Methodology for Identifying Key Influencers

To capture the attention of prospective students who are not actively shopping for education, institutions must first find them on the web when they may be open to learning about professional options. For example, this may occur when they are reading about new industry trends or checking in with their LinkedIn groups. Follow the steps below to identify the external entities, including blogs, social media groups, and professional organizations that are highly influential in the field you are selling an educational product. These steps can be completed as a one-time project (likely stretching over the course of a week), but many prefer to track key influencers over the course of several months.

Case Study: Using an Influencer to Increase Applications

Ohio State University's Fischer College of Business describes a successful case of identifying and utilizing an influencer. A combination of strategic Google Alerts and surveys of current and admitted students led the Fischer College to a blogger who was considered a go-to source of information on business master's programs and who had briefly discussed their new master's program. The Fischer College provided him with more information about the program as well as direct access to ask questions. The blogger, unaccustomed to this level of attention and professional courtesy, was happy to relay the information to his readers. The Fischer College estimates that it received a few dozen applications from individuals who read the program description and endorsement provided by this blogger.

Process Overview

Gather → Make Cuts Based on Authority → Rank Based on Signal Amplification Value → Allocate Influencer Cultivation

Process Step-by-Step

Step 1: Gather

Search for…
- Blogs
- Articles
- Social media posts

→

…To Find:
- Blog authors
- Journalists
- Social media super users
- Professional organizations

Use: search engines, Google Alerts (see Tool #12 for more information), listening tools, etc.

Record:
- ❑ Date
- ❑ Source
- ❑ Author

- ❑ Subject
- ❑ # of comments
- ❑ # of followers / readers

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Step 2: **Make Cuts Based on Authority**	**Remove** any entries that seem insufficiently influential. Warning signs include: ✗ Having an unprofessional or sparse bio ✗ Having very few comments (check for repeat commenters and author comments that could add false volume) ✗ Having low-quality comments (e.g., off-topic, spam, relatives, etc.—essentially not the type of people you envision enrolling in your program) ✗ Having a small readership ✗ Copying another source's content—unless their copy draws a lot of quality comments

Step 3:

Rank Based on Signal Amplification Value

Determine how powerful an influencer the source is. A source is influential if it has some or all of the following:

Attribute	Method of Measuring
Active readership / following	Calculate the ratio of comments to posts
Extensive readership / following	Record # of followers or best guess at size of readership (Alexa.com is one resource that can give an estimate for the site as a whole)
High-fit readership / following	Rate how often the site seems to be speaking to your target market specifically (i.e., does it do so consistently or is its coverage one-off)

Rank each entry based on the above three attributes

Sum all rankings for each entry to come to a composite ranking

Arrange the entries in ascending order of composite ranking

Step 4:
Allocate Influencer Cultivation

Assign influencers to staff for cultivation. Use Tool # 9 for specific guidelines on developing cross-linkages with each type of influencer (blogger, social media group, and professional organization)

Task one staff person with the responsibility of revisiting this process every six to eight months to refresh the list.

Meet as a team once every six or so months to conduct an informal meta-analysis of the list to ascertain whether certain influencers or types of influencers are most valuable (i.e., yield more viable prospects, help convert existing prospects, etc.).