MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS 2026 YEAR IN REVIEW

Much of MarCom's work in 2026 centered on preparing Detroit Mercy's reinvigorated new brand, supporting the University's 150th anniversary and creating materials for a future fundraising campaign. Alongside those major projects, the department helped colleges promote their programs, told the stories of students and alumni, worked with news media and supported University Advancement, Enrollment Management/Admissions, the President's Office, Board of Trustees and other units and departments across all four UDM campuses.

More people are following and hearing about Detroit Mercy. The University's Instagram following grew from 10,000 in January to 11,100 by fall. Media mentions increased 29% in the June reporting period and 23.5% in the October period, compared with the same periods in 2025. The web team also refined its reporting to account for bots, AI-driven traffic and other factors that can inflate website visitor counts.

The following is a look at some of the department's work in 2026 and what lies ahead in 2027. Please note that this is a high-level sampling of work completed by the department and is not an exhaustive list of all completed projects.

BUILDING A REINVIGORATED UDM BRAND

Detroit Mercy's ongoing brand work continues to grow out of a University-wide effort coordinated by MarCom, Greenhouse::Innovation and trustee Marlena Peleo-Lazar. Fourteen strategy sessions brought together stakeholders from across the University to help define what Detroit Mercy stands for and how to communicate it consistently. In January, for example, MarCom and Greenhouse met for half a day with 20 resident assistants to hear about their experiences and ideas for student life. Greenhouse also met with CHASS faculty and staff.

MarCom and Greenhouse also worked with the Community Council and neighborhood liaison Jeremy Lewis on a proposal to share monthly summaries of meetings and initiatives involving Northwest Detroit residents, community organizers and leaders.

The team presented a draft brand print and an overview of the new brand at the June Board of Trustees meeting. The work was taking shape alongside plans for the 150th anniversary and a possible fundraising campaign. After the meeting, MarCom turned its attention to preparing for a winter launch. Key steps included:

- In July, MarCom drafted a launch plan covering the work planned for the next year.
- The University's legal team filed a trademark application for the new brand on Aug. 13. The application was accepted and is in process with the U.S. Copyright and Trademark Office.
- MarCom, Greenhouse and Peleo-Lazar introduced the brand concept and sample materials to campus groups, inviting discussion about how the brand could be used in their work. Sessions included Major Gift officers, Student Affairs, Admissions, Residence Life, the Student Government executive committee, University Leadership Council, Law communications, Optometry, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and Athletics Communications.
- MarCom will soon begin drafting brand identity and usage guidelines for inclusion in the University's institutional guidelines once approved.

- The team explored the possibility of lighting the clock tower in University colors and projecting historical images, including opportunities for sponsorship and fundraising.
- MarCom, Greenhouse, Peleo-Lazar and the President's Council began planning a winter 2027 launch convocation. The program, guest list and media outreach are still under development.

The department also spent considerable time helping colleges and departments use existing University and Faith in Action anniversary identities correctly. Misuse continued despite approved guidelines and workshops attended by dozens of staff members.

PROMOTING THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY AND UNIVERSITY EVENTS

MarCom created the visual identity for Detroit Mercy's 150th anniversary, obtained presidential approval and set standards for its use. Staff held workshops with Alumni Affairs and invited the entire campus community to attend, coordinated promotion for Homecoming and the Live6 Alliance Fall Festival, and planned anniversary advertising at sporting and community events for fiscal year 2027.

At September's Arts, Beats & Eats festival in Royal Oak, MarCom negotiated a featured anniversary sponsorship of the Hitsville NEXT Revue. Detroit Mercy also debuted new television spots featuring trustees, staff and students. The event received coverage through a pre-festival press conference on WDIV and Fox, as well as WDIV's Live in the D. Organizers reported several million views across the activity, although a verified total and breakdown by placement were not available.

During new student move-in and orientation, MarCom's photo and video team documented students working alongside Detroit residents working together to beautify our neighborhood and community. The department shared the images and video on University social media, published a story and secured coverage from WXYZ Channel 7 News.

MarCom promoted the September Celebrate Spirit Mass with Archbishop Gabriele Giordano Caccia, the Apostolic Nuncio and Vatican ambassador to the United States. It marked the first visit by a papal ambassador in University history. The team recorded the Mass and produced a video for alumni and other audiences. The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities promoted the visit ahead of Sept. 17, and Detroit Catholic covered it online Sept. 18.

EXPANDING COMMUNICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC COLLEGES

The colleges received more hands-on help with news stories, social media and program promotion as dedicated communications positions came under MarCom's supervision. Sierra Searcy joined CHASS and Phylisha Drayton joined CES, with both in place by spring. A similar position for CHP was approved in June, and Loreal Salter was hired in July. In October, the President's Office also formally approved the move of the Sports Information Office and Titan Athletics marketing staff under MarCom ahead of the hiring of a new athletic director.

College of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences

Searcy produced a story and video about the psychology program's goat lab, showing how the exercise connects to applied behavior analysis. The project reached thousands of viewers through CHASS and University social channels and was among several efforts to bring the college's programs to life.

Posts welcoming students to campus drew considerable attention. Three SOAR posts received 23,625 views, 621 likes, 93 shares or sends, and 338 profile visits. A freshman interview reel featuring Keaton Aldridge had 9,739 views, 92 shares or sends, and nine new followers. Another freshman welcome reel received 6,911 views.

Together, those five posts drew more than 40,000 views, 933 likes, 31 comments and 200 shares or sends. The team also recorded 10 freshman interviews for release during the semester. These results reinforce the value of showing students, campus life and University events through the voices and experiences of the people who are here.

College of Engineering and Science

Drayton's April Faces on Design story followed Engineering and Nursing students as they developed assistive technology for people with disabilities. Fox 2 Detroit, WXYZ Channel 7, Bridge Detroit and Middle Eastern American Television covered the project.

From Jan. 27 to April 27, CES Instagram recorded 100,062 views and reached 11,115 accounts. People who did not follow the account generated 75% of those views. A student love story attracted about 43,000 views and 1,350 interactions. In Drayton's first 30 days, the account recorded more than 26,000 views, and her videos reached 5,940 accounts.

College of Health Professions

CHP began by taking stock of its departments' marketing needs and strengths, then developed a college-wide marketing plan. The team also wrote and edited the announcement of the new Doctor of Medical Science program.

CHP's Instagram account recorded 42,139 views and 1,205 engagements; Facebook recorded 12,800 views and 1,294 engagements. A reel from the PA Long Coat Ceremony drew 10,100 views, making it the college's first Instagram video to pass 10,000 views.

SUPPORTING FUNDRAISING AND UNIVERSITY PUBLICATIONS

Working with the President's Council and University Advancement, MarCom produced a new Campaign Case for Support, including customizable one-page summaries of fundraising priorities. Senior Design Lead Gaby Rivas, Communications Director Ron Bernas and the team rebuilt the piece on a tight deadline after being asked to revise work prepared by an outside vendor.

Spiritus earned a 2025 CASE Best of District V award for the writing and design of its spring 2024 issue. The magazine is mailed to 67,000 households twice a year and also reaches readers online. A collectible 150th anniversary edition, featuring a special cover and paper, was planned for December 2026.

Senior Communications Officer Ricky Lindsay earned a 2025–2026 CASE Best of District V award for "Making a Wheel Difference," published in the June 2025 Spiritus. The story followed Detroit Mercy alumni putting the University's Jesuit and Mercy mission into action through service in their communities.

Campus Connection articles received 73,000 views in 2025, including 13,000 in December. Those numbers provide a baseline for readership heading into 2026.

GROWING SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCES

Detroit Mercy's main Instagram account surpassed 10,000 followers in mid-January, topped 10,500 by spring and reached 11,100 at the start of the 2026–27 academic year.

From Dec. 21 to Jan. 20, the account drew nearly 500,000 views and reached 65,000 accounts. Between Jan. 20 and April 30, it drew more than 1.17 million views and reached more than 150,000 accounts. The spring report also showed 337 new followers in the preceding 30 days. Paid advertising from MarCom and Enrollment Management accounted for 8% of views during that spring period.

From May through September, Instagram drew 961,000 views and more than 17,000 interactions. Followers generated 66% of the views.

Students and everyday campus life continued to connect with audiences. Popular spring posts featured the basketball team's Horizon League run, 313 Day and campus photography. Orientation, move-in, the first week of classes and commencement performed well later in the year. One graduation photo post featuring Dentistry and Law received nearly 50,000 views, 1,400 likes and reached 17,900 accounts.

Results across other University channels

- Facebook recorded 560,000 views from Dec. 23 to Jan. 20 and had 16,750 followers in the fall 2025/winter 2026 snapshot. The spring report showed 1.28 million views and more than 46,000 interactions over the preceding 90 days, led by a student love story. A later report showed more than 1.36 million views since May 2 and a 23% rise in engagement. A move-in reel received about 8,000 views.
- LinkedIn grew from 49,225 followers in the fall 2025/winter 2026 snapshot to nearly 50,000 by spring. It recorded 136,000 impressions in the 90 days after Jan. 27, more than 12% above the previous period. A later report counted 235,000 impressions since May 2 and more than 5,706 reactions, a 20% increase.
- The main University TikTok account grew from more than 2,500 followers in the fall 2025/winter 2026 snapshot to nearly 3,000 by spring and 3,260 later in the year. Cumulative likes rose from 47,000 to more than 61,000 and then 67,400. A PA graduation video received 11,000 views. The earlier snapshot also listed the Admissions account at 1,723 followers and 415,000 likes.
- Short videos featuring students continued to find an audience on YouTube. An earlier Titan Taxi episode surpassed 8,000 cumulative views, while many later shorts about commencement and campus life exceeded 1,000 views each.
- A new video created by MarCom for the MEAGN program surpassed more than 211,000 views in less than six months.

SECURING MEDIA COVERAGE

Detroit Mercy received 14,700 earned media mentions in the June reporting period, up from 11,400 in the comparable period in 2025—a 29% increase. The estimated advertising-equivalent value of that coverage was $7.6 million in both periods.

In the October reporting period, media mentions rose from 5,900 to 7,300, a 23.5% increase. The estimated cost of buying comparable advertising exposure to that news coverage rose from $4.8 million to $5.1 million. This is an estimate of media visibility, not revenue or money the University saved.

Stories that attracted coverage included Faces on Design, Arts, Beats & Eats, student move-in and community service, and the Apostolic Nuncio's visit. MarCom also maintained and promoted an online directory of faculty and staff experts for journalists.

Getting faculty and staff to participate in media interviews remained a challenge in some areas. Experts in Law, Dentistry and Optometry generally responded more readily than some colleagues on the McNichols Campus. Another concern was the delay in alerting MarCom and senior leadership when a situation might attract negative media attention.

On Sept. 21, MarCom and Associate Professor Jason Roche approached the Detroit Lions about a possible Thanksgiving halftime feature on the team's first Thanksgiving game, played at University of Detroit Stadium in 1934. The feature was not confirmed when this report was prepared.

In October, UDM received a major $7.75 million grant from the U.S. Department of War (DoW) that will allow the University to expand an education-to-workforce pipeline as the U.S. faces growing workforce shortages in critical technology fields. U.S. Sen. Gary Peters played a crucial role in securing funding for the initiative through his role on the Senate Appropriations Committee in the Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations Bill. MarCom establish an integrated communications plan to share this information about the globe and on UDM social media platforms. Approximately 509 media outlets around the world published this news, which generated an audience reach of 115 million. Some of the media outlets where this news appeared include Yahoo Finance, Morningstar, KTLA Los Angeles and Benzinga.

IMPROVING THE WEBSITE AND DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

MarCom updated website design standards to better show what makes Detroit Mercy distinctive and help prospective students find accurate program information through search engines and AI tools. Between Oct. 1, 2025, and Jan. 20, 2026, the team improved the layout and structure of pages for Business Administration, CES, CHASS, Architecture & Community Development, Optometry, Cybersecurity and community programs, and added student testimonial videos.

The web team completed more than 6,600 website updates, requests and changes in 2025—a record and roughly 20% more than the year before.

MarCom and the Office of Equal Opportunity developed an instructional site on digital accessibility and continued working through inaccessible PDFs and other materials. In October, MarCom purchased software to help make PDFs accessible. The departments are assessing how well it addresses the larger accessibility challenge.

Preparing for changes in online search

More prospective students are using AI tools to research colleges. To make Detroit Mercy's information easier to find and understand, MarCom developed a plan to improve consistency across the academic catalog, keep key facts in one reliable location, standardize program marketing pages and add structured data that search tools can read.

This effort builds on the University website's existing page organization, semantic structure, accessibility work and customized Cascade content management system. A University AI Task Force had met by the second quarter, but carrying out the broader plan may require a University-wide strategy and additional resources.

Measuring website activity

The June report showed 257,110 website users from Jan. 23 to April 28, compared with 208,996 during the same period in 2025, an increase of 23.02%. New users rose 18.06%, from 171,520 to 202,503.

These figures need context. Bots, University traffic, blocked tracking, duplicate user records and sampling can affect the counts. To better separate real visits from automated activity, the web team created a geographic filter based on events per active user. It is an improvement, but it may still exclude some real visitors or include some bots.

By October, MarCom was using Google Analytics 4 events as its main website comparison. Events include page views, clicks, scrolling, downloads, form actions and searches. From May 2 through Sept. 16, the website recorded 5,781,898 events after excluding Singapore, compared with 4,591,642 during the same period in 2025—an increase of 25.92%.

An event measures an action on the site, not a unique visitor, prospective student or inquiry. Because the June and October reports measure different things, their results should not be presented as one continuous trend in visitor growth.

WORK CONTINUING INTO 2027

Launching the reinvigorated UDM brand will be a central focus in 2027. Trademark review, campus conversations, usage guidelines and convocation planning are underway. The possibility of illuminating the clock tower is still being explored.

The University will continue promoting its 150th anniversary through advertising and the planned December issue of Spiritus. MarCom will also keep working with colleges and departments to ensure the University and anniversary identities are used correctly.

With communications staff now in place for CHASS, CES and CHP, MarCom will continue telling college stories and promoting academic programs. Marketing plans and websites for health programs and Optometry are complete; paid campaigns and related media outreach are next.

Other priorities include quicker responses to media inquiries and emerging issues, more accessible digital materials, putting the website content plan into practice and improving the reliability of web reporting.