



# Making Your Digital Ads Count

12 Lessons on New and Emerging Techniques in Independent School Recruitment Marketing

# EAB Enrollment Services

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## EAB Enrollment Services

This toolkit was originally created with our enrollment management partners in higher education. It has been adapted to include ideas that are most relevant for K-12.

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# How to Use This Report

## This Report Has Two Main Sections

*A General Overview of the Digital Terrain and a Deeper Dive on Display and Social Ads*



### 4 Lessons on the Digital Marketing Landscape

*A primer on digital marketing*

This section covers basic concepts required for understanding applications of digital recruitment marketing for independent schools



### 8 Lessons on Digital Ads

*A deeper dive on display and social ads*

This section offers guidance on specific issues enrollment managers can expect to encounter when using digital ads for independent school recruitment

## How Different Audiences Can Benefit from This Report

*Based on Their Past Experience with Digital Marketing*



### Beginner

Representative audience members

- ✓ EMs\* new to digital marketing
- ✓ Full admissions team
- ✓ Non-marketing stakeholders



Representative uses

Quickly gain crucial background knowledge required for making smart decisions about digital marketing investments

Use the report as a reference moving forward, when a quick refresh on complex aspects of the digital terrain is required



### Advanced

- ✓ EMs\* with digital experience
- ✓ Data and analytics teams
- ✓ Marketers new to independent schools



Learn which new digital lessons from out of industry have the greatest relevance for independent school recruitment marketing

Advance your understanding by seeing familiar strategies and techniques in a new light



### All Audiences

- ✓ All EMs\*
- ✓ All enrollment staff
- ✓ Key stakeholders



Understand how your practice compares to higher education

Create a common frame of reference for digital investment decisions that span organizational silos

\*Enrollment managers



## Section 1

# 4 Lessons on the Digital Marketing Landscape

### **Digital strategy**

- Lesson 1: Start with a comprehensive view of digital marketing channels
- Lesson 2: Factor in existing content assets when developing your paid strategy
- Lesson 3: Use digital techniques selectively and strategically

### **Assessing marketing impact**

- Lesson 4: Scope your impact-assessment efforts realistically

# What we mean by ‘digital’

### A useful but imprecise term

While “digital” is a helpful and commonly used catch-all term, a true understanding of emerging communication channels requires us to be clear about what we mean when we say “digital.”

This study is specifically concerned with digital marketing, which narrows the field somewhat. Under this heading, it is helpful to further consider the two perspectives on the right.

### A functional perspective

The functional perspective focuses on the aims that digital marketing (as distinct from traditional marketing) is meant to advance—for example, claiming some of the attention your audiences are shifting to the new channels they favor.

### A taxonomic perspective

The taxonomic perspective focuses on the toolkit available for advancing those aims, including channels, techniques, and strategies. The bulk of this study concerns the final item on the list—digital advertising—but will also touch on many of the other listed items.

## Two Perspectives That Can Help Organize Your Thinking About Digital Marketing

### 1 Functional

*What Digital Marketing Aims to Accomplish*

- Leveraging newly dominant media
- Understanding audiences via data
- Mass customizing communications
- Dynamically adapting to buyer’s journey

### 2 Taxonomic

*How Digital Gets Done*

#### Channels

- Email
- SMS
- Social media
- Websites
- Chat
- Apps

#### Techniques

- Marketing automation
- Geolocation
- Predictive modeling
- Search engine optimization
- Website analytics
- IP targeting

#### Strategies

- Content marketing
- Digital advertising

Study’s focus

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Different paths to acquiring digital capabilities

## Assembling core capabilities

As enrollment teams look to boost their digital marketing capabilities, they have decisions to make about how they will acquire the necessary skills and expertise. While approaches vary, any successful digital operation will possess the same key capabilities, including analytics, technical infrastructure, and familiarity with digital content networks.

## Accounting for differences

One of the primary reasons for the variation in digital marketing team structures is the rapid evolution of the digital landscape. Without much precedent and facing an ever-changing landscape of trends and technologies, enrollment teams around the country are experimenting with varied digital outreach.

Few independent schools are fully utilizing digital marketing to its fullest potential when it comes to enrollment management. Although some admissions teams are beginning to integrate digital marketing strategies into their larger recruitment efforts, most have yet to even begin.

## Approaches Observed in the Enrollment Management Space

### Digital Dabblers

*"We've tried some Facebook-promoted posts, some Instagram ads, some SEO, and a little SEM."*

### Full-Service Outsourcing

*"We work with a media buyer who manages all our digital ad spend across different channels."*

### In-House Agency

*"We partner with our corporate marketing department to execute all our digital campaigns."*

### Digital Hobbyist

*"Our EM has a keen interest in data analytics, so we've set up a new system for tracking and testing in digital."*

### Vendor Varsity Squad

*"We work with a long list of digital vendors but keep only the ones that make the biggest impact."*

### Digital Tutor

*"We bring in a digital consultant for six hours each month to answer our questions and train our staff."*

Source: EAB research and analysis.



## Lesson 1

Start with a comprehensive view of digital marketing channels

# Match digital options with your unique aims and capabilities

### A complex landscape

While the basic categories of digital marketing are pretty straightforward, their complexity quickly increases when you consider the many options within those categories and the different ways in which they might be combined. A helpful first step is to lay out all of the channels available—social media, content platforms, search engines, etc.—and to identify the types of marketing activities that might be undertaken in each.

### Which focus is right for you?

A key distinction shown in the chart is that between paid and unpaid approaches. Paid approaches are ones in which hosting networks charge a fee to display your content. Unpaid approaches use content posted on “free” channels, including your social media accounts and school website, to engage parents and students. Schools that have a lot of high-quality content on those channels may choose to emphasize search engine and content marketing approaches, while those that do not may want to lean more heavily on paid approaches.

### An Overview of Online Channels

*With Associated Marketing Approaches*

		Unpaid	Digital Channels	Paid		
Social Media						
Content marketing	✓	Facebook	✓	Ads and sponsored content		
	✓	Instagram	✓			
	✓	Twitter	✓			
	✓	Snapchat	✓			
Content Platforms						
Content marketing	✓	YouTube	✓	Ads and sponsored content		
		Pandora	✓			
		Spotify	✓	Ads		
Search Engines						
SEO <sup>1</sup>	✓	Google	✓	SEM <sup>2</sup>		
Websites						
Content marketing	✓	School Website		Ads		
		Google Display Network	✓			

1) Search engine optimization

2) Search engine marketing, also called “sponsored search”

Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 2

Factor in existing digital content assets when developing your paid strategy

# Paid and unpaid digital marketing efforts are mutually reinforcing

### Paid versus unpaid

As described on the previous page, many digital channels offer both paid and unpaid marketing options. Because that distinction has far-reaching implications for digital marketing strategy, this page provides further explanation for how the two approaches relate.

### Mutually reinforcing approaches

While paid and unpaid approaches can be impactful when pursued separately, they work best when coordinated together.

Imagine, for example, that an independent school has created rich student-facing content for admissions team's Facebook account. The impact of this (unpaid) content will ultimately depend on parents and students actually seeing it—an outcome that can be advanced by using digital ads posted on Facebook that link through to the content. Conversely, the downstream impact of those ads will ultimately depend on how engaging the content it links to is.

### Rationale for Paid and Unpaid Digital Marketing Approaches and How They Interact

#### *Paid*

Includes ads and paid search

#### **Prime “real estate”**

Paid platforms offer access to the highly coveted digital spaces where audience attention is most easy to claim

#### **Advanced targeting capabilities**

Paid platforms typically have proprietary targeting methodologies that can improve efficiency of ad spend

#### **Advanced analytics**

Paid platforms offer advanced analytical tools to help understand audience response, ad performance, etc.

#### *Unpaid*

Includes social media and school website content

#### **Table stakes**

A presence on social media has become a basic expectation that parents and students have of schools they're evaluating

#### **Deep engagement**

Content-based approaches enable you to flexibly and thoroughly engage specific parents and student concerns and aspirations

#### **Unpaid isn't free**

Generating high-quality content, at scale—a requirement for impactful unpaid approaches—is costly

Paid approaches ensure that prospects see your unpaid content

*Mutually reinforcing*

Unpaid approaches boost downstream impact of your paid work

Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 3

Use digital techniques selectively and strategically

# An evolving toolkit largely focused on audience targeting

### Performance-boosting add-ons

Alongside the digital channels and strategies already described, there is an additional category of related innovations that might be best described as “techniques”—add-on approaches that can be used to boost the impact of core elements of digital marketing outreach.






Because of the focus in other industries on lead generation, many of these innovations are focused on audience identification and targeting.

### Uses in school recruitment

In the case of school recruitment, targeting at both the top and further down the funnel allows digital targeting techniques to more effectively engage with mission-aligned families.

They can also be useful for finding and communicating with key stakeholders outside of the traditional independent school audience, including community leaders and realtors.

### Selected Digital Marketing Techniques and Strategies for Their Use in Independent School Recruitment

Technique	Strategy
 <b>List-based targeting</b> Ads served selectively to individuals you specify, based on purchased lists	Boosts efficiency of ad spend by avoiding inappropriate audiences; subtle, targeted marketing in line with independent school brand
 <b>Geo-fencing</b> Ads served selectively to individuals within a geographical boundary	Can improve impact of location-based recruitment events
 <b>IP targeting</b> Ads served to students and families on the basis of household IP address	Engages parents, compensates for limits of cookie-based targeting
 <b>Look-alike audiences</b> New audience created to mirror a specified existing group of students	Could shed new light on candidates in recruitment pipeline
 <b>Behavioral/responsive</b> Ads served based on users’ observed behaviors (e.g., browsing history)	Helps deliver tailored content to “qualified” audiences

To learn more about using Facebook to target prospective families, check out the **Social Media Primer: Maximizing Lead Capture with Facebook**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 4

### Scope your impact-assessment efforts realistically

## Striving to create a complete picture of marketing interactions

### A burden of proof

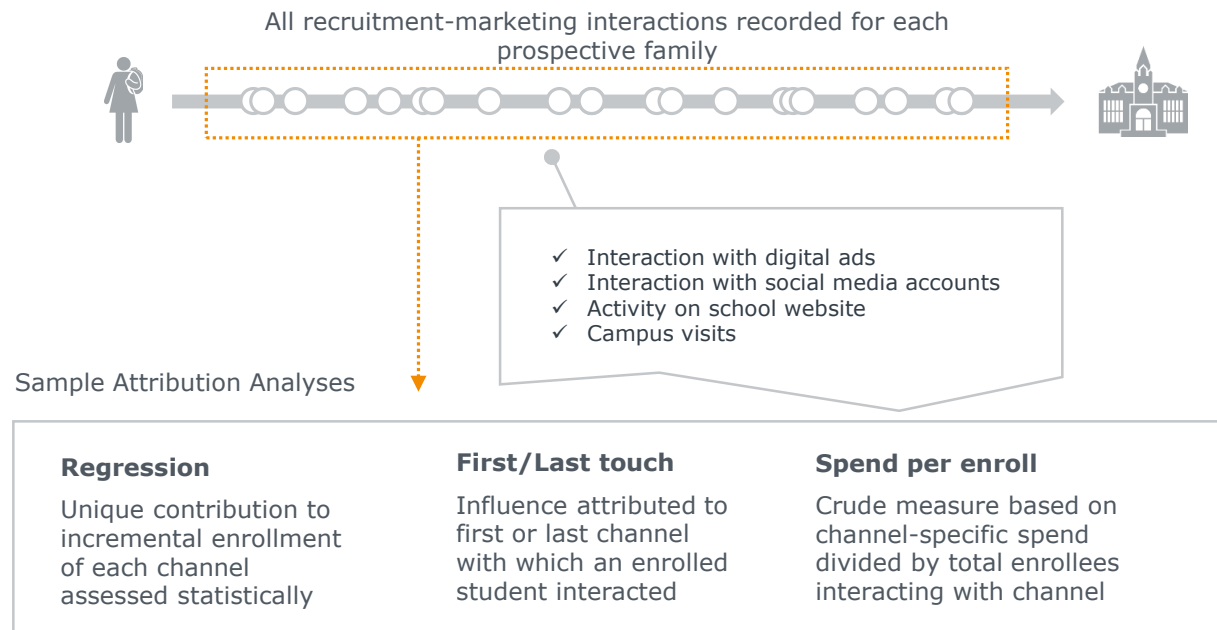
Acquiring digital capabilities can require a significant commitment of time and effort, as well as additional money for expenses such as fees paid to networks that host ads.

Because of the cost involved, measuring the impact of digital marketing investments is a common goal of marketers everywhere.

### A promise of transparency

Demonstrating ROI is important for any marketing efforts; one difference in the digital era is the substantial trail of data that Internet users leave in their wake. This data trail can allow enrollment teams to get a comprehensive picture of all the recruitment marketing interactions they've had with prospective families to better understand which elements of recruitment outreach contribute to success.

### An Aspirational Vision for Evaluating Marketing Activity



Source: EAB research and analysis.



## Section 2

# 8 Lessons on Digital Ads

### **Networks and audiences**

Lesson 1: Favor networks with the right audience demographics and a robust ad offering

Lesson 2: Use list-based targeting to maximize the performance of your digital ads

### **Ad and campaign design**

Lesson 3: Scope your ad-optimization efforts broadly to ensure best possible performance

Lesson 4: Integrate your ads into larger communication flows to ensure downstream impact

Lesson 5: Take a multichannel approach

### **Gauging ad performance**

Lesson 6: Consider contextual factors when evaluating digital ad performance

Lesson 7: Use both proximal and downstream measures of ad impact

Lesson 8: Take advantage of digital ads' proven impact on recruitment outcomes

# Two major categories of digital ads to consider

## A focus on digital ads

While the first section of this report offered a general introduction to digital marketing, this section focuses more narrowly on digital advertising.

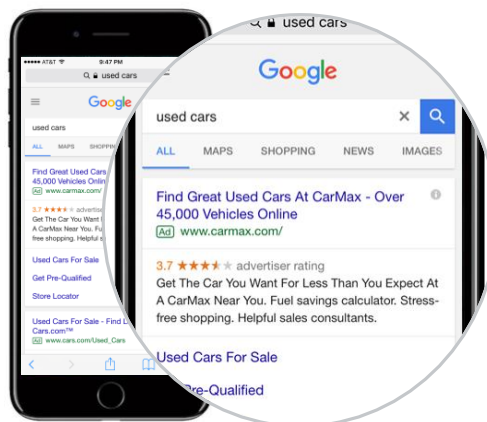
## Two main types of ads

Digital ads present a significant number of options in terms of networks, formats, and cost, which can overwhelm marketers. One helpful generalization is that most digital ads fall into one of two categories: search-based versus display and social ads.

These two categories correspond to different approaches to recruitment marketing. Search-based ads rely on parents taking the first step (i.e. doing a search for local independent schools) and are closely associated with lead-gen efforts. Display and social ads are better-suited to building affinity with parents who have already engaged, or establishing contact with those who have not (i.e. by targeting parents identified by purchasing a list of names of mission-aligned families).

## Two Types of Digital Ads Most Commonly Used

### Search-Based Ads



"Sponsored" results in search engines and on some content sites (e.g. YouTube)

### Display and Social Ads



Image-based ads on websites, social networks, and content sites

The focus of this report

### Other ad types and formats:

- Native advertising
- Video ads
- Carousel ads
- Flash display ads
- Opt-in text messaging
- In-app messaging

Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 1

Favor networks with the right audience demographics and a robust ad offering

### Who should host your ads?

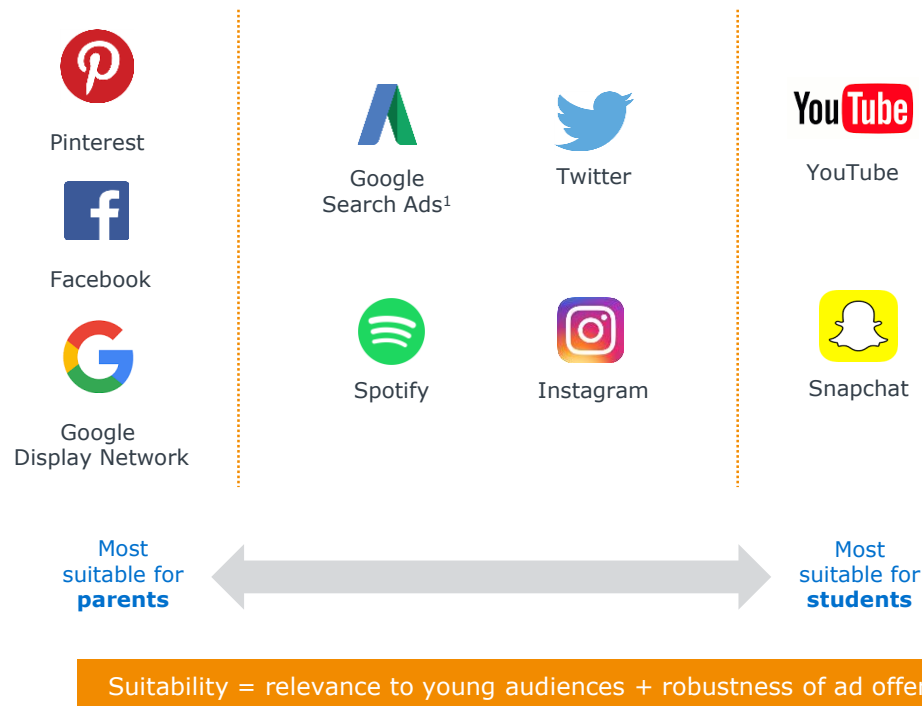
#### Assessing best-fit platforms

When deciding where to place display and social ads, you have numerous options to choose from. Two criteria can be helpful when sorting through them: the network's relevance to parents and students and the robustness of the ad offering. The first seeks to ensure that advertising reaches the right people, while the second aims to provide recruitment marketers with the necessary tools for analyzing and optimizing ad performance.

#### Today's top options

While the digital terrain changes quickly and some schools may have their own reasons for favoring certain networks, two currently stand out as strong options: Facebook, Google Display Network, and Instagram. These networks offer comprehensive advertising capabilities, including the ability to fine-tune ad creative, call to action, and budget; advanced targeting techniques; and comprehensive, customizable reporting and analytics.

#### Selected Digital Networks by Suitability for Parent, Student Recruitment Marketing



1) For search-based (not display and social) ads

Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 2

Use list-based targeting to maximize the performance of your digital ads

### Focus your ad spend on ‘qualified’ audiences

#### Targeting + lists

As we have already discussed, sophisticated targeting is one of the main advantages of digital advertising. This page discusses how targeting is used to generate the lists of names that enrollment teams commonly purchase from third-parties.

#### Direct and indirect list targeting

There are two main approaches to consider when it comes to list targeting. The first, which might be called “direct” targeting, is the ability of platforms such as Facebook to serve ads to parents you specify, such as names you’ve acquired via list purchases.

The second, usually called retargeting, involves serving ads only to parents who have interacted with other digital communications you’ve specified. In cases where your initial outreach is guided by list purchases, the population of retargeted parents will be a subset of names from those lists.

Both approaches increase the efficiency of ad spend by reducing the number of ads served to inappropriate audiences.

#### Example: Targeted Marketing Campaign Using A Purchased List

*Parents Names Purchased from Third Party Group*



Recruitment-marketing email and direct mail

*Responders*



#### Facebook and Instagram Ads

Ads served selectively to specified parents



#### Google Display Ads

Limited to parents who have interacted with recruitment outreach

*Benefits*

#### Leveraging an existing resource

Thoughtfully compiled lists contain a wealth of insight on your prospect universe

#### Minimizing unproductive audiences

A list-based approach eliminates spend on nonhuman traffic and inappropriate demographics

Source: EAB research and analysis.



## Lesson 3

Scope your ad-optimization efforts broadly to ensure best possible performance

# Impact of ad campaigns depends on effort and expertise invested

### Lots to get right

As mentioned earlier, beginning your digital marketing efforts with display and social ads make sense as an initial approach as they present less of an execution challenge than other digital channels.

However, ads can be more or less effective depending on how expertly they are executed; success depends on many steps, from initial planning to post-deployment assessment.

### A digital to-do list

The checklist on the right offers a partial list of activities involved in planning, launching, managing, and assessing display and social ad campaigns.

The next three pages offer examples of how individual elements of digital ad campaign design may be optimized.

### A Display and Social Ad Campaign To-Do List

- ☐ Set goals for ad performance
- ☐ Set and allocate ad budget
- ☐ Choose type of ad to run
- ☐ Choose ad network(s)
- ☐ Determine and specify audience
- ☐ Develop required creative
- ☐ Design and build tracking system (cookies + pixels)
- ☐ Build out landing page(s)
- ☐ Design larger communication flow in which ad operates
- ☐ Evaluate special targeting options (e.g. geolocation)
- ☐ Choose ad parameters to split test
- ☐ Execute ad buys with relevant network(s)
- ☐ Continuously manage ad parameters
- ☐ Gather data on ad performance and parent response
- ☐ Analyze relative performance of variants tested
- ☐ Adjust ad parameters based on findings from testing
- ☐ Reallocate spend to most impactful networks, formats, etc.

#### Effort Versus Impact

Most steps are fairly easily executed at a basic level.

Innovation and/or expert performance within any given task can pose significant challenges for typical independent school enrollment teams.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Campaign design should account for a variety of device types

## Working across devices

One important parameter to consider when optimizing digital ad performance is device type.

Parents and students are spending more time on smartphones, but they also still use computers to go online. Effective ad strategy understands and accommodates parents' and students' related communication preferences and media habits.

## Mostly mobile

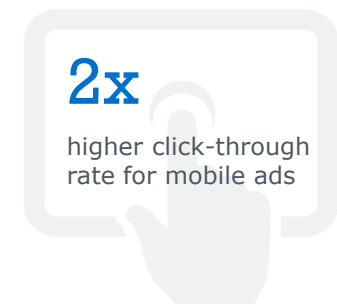
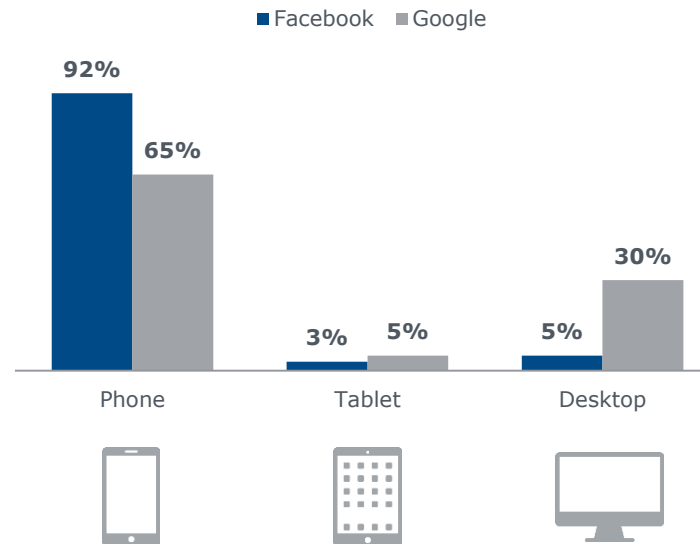
Data from EAB testing sheds light on some important related questions, two of which are addressed on the right.

One is that students' attachment to their smartphones impacts how display and social ads are served; as indicated, the vast majority of impressions occur on mobile devices. Another has to do with networks: Google display ads are far more likely than Facebook ads to be viewed on a desktop device.

Since Google display ads tend to be viewed more on desktops, they are an example of an ad type that may be better-suited for parents. However, an important consideration is that many millennial parents may have communication and media habits similar to those of students.

## Share of Viewable Impressions

*By Device and Network, EAB Client Testing*



Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Creative grounded in testing boosts student response to ads

## Guidelines for impactful ads

While local testing is needed to truly optimize display and social ad performance, adhering to certain guidelines can boost results. EAB research has identified several important rules of thumb, with examples described on the right.

## Within and across networks

Although ads function similarly on Facebook and Google in many ways, there are key differences between the two advertising platforms that impact how users engage with copy and images.

Facebook allows you to fill 20% of the ad image area with text; its ad template also provides three structured areas for copy to support the story the image is telling. This structure plays an important role in what the user sees while scrolling through a newsfeed, with an emphasis on imagery. Google's display network, on the other hand, doesn't have this built-in separation, which means you can choose the size of text in an image.

## Design Guidelines

### For Facebook Ads

Do



- ✓ Strong visuals of school
- ✓ Clear "main character"
- ✓ Strong copy-image link
- ✓ Candid experience visuals

Don't



- ✗ Hard-to-understand images
- ✗ Multiple focal points
- ✗ Weak copy-image linkage
- ✗ Staged visuals

### For Display Ads

## Put your audience first

Ads are most effective when they focus clearly on one specific concern or aspiration of your audience (one message per ad)

## Have a clear call to action

Be transparent about the intended action and what is to be achieved if a prospect clicks your ad, but avoid click bait

## Be brief

Keep body copy short—long copy feels very long on mobile—and have one clear takeaway

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Optimized ad frequency means maximum impact per dollar spent

## How much should you spend?

An important part of designing digital ad campaigns is figuring out how much to spend. This, in turn, depends on an understanding of how much it costs to get the desired level of response from the prospects you're recruiting.

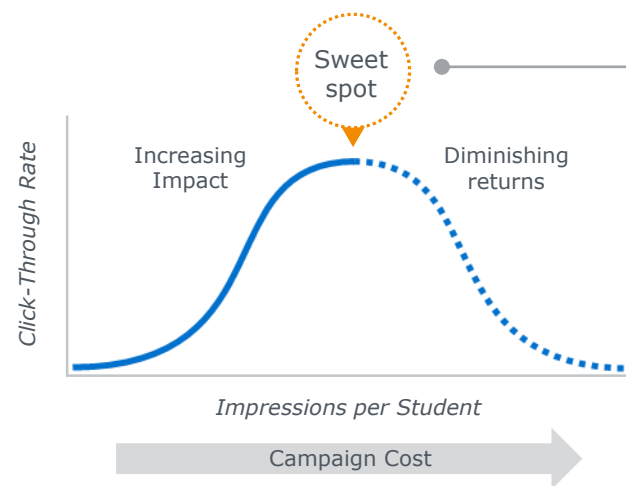
It can be difficult to generalize about campaign cost given the difference in pricing and performance across ad-hosting networks and ad-buying strategies. That said, considering an example can help give a feel for the considerations involved.

## A point of maximum impact for an ad campaign at a higher education institution

The material at right shows how ad spend relates to impact for a campaign in which ads are purchased on the basis of number of impressions. As shown in the chart, as the number of impressions per parent/student increases, so does the likelihood of prospects clicking on the ad—up to a point. There is a “sweet spot” after which buying additional impressions does not increase the probability of a click (and thereby dilutes the click-through rate).

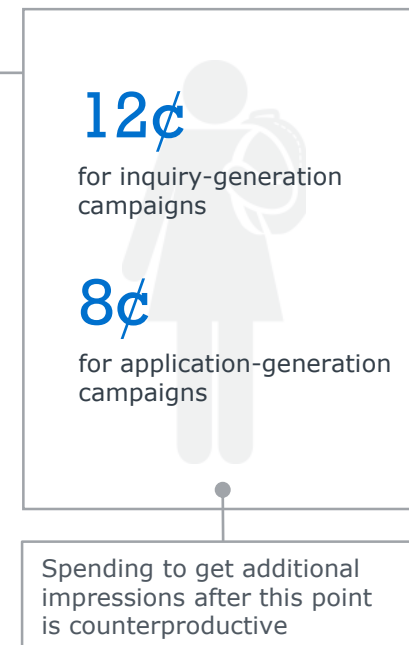
## Click-Through Rate

*Versus Total Ad Impressions per Parent/Student*



## Optimized Campaign Cost<sup>1</sup>

*Per Targeted Parent/Student per Month, by Campaign Type, EAB Enrollment Services Partners*



1) Refers to finding the most cost effective or highest achievable performance under given constraints

Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 4

Integrate your ads into larger communication flows to ensure downstream impact

# Using ads to drive parents and students to action

### Designing communication flows

More often than not, display and social ads are designed to prompt action—a student or parent is invited to click on an ad, at which point he or she is linked through to a landing page.

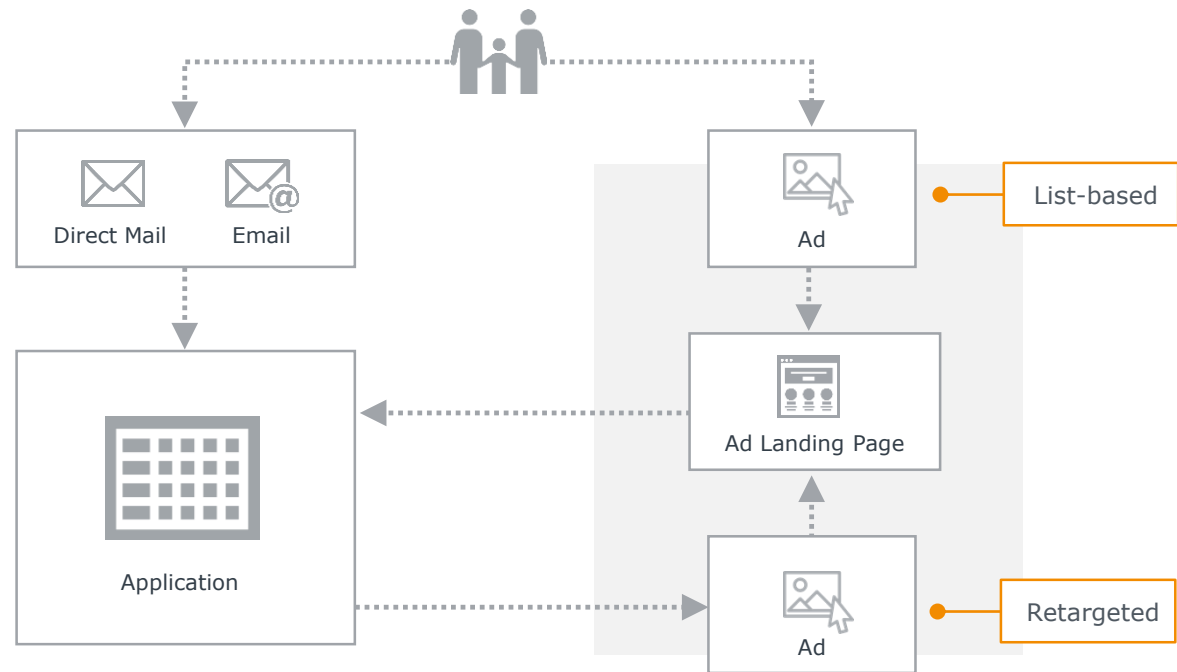
The ad and the material it links to can be designed to serve any of a number of recruitment-marketing ends, including inquiry generation, application generation, and yield management. Whatever the goal, the ad will exist within a particular communication flow, which must be designed as part of the campaign.

### An example

By way of example, the graphic at right shows how display and social ads are incorporated into EAB application-generation campaigns.

Within this structure, list-based targeting serves ads to prospects who have not yet interacted with the school's application, prompting them to apply. Parents or students who have already interacted with the application are retargeted with ads based on that interaction, which keep the application front-of-mind for prospects until they have completed it.

### Example: EAB Application-Generation Campaign



Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 5

Take a multichannel approach

# Give students a variety of ways to engage

### Greater than the sum of its parts

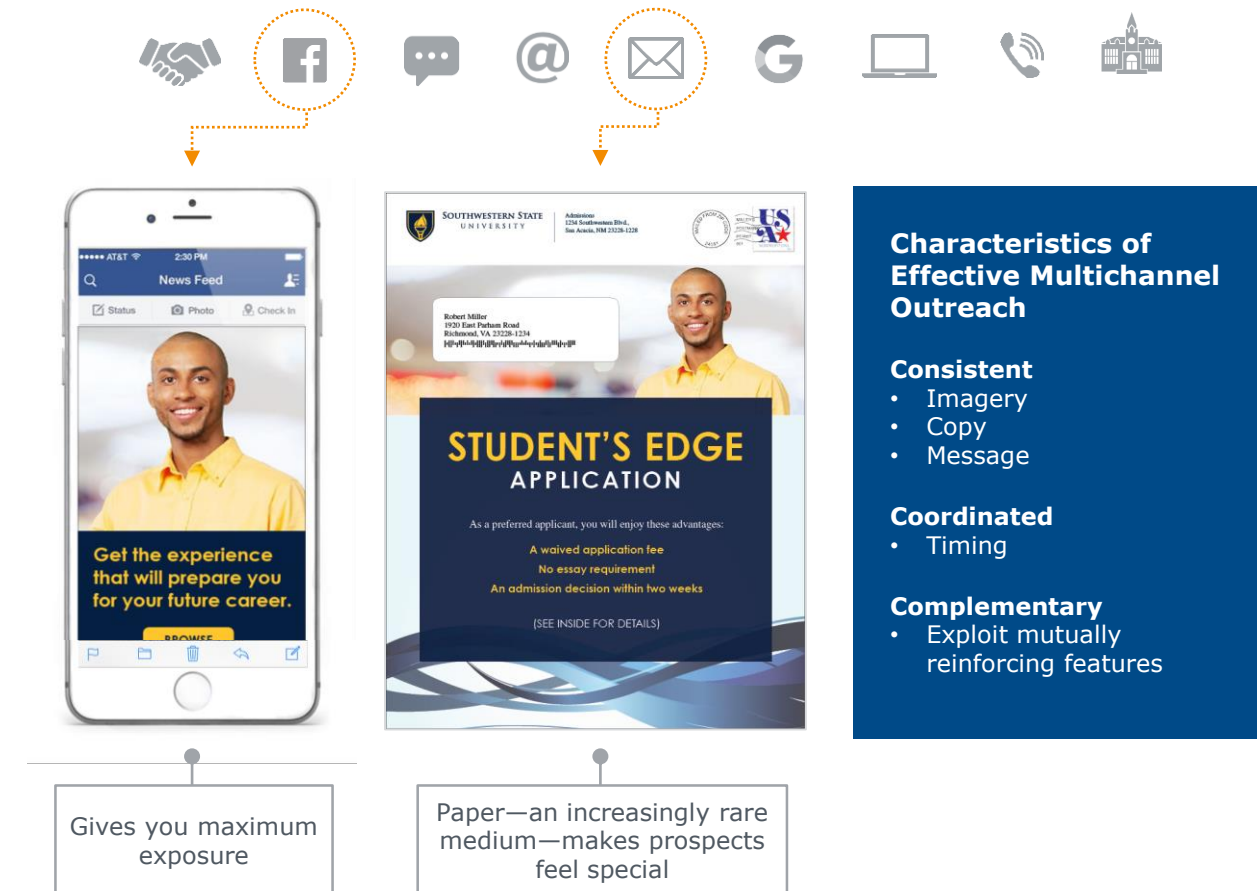
Digital ads are most effective when used in tandem with other media. There are several reasons for this. One is that this multichannel approach honors different parents' and students' varying communication preferences. Another is that each channel has unique strengths and weaknesses, which can be balanced when they are used in combination.

So, for example, while display and social ads have the virtue of being hard for parents and students to miss, paper can feel more "special," and create a more lasting impression with prospects, when used in a limited, targeted manner. Used together (and combined with email and other channels), they strike a balance between frequency and depth of a student's exposure to your brand.

### A coordination imperative

As implied above, the effectiveness of a multichannel approach relies on close coordination across channels. This includes consistent use of creative (imagery, copy, etc.) and timing that factors in the often-differing response curves for email, digital ads, and other media.

### Taking Advantage of Each Channel's Unique Advantages



Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Coordinated timing across channels maximizes ad performance

## Channels influence each other

Effective coordination of recruitment-marketing outreach across channels (digital and otherwise) produces a stronger unified impact. While this applies across many different digital ad parameters, one case in point—that of timing—is illustrated on the right.

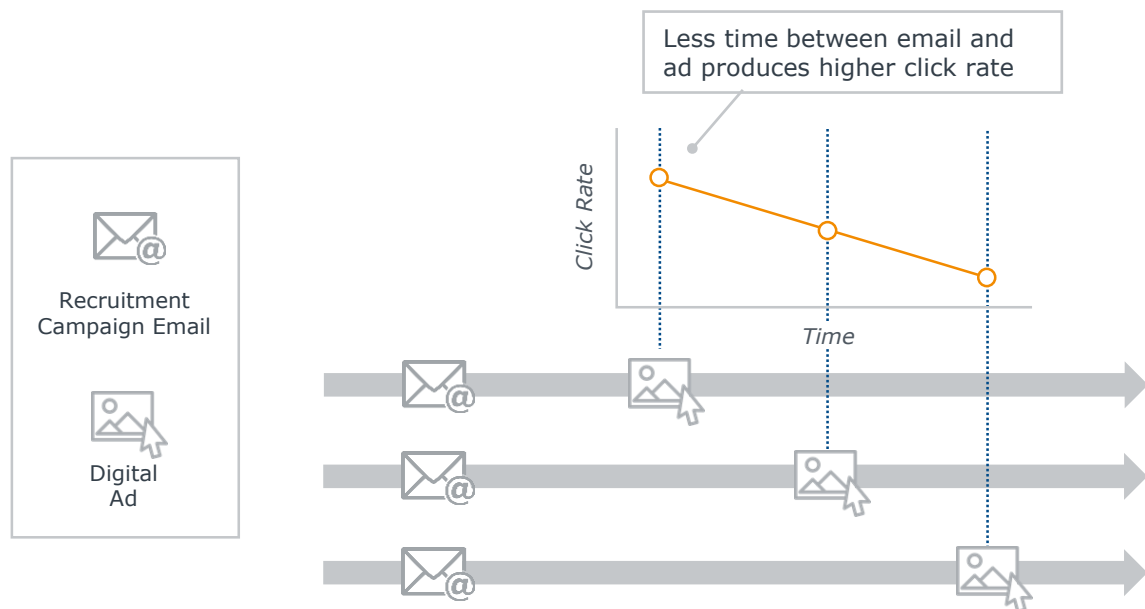
As shown, serving digital ads sooner after related recruitment-marketing emails produces higher response rates.

## Leveraging complementarity

Another form of effective collaboration between channels involves response time. Response rates for recruitment emails show peaks and troughs tied to contextual factors (e.g. approaching application submission deadlines). By contrast, response to digital ads tends to be consistent across time. Optimally-designed campaigns take advantage of this, using emails selectively when spikes in response are desired or expected while creating a steady level of engagement via digital ads.

## Display and Social Ad Click Rate

*By Timing Relative to Recruitment Email,  
Based on Data from EAB Campaigns*



Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 6

Consider contextual factors when evaluating digital ad performance

### Few, if any, channels reach all prospects

#### Ensuring realistic expectations

Many digital channels hold significant promise for recruitment marketing. However, most also come with limitations, which are important to understand when planning ad campaigns and assessing their performance. One important consideration in this regard is audience reach.

#### The limits of reach among student-targeted Facebook ads

As shown at right, even in well-executed Facebook campaigns, there are three factors that can prevent individuals within a target audience from seeing an ad. First, some decision-makers may not have Facebook accounts associated with the email address in a school's records. Second, some decision-makers may have ad blockers installed on their devices. Third, some may not use Facebook often enough during the campaign to have an ad served. For these reasons, the proportion of a target audience reached via list-based Facebook campaigns is often in the range of 50-60%, with high performers coming in around 70%.

#### Case in Point: Not All Decision-Makers Reachable by Facebook Ads

*Three Reasons Decision-Makers May Not Be Accessible via Facebook Ads*



##### Email Not a Match

No Facebook account associated with provided email address



##### Ad Blockers

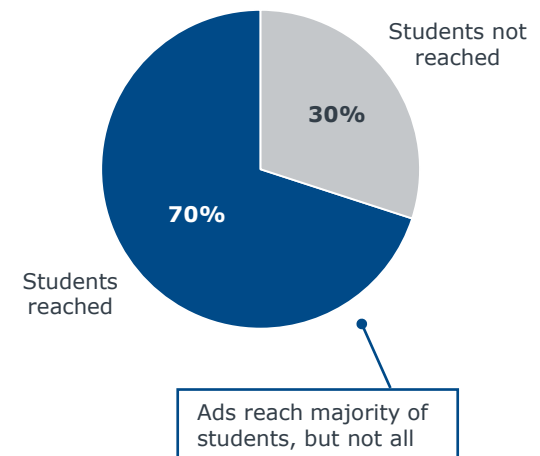
Ad blockers prevent audience from seeing content when Facebook accessed via browser



##### Limited Facebook Usage

Individual not on Facebook often enough to have ad served

*Maximum Reach of Facebook Ads, as a Percentage of Total Targeted Students in University Ad Campaign*



Source: EAB research and analysis.



## Lesson 7

Use both proximal and downstream measures of ad impact

# Proximal measures help you improve ad performance

### Two perspectives

When seeking to understand the impact of your digital ads, two perspectives are relevant.

One focuses on downstream results: that is, are your ads moving the dial on submitted applications, enrollments, or other ultimate measures of recruitment success? (See pages 11 to 13 for more on this point.)

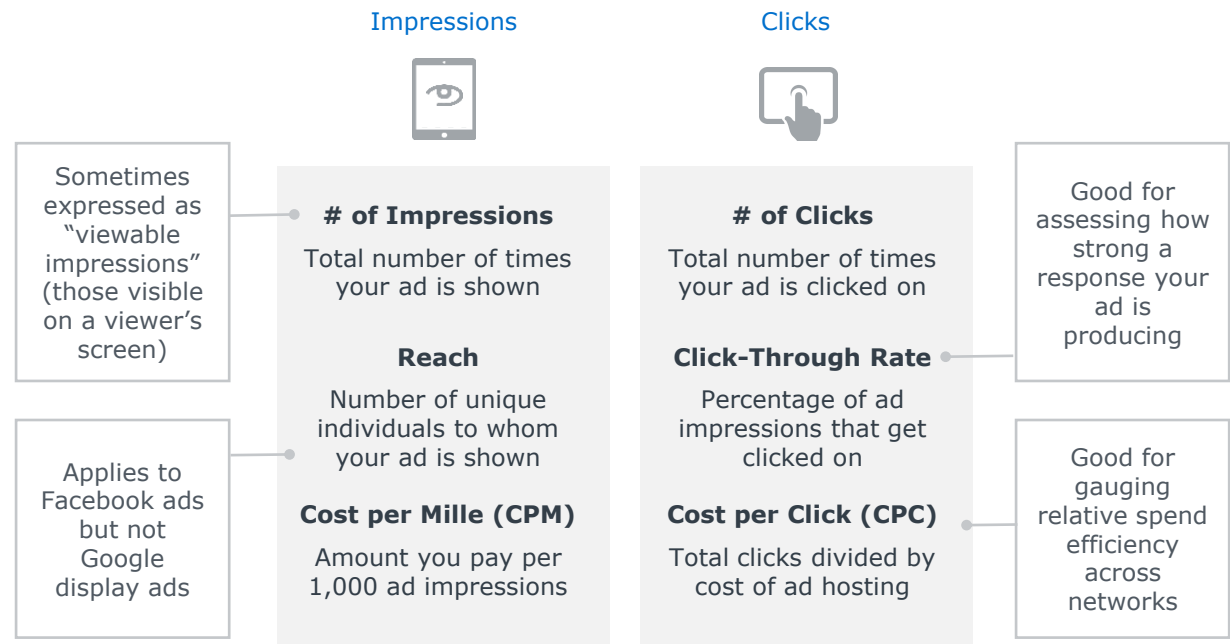
A second is proximal impact—to what extent your ads are registering with their intended audiences and producing the intended immediate impact (e.g. producing clicks). This perspective plays a crucial role in efforts to optimize ad performance.

### Proximal measures

The graphic on the right shows a partial list of measures that are commonly used to describe and assess ad activity. Note that they can be grouped under two headings: impressions and clicks. Also, note that some of these measures lend themselves more to assessing (versus merely describing) performance. For example, click-through rate typically says more about ad performance than does number of impressions.

### How Well Are Your Ads Achieving Their Immediate Aims?

*Two Main Categories of Measures to Consider*



#### Define Your Terms

Definitions can vary significantly across users and organizations; be sure to start related conversations with a shared understanding of terms.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Lesson 8

Take advantage of digital ads' proven impact on recruitment outcomes

# Display and social ads produce a measurable increase in applications in higher education

### Typing ads to downstream impact

As mentioned on the preceding page, both proximal and downstream measures should be used to assess ad performance; this page focuses on the latter.

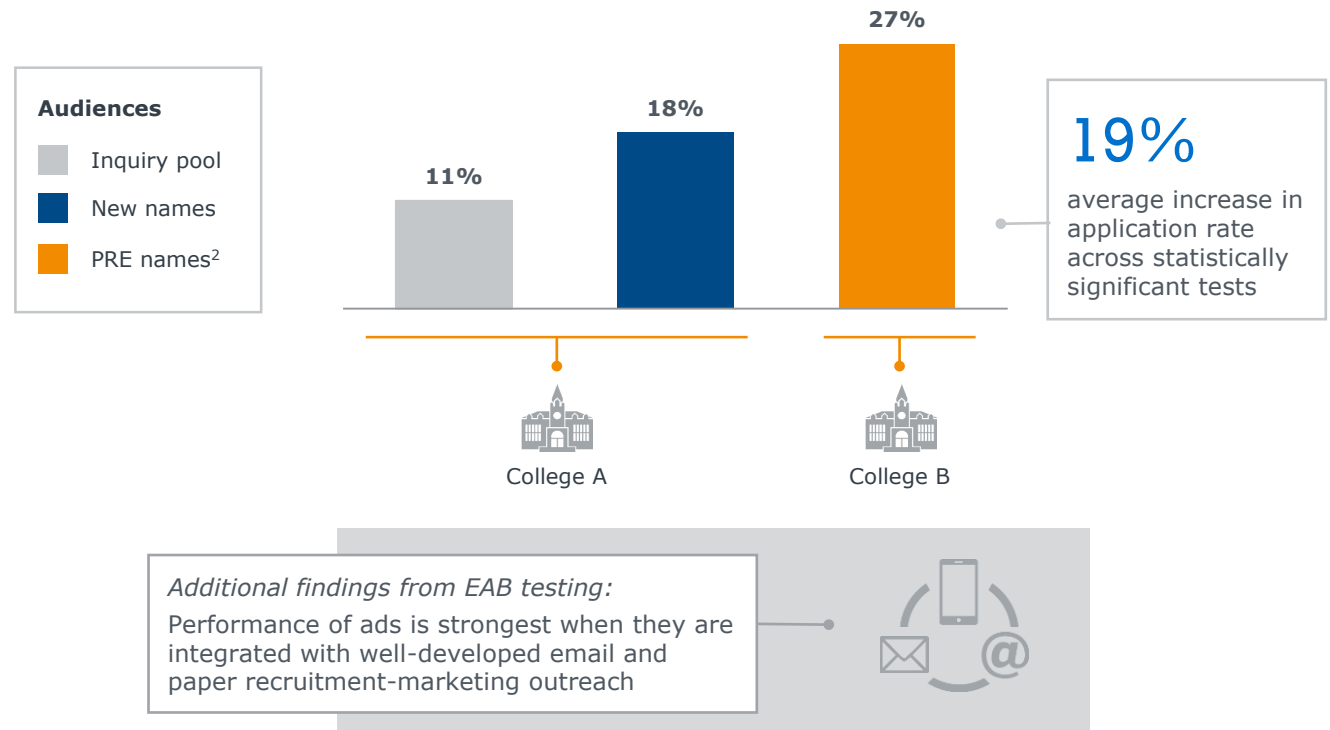
Shown on the right is data from testing performed with EAB partner institutions to compare application rate for students receiving display and social ads plus standard recruitment marketing with that for students receiving only standard outreach. As indicated, institutions using display and social ads saw statistically significant increases in application volume of between 11% and 27%.

### An evidence-based approach

This finding is significant in two respects. First, it shows measurable downstream impact for ads. Second, it provides an example of the sort of evidence that can prove instrumental in making recruitment-marketing investments and engaging stakeholders whose buy-in for those investments might be important. As noted earlier, while this testing focuses on students, the lessons learned here may also apply to younger, millennial parents.

### Increase in Application Rate<sup>1</sup>

Percent (Not Percentage-Point) Increase  
Attributable to Display and Social Ads



- 1) "Application rate" is calculated as the number of students submitting applications divided by the total number of students included in the marketing campaign; increase is for audiences receiving display/social ads in addition to standard recruitment outreach, versus those receiving only standard recruitment outreach.
- 2) PRE names are students who did not respond to outreach efforts during their junior or sophomore years of high school.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



# Coda: **Frontiers** in Digital Recruitment

## **Parent engagement at the speed of conversation**

Real-time customization a common digital-marketing aspiration

## **A rapidly evolving digital toolkit**

The power of digital-marketing techniques is growing exponentially

## Parent engagement at the speed of conversation

# Real-time customization is a common digital-marketing aspiration

### An eye toward customization

A popular vision for the future of digital marketing is providing customers (i.e. parents) precisely the information they need—based on demographics, interests, stage in application journey, etc.—exactly when they need it.

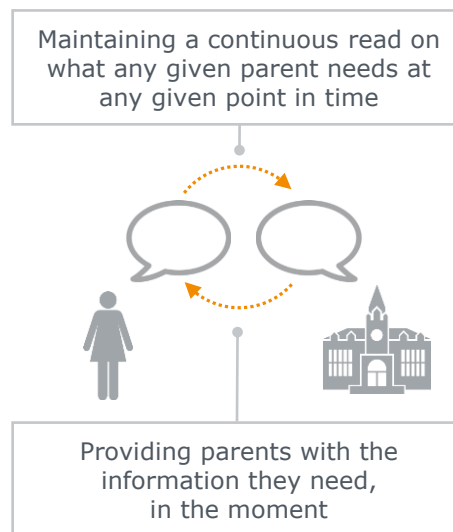
In its most fully realized form, this style of marketing mimics the individualized and responsive style of a conversation.

### Common hurdles

One reason this sort of approach is not more widespread is that successful implementation can be challenging. This is especially true of the automated systems where parents' information needs are identified and appropriate content is served to them. Key hurdles include successfully gathering and organizing the relevant data on prospective parents; perfecting the analytics that translate that data into insight regarding parents' information needs; and the content-creation demands associated with meeting those information needs across parent segments and funnel stages.

### Tomorrow's Promise

*Marketing Interactions  
at the Speed of Conversation*



### Challenges to Be Addressed



#### A systems challenge

Understanding individual parents' information needs in a scalable way depends on the ability to gather and integrate data across multiple systems, which is a challenge for many schools



#### An analytics challenge

The analytics required to turn raw data into a deep and meaningful read on parents' information needs are highly complex, and therefore, difficult to execute



#### A content challenge

Creating meaningfully customized content for different parent segments across the enrollment funnel, entails a huge amount of work; furthermore, segmentation can, in some cases, actually drive down response rate

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A rapidly evolving digital toolkit

## The power of digital-marketing techniques is growing exponentially

### A guiding vision

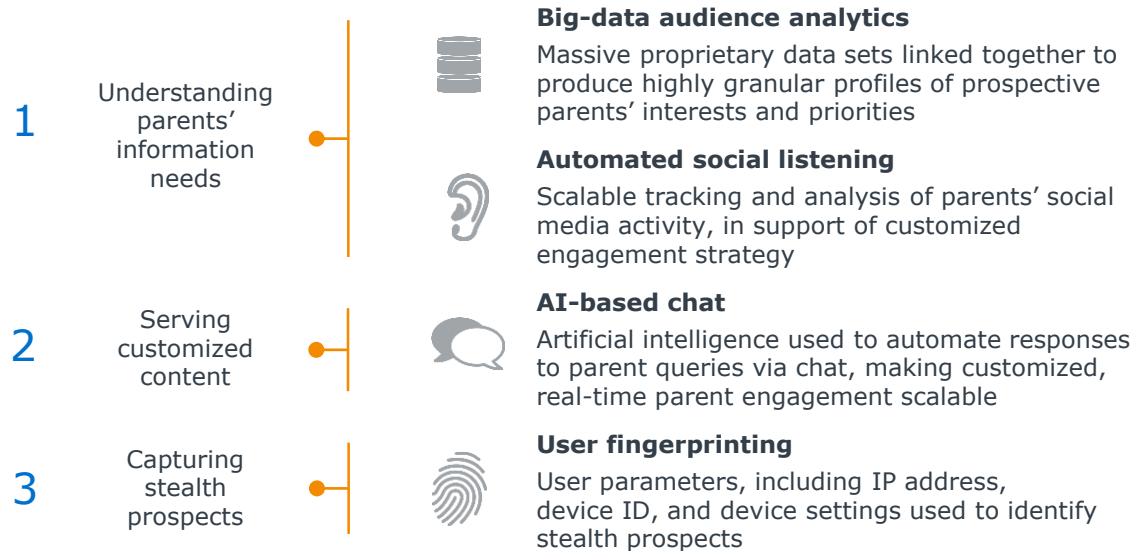
The preceding pages describe a common aspiration of digital recruitment marketing, based on providing individual parents with exactly the information they need, precisely when they need it.

### Related areas of innovation

Several ongoing developments in the digital communications landscape promise to bring this vision closer to reality. One is the vast amount of data being amassed on users of digital media—analytics based on these data sets are able to produce an unprecedented depth of insight on the interests, motivations, and behaviors of individuals. A second is automated content creation, based on artificial intelligence, which holds the promise of addressing individual parents' information needs immediately and at scale. A third, related development is based on improved methods for identifying and tracking stealth prospects, which effectively extends the range of the two developments mentioned above to additional prospective families.

### Three Main Areas of Innovation

*With Examples of Related Approaches*



Source: EAB research and analysis.



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