

Innovation



What it looks like in Higher Ed
Admissions and Marketing

There's a Problem in Higher Education

We tend to view and use our past experiences to guide the decisions we make that affect our future. Unfortunately, when we use the past as an indicator of the future, we may be paving the way for more problems than solutions. Today, Higher Education is very different than any previous time in history. We're serving a much more dynamic market, that's placing huge demands on us. Much more than in years past, timing is important. There's an immediacy to circumstances that surround us. Thus a heightened awareness of the need for **innovation**.

But There's a Solution: Innovation in Admissions and Marketing

In order to avoid the problems of the past, survive the changing times, and thrive in a new and dynamic market, we must start by innovating our Admissions and Marketing departments. Consider how innovation can be a catalyst to your Admissions and Marketing departments.



Let's begin by looking at a single innovation that can have an immediate impact on enrollment; the life blood of a private college or university.

There's a saying in the small business commercial sector that "nothing happens until something is sold." Translated for higher ed that becomes "nothing happens until a student enrolls."

We believe the single most innovative development in higher ed Admissions and Marketing is the growing trend of implementing aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing best practices and processes. With that in mind, it is the objective of this e-book to answer these four questions:

1. WHY are aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing practices and processes important to my university's future?
2. WHAT are examples of aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing practices and processes, and what do they have to offer admissions?
3. HOW can aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing processes be integrated in with your existing people, processes, and culture?
4. WHEN should you deploy and use aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing practices and processes?

If you can answer these four questions, you'll be able to innovate and launch strategies with confidence that will deliver increases in yield for your university or college.

WHY are aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing practices and processes important to your university's future?

Our marketing efforts often fall short of establishing and positioning our brand in order to gain the market share that we desire.

Advancing to meet and exceed our enrollment goals will typically require implementing proven, predictable marketing and sales processes in our Marketing and Admissions departments.



It's been proven that having predictive systems can save time and money when creating and implementing new student-recruiting and application generation campaigns. When it comes to Marketing, we recommend asking yourself, "Why do it if you can't track it?" and "Why do it and not track it?"

If you have predictive top (Marketing) and bottom (Admissions) of funnel analytics that are aligned, your school can determine and direct your Marketing spend. Additionally, by knowing your bottom of the funnel proficiency rates, you can better develop and coach your admissions counselors to produce a better yield for your school.

One of our client schools increased their yield per counselor from 78 to 142 enrolled students over the last 3 years in part because they've tracked the top and bottom of the funnel metrics, and then reacted by equipping their Marketing and Admissions teams with improved best practices/processes and technologies.

Another reason for aligning practices and processes is for the efficient and effective onboarding of new Marketing staff and Admissions counselors. As your university grows, your Admissions and Marketing departments will need to hire people to fill key positions and keep pace with your school's growth



When you have established and documented best practices and processes that new counselors are taught as a part of an orientation and training program, the new hires ramp-up quicker and are productive sooner. For example, research shows that people who are trained on their school's established sales revenues (enrollment) processes, will ramp-up 2-3 times faster than those without.

Looking at the Marketing department, when you hire new staff you'll want to orient them on: 1.) Your established content creation and publishing guidelines and standards: 2.) The criteria you use to capture, scrub and use, and data and analytics you compile; your established standards for designing, executing and reporting your marketing and email and social media campaigns. The result is quality information for both Marketing and Admissions to help achieve or exceed their inquiring application and enrollment goals.

WHAT are examples of aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing practices and processes, and what do they offer?

Aligning Admissions and Marketing results in optimized communication, a world in which your Marketing and Admissions activities are sequenced to “seed” and “feed” each other. For example, your President may ask your VP of Enrollment which lead source produces the most best-fit prospective students that eventually enroll. If you’ve implemented a closed-loop inquiry-to-enrolled Marketing and Admissions process that tracks and reports results; you can produce a report that will answer this question with little effort. This allows you to direct your marketing spend toward the most optimal lead source that yields the most enrolled students.



Another example would be establishing a thorough qualification process where all prospective students are vetted so Admissions is not wasting valuable time on potential prospects that are not, or will not be, admissible. This calls for knowing your university's value proposition, knowing who most benefits from it, what their needs are, and what venues and contexts best positions you've found and counselors to influence the most qualified prospective students.

The development and use of aligned messaging by both Marketing and Admissions is essential to establishing brand clarity and consistency. You will want everybody in your university to be saying the same things, in the same ways. This not only strengthens your university's positioning and differentiation, it can minimize misunderstanding and confusion with your target audience.

Adopting a new aligned approach and centering your Admissions and Marketing around innovation may require a complete change of strategy, a new angle if you will. Let's look at the success of George Fox University (GFU) for example.

GFU dedicated themselves to the development of, and investment in, a brand strategy, and it paid off. In total they conceived and mastered three strategies before moving forward: Brand Strategy, Sales Strategy, and Visit Strategy.

First, they identified and named a core value of the school that they centered their brand around. This does not mean they created their brand, because a brand and its differentiating value is found -- not created. Their brand existed long before they put it to words. "Be Known" is the promise they make to students which encapsulates all that the university has to offer. After strengthening their brand, they extended it to their sales and admissions strategies.

GFU, a small private school from Newberg, OR, looked at what the most well-known schools in Oregon had, that if GFU had, would increase awareness for, and of, their school. It was a football team. This worked for GFU because they were able to place their brand and their value in front of the same audiences as the other larger and more recognized brands (who had football teams) in the state.

They then decided to promote their new football program by adding outdoor advertising (billboards) to their marketing plan and strategy. Their VP for Innovation asserts that this was not solely or necessarily a “football ad” rather a much broader GFU ad with football being the *hook*. Their strategy worked so well that Sports Illustrated picked up on their story.

The third and final element of their strategy was focused entirely at home. Prospective student visits are where this strategy finds its greatest value because the entire university is involved in the Be Known promise. GFU put great effort into attracting and recruiting students from the western, particularly the northwest, region instead of trying to reach a national audience -- which, had been, and would be very expensive.

HOW can aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing processes be integrated in with your existing people, processes, and culture?

The first thing you want to do is get your new initiative blessed from the top. Start with your President, and work down. You need complete buy-in from those approving and allocating the funds for the integration and alignment effort, as well as those who will eventually select and approve the practices and processes that will be implemented. And, of course, those putting these processes into play -- Admissions and Marketing.

Next, you need one or more internal sponsors, or champions. Often, this is your VP of Enrollment or one or both of your Directors of Marketing and Admissions. What's important is that whomever champions the initiative has the commitment and passion to persevere from project start, to project finish. These people also have the opportunity and responsibility to be a role model for others to follow when it comes to practicing the new processes that you are implementing.

Third, you must relate the vision for your project to the entire university, not just the Admissions and Marketing people. You'll want to share the changes in the Admissions and Marketing departments that will affect them and their department. When it's all said and done how the rest of the university reacts to this change that may determine the overall success or failure of the initiative. Additionally, your deployment of your new practices and processes, may cause other departments to consider making changes in their own processes for things to work effectively. Obviously, if people in other departments share your new initiative's vision they are more likely to embrace and cooperate with the changes that are required of them. Far too often we see people working in "silos" and thinking "that's not my job." Each person needs to be in a position where they are ready to commit to the cause and work together, even inter-departmentally. We call this "full-campus involvement."

An example of full-campus involvement is how your professors, or any other faculty, contribute to student visits. Are they representing your mindfully defined brand? Are they saying the right things at the right time? Is their communication in line with the new strategies? You'll want all the answers to these questions to be "yes." When students walk away, they should remember the visit and university as one that was cohesive in brand, identity, values, and purpose.

Fourth, create a document that describes your current state and your future desired state. It will be like a blueprint or schematic of your current practices and processes as well as the new ones you want to integrate. We call this document your Enrollment Process Map. It is a living document that guides your initiative. It's edited and updated frequently to reflect any new ideas and changes that are made.



Finally, invest in your people. Provide them the time and training they need to succeed at accepting and integrating the new practices and processes into their departments and individual jobs. When you invest in your people you will see the principle of sowing and reaping fulfilled within your school.



WHEN should you deploy and use aligned, value-based, consultive sales and marketing practices/processes?

Finally, after understanding **why** aligned value-based strategies should be implemented, **what** they look like, and **how** to do so, you can figure out **when** best to integrate these new strategies into your school.

At any point in time a university can be in one of three modes: Trouble, Even Keel, or Growth.

Trouble -- Enrollment and tuition revenues are down. When your school is in Trouble mode you are motivated by the need to do something different because what you are doing isn't working. Unfortunately, because tuition revenues are down, this is not the best time to be spending money. However, if you don't make the investment now then your enrollment may continue to decline.



Assuming you have tested some of your new desired practices and processes and are confident they will produce the results you want, this may be the best investment you can make at this time. Even if you have to shift some funds from one budget to another, or tap into your line of credit, it's recommended that you consider making the investment now.

Even Keel -- Enrollment and tuition revenues are stable. When your university is in Even Keel mode things are going along smoothly. Prospective student admits are normal. Some months your numbers are up and some they are down, but overall they are pretty steady.

There's no pressing need to do anything different. Our experience has been that if there's no urgent need for change, unless your university's culture is very proactive, you're in danger of falling into the trap of "*Waiting until things go south before we act*" - which is the previous category: TROUBLE. Although you're not likely to act, assuming you have time and money to do so, this could be the best time to invest in a new initiative.

Growth -- Enrollment and tuition revenues are up. When you are in Growth mode, your university's yield rate is high, or trending up. Generally speaking things are good, however, people and processes are being stretched to keep up with demands, pace, and expectations of your university's leaders. The fact that cash reserves and cash flow may be at their highest level doesn't necessarily mean this is the best time to invest in a new initiative. What you don't want is those people (Marketing and Admissions), that are in direct or indirect revenue producing positions to take their eye off the ball. You want them fully engaged in their respective work, to sustain the momentum you've been experiencing as you take your school to the next level.

Looking at these three modes, we can see that there are pros and cons to each. Is one of the modes better than the others when it comes to the right time for change? If push comes to shove, we would put them in the following order:

1. Even Keel

2. Trouble

3. Growth

We believe the best mode from which to invest is the Even Keel mode. It allows you to prioritize your school's needs so you have the necessary time and resources to research, decide, fund, and implement a new Marketing and Admissions initiatives. We put the Trouble mode second because if you do not act now, you may not have a second chance.

Additionally, as alluded to earlier, if you do not act in the Even Keel mode, given the state of higher education today, you're likely to end up in the Trouble mode. Circumstances may be such that it's critical for you to find the necessary resources to do the work now. The Third mode is Growth.

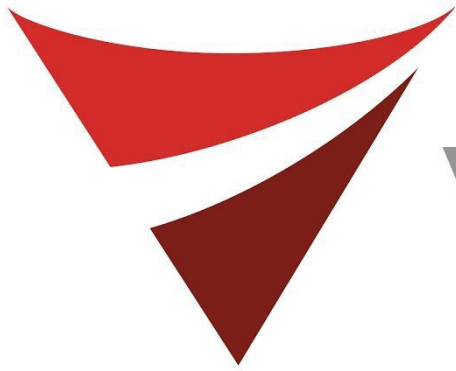
This mode is listed last because when you are in a period of expansion, you want all hands on deck to market, sell, admit, and enroll all the students you can. You want and need both your Marketing and Admissions team's full attention and band-width to execute your enrollment-increasing best practices and processes.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

If your school would like to increase your yield and tuition revenues, send us an email at info@valuebased.com, or give us a call at 1-800-597-1873.

We're ready when you are. "At Value Based, we're focused on maximizing the Admissions and Marketing functions of your school. When both departments are aligned and function as one, they're more likely to achieve your tuition revenue goals. It's an aligned value based sales and marketing initiative that will make the difference for your school."

If you'd like to learn more about Value Based and our approach to helping colleges and universities improve their yield, please check out our website to learn why some of our new client schools have increased their yield from 20% to 50% over the last three years. It's our people, promotion, processes, and presence that will help you achieve yours.



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