



# ***Winning Enrollment Tactics***

FOR GROWING GRADUATE & NON-TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS



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## **Executive Summary**

The internet, the aftermath of the recession, and increased fierce competition together have caused rapid changes in higher education. These shifts have created a new type of prospective student, executing a novel kind of college search.

According to a study conducted by Velocify, 62 percent of prospects submitting inquiries spend 3 or more hours researching on the subject before submitting a request for information. The “new” prospect is better informed and more demanding, thereby requiring a new approach.

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The first major ingredient for growth is that an institution must truly understand and value the non-traditional learner. A separate marketing strategy, admissions and student services team must be established.

These are perhaps the biggest key growth opportunities for universities and colleges, making up the most significant component of constituents in higher education.

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According to a Clearing House report, there are over 31 million people who attended college, but did not complete their education. The segment decides to take their education further based on factors that are different from those that influence traditional undergraduates. These include being a role-model for their family, career advancement and increased earnings. They are worried about debt and school reputation.

While many universities struggle to grow their professional and working adult programs, many schools are growing and thriving. What are successful enrollment teams in such universities doing differently than those that are struggling?

This white paper discusses how enrollment winners are behaving and operating differently in the current landscape. Overall, these top enrollment teams have adapted by creating a new culture and leveraging strategies as well as tactics that are radically different from those that have been left behind. There is a specific combination of behavior and tactics that enrollment winners follow, to achieve outcomes that others do not. These factors set successful enrollment efforts apart.

KEY INSIGHTS	INSIGHTS
<p><b>BEHAVIORS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with prospective and existing students by being proactive and responsive</li> <li>• Partner with prospective students to educate them with insights and options that add value and fight competition</li> <li>• Willing to invest in their success by creating more opportunities</li> </ul>	<p><i>They behave and operate radically different.</i></p> <p><i>The enrollment team and the university are trusted and valued partners for the educational journey and they remain a partner from prospective student to alumni.</i></p>
<p><b>STRATEGIC FACTORS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program or “product” focused</li> <li>• Spectacular conversion path</li> <li>• Holistic Enrollment</li> <li>• Approach: Admissions and Marketing are one team</li> <li>• Mature Lead Management Process</li> </ul>	<p><i>Successful universities create and promote the key factors of difference of their programs. The enrollment teams view their programs as the key product to sell the differences between their institution and competitors as a part of a unique and spectacular conversion experience.</i></p>
<p><b>TACTICAL FACTORS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent ongoing interaction with prospects and students</li> <li>• Immediate, professional response to inquiries and issues</li> </ul>	<p><i>These institutions remain “front of mind” and relevant during the student life cycle with an integrated communication strategy that is personal and proactive.</i></p>

***Here is a summary of key strategic factors, tactics and behaviors of enrollment teams that separate winners and the runner ups:***

1. Value relationship over revenue
2. Partnership over profit
3. Inform rather than persuade
4. Focus on program or product
5. Frequent interactions and immediate professional response to issues and inquiries
6. Providing a spectacular conversion path and student experience.
7. Earn referrals.
8. They are predictable for their administration and stake holders

We have examined these factors in greater depth, hoping to provide enhanced performance for our valued clients. We have found the following distinct interrelated factors and behaviors that set winners apart.

**1. Value relationship over revenue:** They establish a personal relationship with the potential student by listening and attempting to truly understand their needs. They then match those needs to a specific program offered by the university. They understand the prospect's concerns and goals. They inspire confidence in the institution by listening and problem solving. They clearly understand the prospect's motivations, aspirations and challenges. The relationship with the program positions the institution as the top choice for the prospect.

**2. Partnership over profit:** The institution and its enrollment team are seen as the prospect's vital partners. They recognize and remember that prospects are people taking one of the most important and expensive decisions of their life. These teams are highly responsive and collaborative. They educate prospects on new ideas and perspectives, and become a key ally in their decision to return to school.

**3. Inform rather than persuade:** By building a relationship based on trust, demonstrating expertise, and inspiring the potential prospect, the institution is positioned and linked together with the prospect as they embark on the journey together. It makes the university the prospect's top choice automatically. Persuasion is minimized. The enrollment teams inspire confidence in the institution by listening, problem solving and creating a partnership so the institution becomes the logical first choice for the prospect.

**4. Program-focused:** Winners have clear program differentiation. Programs are as important as branding. They connect the prospect's desire to program benefits and outcomes, thereby aligning the university with the needs of the prospect. Most institutions struggle with telling their story or, specifically, explaining why a student should choose their program. Why is your program better than that offered by your competitor?

Many institutions pitch features and benefits, such as great faculty and accelerated learning, instead of focusing on the product or program. As education has become more commoditized, what is it that makes your institution stand out from the rest? Part of the answer is that the academic program is an important factor in the key value proposition and a major opportunity for differentiation. It is no longer enough to merely sell the “product” of education. To rise above the noise, universities must invest in program research before the program is offered. The following market research must be executed:

- a. Demand for program
- b. Size of target audience
- c. Employment demand
- d. Competitive outlook for each program
- e. Market saturation by program
- f. Brand equity within the market
- g. Available channels to reach target audiences
- h. Cost per lead and targeted cost per enrollment

According to Google’s 2012 report titled Education Trends Through the Eyes of Your Customer, 83 percent of student searches started with a program, a non-branded query. It means that most students do not have any school in mind when looking for one. As they narrowed their search, brand became important. However, in case of equal brand equity, program key value differentiators became critical. When you look at the competition, what are the key factors that distinguish your program from your competition?

**5. The right response:** Prompt, professional and frequent. Prospects expect lightning fast response to their initial inquiry, so an immediate and professional response is a minimum expectation. Following-up is equally critical. Most schools stop reaching out to prospects after the first week. Ongoing, continued, and frequent nurturing that includes voice, print, email and text communication is mandatory. A high level of service culture and strategy are key differences.

**6. The right infrastructure:** Do you have the staff capacity to respond to an ever-increasing competitive market? Most efforts stop seven days after submission. Can your team respond immediately to inquiries?

**7. Spectacular student experience:** Has your institution created the most spectacular student experience possible? Do you measure and monetize every step of the conversion path from first click to alumni? Identifying and measuring every step of the conversion path and creating the most spectacular student experience – from first click to alumni. Eliminating enrollment barriers and providing a smooth conversion process. Holistic, measurable strategic alignment with enrollment and marketing operating as a team.

## Here are questions for you to evaluate your prospective student experience:

**a. User experience:** *Are prospects able to easily access relevant information on your website? Is it user friendly? Can they find specific program information? Do they want to learn more?*

*When a prospect inquires, how long does it take for your team to respond - seconds, hours or days? Is there an immediate 'Thank You' email? Is there an immediate outbound call (within minutes) from a team member who is pleasant and professional?*

*What does your mature lead strategy look like? Are you in compliance with DNC & the CAN-SPAM Act? Are nurturing and maximizing the value of the inquiry?*

We conducted a secret survey of several online programs and only a few schools responded in a timely and professional manner via email or phone. Remember, there is fierce competition for prospects. On an average, they send inquiries to 2-5 institutions depending on the level of the degree they are looking for. The school that makes immediate contact with the right program will be able to tell its story and win.

**8. Holistic enrollment approach:** Strategic marketers are aligned with the enrollment effort and both teams work together as one to get prospects interested and enrolled.

**9. Earn referrals:** Winners generate and work with inquiries. Enrollment teams that execute these strategies put themselves in the position to ask and earn the referrals from their prospects. If you have delivered on your promise, it is perfectly acceptable to ask for referrals. Once you have delivered on your promise, it is perfectly acceptable to ask for referrals. In fact, 25% of inquiries are generated and measured from referrals.

**10. They are predictable:** Leveraging data and establishing KPIs, reporting and ongoing assessments have a high probability of ensuring success. They help schools in identifying if they are on the right track or not.

**Conclusion:** Successful universities win by growing their student enrollment and executing best practices. However, they also continue to win in the future because they ask and receive great referrals from past and current students.

Enrollment winners behave and operate differently, so the outcomes are better. Overall, the top enrollment teams adapt to changing scenarios by creating a dynamic culture that is strategic and radically different from the second place finishers. These organizations work even when others stop and position themselves to win now as well as in the future.

We can help you grow expand your reach and increase your revenue with quality



### ***About Educationconnex***

Unleash the potential of your enrollment effort with Educationconnex! Reach more! Enroll more! Educationconnex is an enrollment solutions company which develops data-driven enrollment strategies that identify and drive tactics to grow your total student enrollment.

We can help you grow expand your reach and increase your revenue with quality enrollment. Since 2008 we have been helping non-profit universities grow enrollment through strategic marketing and recruitment solutions. We develop data-driven enrollment marketing and conversion strategies that produce a consistent, predictable flow of student applications. We can deliver an end-to-end solution (Strategic Marketing + Enrollment Conversion) or as a standalone service.

**Find out more about how Educationconnex can help you increase enrollment by visiting [Educationconnex.com](http://Educationconnex.com) or calling at (951)-443-3533**