WHITEPAPER

Inefficiency Is Not An Option

ecity interactive

More than ever, higher ed institutions need to focus their marketing and enrollment management efforts on a core set of priorities.

Here's how to figure out what those are. Read on to learn what steps you can start taking today to shore up your next enrollment cycle.

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Introduction

You're hearing it. You're seeing it. You're feeling it.

These are deeply uncertain times for higher education. From shifts in demographics, disruption in how education is packaged and delivered, to evolving tastes among increasingly segmented markets, most institutions are looking to their admissions and marketing leaders to answer more and harder questions.

With so many siloed stakeholders and voices involved in marketing and recruitment decision-making, it is easy – and natural – for each business unit to try to answer all the questions they each think are most relevant, often times resulting in an unfocused and non-strategic approach to marketing and enrollment. Instead, higher ed leaders need to rally their teams around a single list of essential questions, the answers to which will pinpoint where the biggest opportunities for your institution lie.

Whether you're focused on undergraduate, graduate, or executive education, here are ten questions you need to be able to answer to position yourself to bring in next year's class.

QUESTION 01:

What Is Your Data Saying?

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Too often, though, big decisions like these are made based on anecdotal experiences or what might be happening at another institution. But, when you need to assess the full potential of your portfolio of programs, ask yourself what the data is saying. Google Analytics can provide useful insights into what the level of interest is for specific programs at your institution and, just as importantly, for these types of programs nationally or globally. Google Analytics is a free tool and you probably already have dashboards set up. But chances are your account is collecting dust from inactivity. As you determine where you need to make investments, dive back into Google Analytics – the deeper the better. There are opportunities hidden in the data that don't show themselves if you're just looking at your admissions funnel.

Anonymous Website Visitor	
Lead	Has provided us with contact details usually via Form on site
Started App	Started Application
Submitted App	Submitted Application
Completed App	Has successfully fulfilled all requirements of the application
Decision Point	Institution has accepted or denied the student. If accepted, the student must make a decision on if they will commit
Enrolled	Student has matriculated into the institution

QUESTION 02:

How Effective Is Your Media?

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Brace Yourself: An estimated 40% of your marketing dollars are being wasted.

But do you know which 40 percent that is?

You might have brand-level and program-specific ads in the marketplace. You may have a split between traditional and digital ads. You might have sponsorships and you might have retargeting campaigns.

What's actually populating the top of your funnel with students that are primed to be recruited?

Too often, higher education institutions work with expensive media partners that present data showing "conversions" – the percentage of students that decided they would share that email address or phone number with your program. Those are helpful metrics, but because they are just leads, they aren't the type of "conversion" higher ed marketers care most about, and as such those conversions are not goals unto themselves. Because getting the class is the goal. Contact-information conversions are just a start. You need to get beyond the conversion data and demand insights into how you can improve performance and ultimately realize enrollment goals in this hyper-competitive landscape.

Ask your students...

Another way to assess where your marketing dollars need to be spent is by surveying your current students. In addition to providing you an opportunity to identify new differentiators for your program and reaffirm established ones, surveying your current students may help you identify new marketing channels based on where and how they consume different types of content and media. For instance, you might find that a surprising percentage of your current students are active Instagram users even though your media partner says that your targeted demo is most easily found on LinkedIn. The only way to get this hyper-relevant information specific to your ideal student is to ask.

QUESTION 03:

Do You Know What You're Actually Offering?

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And, just as importantly, does everyone agree on what you're offering? You have probably experienced this distinctly higher-ed challenge.

Try to hone in on simple questions like:

→ What is the program?

→ Who is in it now?

→ Who is it meant for?

→ And how + why does it best serve students?

Everyone in the institution may have a different answer to any of these questions. Marketing briefs enable the marketing and admissions teams to build and document consensus on these questions so that you can market and message effectively. These documents are both strategically collaborative and collaboratively strategic. Everything from your ads, to your emails, to your events can have more of an impact if there is a unified understanding of what your program is, does, who it's for, and what distinguishes it in the marketplace.

As an added bonus, engaging in the process of creating the marketing brief will also bring all of your internal stakeholders to ask a question the academic side of the house too often hesitates to ask: **We have this product, but is anyone actually buying it?**

QUESTION 04:

Who Is Your Competition (Really)?

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Who Is Your Competition (Really)?

You can't differentiate yourself from the competition with your marketing and messaging until you know who your competition is. But ask your leadership, your faculty, and your frontline admissions counselors who your competition is and you can likely expect three (or more!) different answers.

To answer this question in a way that will effectively inform your decision making, you'll need to put on your academia blinders. Ignore (temporarily) the noise that comes from phrases like, "peer institution" or "aspirant program" or "research productivity." Keep everyone focused on programs and institutions that have the same students in their funnels that you do in yours.

And, how do you find out?
You need to ask some key questions:

→ **Is there a space in your CRM for admissions counselors to record schools + programs that your prospective students mention?**

→ **Are you surveying non-enrollers?**

→ **Are you surveying enrollers?**

You can get and confirm this information at multiple points in the recruitment lifecycle to make sure you get the data you need.

QUESTION 05:

How Are You Investing In Search Engine Optimization (SEO)?

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You know this because this is how you shop yourself. Whatever you're looking for, you start with that first group of Google search results – and you rarely look much further. With that in mind, are you investing the way you need to in your school's Google placement? Effective search engine optimization requires an investment of time and money. And, in SEO as it is in many places, content is king. When deciding where to spend your time and money, search engine marketing (SEM) can often seem like the shortest path to generating leads. Because of that, SEM probably eats up an outsize portion of your digital marketing even though **SEO delivers 6x higher ROI than SEM**. Ensuring the content and messaging your website is designed to meet the right users when in their search journeys is a first-strike capability every marketing and admissions leader needs to grow the top of your funnel and, ultimately, your enrollment.

Capitalize on the opportunities you've identified

You are starting to answer the most essential questions for admissions and marketing professionals in higher ed to ask – the ones that pinpoint your biggest opportunities. But once you have a handle on what the biggest opportunities are, how do you prepare to be able to capitalize on them?

If answers to the first five essential questions ensure everyone on your team is speaking the same language and agrees on the biggest opportunities, answers to these next five essential questions make sure that you're using **the right tools at the right time to get the right students**.

Before we dive into the next 5 questions, let us know how we can help!

As an agency, we are passionate about higher ed marketing and enrollment and have over 20 years of experience helping enrollment and marketing leaders like you reach your goals. So, if you have questions about what you're read so far or are ready to supercharge your next enrollment cycle, email us at tkegelman@ecityinteractive.com.

WE'RE READY TO TALK!

QUESTION 06:

Have You Developed Personas for Your Programs?

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It's easy to think that the interest among your prospective students in a program like yours is created equally.

It's not.

You have one program but you have all kinds of students in the funnel for that program whose motivations, experiences, behaviors, and future aspirations vary greatly. And because all of them may present a viable recruitment opportunity for your program, catered messaging based on specific personas in your funnel is critical to getting the best results. You know this.

But too often, as marketers develop personas for academic programs, they gather input from recruiters, faculty, and leadership that leads to more personas than you need (or can even use).

Developing personas doesn't limit or restrict who is coming into your program. Instead, developing and using personas helps you pinpoint the best places to put your time and money for the highest ROI. Rally your team and stakeholders around a maximum of three personas for your program that constitute the most highly desired recruits based on recruitability and academic and cultural fit.

Personas create unique opportunities on two fronts in higher education:

First, they allow you to take advantage of the high degree of targeting digital marketing offers you; second, they allow for effective marketing, personalized recruiting, and solid admissions counseling to function symbiotically.

QUESTION 07:

Do You Have a Student Journey Map?

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Having a handle on the personas you want to target is only useful if you're prepared to meet each of those personas at the right time with the right message throughout at every milestone in every stage of the student lifecycle—from discovery and inquiry all the way through enrollment.

That may sound daunting, but a clearly defined student journey map makes it simple.

To get there, you need to know every single communication and call to action deploying to a student in every stage of the funnel.

Even though no one intends to compete with any of their colleagues when they're messaging students, if you don't have student journey maps for your programs, there's a good chance your colleagues are sending messages that are competing with each other. Developing a student journey map will effectively tackle this problem.

Remember: Students don't think of your institution as the cumulative sum of distinct offices with different responsibilities. They think of it as one college or university. For example, a program's advising unit may be sending students information on how to register for classes before the student has even submitted their tuition deposit. The student may be asking, "Why is this university telling me to register for classes before I have even finalized my choice?" While advising is just doing its job and anticipating student needs, the student doesn't think of it that way. They're just a little confused and a little unclear about why they got this message. Unifying and visualizing marketing, recruitment, admissions, and on-boarding communications, calls to action, and expected behaviors in a single message map is the only way to ensure you are effectively moving students through the funnel and ensure you are effectively serving your students.

QUESTION 08:

Do You Have a Service Level Agreement Between Your Recruitment & Marketing Teams?

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Higher education is one of the few places where marketing and sales (yes, enrollment is sales) teams often exist in different silos.

Too often, these silos can lead to mis- or non-aligned operations, varying definitions of success, and organizational friction. While the working relationship may be productive and you have your regular marketing/admissions huddles, is there true consensus on who is doing what? Does each team have specific targets and key performance indicators with which they can track progress toward their goals? How often do you meet? What channels do you use to communicate with one another? What's the best way to provide feedback to one another? These are some questions you should be considering as you set up your SLA.

Service Level Agreements between your marketing and recruitment teams articulate specific **strategic, tactical, and technical** initiatives that everyone is responsible for overseeing, and identify key metrics against which these teams will be assessed. These agreements officially ensure both arms of the operation collaborate and are accountable to each other.

Common friction points that might warrant agreement between the two teams:

- How often is the website updated?
- Collateral needs: Print pieces? Presentation decks?
- Email content, design and deployment.
- Email communication plan changes and updates.
- Lead volume vs Lead quality

QUESTION 09:

Do You Know the ROI of Your Content?

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Chances are your institution has already jumped on the opportunities content marketing provides.

You're in regular contact with your students, faculty, top researchers, talent recruiters, and alumni, and you're feeding a lot of opportunities to writers (and maybe even writing some content yourself.) But, are you truly engaging content marketing or are you just developing content in fits and starts?

To ensure that your commitment to developing content translates into a content marketing strategy, you're going to need two things: time and patience. But, the good news is you won't need more money.In our experience, content marketing is 1/3rd less expensive per lead compared to paid search.

***So, the investment really comes down to time and human capital.** Estimates show that it can take around 18 months of keeping to a firm content publishing schedule until you will see measurable results. This may be why so many institutions opt for a paid search approach to lead generation – it takes less time to just pay to have your program listed in search results. But, if you can build and maintain an audience that organically comes to you via your content over time, your cost per lead will drop significantly, allowing you to reap the benefits of content marketing.

QUESTION 10:

You Have a Pricey CRM, but Are You Getting the Most Out of It?

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They're big.
They're expensive.
They're complicated.

In retrospect, it might feel like it was pretty easy to sell your leadership on why you needed a CRM, but as you try to take advantage of new and future opportunities, you might be asking yourself if your institution is using it effectively. You might feel like you already know the answer:

Probably not.

Too many institutions use their CRM as a record-keeping tool to answer just two questions: What did admissions send and when did they send it? But a CRM has to do much, much more for your institution. Otherwise you're wasting it. Effective use of your CRM means that it is collecting data points, interactions, and behaviors from your students in every stage of the recruitment, admissions, and enrollment lifecycles. This is where your student journey maps can guide you. As you identify every office, unit, and stakeholder that needs to engage students, you are also developing a list of who in the institution probably needs to be using, accessing, or at least recording activity in the CRM. This kind of enterprise-wide adoption has far-ranging benefits that can provide insights far beyond enrollment. You need to give your CRM permission to identify and communicate opportunities for all stakeholders in the institution by moving beyond just recording interactions and towards a CRM that collects data points around student behaviors and actions. Tracking these in real time will advise your tactics in real time on both a macro and individual-student level.

If you do this right, you won't just finally get what you paid for – you'll be working smarter than ever before. Imagine what you could do on the marketing, recruitment, and retention fronts with data points on every student from every point in the student lifecycle.

Possibilities abound.

READY TO WORK TOGETHER?

Let's Get Started.

Clearly, opportunities abound.

Your institution has so many ways to market and recruit with more precision to get better results. The work of turning answers into dynamic strategies, potent tactics, and time-saving technologies may feel daunting, but that's where we can help.

eCity Interactive higher education marketing and recruiting solutions and services are uniquely equipped to organize, execute, and sustain your efforts by leveraging data, delivering insights, and aligning your teams with consensus-driven goals.

At eCity, We've Got it Covered:

- ✓ CRM & marketing automation
- ✓ Email & Lead nurturing
- ✓ SEO
- ✓ Paid Media
- ✓ Admissions funnel audit
- ✓ Student Recruitment
- ✓ Content analysis and creation
- ✓ Bottom-up forecasting

Let's Talk.

Thank you for reading our Inbound Marketing for Higher Ed white paper. If you'd like to learn more about inbound marketing, or if you're interested in partnering with eCity on an inbound marketing campaign, please reach me directly at tkegelman@ecityinteractive.com

Many thanks,
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