



Voices from the Field

5 Current Challenges in Enrollment Marketing and Communications

Enrollment Management Forum
Marketing and Recruiting Effectiveness Center

About This Briefing

In June 2018, the Marketing and Recruiting Effectiveness Center (MREC) convened several cohorts of enrollment marketing and communications (M&C) professionals to share their challenges, explore top trends in the field, and discuss significant changes impacting their work.

This briefing is a synthesis of the five most pressing issues that emerged across this series of conversations. These challenges surfaced across member institutions of all sizes, selectivity levels, and geographical locations. The MREC team will use these member-generated top issues to guide our forthcoming research agenda.

This briefing is just one of a suite of resources MREC has produced to serve your enrollment teams. For access to our entire library, visit eab.com/mrec

Use This Briefing to:

- Shed light on current trends in enrollment M&C
- Educate other campus constituents about key challenges and needs of M&C at your institution and across the field
- Share questions with your team for departmental consideration
- Identify early solutions to common problems

Inside This Briefing

5 Current Challenges in Enrollment Marketing and Communications

1 Designing a Digital-First Strategy
Many institutions treat digital activities as add-ons rather than a core component of their strategy, making their digital marketing disorganized and less effective.

2 Creating Effective Personalization
Institutions are struggling to navigate resource and privacy concerns while meeting expectations students now have for personalization and high-touch engagement.

3 Adopting an Inbound Marketing Methodology
Schools must draw student interest online with compelling, relevant content that encourages them to engage digitally and come directly to the school for more information.

4 Making Data-Driven Decisions
Using data and analytics is a hot topic, but it is hard to identify the *right* analyses, the *right* data, and the *right* ways to translate insight to action.

5 Streamlining Communications
When individual teams or offices outreach independently, or when similar messages are duplicated across campus, prospects are likely to be overwhelmed and/or confused.

Many institutions treat digital activities as add-ons rather than a core component of their strategy, making their digital marketing activities disorganized and less effective.

Institutions Need a Comprehensive Digital-First Strategy

All institutions have digital elements in their marketing and communication plan, but few can articulate a fully formed digital strategy. Digital capabilities are often tacked on to the fringes of existing marketing activity. However, M&C teams recognize the need for a digital-first strategy, both to keep up with the pace of change in this space and to better tie digital and online efforts to the core marketing and recruiting strategy of the institution. Members expressed that internal resistance to significant change or campus-wide slowness to adapt to digital needs regardless of division were the main roadblocks to implementing digital-first initiatives.

Digital Strategy Should Inform All Marketing Activities



72% of executives identify overcoming **internal resistance** as a primary hurdle to embedding digital-first culture.

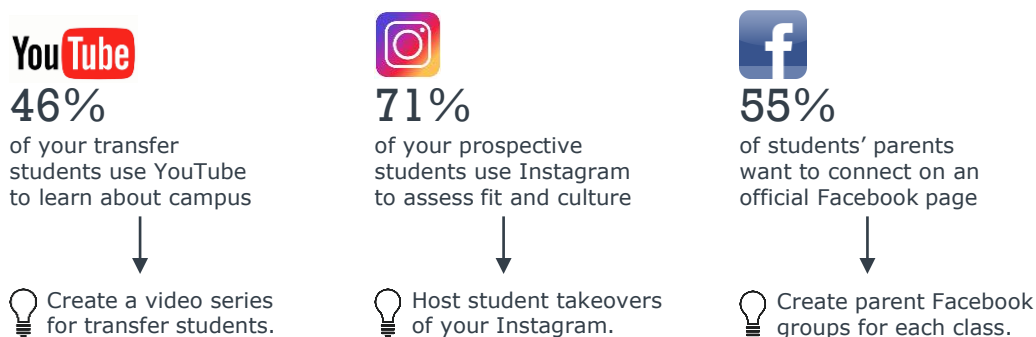
CGI Global 1000
2016 Executives Report

Allocating Efforts Across Traditional and Emerging Channels

Designing a successful digital-first strategy is the starting point to determining the right overall channel mix for your institution. With an ever-growing list of available channels, teams must decide where to focus efforts across various options. Which traditional approaches remain effective? How will emerging social media dominate tomorrow's recruiting landscape? Progressive institutions identify "power platforms" where prospect engagement and visitor numbers are highest. These are the places students seek information and are receptive to the messages. Knowing your power platforms can help you decide how to strategically engage with various segments.

Use Channel-Specific Insight to Inform Marketing Activities

Illustrative Example



Looking Out of Industry for Guidance



Use Data to Inform Print and Email Campaigns

Email and print campaigns can be highly effective, but don't think of them as a single-use tool; focus on tailoring messages to specific segments at strategic times to maximize their impact.



One Size Probably Shouldn't Fit All

Schools should consider personas, target groups, or student segments when designing overall marketing campaigns. Different prospect groups respond better on certain channels, so use this to meet your prospects where they are, but keep in mind that not all segmentation is equally effective.



Identify Concrete Goals for Distinct Marketing Campaigns

Building affinity (love our brand, connect with us) and encouraging actions (visit our campus, apply now) are separate but complementary campaign types. Choose channels that your prospects use for these distinct activities by familiarizing your team with prospect social media behaviors.



34% of the overall budget marketing leaders spend is on channels they didn't know existed five years ago.

Salesforce Research
State of Marketing 2017

Institutions are struggling to navigate resource and privacy concerns while meeting expectations students now have for personalization and high-touch engagement.

Prospective Students Expect Tailored Content From All Industries

Personalized marketing is rapidly becoming the status quo in commercial industries, and this has changed expectations. How can a small staff, a limited budget, and a long approval process compete with Amazon's rapidness or the individual attention of style brands like Stitch Fix? Schools recognize the importance of personalization, but limited budgets restrict options. In addition, privacy and data issues make pursuing personalization more difficult.

Common Barriers to Personalization

- Legacy systems, weak or no CRM, limited technology
- Insufficient data on prospects to support tailored marketing
- Feasibility and scalability with large prospect pools

Major Concerns on Institutions' Minds

- The permissibility of student data used for marketing
- Whether targeted efforts are seen as helpful or invasive
- Building capacity efficiently without moving too quickly

Questions Institutions Are Asking



Where to Start and How to Build Incremental Capacity

- Where is the best starting point, especially with limited technological capability?
- What is an efficient way to offer increasingly personalized content?



Creating Natural, Helpful Experiences Without Turning Students Off

- What tactics turn students off? Does this vary based on funnel stage?
- Where is the line between helpful levels of personalization and invasive tactics?



Defining What Makes Personalization Meaningful

- What tactics (like using mail merge) no longer seem truly personal?
- When and under what conditions do prospects respond better to personalization?



Identifying Prospect Preferences and Employing them Effectively

- Do different prospect segments have different preferences we can meet?
- Is there an over-saturation point with personalized content?



As counterintuitive as it seems, our first step toward personalizing our communications is throwing everyone into the CRM and dividing them into clusters.

Vice President for Enrollment Management
LARGE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

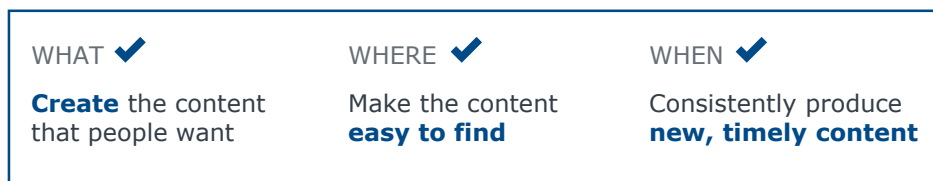
Schools must produce compelling, relevant content online that piques prospective students' interest and drives them to engage directly with the school for more information.

Universities and Colleges Need to Adopt a New Marketing Mindset

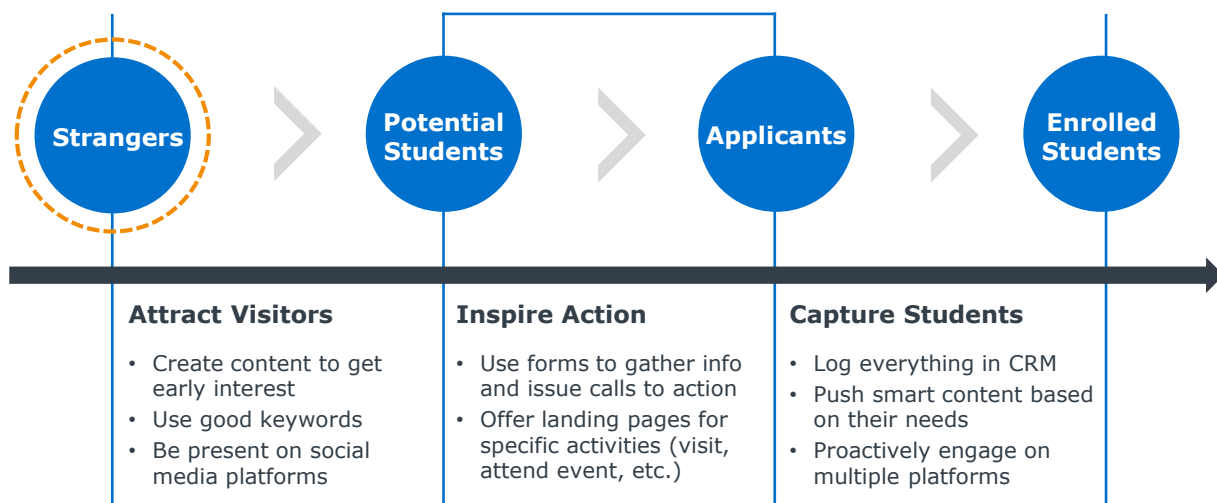
Students' online search habits have changed. Prospects start their search by going to the internet and looking for answers to questions about school choice, the job market, and academic programs. Even when they find their way to your site, they are less likely to fill out an inquiry form or contact you directly. In this new reality, a persuasive inbound marketing strategy—one that emphasizes producing valuable content that meets these needs and answers these questions that prospects have—can bring organic online traffic to the institution and cultivate the relationships that bring strangers through the funnel, helping them become inquiries, applicants, and finally, enrolled students.

Provide Content That Meets Needs at All Stages of the Funnel

At each stage of the decision-making process, prospects want different information. A good inbound strategy will leverage varied content that meets each new need in a way that also enhances institutional prominence in search results. Your goal is to encourage repeat visits and more touchpoints.



Higher Education Inbound Marketing At-A-Glance



75% of organizations across the world consider inbound marketing their primary approach to marketing.

HubSpot Research
State of Inbound 2018 Global Report

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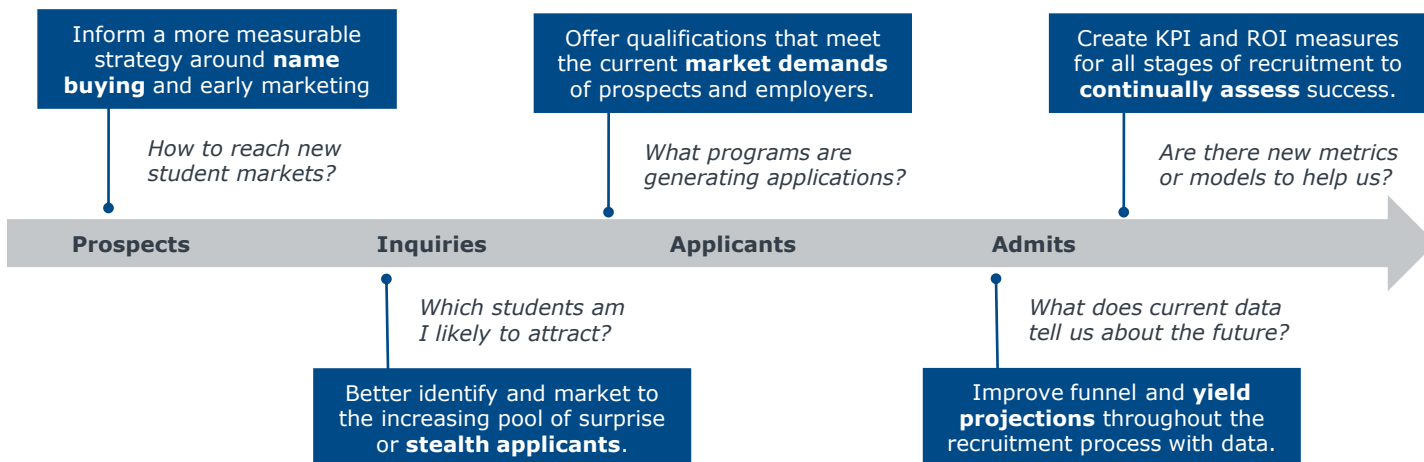
Translating Data into Insight into Action

Most institutions collect ample data, but this wealth of information is not enough—schools need to develop strategic insights from data and then translate the insights into new actions. As M&C teams increasingly use more sophisticated marketing automation and CRM platforms, they are able to answer more nuanced questions with the data, but many struggle to decide the best starting questions to ask.

Core Questions Institutions Have About Using Analytics

- How can we **assess non-digital activities** and compare them to digital performance?
- What are the abilities and limitations of the **existing tools and software** my institution has?
- What **attribution model** should and can we use to assess channel effectiveness?
- What **unique metrics** are other schools using that we can use for our own analyses?

Progressive Schools Employ Data Across the Funnel to Inform Strategy and Action



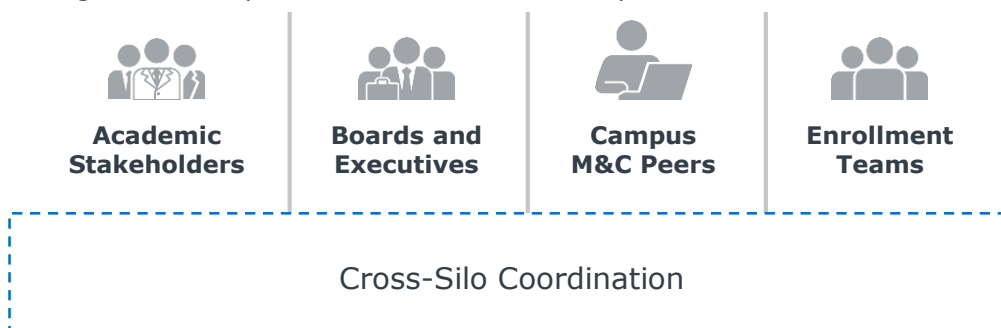
It isn't enough to have data. Knowing what numbers *matter* and how to translate them into strategies and actions is critical to our success.

Head of Marketing for Enrollment Management
SMALL PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

When individual teams or offices outreach independently, or when similar messages are duplicated across campus, prospects are likely to be overwhelmed and/or confused.

Coordinating Marketing and Communications with Diverse Campus Constituents

M&C teams' work spans across all manner of goals, priorities, and constituent groups on campus. Despite its wide reach, marketing and communications activity often lacks vital coordination, and many teams find that their role requires ongoing advocacy, whether it is to teach academic units the importance of being unified in outward prospect communications, to hone a singular institutional brand voice, or to manage the varied priorities that exist across campus.



Decentralization and After-the-Fact Coordination Pose Challenges

Many M&C teams we spoke with expressed frustration at the quantity of messages that prospective students receive from various departments and units on campus. It is difficult to coordinate institutional messaging, but everyone recognized that this coordination creates a smoother and more engaging prospect experience. The task of organizing across the institution often falls to the M&C team.

328 The number of outbound communications one school discovered it was sending in a year to prospective students *before* enrollment.

2017 EAB Yield Communication Study

Financial aid office reminders, department head emails about recruiting events, admissions office updates, and many more can feel like an avalanche to prospects. Even schools that manage their enrollment messages centrally can find that other parts of campus, such as student housing or parking authorities, contribute to the quantity of communications reaching students' inboxes.



A lot of my job is serving as the go-between; I talk to our vendors, our board, our academic deans, and validate the actions our university takes in marketing.

Director of Enrollment Marketing
LARGE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

How Are Schools Coordinating Across Teams, Departments, and Campus?

Different tools and processes offer ways to manage every group at the institution that wants to reach prospective students directly. The top ways schools are tackling this task are through developing institutional communication plans, shared editorial calendars, and using varying degrees of centralized oversight.



Communication Plans

These plans formally define what is sent to prospects from inquiry to enrollment.

Key Benefits

- Help clarify communication responsibilities
- Ensure message consistency, limit outgoing message volume
- Build campus-wide buy-in if co-created with other departments



Editorial Calendars

A shared calendar helps map content in real time for groups across the institution.

Key Benefits

- Help plan regular content releases and regulate content flow
- Ensure adequate use of various platforms and channels
- Centralize knowledge and coordinate content to avoid duplication or conflict



Centralized Oversight

A designated office overseeing communications can help maintain a consistent tone and brand.

Key Benefits

- Maintains coherent voice and messaging for the prospective students
- Offers a clear hub for M&C decision-making, which can minimize confusion



EAB produced an **Integrated Prospect Communication Plan Toolkit**. Download it [here](#).



- **Phase 1:** Laying the Groundwork
- **Phase 2:** Conducting the Audit Workshop
- **Phase 3:** Enhancing Audit-Approved Communications
- **Phase 4:** Implementing the New Communication Plan

MREC Thanks All Its Advisors

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Full-Scale Enrollment Support

Research has always been at the heart of EAB. Today, our approach to harnessing higher education best practices has three core tenets: investigation, insight delivery, and the ignition of transformative action on campus. **Enrollment Management Forum** does this exclusively for enrollment leaders to help them address their unique challenges.

Since complex problems require multifaceted solutions, we also apply these insights through a customized blend of technology and services. Our **Enrollment Services** offering, fueled by the market's largest data asset, combines prescriptive analytics, smart recruitment marketing, and strategic advisory support to help colleges fulfill their enrollment mission.

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Your Enrollment Success, Powered by...

Enrollment Intelligence



1.5B+

Student interactions analyzed annually

100+

Data and analytics experts on staff to support EI

300+

Field marketing tests performed annually

7:1

Average ROI of EAB Enrollment Services clients

Enrollment Management Forum

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About the Enrollment Management Forum's Marketing and Recruiting Effectiveness Center (MREC)

MREC is EAB's new research resource for enrollment teams, supporting strategic decision-making and targeted improvement efforts in marketing and recruiting. Our research team continually evaluates existing and emerging ideas and pinpoints those that are the most viable.

MREC shares new findings each quarter through a suite of deliverables, including:

- Short research briefs and white papers
- Live webinars
- Expert takes on emerging issues
- Decision-making tools and discussion guides

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