

How to Attract Students to Your University and Drive Enrollment



make yourself perfectly clear

Attracting students to a college or university is a competitive process. With countless options to choose from, colleges and universities need to leverage traditional, social and inbound marketing and communications tactics and strategies to increase enrollment. It's not enough to have great programs and great faculty. You also need great ways to get the word out and stay on prospective student's radar from PSAT day through decision day.

The formula for building the right marketing program is as unique as each college's degree programs and on-campus, hybrid or online experiences. That's right – there isn't a template. It's time to roll up your sleeves, take an objective look at your college or university's existing marketing and develop hard-working, measurable strategies and tactics that drive students to take action and accept your acceptance letter.

So, where should you start?

1. Speak Their Language

What are prospective college students really concerned about? What will get their parents on board? How can you get college counselors in high schools across the U.S. to promote your brand? There aren't one-size-fits-all answers. It's up to your team to do the research – be it yourselves or by commissioning a research firm – to get the answers. This data will inform your strategy, your tactics and the way you sell your college experience to students, parents and college advisors.

The benefits of speaking your buyer's language are countless. You need to dig deep to figure out what makes them tick, what moves them from awareness to interest, and from interest to action. As you set out on the path to becoming a master of student-, parent-, and advisor-speak, listen to what these folks are saying, monitor what they are doing online and collect first-hand observations and insights that will lay a solid foundation for marketing your college or university.



2. Become a Trusted Advisor

Creating compelling, relevant, searchable and shareable online content is a powerful way to attract students to your university. It is also key to building trust among the parent community and demonstrating your expertise to the college advisors of the world. There are several places to house this content, including a blog.

Blogging is the single best way an organization can boost its organic search engine rankings and draw qualified traffic to its website. How do you do this? By talking about what people are already thinking about and searching for. No, you don't need a crystal ball to succeed at blogging. You just need to know what's already on your audiences' minds. Combine equal parts research, creativity and expertise and you will be well on your way to building and maintaining a blog that sells.

So what do you blog about? Great content is carefully tailored to the needs of the target audience. If your blog is geared towards attracting prospective students, perhaps you talk about the top questions to ask during a college interview or the top five questions incoming freshman want answers to. Get creative, get optimized and get blogging.

Once you've mastered the art of blogging, it's time to take your blog to the next level and add free downloadable incentives such as whitepapers and e-books. These materials are opportunities to build a deeper level of trust and showcase the wealth of expertise your team has to offer. For the biggest ROI, hook the downloads up to a tracking database and integrate with a series of strategic, value-driven (and trackable) follow-up communications.

3.

Debunk Myths

Perhaps people say you have the crankiest professors. The hardest exams. The most boring campus in America. We get it. You don't necessarily want to brag about. Guess what? You don't have to brag about, you just have to own it.

When target audiences have widespread misconceptions about a brand, they need to be addressed. Not in a 'slap your wrist, shame on you' kind of a way, but in a 'Hey! That's not who we really are' kind of a way.

Maybe you develop an email marketing campaign targeted towards prospective students that is designed solely to dispel myths about your college or university. Perhaps it's a series of short and witty videos that are shared across the college's social media marketing channels. Regardless of the medium, be sure that the content is relevant, authentic, engaging and easy to share.

4.

Help Prospective Students Visualize Themselves On-Campus

Some students don't have the luxury of revisiting a campus before they make their final selection. And, after visiting numerous colleges and universities, it can be hard to remember everything that they loved about a particular school. The continued growth of social media provides tremendous opportunities for colleges and universities to remind prospective students why their school is the right choice. Now, let's get visual.

Video

Short videos, which can easily be created with smartphone apps such as Instagram and Vine, are a great way to share a snippet of the Top Notch University experience. The important thing is to frame the video as it would be seen through the eyes of an on-campus student. Think about a view from the stands during a sporting match, a highlight from a campus tour, a glimpse into a day in the life of a Top Notch University student, you get the idea.

Photos

The world is full of visual thinkers. Instagram and Pinterest are two great ways to reach these folks. Whether you hold a contest where current students submit a photo of their best Top Notch University moment, build Pinterest boards around various topics of interest (what to do on the weekends, campus clubs, only at Top Notch University, etc.) or ask prospective students to share the best photo from their first visit to campus, there are countless ways to build and strengthen relationships with prospective students in a visual social world.

5.

Stay on Their Radar

Put yourself in the shoes of a prospective student. They completed their college visits when they were a junior and it has been an eternity (read: approximately one year or less in teenage years) since they visited your campus, attended your classes and networked with students and faculty. Do they even remember the amazing student union or the state-of-the-art television production studio?

A lot happens between the time a student visits a college and the time they enroll. Stay with them throughout the process. Imagine getting an email from Top Notch University that says:

“We know you’ve got a lot on your plate. You’re studying for finals, planning that epic post-prom party and, oh yeah, deciding where to spend the next four years of your life. We get it. Life’s complicated. Let us make your college selection process easy.”

This short little email screams ‘we get you’ (known as understanding your buyer persona) and builds trust among potential students.

Other ways to stay on prospective students’ radars? Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, you get the idea.

When selling the college experience, it is important to develop a multi-channel approach that focuses on reaching prospective students on their own terms. Make your content easy for them to find when the search is on and be a coach when it comes time to make the all-important enrollment decision. Think visually, work strategically and, most importantly, make it searchable, shareable and measurable.

Interested in learning about additional ways to sell your college or university to prospective students? Visit our blog <http://info.cocommunications.com>

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