digital marketing institute

How To Create A Digital Strategy That Attracts Students

Personas, website, mobile, digital channels, measurement, content, paid search, cutting-edge technologies, alignment.

With 3.5 billion people connected online today, it's no surprise that technology is an integral part of our lives. We look to Google for answers to our questions, and Facebook to crowdsource shared public opinion. In fact, 67% of consumers are influenced by online reviews when purchasing goods and services.

This compels brands to compete with each other for consumer attention through a variety of strategies across multiple channels and platforms to attract organic traffic with the hopes of increasing conversion.

But, this strategy is not limited to consumer brands. Educators in colleges, universities, and training providers must understand the value and importance of digital marketing as part of an enrollment strategy in order to establish an online presence on the platforms that matter most.

In this eBook, we explore 9 ways to use digital to attract and engage students to drive enrollments.

1. Define personas

The key to a successful digital strategy is understanding the makeup of an audience. Identifying key personas and what motivates them will help you devise a strategy that hits an audience's pain points and craft messaging that drives engagement.

Carrying out research through data analytics and social media along with conducting polls and surveys through digital channels will help to find out where your audience engages and what content they are interested in will enable you to identify multiple personas.

Once identified, the key is to segment them into personas with details that are unique to that group such as demographics, goals and challenges, job types of interest, companies followed on social media, digital channels used etc.

A type of living bio, these personas should be revised and updated as new information comes to light or new ones emerge as market conditions change.

2. Invest in a world-class website

It may seem obvious, but the first thing a student will probably search for online is your website. In fact, according to research, 80% of college-bound students agree that websites influence their decision more than any other resource.

Therefore it's crucial to create a user-friendly, informative and optimized website that is visually appealing and responsive. Tracking data on an ongoing basis will help to understand how and where students engage so you can refine and optimize a website to provide content and solutions visitors want.

In addition, incorporating real-time personalization will enable you to build a profile of a visitor based on the content they engage with. These profiles can help you target visitors more effectively and enhance the user experience.
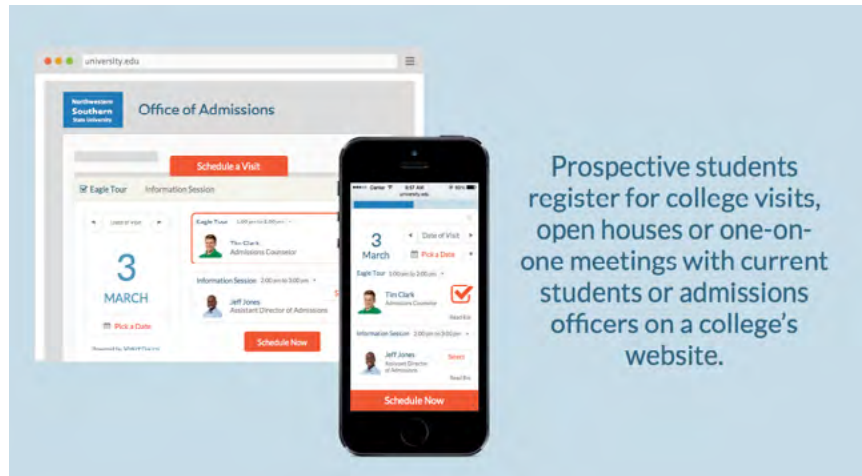
77% of students want their schools to use personal information to make their college experiences better

- edtechmagazine.com

3. Integrate Mobile

In an era where students are brought up on technology and the smartphone has a ubiquitous presence, it's essential to make mobile an integral part of a digital strategy.

Increasingly students use mobile devices during the discovery phase of seeking out courses or programs while the majority make their first visit to websites on their mobile devices, and significant proportions apply using a phone. Statistics show that in 2016 alone, 43% of all worldwide website traffic was generated via mobile devices.

Prospective students register for college visits, open houses or one-on-one meetings with current students or admissions officers on a college's website.

Apps such as visitdays can help create a personalized experience for prospective students. Once registered to come on something such as an open day, the app uses emails and text messages to provide information on where students should go and who to meet. It can also help cancel or reschedule as and when needed.

This automated and personalized approach takes the work out of the registration process but enables tracking and keeps communication open from point zero.

61% of users are unlikely to return to a mobile site if they have trouble accessing information, with 40% visiting a competitors instead

– McKinsey & Co

4. Research Effective Digital Channels

More than 50% of college students use search engines to discover higher education institutes, while 16–24-year-olds now spend an average of nearly 2 and a half hours on social media each day.

The key to engaging with a marketplace is knowing the digital channels they use. With a range of digital channels on offer, research is required to figure out where and how your target audience engages online. Each channel has its pros and cons and knowing those will help identify the right channels. For example:

• **Visuals** –Snapchat is very popular amongst the younger generation it attracts serious content creators and is becoming a powerful ad platform while Pinterest thrives on quality imagery and with 100 million active users it is a platform with some teeth.

Baylor University
Baylor University's presence on Pinterest is packed with all sorts of items that prospective students, as well as current students and alumni, would find interesting.
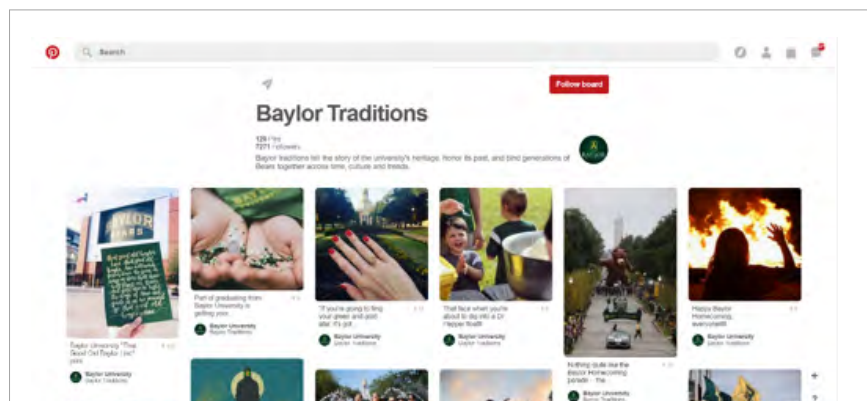
Their Baylor Traditions page is a great example which showcases the university's most tried and true traditions. Light is shed on highly-anticipated annual events including homecoming, "Dr Pepper Hour", All University Sing, and much more. This board shows what makes Baylor different from any other school and will prove handy to any students trying to differentiate Baylor from competitors.

- **Targeting** – In recent years Facebook has lost the attention of teens and millennials as they move to platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram. However, with over 1.65 billion users, it has huge reach and can be used effectively to segment and target personas.

University of Nevada

At the University of Nevada, Facebook was used creatively to tap into the legacy and history of the institution. By featuring a profile of a student from 1916, they managed to not only show their creativity as an academic institution but also received worldwide press coverage to promote the university itself.

This campaign goes to show standard campaign ideas, such as photo contests will easily be outdone by universities who dig a little deeper and come up with something that stands out from the crowd.

- **Real-time** – With 310 million active monthly users, Twitter is a powerful driver of engagement and can enable educators to communicate quickly with potential and existing students by providing solutions to problems quickly and effectively. As a network, it is very effective as a content sharer rather than lead generation.

University of Glasgow

The University of Glasgow is the fourth-oldest university in the English-speaking world and one of Scotland's four ancient higher education institutes. The key to their success on Twitter is the use of a conversational style. Rather than taking a dry, corporate approach to the content it shares on the platform, it uses humor and creativity to speak to its target audience.

One of the most notable things about their Twitter feed is the fact that it tweets about their followers and their lives - something that, while it seems straightforward, many educators fail to accomplish well on the platform.

- **B2B platform** - LinkedIn is a unique social network as it blurs the lines between being a knowledge-sharing platform and a relationship-building tool. Similar to Facebook, it can be used to effectively build a community, but also to reach new prospects.

University of Texas

On LinkedIn, the University of Texas Austin shares professional-oriented items involving its staff, faculty, students and alumni. Their company page is populated with posts that focus on careers and skills alongside more light-hearted and accessible articles recommending books to read for the summer. Overall the general vibe of their page is a pride in the University and its students.
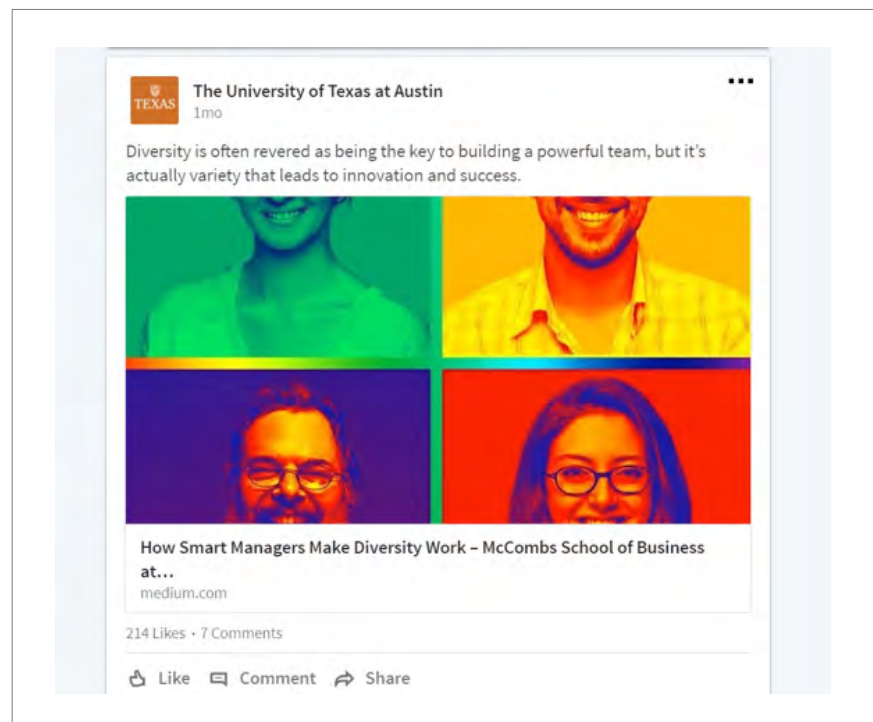
Whatever platform matches your needs, it's best to figure out all the viable online paths of driving enrollment and assess the metrics to adapt as required to make the most of each platform.

5. Measure & Report

Measurement and reporting are crucial to any form of marketing. Assessing, measuring, and reviewing the performance of campaigns can help you identify the effective activities and modify those that prove ineffective. When testing different variables measure their impacts and knock on affects with reporting.

To begin, set a benchmark to which you can make a comparison. Metrics that you can track and report through tools such as Google Analytics and social network analytics (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) include:

- Budgets
- Website Performance
- Organic traffic
- New vs. Repeat Visitors
- Channels
- Leads
- CPL – Cost Per Lead /No. of Days vs. No. of Leads
- Content
- Views/shares/downloads etc.

6. Curate and Create content

Every minute online sees 3.3 million Facebook posts, 29 million Whatsapp messages and 3.8 million Google searches. This overload of content means that people have a wealth of information at their fingertips to inform decisions. To cut through the glut, you will need to create and curate content that is of interest to your target audience.

Creating relevant and informative content such as blogs, videos and eBooks or whitepapers will not only establish your institution as an influencer, it will drive traffic to your website. Producing new pages continuously with meaningful content will help the ranking of your website on search engines. The result: more people will see your content and brand.

In addition, sharing third party content will demonstrate thought leadership and with time and careful curation help establish you as a trusted content source. Content can be from a range of sources such as niche education publications or mass media and formats such as long form articles to short videos. Using content from existing students such as guest blogs or videos can also go a long way to engaging prospective students.

7. Understand and Experiment With Paid Search

Experimenting with paid media or native advertising can help expand reach, increase brand awareness, page views and student lead flow. Trialing different platforms can also reveal where students spend their time.

70% of users prefer to learn about products through content versus traditional advertising. As such brands are using native advertising to provide more relevant messaging, increase engagement, create word of mouth and generate awareness.


Educators can use this fact to their advantage by creating ads that are targeted and drive traffic. Take New Jersey Institute of Technology who uses Facebook's sponsored ads to target users and showcase their MBA program. These type of ads can be successful as they are visual, unobtrusive and relevant with a clear call-to-action.

8. Consider Cutting-Edge Technologies

Why not go the extra mile and consider ways of integrating technology into your marketing strategy? For example, virtual reality (VR) can be used to create a compelling documentary showing campus life, student interaction, and state-of-the-art infrastructure. This creates an immersive experience and lets prospective students visualize and internalize the entire process.
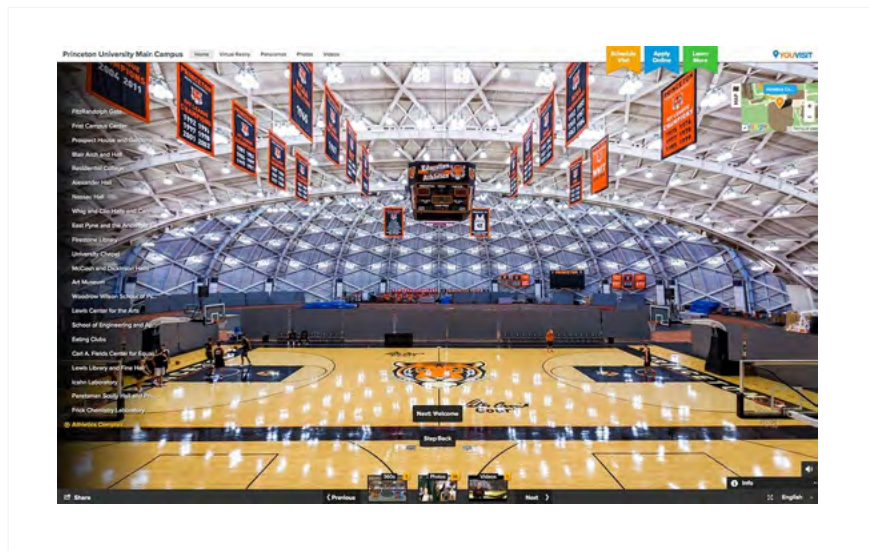
Take Princeton as an example, known as a university that attracts an international pool of students, they use VR to cater to the needs of students across the world. By making their VR tour available in many languages from English to Korean to Mandarin, students visiting online can participate and understand the tour. The tour includes 23-stops to enjoy the views, photos and videos of take the enhanced tour with VR glasses combined with a phone.

9. Align Offline with Online

While brochures and flyers may seem outdated in the digital realm, they still have their place in both information provision and brand awareness. The way to make these assets work is to integrate an offline strategy with an online one.

For example, a Snapchat ad campaign could promote a college fair to drive online visitors to an offline site. Likewise, prospects passing by a college fair could pick up a flier with a website or social media link. QR codes are particularly effective in merging online with offline and can be used on banners and outdoor advertising to link to a social media account.
The upside is that by combining online and offline strategies together will enable you to merge marketing activities to feed into a sales funnel.

Digital has proven its worth as a way to boost brand awareness and engagement amongst customers and students alike. This eBook will help you to make the most of the digital channels on offer as a recruitment tool by expanding reach and mindshare to the people that matter.