

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES FOR ENROLLMENT STAFF

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Competition for prospective students' attention has never been fiercer. The congested higher education marketplace means that every communication between colleges and prospective students must further institutional branding and messaging. With the regular development of new technologies, a sound communication strategy has become paramount as we establish a public "face" for the institution to new audiences.

In this issue of "Enrollment Manager" we will address staff communications priorities, operational strategies and accountability. We will offer some suggestions from our experience that will help you make every communication count while enabling your messaging to stand out among others.

The use of an independent outside firm to establish this process and periodically evaluate effectiveness is recommended. Many of our colleagues have utilized The Dysart Group of Charlotte, NC to support this process.

Phone and Follow Up

Solid persuasive telephone skills are necessary in the overall enrollment operation. Follow-up correspondence is a must. Some of our colleagues have borrowed professionals from the business world—namely call center trainers—to

Communicate Across Platforms

Use of social media such as e-letters, blogs, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Facebook increase frequency of communication to key current and future constituencies, including prospective students, families, and donors, at little or no cost.

Using such technologies, staff can foster and cultivate new relationships, expand existing networks, and raise the entire institutional profile. Further, a great deal of mileage can be gained from the repurposing of various institutional communications—in fact, often more than from the initial exposure.

Raise Your Visibility

Because the enrollment staff is the public face of an institution throughout the recruiting process, it is important that the image they project is both reflective of the institution's mission and values and in sync with its core messaging and overall branding strategy. Perception is reality when it comes to such marketing communications.

Communicate Early and Often

In his 2007 bestseller *Millennials Go to College*, Neil Howe observes that if prospective students don't know your brand by the age of 13, it is unlikely that they will consider applying when they are high school juniors. Thus, it is critical that you get your institutional brand out early and often.

Just as the successful realtor's mantra is "Location, location, location," the effective communicator relies on "repetition, repetition, repetition." Enrollment staff need to be able to relate what's been called the "30-second elevator message" about their institutions in a concise, compelling way.

Consistency is Key

Many communications experts have noted that when evaluating the efficacy of messaging, they find that consistency and continuity often trump content. In an August 2012 interview with the McKinsey Quarterly's Allen Webb, Olympic decathlon champion Dan O'Brien observes, "In the long run, consistency always wins out." O'Brien won a gold medal in the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, following three consecutive world titles in

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decathlon.

"Although Dan's commentary focuses on athletics, not business, executives may find parallels between the competitive challenges he describes and those facing their companies," Webb notes. Simply put, it's almost impossible to repeat a message too often for today's multitaskers.

Cultivate Compelling Messages

A vast body of research demonstrates time and again that people act on emotion undergirded by fact much more responsively than they do on the basis of facts alone. Emotions and effective storytelling trump facts, data, and statistics every time. Personalizing, localizing, and using emotion to connect with audiences are the hallmarks of persuasive communications that cause people to change their behaviors in ways favorable to the college or university.

We like the "SUCCES" formula for "sticky messages" advanced by authors Chip and Dan Heath: compelling and memorable messages must be simple, unexpected, concrete, concise, use emotions, and tell stories.

Finally, here are a few other specific recommendations to improve the effectiveness, process, and performance of your enrollment team:

- Extensive training in communication techniques including telephone, traditional written materials, text messaging, email and social media
- Weekly summary reports on communication between enrollment staff and prospects including volume completion
- Performance review checklists
- Periodic external performance appraisal
- Setting, implementing and annually reviewing departmental goals and progress toward those goals

In conclusion, tell your story as often and in as many ways as possible while utilizing a common sense "plan, do, check, act" managerial strategy to measure your efforts and make continual improvements.



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