts education within a residential environment. Today, innovative coeducational programs for graduate and advanced study complement the undergraduate program.

Converse believes that the Founder's Ideal is a call to arms to develop engaged leaders who think critically and creatively and effect positive change in the world. Students develop their unique voices through our challenging liberal arts curriculum, century-old honor tradition, and Daniels Center for Leadership and Service. Our close-knit residential community cultivates a spirit of sisterhood and enterprise among women diverse in backgrounds and interests. Across the board – from art and design to science, business, music and education – professors actively mentor and challenge students through spirited discussions inside and outside of the classroom. The Nisbet Honors Program, Petrie School of Music, independent and collaborative research opportunities, leading national debate teams, study abroad and internship programs, and a 9:1 student/faculty ratio differentiate the Converse learning community.

Converse competes in NCAA Division II athletics – the highest level of any women's college, is the only women's college on the All-Steinway School roster, and is consistently top ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Our Mission

Converse educates students to see clearly, decide wisely and act justly, developing engaged, adaptable citizens committed to progress, by offering a distinctive undergraduate education for women and innovative programs for graduate and advanced study.

Our Vision

Converse will be nationally recognized as an excellent master's university, acclaimed as a center for creative thinking and learning and a community that produces engaged citizens who effect positive change. Converse will lead in the cultivation and development of creativity across all disciplines in and out of the classroom.

Our Distinction

3 “C”s put Converse in a class by itself:

- **CREATIVE MINDS**
 - Developing creativity across all majors, in and out of the classroom
 - Preparing adaptable leaders for an ever-changing world
 - Independent and collaborative research

- **CUSTOMIZED EDUCATION**
 - Self-designed major and multiple majors
 - Study/travel
 - Internships

- **COMMUNITY THAT IS ALL ABOUT CONNECTEDNESS**
 - College Town – 14,000 students at 6 colleges in Spartanburg
 - Preparation for life, not just a career
 - Developing engaged citizens who effect positive change in the world (leadership and service)

Converse Facts

- 1,938 total enrollment (773 undergraduates, 1,165 graduates)
- From 15 states and 14 countries
- Approximately 25% ethnic minorities and 2% international
- Undergraduate Degrees: BA, BS, BFA, BM
- Graduate Degrees: MFA, MAT, MEd, MLA, MM
- 44 undergraduate majors and 21 minors

Converse competes at the highest level of any women’s college in the nation - NCAA Division II - as a member of Conference Carolinas. Converse fields teams in basketball, cross-country, lacrosse, soccer, swimming, tennis and volleyball.

History of the Converse Website

The current website was designed internally by the Communications Office with the aid of a contractor in 2001. The contractor, who also provided the hosting for the site, did all the programming. The site was programmed primarily in Classic ASP, FrontPage, and some PHP, it was later expanded with ASP.NET programming and VB.NET. The website was created with a companion Intranet website (intra.converse.edu) which is used as custom-built content management system for the main website, and as a normal intranet site. During a merger between Converse’s hosting company with another small hosting company, the Converse website experienced a lot of downtime and very little customer support, as a result of which, Converse was forced to migrate to a new hosting company. As part of the move and the knowledge that the Converse website will have to evolve, a content management system was purchased (Ektron CMS400.NET), and is currently implemented in only a few areas of the site (Athletics, some forms, and the student blogs). The Converse website attempts to provide something for all audiences, both internal and external, with the intranet providing internal information that needs to be accessible through a login. The College wants to transition the focus of the website towards external audiences.

Redesign Project Objectives

Converse College has identified the following objectives in order to develop a more appealing and creative website that will be engaging and will help communicate effectively with its external audiences.

Creative function and design

The College seeks to redesign the site which will carry the theme of creativity in order to better communicate its new mission to become a center for creative thought and problem solving. This means that the new design will have to be very creative and highly functional, but also that creative solutions to common website functionality such as the calendar and the online application should be developed whenever possible in order to enhance the user experience. It is imperative that the Converse site be creative and innovative in an immediately obvious and distinctive manner in order to support the branding efforts of the College.

Actionable communication with external audience

The redesign project aims to create a highly functional website that is action-driven. Converse seeks to create an interactive experience for each of its audience members, prompting them to take actions such as apply, donate, register for events, etc. The website will focus on the following external audiences, in order of importance.

1. **Prospective Undergraduate Students**
2. **Prospective Graduate Students**
3. **Alumnae**
4. **Donors (could be alumnae, parents, friends, etc.)**
5. **Parents and Family**
6. **Local/Global Community (the public, business, sports fans, the media)**

Content Management System

Converse College's website currently uses a combination of two content management systems, a custom solution created for the old website, and a new customizable solution from Ektron (www.ektron.com) CMS400.NET. Converse College wishes its redesigned site to be integrated with the CMS400.NET software that it has purchased, and therefore will only contract with an agency that has experience implementing websites with the Ektron software.

Usability and Accessibility

Converse College wishes its redesigned site to adhere to usability standards such as ADA compliance with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, S1194.22.

Templates and style sheets

As the redesign project ends, Converse College will continue to develop and add sections to the website. Therefore, Converse desires the contracted agency to provide templates and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) that support the look and feel of the overall website and are flexible enough to support the different audiences of the website.

Scope

The scope of the project will encompass a complete website redesign. Converse wishes to prioritize those areas of the website that are most strategically important to a successfully redesigned site. Converse is aware that the priority list below may not encompass all areas deemed by the agency to be most strategically important to meeting the objectives of the redesign project and seeks guidance from the agency regarding areas to add or change. Following are the highest priority areas of the existing Converse website (not in priority order):

Home page

Home page www.converse.edu

Important Areas of Interest

About Converse	www.converse.edu/overview
Admissions	www.converse.edu/admissions
Alumnae	www.converse.edu/alumnae
Athletics	www.converse.edu/athletics
Student Life	www.converse.edu/studlife
News & Calendars	www.converse.edu/news
Giving to Converse	www.converse.edu/giving
Twichell Online Box Office	N/A

Academic Areas and Centers

Petrie School of Music	www.converse.edu/petrie
Undergraduate Academics	www.converse.edu/academics
Graduate Academics	www.converse.edu/coedgrad
Converse II	www.converse.edu/academics/converseii/
Nisbet Honors Program	www.converse.edu/academics/nisbethonorsprogram.asp
Alia Lawson Pre-College	www.converse.edu/precollege/
Daniels Center for Leadership and Service	www.converse.edu/daniels/

Project Deliverables

Research and discovery

The contracted agency will conduct research on the target audience of the Converse website, including campus constituents, and conduct interviews in order to familiarize itself with Converse's strategic plan and objectives and to understand what information and the types of features the target audience is expecting to be able to access on the redesigned site. The agency will use existing research provided by the College, other research available to the agency and knowledge that it may have to make recommendations for the development of the site. The findings during this phase of the project will be used to form the basis for the project plan.

Project plan

The research will be used to create a detailed project plan document by the agency, including all features, responsibilities, timelines and deliverables. The final components of the project plan will be decided upon by the Converse College Web Oversight Committee with the consultation of the contracted agency.

Site architecture

The agency will use the research to propose a detail site architecture that is aligned with the agreed-upon strategy.

Site navigation

The agency will present a site navigation strategy addressing the focus of the navigation (such as audience-driven, topic-driven, a combination of the two, or other), the reasoning behind that strategy, and how pages that do not fall into one of these categories will be handled.

Design prototypes

The agency will present to Converse College at least three design prototypes — including storyboards, creative treatments, site maps, color palettes, navigation tools, etc. — for each level of the site to be redesigned.

Testing

The agency will continually test all templates that will be used in the final production of the website for usability, technical functionality and consistency and should be documented. The navigation and its logic will be tested to make sure that target audiences follow the logic of the navigation. All pages including Cascading Style Sheets will need to pass W3C validation for their declared doctyles and encoding.

Site redesign

The agency will redesign the site within the agreed-upon scope. Converse would like to explore the possibility of adding other functionalities to the redesigned site, which will be identified during the planning phase. These additions are value-added features designed to keep Converse current with the latest trends and potential audience demands. For pricing purposes, these should be priced separately. Converse recognizes that some of the features and functionalities listed below could be solved with a solution that is already available on the market. Converse expects the agency to make a recommendation about those products, where applicable.

1. Interactive Calendar for internal and external events

- Allows submission and approval of events

- Allows edits and updates by users and admins of th calendar (edit/delete your events)
- Displays various calendar views (month, day, week)
- Allows event category filters (filter showing academic/sport/public/etc events)
- Exports events in both RSS and .ICS
- Calendar customizable and easily embeddable in different areas of website (Alumnae section shows Alumnae calendar of events)
- Includes hCalendar microformats (microsofrmats.org)

2. Online Application

- Applications for prospective undergraduate and graduate students
- Easy to update from year to year
- Prospective students can save unfinished applications
- Prospective students can get feedback on application process (accepted/under review/rejected/etc.)
- Tie together along with a payment module for tuition

3. Personalization

The redesigned site will have the ability to recognize returning visitors and customize their experience to reflect their areas of interest according to their relationship to Converse (Alumnae/prospective student/parent/etc.).

4. Site map

The site map is self explanatory but should be clean and easy to understand and help visitors find information quickly. The agency should provide its expertise in recommending the layout of the site map.

5. Search

The search for the redesigned site will take the form of a custom search box that appears on all main pages. The search will allow visitors to search the site (through a customized Google search results page) and (with the selection of a radio button) search the directory (see Faculty/Staff directory below).

6. Financial aid/scholarship/tuition calculator

These are forms which will require minimal input from the visitor (no account creation should be required) and will immediately report back to the visitor how much financial aid/scholarship they are entitled to, and how much their tuition will be.

7. Interactive campus tour

The campus tour will be a visual representation of the Converse campus with the possibility of integrating images/flash/video/3D alongside written content that will capture the audience's attention. Converse is expecting that the contracted agency provide a highly creative solution to this common feature.

8. Alumnae online community

The alumnae online community should allow alumnae to keep in touch with their classmates. It should contain forms to update their contact information. More information will be provided as the requirements for this feature are fleshed out.

9. Payment processing module

A module to easily accept and process credit cards online. Since many different sections of the site will need to accept credit card payments this module is expected to be easy to integrate into the code of new registration forms such as the gift giving form, or tuition payment forms. It should be customizable and be able validate credit card information, as well display successful/failed transaction messages back to the visitor.

10. Gift giving form

The gift giving form is to be integrated closely with the payment processing module. It should allow visitors to make pledges or schedule several payments over a certain period of time. The gift giving form should make a strong case for giving money to Converse so that donors are more likely to become repeat donors.

11. Contact forms

Different contact forms will be used throughout the site in order to allow quick communication between visitors and on-campus constituents. These forms should use a CAPTCHA such as reCAPTCHA (recaptcha.net) in order to support visually impaired visitors.

12. Press/Newsroom

- A press/newsroom section of the site that will include news articles, photos and videos from the converse website.
- A search that allows visitors to locate news stories by keywords, date ranges and categories (athletics, academics, theatre, etc.).
- This section should include a news aggregator for news feeds about converse from other sites, so that visitors could read positive articles about Converse from other venues.
- News e-mail/RSS subscription section

13. Admissions counselor IM and chat

- Each admissions counselor's biographical page will have several links to common chat protocols such as AIM, Yahoo, MSN, etc. allowing prospective students to initiate an instant messaging session with the counselor to ask questions.
- A chat widget such as meebome (meebome.com) will be used to facilitate chat between those prospective students who do not have an instant messaging account and admissions counselors.
- Each admissions counselor will have multi-protocol IM client such as pidgin (pidgin.im) installed on their computer.

14. Incoming freshmen online community

- An online community for accepted students
- Provides profiles and forums like MySpace or FaceBook

16. Faculty/Staff directory

- Searchable by names and departments
- Links faculty to biographical page
- Includes hCard microformats (microformats.org)

17. Ticket/Box Office Solution

Currently, Converse only sells tickets to events at the Twichell Auditorium offline. Converse would like the contracted agency to recommend and integrate an online box office ticketing system that will sell and reserve tickets to Twichell Auditorium in real time. This system will be accompanied by a custom mini-site for Twichell Auditorium, with a calendar (see

calendar above), photos, text and possibly video of past shows and events at Twichell Auditorium.

18. Sitemaps

The site should provide indexing support to Google through the use of Sitemaps (google.com). This feature will have to be a custom add-on to the CMS since all content will reside inside the CMS.

19. Print Display Version of Cascading Style Sheet

Converse College is interested in having a CSS that will define how all pages on the redesigned Converse website will look when printed. This version of the CSS should be included in all pages and will display a slimmed down version of the website. For example, the navigation, the header and the footer will be replaced with a printer friendly version, along with the rest of the content, inside which, all linked text will display the full address from the HREF attribute of the link in parentheses to the right of the link.

20. Photography for website

The contracted agency will be expected to produce engaging photography of students, and the campus for the website. Converse has a gallery full of pictures which could be used during the redesign, but is interested in an agency that could provide additional photography when Converse's cache of photos is lacking.

21. Others as identified in project plan

The contracted agency will be expected to make recommendations on features and functionality that would greatly benefit the Converse website.

Site Index Capabilities

The agency is expected to redesign the site for optimal search index placement. All pages should have appropriate meta data, page titles, tags, etc. Please see Sitemaps (#6 above).

Redesign implementation

The redesigned site must support older browsers and show a consistent design across the different OS platforms.

CMS implementation

The agency will be responsible for development and implementation of the redesigned site with Converse's purchased CMS solution (Ektron CMS400.NET). All content must be separated from the design using the CMS to allow on-campus constituents to update their section of the site. In the case of strictly formatted content the agency is expected to use the XML functionality that is built into of the CMS to allow a form-like submission of content.

Templates

The agency will provide Converse with at least three templates (quantity TBA – should adequately support the look and feel of the overall website and be flexible enough to support all target audiences) accompanied by Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), so that Converse staff can continue development of the site.

Documentation and training

The agency will thoroughly document all materials it produces, including well-formed and commented code, the Cascading Style Sheets and the templates, as well as programming code and JavaScript. Training will be conducted at Converse College and will need to be priced separately so that Converse can decide how much training will be done by the agency.

Standards manual

The agency will provide a standards manual for the redesigned website, which describes styles, color palettes, URL structures, naming schemes, file structures and all standards followed.

Post-launch technical support

The agency will provide a period of six months of technical support following the successful implementation and launch of the redesigned site.

Project Sequence and Timing

Converse College hopes for a launch date of **August 2009**. Agencies should provide their own timetable in their proposal responses.

1. Research and Discovery – **Begins August 1, 2008**
2. Strategy and site architecture
3. Design and testing
4. Implementation
5. Documentation and training
6. Post-Launch support

Roles and Responsibilities

Converse College redesign leadership

A web oversight committee consisting of different constituents from the Converse campus has been assembled in order to help support and review the redesign process. A web team from the Converse College Communications Office, headed by Web Developer, Tom Algai, a Web Content Manager (in hiring process) and Director of Communications, Beth Lancaster, will manage the redesign project. Tom Algai will serve as liaison with the redesign agency and report to Director of Communications Beth Lancaster.

Converse technical leadership

A web support team, located in Converse College's Office of Campus Technology and led by Chief Technology Officer, John James, will provide technical expertise and support to the redesign project.

Converse College approval of agency team

Converse College reserves the right to interview the assigned members of the agency's project team before the agency is selected. If, at any time during the website redesign project, the Converse College web team determines that a member of the assigned agency team is not positioned to meet the requirements of the proposal, the College reserves the right to require replacement of the team member(s).

Agency responsibilities

The agency is responsible for all deliverables related to the Converse College website redesign project. Additionally, the agency's responsibilities will include management of its internal project team and regular communication with the Converse College project manager/liaison. Strict adherence to agreed timelines must be followed as well as notification of delays, complications, communication barriers, or potential cost overruns. The Converse College project manager/liaison will review materials at milestones and sign off during critical stages of the project.

Responsibility for content

Converse may wish for the redesign agency to provide content for upper-level pages of the site that require careful branding and positioning language. Converse College's Web Content Manager will work in partnership with individual departments to provide all additional content for the redesigned website — unless otherwise agreed upon with the agency following the strategy phase.

Converse Technology Environment

The following technologies, dependencies and environments are currently supported by Converse's Communications Office.

Technologies currently in use

Primary technologies in use

Microsoft Windows 2003, Microsoft IIS, Microsoft SQL Server 2005, ASP.NET, VB.NET, Classic ASP, JavaScript, Visual Studio, Dreamweaver, Ektron CMS400.NET.

Secondary technologies supported

PHP, Flash

Supporting architecture

Converse College maintains its own dedicated server outside its current on-campus network. Converse maintains its own DNS structure and name resolution. All code is maintained internally. Converse expects all code solutions and code provided by the agency to use best practices for security, including availability, integrity and confidentiality.

Proposal Process and Evaluation

Anticipated schedule for process evaluation

1. **Release Request for Proposal - April 18, 2008**
2. **Proposals due to Converse College from agencies - May 16, 2008**
3. **Agency presentations/interviews - June 2-6, 2008**
4. **Agency selection - June 20, 2008**
5. **Contract finalized - July 7, 2008**
6. **Project begins - July 21, 2008**

RFP response guidelines

Proposals should include a cover letter and/or executive summary that states how your proposal meets Converse College's objectives. The body of the proposal should include at least the following components:

1. Company brief (history, staffing, experience, range of services, business philosophy).
2. Company organizational chart and resumes of principal staff for Converse College's website redesign project, including resumes of subcontractors, if any. All subcontractors must be clearly identified.
3. Overview of your strategic approach to the Converse College website redesign project and all of its individual elements (research and discovery, site architecture, navigation strategy, design, testing, implementation, training, post-launch support, etc.).
4. Description of how the project would be organized and executed.
5. A list of examples of college/university websites you would consider to be outstanding and why.
6. Assessment of your approach to content management system implementation using Ektron CMS 400.NET.
7. Timeline for all deliverables, divided into phases of implementation.
8. Identification of any hardware or software requirements for the implementation and maintenance of proposed solutions, including servers and disk space requirements.
9. Pricing structure and/or fees for all deliverables, including line items; estimates for any hardware or software requirements not already owned by Converse College and corresponding training; and estimates for any travel costs associated with the project.
10. Names and contact information for three clients for whom you have completed projects that are similar in scope and complexity to the Converse College website redesign project.
11. A list of links to website projects you have completed that are similar in scope and complexity to the Converse College website redesign project (samples of print materials are encouraged but not required).

When submitting your proposal, please:

1. Submit one original and three copies labeled "Converse College Website Redesign" to arrive at Converse College by May 16, 2008, 4:30 p.m.
2. Provide one electronic copy with the original proposal.
3. All supporting materials and documentation should be included with the proposal and labeled as "Attachments."

Proposal evaluation

Converse College will evaluate responses to the RFP and determine the agencies best suited to fulfill the College's requirements. A small number of agency representatives will be invited to present their proposals and discuss their qualifications based on their responses to the RFP. One agency will be chosen to work with Converse College unless the College feels none of the agencies are fully qualified.

Proposals will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. Agency expertise and experience, including experience in the higher education market
2. Expertise of agency staff assigned to the Converse College website redesign project
3. Understanding of Converse College's vision and strategic objectives
4. Response to Converse College's deliverable requirements
5. Proposed timeline/delivery
6. Cost

Business and Legal Considerations

Cost of preparing proposals and oral presentations

The costs involved with the preparation and development of proposals and any activities prior to contract with Converse College are solely the responsibility of the agency. Converse College will not provide reimbursement of such costs.

Ownership of creative material

Converse College requires that designs/concepts provided to Converse as a result of this project become the property of Converse College and may be used by Converse College in any way it sees fit. All rights of ownership will reside with Converse College.

Ownership of source code

Any source code developed by the agency, or software, graphics, video, animations, or audio files provided as a result of any contract will become the property of Converse College. Source code for all software developed by the agency for this project will be provided to SPU at no additional cost. Any open source or other general-licensed code used by the agency must be fully disclosed.

Warranties

By submitting a proposal, the agency represents and warrants to Converse College that it has the capability to perform the requirements as stated in this RFP, its proposal, and any accompanying documentation. If selected, the agency represents and warrants that its work and any goods or services provided to the College by or on behalf of vendor will be good, merchantable, free of all material defects, non-infringing and performed in a good and workmanlike manner.

The Agreement

The successful agency will be required to sign an agreement with Converse College not limited to, but including, a Creative Rights Agreement, written Addenda executed by both parties, and those portions of the agency's proposal or correspondence accepted by the College in writing. No modification or change of any provision in the resulting Agreement shall be made unless such modification are mutually agreed to in writing by Converse College and the agency and incorporated as a written amendment to the Agreement.