



# Student Recruitment Guide



Advisory Services



“As Education institutions, we have the responsibility to attract the best future talents for the industries we serve. The recruitment experience must immerse students in the culture of our institution and industries, with each touchpoint delivering on our brand promise.”





# Student Recruitment

Institutions of higher education are facing increased competition and technological challenges, intensifying the pressure on their student recruitment department.

Connecting with prospective candidates and their parents at the right time and with the right message is just one of the challenging tasks.

The issue is further complicated because student applicants aren't following the traditional "marketing to sales to customer" funnel.

Instead, each higher education prospect follows a unique decision path, at a pace that can vary from several years to just a few weeks.

One prospect might know they want to choose your school before even speaking with a staff member, because they've already been convinced by your social media account.

Another prospect might speak with a recruitment officer first, and then require additional marketing attention in the form of webinars or blog posts before choosing the school.

When a prospect who has already read thirteen reviews gets in touch with your recruitment officer, they are going to require a different conversation than a prospect who's only heard of your school from a Facebook ad.

That is why, your marketing and recruitment teams need to be agile and in tight alignment.

Now more than ever, strategies to reach students wherever they are and give them the confidence and knowledge to succeed in their student journey are important.

Student recruitment is harder than ever, and standing out in an increasingly competitive crowd is becoming a challenge.

**So, how do you grab your prospective students' attention with a college and student recruitment strategy?**

# What does student recruitment mean?

Student recruitment refers to the practice of encouraging qualified individuals to enroll in an educational program. Further education colleges, universities and other skills training providers all use student recruitment strategies to attract potential students.

To recruit students, you need to have a clear student recruitment plan and a system to implement it.

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## What is a student recruitment plan?

A student recruitment plan is a document that outlines your recruitment objectives and the communication, marketing and sales strategies that will be put into place to achieve them.

It also identifies the tools you'll use to implement your plan and what metrics you'll use to measure success.

The student recruitment plan should be informed by your institution's vision as well as data from previous recruitment cycles.

## Why do you need a student recruitment plan?

A robust student recruitment plan is essential for cutting through the competition and recruiting the students your university requires to continue to thrive.

Your recruitment plan will help align the various teams who interact with your potential students and ensure that their efforts deliver a consistent brand experience.

Your previous year's recruitment plan will be an essential benchmark to understand what worked and what didn't work so well, so that you can continuously improve your future recruitment activities.

## How to prepare a student recruitment strategy?

In the following pages, we will provide you with an overview of the essential steps needed to prepare a comprehensive student recruitment strategy.

STEP 1

# Target audiences and personas



## Analyze target audiences and establish target persona

Identifying your target audience is essential in order to develop content that will appeal to their needs and offer compelling evidence that your institution is the best choice for them.

**To get started, first determine:**

- **Who is your target audience?**
- **Where and when can you best engage with your audience?**





# Define your target market and understand their needs



All the subsequent marketing choices you make to recruit students are founded on whom the target audience for the message is.

For example, you might consider who in the student's family will play a role in making the decision.

How you approach marketing to a student versus their parents is going to be different.

It is often wise to look at the wants and needs of the primary decision maker, which, for undergraduate studies, will most often be the parents.

Consider what the parents want out of a school for their children and what they could be worried about.

Pay attention to the fact that the primary decision maker will not only vary based on the level of studies - undergraduate versus graduate versus continuous education - but also based on cultural or regional traits.



# Target Personas

Next, it is time to envision who your target audience is.

Professional marketers recommend creating “buyer personas” that can be used to help you understand your prospective target market better.

Personas are semi-fictional characters that help you nail down the essential characteristics of your target audience. Be as detailed as possible when creating target personas.

What is the age of the decision makers?  
What is their typical income or occupation?  
Where do they shop?  
What websites do they visit?

Go beyond the demographics data to include their interests, their motivations, their worries and wishes when thinking about education. All this and more goes into developing a persona.





STEP 2

# Consumer journey and lifecycle



Identify your audiences' consumer journey and define the desired experience during the entire lifecycle

Next, clearly define the student journey in order to map out marketing strategies.

Creating a student journey map enables your marketing team to visualize what your target audience does and feels at all touchpoints, so you can help steer the path toward a successful recruitment. A student experience map is helpful to create a school wide student-centric strategy.

It is very likely that your student experience map will help identify touchpoints and interactions beyond your marketing and recruitment teams, such as the reception team, the financial office, or the alumni office. The map will help raise awareness of the positive impact that these teams can have on the recruitment process.

The experience map allows you to chart courses of action to better meet the needs of the student.



STEP 3

# Competitive research and messaging





## Conduct competitive research and define sell-against messages

Competitive research is the cornerstone for effective marketing strategies and messaging. When conducting this research, consider who the main competitors are, how they are seeking your prospects' attention, and how can you respond?

Approach this from the viewpoint of your target market. If your prospect views an institution as an alternative, even if you don't believe it is in your league, then it is your competitor.





## Who are your competitors?

- Direct competitors operate in your target geography and offer a program that could be seen by your prospects as a substitute for yours
- Indirect competitors provide programs that are not the same as yours, but could satisfy your prospects' career aspirations

## Ways to identify competitors:

- Describe jobs that are a good fit for your school's young graduates, then search LinkedIn for people in similar jobs and identify the education institution they attended
- Identify websites with similar keywords as yours
- Monitor online comments and discussions
- Look at rankings in the education segment you are in
- Track fair exhibitors

## Analyze competition on all the key marketing aspects

- Positioning & messaging comparison
- Website traffic information
- Social media reach across various channels
- Search Engine Optimization (details, like keywords and inbound links)
- Paid online ads
- Content published
- Calls to action and conversion points
- PR activity and results
- Other key marketing programs
- Marketing tech stack

STEP 4

# Unique Selling Points







## Optimize the Unique Selling Points for your school

A Unique Selling Proposition (USP) is a sentence that explains what makes your school unique. It tells students why they should enroll at your institution instead of one of your competitors. Ask, how can we best attract, engage and delight our prospects?

Your USP sets your school apart from your competition. It should be clear, concise, and easy for prospective students to understand. A USP can be used across all marketing communications, interactions, and branding.

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# Optimize the Unique Selling Points for your school

When creating or revising your school's USP, keep these factors in mind:

- Who are you targeting, and what needs or desires do they have?
- What makes your school unique?
- Is that something your target audience cares about?
- What are the benefits your school offers that others don't in the eyes of your audience?
- How will you communicate your USP?



STEP 5

# Recruitment goals





## Establish your recruitment goals

You may want to start broad before narrowing your focus.

To get the most out of your recruiting plan, you should collaborate with other leaders in the institution ahead of time.

Your main objective may be to maximize each program's capacity.

Beyond that, you may want to achieve a certain ratio of domestic to overseas students,

or make your student body more varied in terms of characteristics and origins.

Always attempt to develop SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, Timely). We recommend allocating a section of your strategy to foreign student recruiting, or constructing a separate international student recruitment plan.



STEP 6

# Marketing and communication plan





## Create a marketing and communication plan



A marketing plan is a written strategy for how your marketing team will act. It includes the high level objectives, the metrics and the steps that your teams will take to achieve your goals.

A communication plan helps you to effectively deliver information to your target audience. It identifies the messages you need to promote, to whom you're targeting those messages, and where.





**A well-written marketing plan has enough detail to give your team direction, but not so long that it's cumbersome to read.**

## How to write a marketing plan?

- Define your school's marketing objectives.
- List your marketing initiatives.
- Pick your marketing channels.
- Set your key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Refine, measure, and improve.

## How to write a communication plan?

- Conduct an audit of your current communications materials.
- Set SMART goals for your communications plan based on the results from your audit.
- Identify the target personas who are going to be your main audiences.
- Outline and write your plan, keeping your audiences in-mind.
- Determine the channel(s) through which you need to deliver your messages.
- Define the pace and frequency of your messages.
- Identify who in your organization will be the "voices" for each type of topic.
- Measure the results of your plan, and work with stakeholders to determine successes and areas for improvement.

## Internal marketing and communication

Your institution's extended community will play an important role in influencing future students and their families.

Therefore, you should also invest in internal marketing and communication, to help sustain the enthusiasm and the engagement of the people who care the most about your institution: current students, staff, faculties, alumni.

Your extended community should have access to an intranet or secure portals with a single point of access to discussion boards, calendars, committees, online class areas, news and updates, photo galleries, and data about the school development and performance.

Information about what makes your school unique, successes and achievements of your community should be included in these channels.

STEP 7

# Outbound and inbound marketing



Build  
awareness by  
understanding  
both outbound  
and inbound  
marketing  
dynamics

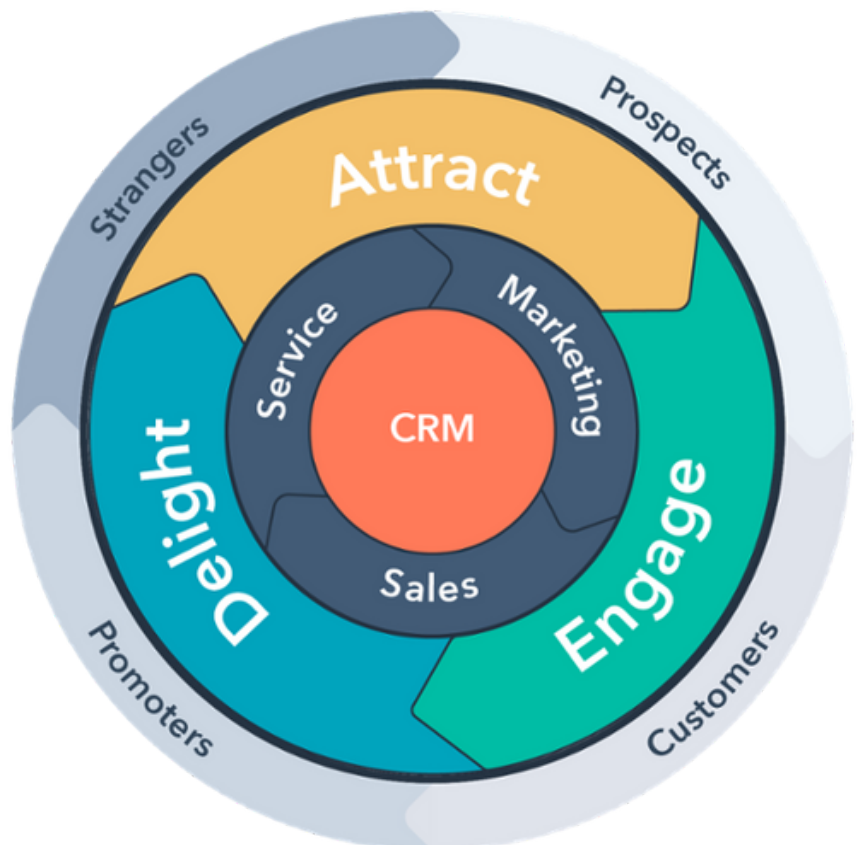


#### The HubSpot Flywheel model

*With the flywheel, you use the momentum of your happy customers to drive referrals and repeat sales. Basically, your business keeps spinning*

Formerly, buyers decided primarily based on what the company had to say, but now they are influenced primarily by the company's customers.

Marketers in today's world need to realize that traditional marketing strategies and tactics are not as effective as they were five to ten years ago.





**“Instead of one-way interruption, web marketing is all about delivering useful content at just the precise moment that a buyer needs it.”**

**- David Meerman Scott**

## What is Outbound marketing? Or interruption marketing...

Outbound marketing seeks to push messaging out to potential customers.

Outbound marketing activities are often called interruption marketing, as they typically do not take into consideration whether the target audience wants to hear from you at the time you communicate.

They should be implemented carefully, so that they can serve as an essential support to amplify inbound marketing activities, without annoying your target audience.

Outbound marketing outreach activities can include:

- Search engine advertising
- Programmatic advertising
- Social media advertising
- Print advertising
- Sponsorships
- International student recruitment fairs
- LinkedIn prospecting
- WhatsApp and SMS marketing
- Cold calling and emailing purchased databases

## What is Inbound marketing?

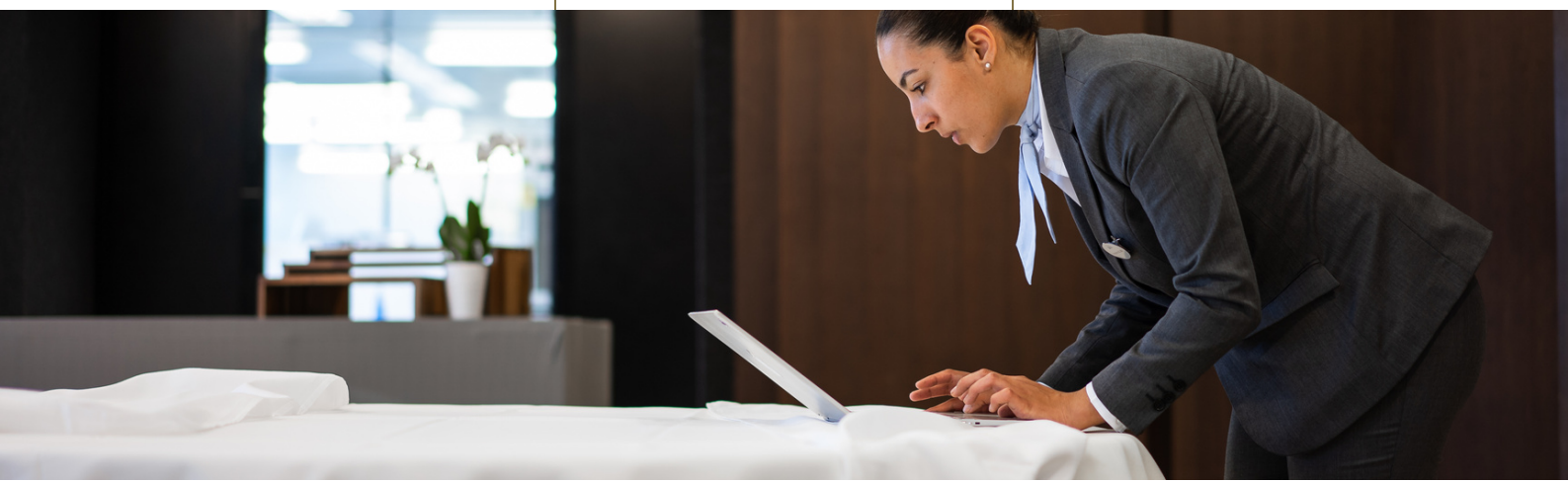
Inbound marketing is a strategy where you create content or social media tactics that spread brand awareness, so people learn about you.

Once people show interest in your programs, inbound marketers strive to provide them with helpful information that supports them during their decision process until they are ready to select your program. Inbound marketing continues after the purchase to delight your customers so that they hopefully become active promoters of your institution.

By creating content designed to address the needs of your target personas, you attract qualified prospects and build trust and credibility for your school.

Inbound marketing outreach activities include:

- Own blogs and news sites
- Own website
- Content marketing
- Opt-in email marketing
- Search Engine Optimization
- Social media
- Guest blogging
- Contributions to online forums





## What is lead generation? And why do you need it?



Leads are individuals who have expressed interest in your institution's programs or services in some way. In exchange for information about your programs or educational materials for your subject of expertise, your contact will typically give you their information - like their name, email, or phone number.

Consequently, lead generation is the process of attracting as many strangers as possible and converting them into clients.

You can achieve predictability for your business by having a lead generation strategy. In capturing and nurturing leads, you can build a relationship with your prospects, expecting them to consider your school as their first point of contact when they are ready to buy.



STEP 8

# Marketing platforms



# Nurture your prospects with the right marketing platforms and tools

Marketing efforts drive prospects to your database, after which those prospects need to be nurtured with a series of timely and personalized communication.

For this, it's helpful to link your Content Management System (CMS) to your Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform via automation.

## CMS-CRM Integration

A good CMS-CRM integration will funnel all activity on your website straight into your CRM for instant analysis, reporting, and actionable insights.

You'll also be able to see how your site is performing alongside your other online channels, which better informs your marketing and content strategy.





STEP 9

# Prospective Student Engagement





Accompany  
your  
prospective  
students  
through their  
applications  
until their  
first day on  
campus and  
beyond

Your objective is to guarantee that your prospective students can readily communicate with your sales and support staff and that their concerns are rapidly resolved.

When an individual's application is approved, you can utilize your CRM to add them to a new communication workflow.

You may set automatic emails that continue to excite their interest as they reach this new stage of their relationship with your institution, from networking event invites to alumni testimonials.

A communication workflow's goal is to guide a potential candidate through the application process by providing them with relevant and timely information. The contact doesn't end once your successful students have received confirmation of their acceptance. To discourage candidates from "dropping out" and enrolling at a competing university, you'll need to keep them motivated. This content should be designed to help them on their journey to becoming a fully fledged student at your university.

STEP 10

# Data analysis and improvement plan



# Analyze your data and adjust your plan

After each intake, you can analyze the data you've collected. Analyzing your data will enable you to figure out what's worked well during the recruitment cycle and where you should focus your efforts next time.

Your CRM software can provide you with these insights because it'll have inbuilt analytics capabilities. Use your CRM to dig deeper into the ultimate success or failure of your events, marketing campaigns and other student recruitment efforts.

## Consider:

- Which outreach and inbound activities attracted the most applicants?
- What is my average lead to enrollment ratio?
- What is the demographic spread of my applicants?





# Get started with our insights and templates:

Creating a customer persona  
Understand your audience - Customer Interview guide  
Mapping a customer journey  
Competitor analysis guide & templates  
Unique Selling Proposition guide - Canva template  
Marketing plan and budget guide & template  
Communication plan template & checklist  
Digital Marketing guide & templates  
SEO - Search engine optimization guide & templates  
School website structure template  
Content marketing guide & templates  
School social media guide  
School online advertising guide  
Marketing automation & email marketing guide



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