

ARTICLE



Eight Questions You Should Be Asking About Your Recruitment Communication Plan

Great rock music, like all great communications, has many critical components in common. Just as a great song masterfully weaves orchestration, a catchy tune with a repeating chorus and strong lyrics that tell a story, a strong communication plan is composed of a carefully arranged sequential series of messages with a central theme. Similar to lyrics in a well-written song, a good communication plan focuses on messaging your prospective students care about.

While most colleges and universities have drafted recruitment communications plans, many of these plans lack consistent messaging, a common theme and proper timing.

If you have been experiencing declining conversion or yield rates, it may be time to take a closer look at your current recruitment communication plan.

HERE ARE SOME KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER AS YOU REVIEW YOUR INSTITUTIONS COMMUNICATION PLAN:

1. **Is your communication plan comprehensive?**

A strong recruitment communication plan is actually not just one plan but several segmented to each of your key markets. A comprehensive communication plan includes sequential messaging to undergraduate, transfer, graduate and international students. Depending on your particular mix of programs, you may have unique submarkets such as aviation, nursing, or ministry that require uniquely targeted messaging. And do not forget about parents. Parents are often co-decision makers with their undergraduate students and have their own set of needs and interests.



While it is certainly critical to inform the student of the next steps in the process, it is equally important to continually promote the benefits of your institution.

2. **Are you nurturing students with communications at each stage of the recruitment funnel?**

At KelmscottEDU, we've seen many college communication plans that focus communications at the inquiry phase, but little to none at later critical stages of the funnel. In order to have strong conversion and yield rates, you need to effectively communicate with students at every stage of the recruitment funnel. A careful mix of communications should be developed and sent to your suspects, inquirers, applicants, admits, deposited and registered students.

3. **Are your messages personalized?**

Today's technology allows you to use student data to personalize your recruitment communications. Using our institutions' CRMs, most of us send messages addressing prospective students by their first name in both electronic and print communications. But in today's competitive recruiting market, messages need speak directly to the student's particular needs and interests. A strong communication plan will target the messages to each individual student. Don't stop at the student's first name. Instead, use the data you have collected to personalize messages based on location, gender, major, interests, and more.

4. **Are you using multi-media communications or have you moved to a cross-media strategy?**

Cross-media communications is a powerful way for enrollment managers to increase their ROI. A strong recruitment communication plan will have a well-planned combination of emails, letters, postcards, phone calls, event announcements, surveys, brochures, viewbooks and other publications. But unlike multi-media marketing, crossmedia communications funnels the responses from these communications into a single database. That data is then used to generate customized messaging that creates a dialogue between the institution and the prospective student.

5. **Are your communications too focused on function and not enough on engagement?**

Many recruitment communication plans focus on function or tasks to be completed such as getting the applicant to complete the application file or on encouraging the admitted student to deposit. While it is certainly critical to inform the student of the next steps in the process, it is equally important to continually promote the benefits of your institution. All too often, marketing messages take a back seat to task-oriented messages at the applicant and admitted student stage. While you want to send messages requesting transcripts, letters of recommendation, and deposits, these communications need to be intermingled with messages highlighting key benefits of enrolling.

6. **Is your CRM or institutional database capable of sending your complex communication plans?**

CRMs are becoming an increasingly common tool in enrollment, but the quality of the communication tools varies considerably within these systems. Enrollment managers rely on their CRMs or institutional database,



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such as Banner or Jenzabar, to send their communication plans. As you reflect on the questions above, ask yourself: Does my current CRM or database have the capability of sending these complex messaging sequences? Many institutions have turned to KelmscottEDU for execute their communication plans due to issues with their institutions systems or lack of personnel. At KelmscottEDU, we have the tools and expertise to design and launch multi-layered messaging sequences while utilizing cross-media marketing.

7. **Are you executing your communication plan in a timely manner?**

Most of us spend an untold number of hours planning and creating our recruitment communication plans, but what about execution? Are you sending your print and electronic messages out in a timely manner? Are you new inquiries receiving an initial message immediately or does it take your office weeks to enter inquiry cards into your database? While creating a communication plan is important, executing that plan accurately and in a timely manner is equally essential to maintain your prospective students' interest.

8. **Have you evaluated your results?**

Evaluations of your communication plans should be done on an ongoing basis and at the conclusion of your campaign. It is important to have the tools to measure responses, opens, click-throughs, event attendance, and compliance with task requests. You also need to verify that your team is sending the communications and that they are sent on time per your original plan. Analyzing this data, you want to look for strengths and weaknesses in your messaging and make adjustments accordingly.

GET A COMMUNICATION PLAN AUDIT

Though to many of you the idea of having an audit may seem on par with going to the dentist, it is actually a rather painless and informative process that can help you dramatically increase your inquiry numbers and quality. Allow KelmscottEDU team of recruitment strategy specialists to conduct an audit of your recruitment communications. Simply provide us with your current communications, and we will conduct a deep analysis, and provide you with a detailed report highlighting existing strengths and opportunities for improvement.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathleen Cross, Ph.D. serves as Executive Vice President of KelmscottEDU, a nationally recognized higher education enrollment consulting and marketing firm, where she leads consulting, strategy, and marketing. With experience working in both U.S. and international universities, Kathleen is a former Vice President of Enrollment, Chief Technology Officer, and Dean of Studies Abroad.

Serving 500+ higher education institutions over the years, Kathleen's approach is to create authentic experiences that engage and inspire the audience combined with innovative and proven data-driven strategy.

Kathleen holds a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration from Saint Louis University along with a bachelor's degree from Saint Louis University and master's degrees from the University of Cincinnati and California State University. Kathleen also serves as a professor in the Higher Education Administration Graduate Program at Bay Path University. She is a frequent national speaker and published author.

She has additional experience in corporate and healthcare organizations as a former bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist and former director and part-owner of successful medical device/technology company. She has lived in several countries and fluent or proficient in multiple languages.

ABOUT KELMSCOTTEDU

KelmscottEDU is a privately owned, full-service communications and marketing solutions provider for the higher education market. Founded in 1936, our headquarters houses, a team of enrollment and marketing strategy experts, an award-winning graphic design and copywriting department, an e-business technology center, sophisticated printing operations, and mail and fulfillment operations—assuring you quality control, lower costs and fast, effective results.

Comprehensive Enrollment Management Solutions

- Slate Print
 - Search 365—Year-Round Search Solution
 - Award-winning Creative Services
—Branding, Strategy, Copy & Design
 - Recruitment Calling Campaigns
 - Admission Team Training
 - Enrollment Communication Consulting Services
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 - Printing, Mailing & Fulfillment
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- And more

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