



# Brand Ambition

How the split-U got its groove

BY LYSSA GOLDBERG, '15

There are thousands of universities across the nation, but only one gets to be "the U." Here's a look at how U logos and traditions have evolved into an internationally recognized brand identity.

people who saw the split-U would automatically think of the University, recalls Schwartz. "Beyond our wildest dreams, this is what happened," she says. Fueled by excitement about a growing sports program, there was a hype surrounding the U that stuck. Without this logo's creation, she adds, people probably never would have thought about calling Miami "the U."



1979

## The Great Logo Debate

According to an August 1979 article in *The Miami Hurricane*, UM President Henry King Stanford set up a committee to find a replacement for the U logo. Among those in favor of replacing the U at that time was the chair of the graphics department, who felt the single letter didn't properly symbolize or clearly

distinguish Miami. But students protested, launching a "Save the U" campaign. Also vocal about saving the U was then-alumni board of trustees member Walter Etling, A.B. '48. (Read the article at <http://merrick.library.miami.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/hurricane/id/23046/rec/9>.)

1980s

## It's All about the U

Today the phrase "It's All about the U" can be seen on T-shirts and overheard daily, but it originated in Athletics.

John Routh, known for his role as both Sebastian the Ibis and the baseball team's Miami Maniac, arrived at UM in 1983. He says Athletics coined the phrase, but for a very different purpose. Athletics employees who felt they worked hard and for little pay would express their dedication to the athletes by saying, "It's all about the U," explains Routh, now executive director of the UM Sports Hall of Fame. Years later, the slogan was adopted University-wide.



1992

## Throwing Up the U

The U hand gesture first emerged in 1992 for a home football game against Florida State. Former UM cheerleader Bill Tigano, B.S.C. '93, created the symbol for football fans to use as the Band of the Hour played the *Star Wars* "Imperial March."

"FSU has the chop, and the Gators have their chomp," Tigano told *Miami* magazine in 2007. "So I wanted to come up with something to identify us."

"Over the years, it grew and grew," Routh adds. "Now when you do the U, everyone knows exactly what you're talking about."



well recognized the U brand was, says Joanne Leahy, executive director for the Office of UHealth/Miller Marketing.

Study results indicated that people, including those beyond the local community, who saw the U thought of the University of Miami, not just its athletics program. In fact, notes Leahy, almost 40 percent of people in the Northeast United States also recognized the U.

"People just knew what the U was, and they not only knew what it was but also thought very highly of it," she explains.

2009

## Brand on the Run

Prior to the prevalent split-U, the University of Miami used the Miami "bar" logo on University documents and supplies. But in 2009 the split-U

became UM's new brand identity.

Adopting an athletics logo as an institutional brand is an unusual move for a university, but the administration made the leap successfully after the academic marketing firm they'd hired for the study surveyed high-achieving high school students as well as parents, alumni, and high school guidance counselors during focus groups in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. The verdict: The split-U is one of the most recognizable collegiate marks nationally and may be the most pervasive graphic symbol in South Florida.

2012

## Putting the U in Momentum2

When it came time to announce the University's new \$1.6 billion capital fundraising campaign this year, UM President Donna E. Shalala emphasized the University's pride in the split-U, selecting it as *Momentum2*'s official logo.

An earlier version of this article first appeared in *The Miami Hurricane*.



### The Man Behind the U

William "Bill" Bodenhamer dreamed up the Miami Dolphins logo for \$250 in 1965. Giving that iconic mammal a run for its money is the bold but underappreciated letter of the alphabet he developed for the University of Miami Athletic Federation (now the Hurricane Club). Bodenhamer passed away in 2000, but the symbols he created have stood the test of time. His son, William S. Bodenhamer Jr., confirms that the 1973 split-U remained one of his father's favorite creations. "That U meant something to my father and my family—and certainly meant something to the University," he says.

A University of Arkansas graduate, Bodenhamer Sr. was a designer for the U.S. Air Force before moving to Miami with his wife in 1957 and starting his own firm in 1962. He also designed logos for Capital Bank, Calder and Tropical Park racetracks, and the Lighthouse for the Blind. Although Bodenhamer suffered from glaucoma in his later years, his son says he kept working and mentoring students until his death at age 72.

2008

## A Healthier U

The University of Miami Health System adopted the UHealth name and logo after a market research study showed how