Four Pillars of Higher Ed Enrollment Marketing

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Advance Education is excited to present this valuable resource for education marketing professionals. This informative guide offers actionable insights and strategies, drawing from our extensive industry experience and data-informed approach. Designed specifically for marketing executives in colleges and universities, the white paper provides the tools needed to navigate and succeed in today's dynamic educational landscape.

These pillars encompass the essential components of higher education enrollment marketing, from laying the groundwork to ongoing refinement and improvement. Each pillar represents a critical stage in the process of attracting and retaining students at colleges and universities. By examining these pillar strategies, readers can make informed decisions, in consideration of their existing strategies, to unlock their institution's full enrollment potential and achieve unparalleled success.

PILLAR 1: FOUNDATION
Laying the Ground Work

In today's highly competitive higher education landscape, an institution's success relies heavily on its ability to effectively market itself and stand out from the crowd. In Pillar 1, we will review the key tenants for colleges and universities to establish a solid foundation:

- **BRAND IDENTITY**
- **MARKET INTELLEGENCE**
- **STRATEGIC GOALS**
- **BUDGET & RESOURCE PLANNING**
- **MARKETING TECHNOLOGY & INTEGRATION**

Your Brand: Define and Refine Institutional Identity and Value Proposition

Before diving into enrollment marketing strategies, it is crucial for colleges and universities to clearly define their institutional identity and value proposition. Your brand serves as the foundation upon which all marketing efforts are built. It is the unique and compelling story that sets your institution apart from others and resonates with your target audience.

To refine your brand, conduct thorough internal and external research to identify what makes your institution special. This includes understanding your core values, strengths, and unique offerings. By aligning your brand with your institution's mission and values, you create a cohesive and authentic representation that appeals to prospective students. Internal stakeholders must reach consensus so that the entire institution can project the identity and values every day.

A 2023 SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUDES:

"The race to the top of the global leaderboard of higher educational institutions should rest upon the ability to effectively develop brand name recognition and reputation, be it a national or international university."

Heliyon, June 2023

A recent Advance Education client campaign, delivering a consistent level of impressions month-to-month, now garners
65% greater ad engagement
resulting from a focus on brand messaging and campaign optimizations.

Leverage Comprehensive Market Intelligence to Inform Strategy

To effectively market your institution, it is essential to have a deep understanding of the competitive landscape and the needs, preferences, and behaviors of your target audience. Comprehensive market intelligence provides valuable insights that inform your marketing strategy and enable you to develop targeted and impactful campaigns.

Market research, including competitor analysis, allows you to identify gaps in the market and uncover opportunities for differentiation. By recognizing what competitors are doing well and where they fall short, you can position your institution strategically to meet the needs of prospective students more effectively. Understanding the market landscape through competitor analysis can be a game-changer for your marketing strategies.

Research by McKinsey & Company emphasizes that organizations that effectively utilize customer analytics are **23 times more likely** to outperform their competitors.

Set Strategic Goals and Measurable Objectives Supported by Data and Analytics

Strategic goals are the roadmap that guides your enrollment marketing efforts. These goals should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. By setting clear objectives, you ensure that your team is aligned and working towards a common purpose.

Data and analytics play a pivotal role in setting these goals and measuring progress. By leveraging data, you can gain insights into the effectiveness of your marketing initiatives, identify areas for improvement, and make data-driven decisions to optimize your strategy.

A report by Salesforce reveals that organizations that set clear, data-driven marketing goals are 376% more likely to report success than those without well-defined objectives. This highlights the transformative impact of data-driven goal setting.

Create a Budget and Resource Plan That Reflect Your Strategic Goals and Measurable Objectives

To bring your enrollment marketing strategy to life, it is crucial to allocate resources efficiently and effectively. A well-defined budget and resource plan ensures that you have the necessary tools, staffing, and funding to execute your strategic goals.

When creating a budget, consider the specific needs of your marketing initiatives, such as digital advertising, content creation, brand development and technology.

The American Marketing Association's research underscores the correlation between strategic budget allocation and marketing effectiveness, revealing that organizations that align their budgets with strategic goals experience a 25% increase in overall marketing performance.

Ensure Your Technology Will Support the Marketing Objectives

In the digital age, technology plays a critical role in delivering personalized and targeted marketing messages to prospective students. It is essential to evaluate your technology infrastructure to ensure that it supports your marketing objectives.

A key component of this technological infrastructure is the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The right CRM system allows you to effectively manage and nurture relationships with prospective students throughout their decision journey. Choosing a CRM system that meets the unique needs of your institution ensures seamless communication and personalized experiences for prospective students.

Tracking lead data from digital marketing campaigns in an Advance Education client's CRM enabled deeper analysis and optimizations, resulting in a 69% decrease in cost per lead for a recent campaign.

Ensure Integration Between Your CRM and Other Relevant Systems

To maximize efficiency and streamline processes, it is crucial to ensure integration between your CRM and other relevant systems, such as the Student Information System (SIS) and ad management platforms.

Integration between these systems allows for seamless data sharing and automation, allowing you to track and analyze the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns accurately. This integration also enhances your ability to provide personalized experiences and targeted communications to prospective students, promoting engagement and conversion.

A study by Gartner found institutions that carefully integrate their CRM systems with other relevant technologies witness:

36% increase in marketing efficiency

43% rise in customer engagement
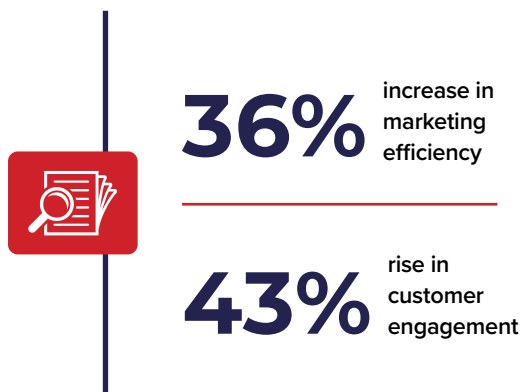
This showcases the tangible benefits of synchronized technology infrastructure.

Colleges and universities can enhance their enrollment marketing efforts and position themselves for success in today's competitive landscape by establishing a solid foundation through:

- Defining your brand
- Leveraging comprehensive market intelligence
- Setting strategic goals supported by data
- Ensuring you have the right technology infrastructure

PILLAR 2: **CAMPAIGN PREP**
Audience Development and Segmentation

In today's dynamic and evolving landscape, the ability to deeply understand, segment, and engage with potential students is paramount to the success of any educational institution.

Conduct Comprehensive Intelligence Analysis

Leveraging both qualitative and quantitative data, institutions can uncover a full audience perspective. This includes essential demographics, behaviors, interests, preferences, and other pertinent factors that shape the decision-making process of prospective students.

Audience Segmentation and CRM Integration

Integrating digital marketing campaign data into an educational institution's CRM system can lead to significant improvements in enrollment marketing effectiveness.

Educational institutions can gain insights into student preferences, behaviors, and interactions across multiple touchpoints. This integrated approach allows institutions to personalize communication, tailor marketing efforts, and ultimately increase student engagement and enrollment rates.

Recent studies by industry experts (J. Smith & R. Johnson, 2021) show that institutions effectively using qualitative and quantitative data experienced marked improvement in audience engagement and enrollment, highlighting the pivotal role of intelligence analysis in shaping successful marketing strategies.

Interpreting the wealth of data obtained through intelligence analysis, institutions are better equipped to construct detailed audience personas and profiles. This approach enables marketers to understand their audience on a granular level and tailor their messaging to resonate with specific demographic segments, thus increasing the likelihood of meaningful engagement and conversion.

Tailored Messaging
Armed with comprehensive data, marketing teams can create personalized and relevant messaging that resonates with different segments of their audience.

Effective Campaigns
By understanding behaviors, interests, and preferences, institutions can design targeted campaigns that yield better results.

Improved ROI
Focused efforts lead to better resource allocation, ultimately improving return on investment (ROI).

Recent campaigns for Advance Education clients have demonstrated the tangible impact of audience segmentation on enrollment outcomes. Utilizing targeted segmentation strategies, such as personalizing communication based on the preferences and behaviors of distinct audience segments, institutions have witnessed a substantial uplift in their conversion rates and overall enrollment figures. These results showcase the real-world effectiveness of leveraging analysis insights to drive audience segmentation and its direct correlation to positive outcomes in enrollment marketing.

For example, this Advance Education client experienced noticeable shifts in 2024 (red line) with more prospective students starting applications moving through to application completion compared to previous years.

Completed Applications: Term Over Term

NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS

MONTHLY TREND

SUMMER YEAR 1   SUMMER YEAR 2   SUMMER YEAR 3
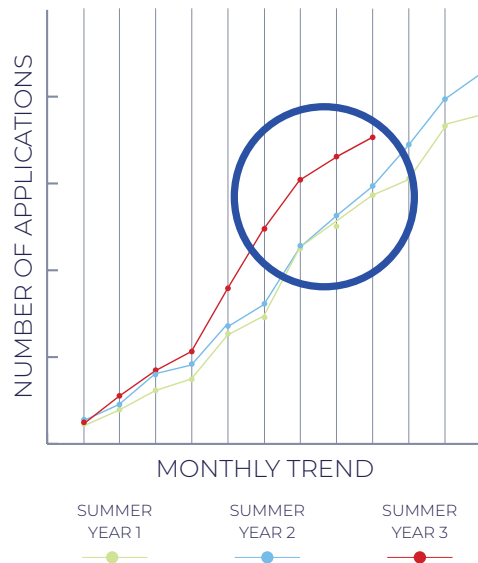
By conducting robust intelligence analysis and applying the resulting insights to craft targeted audience personas and segmentation, colleges and universities can significantly enhance their marketing efforts, foster meaningful connections with potential students, and ultimately drive higher enrollment rates.

A review of various recent surveys shed light on the changing preferences of today's prospective students. The data reveals a growing emphasis on personalized communication and tailored experiences, indicating a significant shift towards audience-centric marketing strategies in the higher education sector. Institutions that align their marketing efforts with these evolving preferences stand to gain a competitive edge and drive meaningful engagement with their target audiences.

PILLAR 3: LAUNCH
Engage and Nurture Relationships

Engaging and nurturing relationships with prospective students is crucial for successful enrollment marketing in a highly competitive landscape. Institutions must design marketing strategies that align with specific audience segments, consider every stage of the funnel, and ensure each stage is set up with detailed campaign tracking for optimization.

- **STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH AUDIENCE SEGMENTS**
- **CONSIDER THE STUDENT JOURNEY**
- **ACHIEVE OPTIMAL REACH**
- **CAMPAIGN TRACKING**

Design Strategies Aligned with Audience Segments

Designing marketing strategies aligned with audience segments is critical for educational institutions to engage prospective students effectively and drive enrollment. Different audience segments have unique preferences, needs, and behaviors, so tailoring marketing strategies to address these specific characteristics can enhance your institution's appeal and resonate with your segmented audiences. For example:

Traditional Undergraduate Students

Develop specific marketing strategies to attract high school graduates by highlighting campus life, diverse extracurricular activities, and academic programs tailored to their interests.

Non-Traditional or Adult Learners

For working professionals or adults looking to further their education, create targeted marketing campaigns emphasizing flexible class schedules, online learning options, career advancement opportunities, and support services geared toward non-traditional students.

Graduate and Professional Programs

Develop specialized marketing approaches for graduate and professional programs, focusing on research opportunities, industry partnerships, and career-specific outcomes relevant to these advanced degree seekers.

Consider The Entire Student Journey

Considering every stage of the marketing funnel helps in maximizing the effectiveness of enrollment marketing campaigns. Top-of-funnel marketing is important in supporting and maintaining lower-funnel conversions. Eduventures, a higher-ed blog, notes that a Top-of-Funnel campaign can yield 3x more leads than a Bottom-of-Funnel campaign, as some prospects may be earlier in the enrollment journey.

DOWNLOAD
Advance Education's
Layered Display white paper.

Achieve Optimal Reach

To attract best-fit prospects for your school, marketing campaigns should be grounded in strategies designed to deliver optimal reach. Don't simply strive for volume. Rather, strive to reach those prospects that are most likely to be attracted to your school and to matriculate. A good example is narrowcasting — a targeted messaging approach that can improve enrollment marketing efficacy. It involves high-frequency, targeted messaging with strong calls-to-action, and can be used to amplify the impact of different marketing campaigns.

Additionally, Advance Education's unique and effective Layered Display strategy can be applied to both display and video advertising. This approach effectively targets an audience in stages, impacting and influencing the most relevant prospects as they research schools, develop deeper interest, and ultimately make decisions.

Campaign Tracking

Proper campaign tracking is essential in understanding the preliminary results of different campaigns. With a baseline for the success or failure of each campaign, optimization at each stage in the funnel becomes possible. By linking a brand marketing budget to lead generation and enrollments, institutions can justify to their leadership a case for more spend in brand awareness. Studies indicate that an increase in brand awareness corresponds to an increase in enrollment.

This chart demonstrates how an Advance Education client's weekly application submissions increased or decreased in direct correlation to a change in the campaign's previous week branding focused impressions.

Trend in Weekly Layered Display Branding Focused Impressions vs Resulting Web Leads Following Week

	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9
WEEK 2	+33% impressions	+22% web leads						
WEEK 3		+7% impressions	+13% web leads					
WEEK 4			-8% impressions	-12% web leads				
WEEK 5				-21% impressions	-1% web leads			
WEEK 6					-12% impressions	-11% web leads		
WEEK 7						-3% impressions	-2% web leads	
WEEK 8							+4% impressions	+16% web leads

PILLAR 4: OPTIMIZATION
Continuous Analysis and Adjustment

The only constant in life and business is change. The ability to adapt and evolve is critical for sustained success. By delving into the metrics and employing strategic optimization, colleges and universities can secure a competitive advantage, can boost efficiency and effectiveness over time and improve ROI.

- **ANALYZE DATA FOR MEASURING SUCCCESS**
- **LEVERAGE A/B TESTING FOR CONVERSION OPTIMIZATION**
- **ADAPT TO EVOLVING DIGITAL MARKETING TECHNOLOGIES**
- **EMBRACE DATA-FOCUSED DECISION-MAKING**

Analyze Data for Measuring Success

An important aspect of continuous analysis and optimization is a deep dive into the data generated from marketing campaigns and strategies. The ability to dissect and interpret this data provides valuable insights into the performance of marketing efforts, allowing for strategic adjustments to be made based on empirical evidence, often in real time.

According to a survey conducted by Inside Higher Ed, 68% of higher education marketers consider data analysis as the most important aspect of their jobs.

"2020 Survey of College and University Admissions Officers," Inside Higher Ed.

Leverage A/B Testing for Conversion Optimization

Statistical A/B testing offers an invaluable tool for improving conversion rates. The ability to systematically test and validate different iterations of marketing materials and strategies empowers higher education institutions to make informed decisions regarding the most effective ways to engage and convert prospective students.

A study by Harvard Business Review revealed that companies implementing A/B testing experienced a significant uplift in conversion rates, ranging from 70% to 100%.

"A Study of Conversion Rate Optimization Practices and Their Effectiveness," Harvard Business Review

Adapt to Evolving Digital Marketing Technologies

Technological progress is perpetual, and remaining current with the latest digital marketing technologies is key. By embracing evolving and innovative digital platforms and methodologies, institutions can foster a culture of continuous improvement and increased effectiveness in their marketing efforts, ensuring that their engagement with prospective students is both progressive and resonates in the dynamic digital landscape.

Hanover Research found that 82% of higher education decision-makers emphasize the importance of staying ahead of the curve with respect to digital marketing technologies to remain competitive in the higher education landscape.

"The Future of Enrollment Management," Hanover Research.

Embrace Data-Focused Decision-Making

Integrating the results of continuous analysis and optimization back into the institution's database (SIS, CRM etc.) makes way for strategic, ongoing improvement.

A report from Hobsons indicated that institutions that prioritize data analytics in their decision-making processes are 3.5 times more likely to see an increase in student applications and enrollments.

"Improving Higher Education Enrollment and Success," Hobsons

By fostering a culture where decisions are informed by data-driven insights, educational institutions can set themselves on a trajectory of continual responsive adaptation to the evolving needs and expectations of their prospective students.

This positive cycle of advancement represents a cornerstone of effective enrollment marketing within the higher education sector. Utilizing data, feedback, testing, and technology in a cyclical and refined approach, institutions can position themselves for sustained success in their recruitment and retention efforts.

CONCLUSION

We encourage you to embrace opportunities for continuous improvement and refinement of your existing strategies. This self-evaluation checklist is not just a tool but can be a catalyst for transformative thinking. It's designed to dovetail with the insights and methodologies outlined in this document, ensuring that you can effectively assess and enhance your institution's marketing endeavors.

Remember, the landscape of higher education enrollment marketing is ever evolving, and so should your strategies. By regularly revisiting your approach and utilizing this checklist, you can identify opportunities, bridge gaps, and elevate your marketing efforts.

PILLAR 1: STRONG FOUNDATION	A+ GRADE	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK
1. Your Brand: Define and Refine Institutional Identity and Value Proposition			
2. Leverage Comprehensive Market Intelligence to Inform Strategy			
3. Set Strategic Goals and Measurable Objectives Supported by Data and Analytics			
4. Create a Budget and Resource Plan that Reflects Strategic Goals and Measurable Objectives			
5. Ensure Your Technology Will Support the Marketing Objectives			
6. Ensure Integration between Your CRM and Other Relevant Systems			
PILLAR 2: AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT & SEGMENTATION	A+ GRADE	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK
1. Conduct Comprehensive Intelligence Analysis			
2. Audience Segmentation and CRM Integration			
PILLAR 3: ENGAGE & NUTURE RELATIONSHIPS	A+ GRADE	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK
1. Design Strategies Aligned with Audience Segments			
2. Value the Entire Student Journey			
3. Achieve Optimal Reach			
4. Campaign Tracking			
PILLAR 4: CONTINUOUS ANALYSIS & OPTIMIZATION	A+ GRADE	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	DOG ATE MY HOMEWORK
1. Analyze Data for Measuring Success			
2. Leverage A/B Testing for Conversion Optimization			
3. Adapt to Evolving Digital Marketing Technologies			
4. Embrace Data-Focused Decision-Making			

We're enrollment marketing experts and we're here to help.

Advance Education is a digital marketing agency specializing in enrollment marketing for higher education, community colleges, and vocational schools. Through partnerships with traditional four-year universities, community colleges, and technical and career schools, we help institutions level up marketing strategies for student recruitment, as well as alumni outreach.

1 Market intelligence and student assessments help us build the perfect targets for your enrollment goals.

2 Creative that connects, intrigues and inspires fuels the science of marketing strategy.

3 Never-satisfied, results-oriented optimization is what keeps our campaigns on top, delivering continuous ROI aligned with your goals.

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I am very satisfied with our partnership with Advance Education... Their willingness to contribute to the success of our campaign has been a substantial asset... **Their expertise has been invaluable in the success of our marketing endeavors.**

JAI PATEL
Digital Marketing Manager
Pacific School of Religion

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Email us at **EnrollmentConsult@AdvanceEducation.com**.

Read more about our work with institutions like yours at **www.AdvanceEducation.com**