



STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE YOUR SCHOOL

*Declining
International
Enrollments*

**Advancing Women
in STEM Fields**

**TRUE
ATTRIBUTION**

THE **frank** AGENCY

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WINTER 2018

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COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS?

Drop us a line, we'll be listening. For comments, suggestions or general inquiries contact us at hifrank@thefrankagency.com

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From the President

A NEW YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY LIES AHEAD.
WHAT WILL YOU MAKE OF IT?

As we enter 2018, we see a number of challenges and opportunities on the horizon. While enrollments this past fall were still in a decline, there's definite improvement from the slump we've seen over the past several years. Now is the time to step back and re-evaluate how your brand and messaging resonate with the upcoming generation of students so you keep forward momentum.

Online schools are creating heavier competition for brick-and-mortar institutions, marketing trends have shifted, and schools are struggling to retain a demographic of high-lifetime-value students. These issues, combined with the constant struggle to be heard – to stand apart from other institutions – make each day a unique challenge. But they also provide opportunities to grow and show yourself as a true trailblazer in the realm of higher education.

To succeed, a school must look beyond just frontloading enrollments and instead look to the long term. How do you increase each student's lifetime value by graduating them? Turn them into loyal alumni? Help them become advocates for your school in their communities and social networks?

The entire student journey must be considered and crafted depending on three strategic pillars: successfully communicating your school's personality and culture; building cost-effective lead generation processes that lead to profitable enrollments; and delivering a memorable and lasting experience that retains students for the long term.

Keeping these three tiers in mind, let's move forward into 2018 – ready to advance, adapt and innovate.

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INSIGHTS,
INNOVATIONS AND
STRATEGIES FOR
THE HIGHER
EDUCATION
MARKET

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD:

How to Differentiate Your School from the Rest

Colleges and marketers alike have echoed the same sentiment increasingly over the past few years: it's hard to make a school stand out.

What happened in 2016 between the University of Buffalo and the University of Sydney is a prime example of this. Two schools on either side of the world somehow separately came up with almost exactly the same brand statement – even using a similar-branded font.

This mishap drove home the idea that a brand needs to be more than just a reinvented tagline if a school truly wants to differentiate itself. To create a unique and appealing brand, there first needs to be a unique and appealing *culture* in place.

But what does it look like to create an internal culture that translates to external brand

and marketing? Before we can answer this question, we need to step back and look at what causes the “sameness” that plagues higher education.

The Issue of Uniformity

The main problem behind the “sea of sameness” in college branding typically comes from schools attempting to sum up their whole mission in one tagline or pithy statement. This isn't necessarily a negative goal; pithy statements are often memorable and can make an impact if used correctly.

However, in higher education, summing up a mission into a short slogan often means that schools end up using very similar language. Words like *expand*, *explore* or *discover* and other inspirational, forward-looking verbiage are used to form the

basis of these catch-phrases, but therein lies the dilemma: at the end of the day, *schools by their nature have very similar goals*, so creating a tagline around those goals often does little to distinguish an institution. Instead, it may only set them adrift in the “sea of sameness.”

Add to this the visual aspect of schools' marketing. The images used in most college marketing materials tend to follow a similar track as they become an extension of the pithy tagline – each school echoing the same sentiment, rather than creating a distinct impression that tells a student exactly how and why their institution is one-in-a-million.

Breaking the Mold

If a tagline isn't enough to convey the nuances that set an institution apart, then the distinction needs to come from



A tagline isn't enough to set your school apart. The distinction must come from inside and extend outward into everything you do.

somewhere else – that is, from within the culture of the school. This is essentially an “inside-out” approach. By fostering a unique culture that pervades the life of the school at every level, you shape external perceptions of the school brand. *The external will always follow the internal.*

But this method is incredibly conceptual and maybe even a little vague. How can you, on a practical level, shape an internal culture?

This takes dedication and careful implementation, but first and foremost, it requires reflection.

Find the areas where your school excels.

Schools may all have similar goals, but each institution is different –

regardless of whether or not these differences are immediately perceptible. The first step to building your institution's culture is to find those traits that make your school not only different, but exceptional.

For some schools, their claim to fame may be their world-class faculty, or a diverse assortment of extracurriculars and student activities. It may be a particular program which your school has cultivated into an area of expertise. You may even think about your campus's physical location as a draw – especially if it's in a large city or scenic area.

These are the things you'll be bringing to the forefront. They're already part of your school's heritage – now advance them to engrain them into the student consciousness and culture.

Give students and faculty the freedom to further these characteristics.

You can't advance your strengths without help from the individuals that make your school what it is. Your students and faculty should feel free to explore and make their own contributions to the culture – which will help that culture to take root and pervade your institution.

Is one of your strengths a particular field of study? Allow faculty the freedom to research more deeply into these fields, or encourage them to publish writing on their fields of study. This establishes your expertise and makes you stand out as proponents of these fields.

Is one of your strengths a diverse student demographic? Encourage students to form organizations that celebrate their

diversity or bring awareness to particular social issues.

Furthering your strengths in this manner not only more deeply engrains them into the culture, but it also creates other natural avenues to reach potential students.

Display your cultural identity markers.

You've fostered your inherent traits and created a discernible and distinctive culture. Now it's time to carry these strengths over to your external marketing.

Make your culture prominent and forefront in all your marketing materials. It needs to be the first thing potential students see – whether in your look book, on social media, your website, or traditional channels. A student that sees your marketing needs to see your distinct cultural markers – not a generic tagline.

Your cultural message will be displayed through visuals, but also through

the language you choose. Even your tone needs to reflect your culture.

And beyond this, your culture will also dictate how you engage with potential students. Will your communication take place largely over social media, or will you choose the more personal phone call?

Will your student events be large, raucous rallies or small, intimate gatherings? Will your look books be printed on textured paper, or will they be fully digital with multimedia aspects? Your cultural traits will determine all aspects of your communication with students – whether it's individually or to your target at large.



FIND

your cultural markers

FOSTER

your markers

DISPLAY

your markers



When your culture is tangible through every marketing channel and visible at every prospect tour – when it continues through each step of the student experience, from enrollment through graduation – then you've succeeded in your differentiation efforts. Then you will know you're making an imprint on your target audience – one that tells exactly what your school is about, over and above the rest of the institutions in the pool.

Creating a Lasting Impression

Differentiation doesn't occur on its own, nor does it occur in a vacuum. It must be fostered through conscious effort on the part of the school's leadership and faculty.

When an institution commits itself to advancing its unique cultural traits, the result is a school that not only creates impactful first impressions – but *fulfills* those impressions to ensure satisfying student experiences from beginning to end. ●

It's not just about creating a first impression. It's about fulfilling those first impressions and creating a satisfying student experience.

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP: ADVANCING WOMEN IN STEM FIELDS



Our current era has been defined by the advancement of science and technology. With the incredible strides that have occurred in these fields over the past several decades, the need for data scientists, computer and engineering specialists, and other skilled STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) professionals only continues to increase – in fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that by 2024 nearly half a million STEM jobs will be added to the labor pool.

However, coupled with this exciting progression is a troubling fact: according to the U.S. Census Bureau, women account for only about 25% of those employed in science, technology, engineering, and math occupations. Similarly, only about 19% of engineering degrees awarded in 2014 were awarded to women (*National Student Clearinghouse*). There is an unmistakable disparity between the number of men and women in STEM fields, both in the job force and in educational settings – and this disparity has continued over a period of decades with no significant change.

This issue seems incongruous with a culture where female students make up the majority of all higher education learners. So why exactly are women in the minority when it comes to STEM?



By elevating and incorporating women in STEM fields, schools can become instruments of empowerment.

The Cause

Since numerous neuroscientists and experts have repudiated the idea that women are innately or biologically less capable of excelling in scientific and mathematical fields, we must conclude that the cause of this issue is sociological in nature.

One source of the disparity is that women have historically been *perceived* to be less capable in STEM capacities. This negative perception has had an actual impact on women's performance in these areas.

A study executed by the American Association of University Women revealed that when young women are not exposed to negative stereotypes, they consistently score significantly higher on math and science exams than young women who are exposed to such influences. This tells us that stereotypes and preconceptions do play a heavy role in whether and how far women excel in STEM fields.

But there are more sociological issues in play. Looking specifically at technology, in the 1980s when video games and computers first entered the market, they were typically marketed to boys. This created a culture surrounding computers, gaming, and coding that is generally male, even today.

Thus, it would appear that the main cause behind women's lag in STEM areas is entirely the result of sweeping inaccuracies: not only do women perceive themselves to be less capable, but they also have a perception of these fields as being primarily male-oriented. These factors have created dynamics that perpetuate this gender gap – and the only way to change the situation is to reinvent people's perceptions.

The Cure

We can see that some reshaping is in order – both of women's self-perceptions and of the perceptions associated with STEM fields themselves. And, as in

any ideological battle, the best way to fight negative messages is through positive ones.

For the schools' part, these positive messages will come in two ways: through the actions and culture of the school itself, and through actual marketing.

First, the school that wants to be an instrument of empowerment needs to incorporate women in STEM fields.

It should be evident in looking at the faculty and leadership that women are a critical and valued part of the school's STEM programs.

Additionally, schools should take an active role in promoting the successful women that shape these fields. Elevate female contributors to STEM fields by hosting them as guest speakers, inviting them to give master's classes, or sharing their work.

But beyond promoting successful women in STEM, efforts need to be made to provide more opportunities to women who wish to make their own contributions in these fields. For example, offering more scholarships for female STEM students, flexible program options for women who have families or are otherwise "nontraditional," and data-driven retention programs to keep these students on track to graduate. Using these strategies, schools can both secure and retain a whole swath of female learners.

These changes will create an overall atmosphere and trajectory that is favorable to women pursuing STEM degrees, but when it comes to exhibiting these traits

in your marketing, it is up to you to ensure that you're sending clear messages.

Your marketing needs to convey, both visually and verbally, the kind of female inclusion for which you strive. It should tell potential students that STEM fields are wide open to women, and that women will excel in these courses. And, to dispel the myths about STEM fields being boring or stereotypically "nerdy," your marketing should also tell of the potential that is available through a STEM degree and the unique opportunities it can offer.

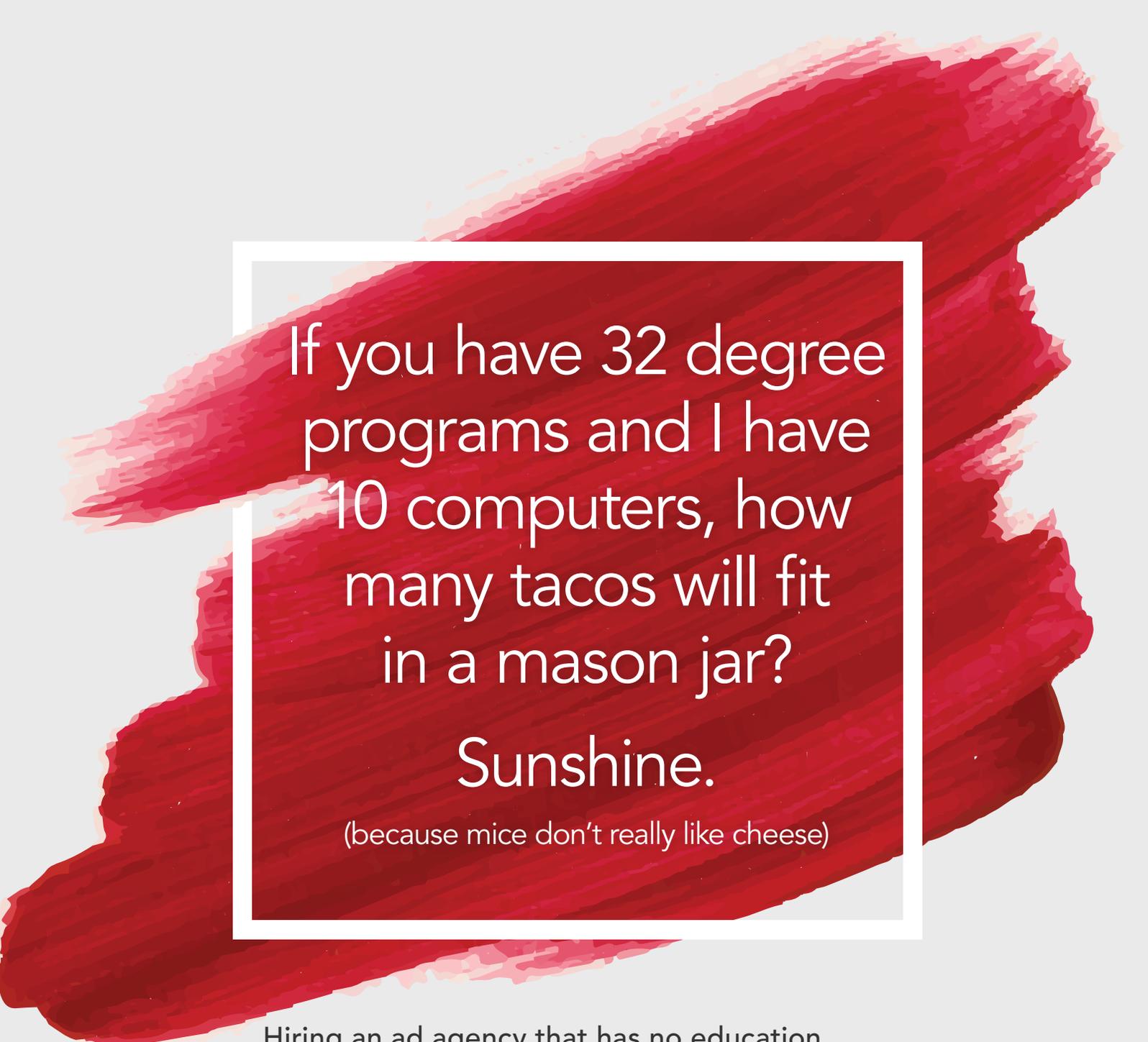
Through careful and consistent messaging, your institution can take an active role in turning around the negative perceptions that so often plague women in these industries.

Rebalancing the Scales

The gender gap in STEM fields is not as pronounced an issue in some countries. In India, the percentage of women in STEM classrooms is often closer to 50%, according to the *All India Survey on Higher Education*. This tells us that the inequality can be rectified.

Since schools are the gateway to industries, some of the responsibility now falls upon institutions to make the changes necessary to bring balance to the STEM culture. With a mind to denounce and reshape misconceptions, schools can produce even more successful STEM graduates than ever before, while bringing equality to a whole portion of an industry that for so long has been the proverbial "boys club." ●





If you have 32 degree programs and I have 10 computers, how many tacos will fit in a mason jar?

Sunshine.

(because mice don't really like cheese)

Hiring an ad agency that has no education experience makes even less sense.

Let us do the marketing math for you. With over 15 years' experience in higher education, we'll work to deliver the lowest cost-per-enrollment at the highest conversion rates.

LET US SIMPLIFY THE EQUATION

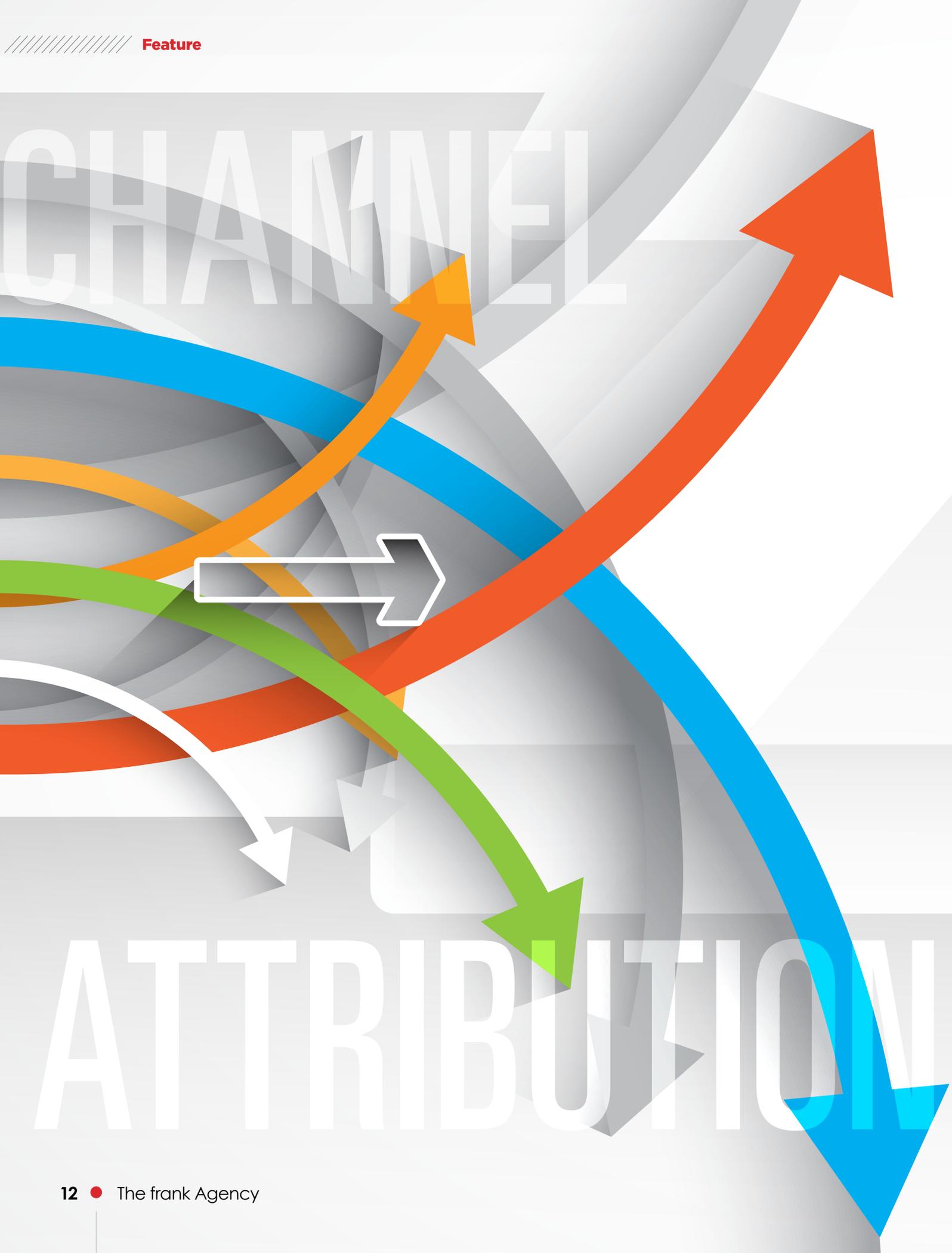
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CHANNEL



ATTRIBUTION

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MARKETING SPEND THROUGH CHANNEL ATTRIBUTION

It's the perennial struggle – the nagging question that keeps higher education marketers awake at night: Am I really making the best use of my marketing dollars?

An accurate attribution model is more critical than ever as marketing channels grow in number and complexity and make it difficult to discern where your marketing spend ends up. Yet the complexity of modern marketing isn't the only challenge to proper attribution.

For higher ed marketers especially, traditional channels are heavily influential in the conversion process. But these

channels are not usually trackable in attribution models, which begs the question – exactly how influential are traditional channels?

Without having an exact picture of how your traditional channels contribute to conversion, you're operating largely on trial and error when allocating your marketing spend. In fact, you may be wasting incalculable amounts by pouring money into

a channel that's not performing as you believe it to be – or you may be overlooking your most influential channels in favor of nonperformers.

However, these risks can all be mitigated through proper channel attribution. Let's dig deeper into the question of attribution models and how they can help you form a clearer picture of your marketing performance.

A Little Background

You're likely already familiar with the most common types of attribution models: first-touch, last-touch, and linear (or equal). These can give you a general idea of which channels are involved in conversion, but unfortunately, they can't really describe accurately the extent to which each channel contributes to conversion.

The problem with these models is that they assume each interaction is a conversion-based engagement, but this is not always the case. Each touchpoint is an opportunity for influencing a decision – but where attribution models often break down is that they cannot assign a dollar value to each point of interaction. They simply aren't able to examine the influencers on such a granular level.

And, more broadly speaking, these standard models are

effective for tracking digital channels, but less so for traditional channels. For schools that use a large mix of direct mail, TV ads, and other traditional outlets along with digital, this creates a serious predicament. As the famous John Wanamaker quote goes, "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don't know which half." This is the situation for many institutions that aren't able to track the ROI of their traditional channels.

Boiling the issue down to this level, you discover that a completely new attribution model is needed – one that both takes traditional marketing into account, and gives a more accurate picture of which channels are contributing to conversions (and how much they contribute). There's only one solution that fills all these needs: a custom model that is tailored to your institution.



100% CREDIT

FIRST TOUCH:

A model in which the first touchpoint in the conversion process is given all the credit for the conversion



100% CREDIT

LAST TOUCH:

A model in which the last touchpoint in the conversion process is given all the credit for the conversion



33% CREDIT

33% CREDIT

33% CREDIT

LINEAR:

A model in which each touchpoint of a conversion is credited equally

Building the Perfect Model

Now, lest this seem like an easier-said-than-done solution, we'll demystify the process a little bit by describing the ideal custom model.

To be effective, a custom model must be **data-driven, cross-channel, variable, and constantly optimizing**. Let's break down each of these tenets:

1. Data-driven. A custom model must begin and end with data. In-depth behavioral data and other research will give you a "baseline" for how students interact with your institution, and this will be the springboard from which you develop your model. Gathering and analyzing this data gives you the background you need first to create the model (point 3), and then to optimize it (point 4).

2. Cross-channel. The pain of trying to track and then attribute success to traditional channels is one that marketers feel daily. However, by linking traditional channels to digital, you create touchpoints that are actually trackable and can be incorporated into your attribution model. Then you can finally and decisively determine how your traditional channels fit into the mix.

3. Variable. The downside to many multi-touch models (i.e., the linear model we discussed earlier) is that the weight assigned to touchpoints is fixed. Different models may assign value differently, but that weight is generally a fixed percentage. For your custom model, you need a variable weight that is extrapolated from your data, and which can be updated and refined according to new data that you receive.

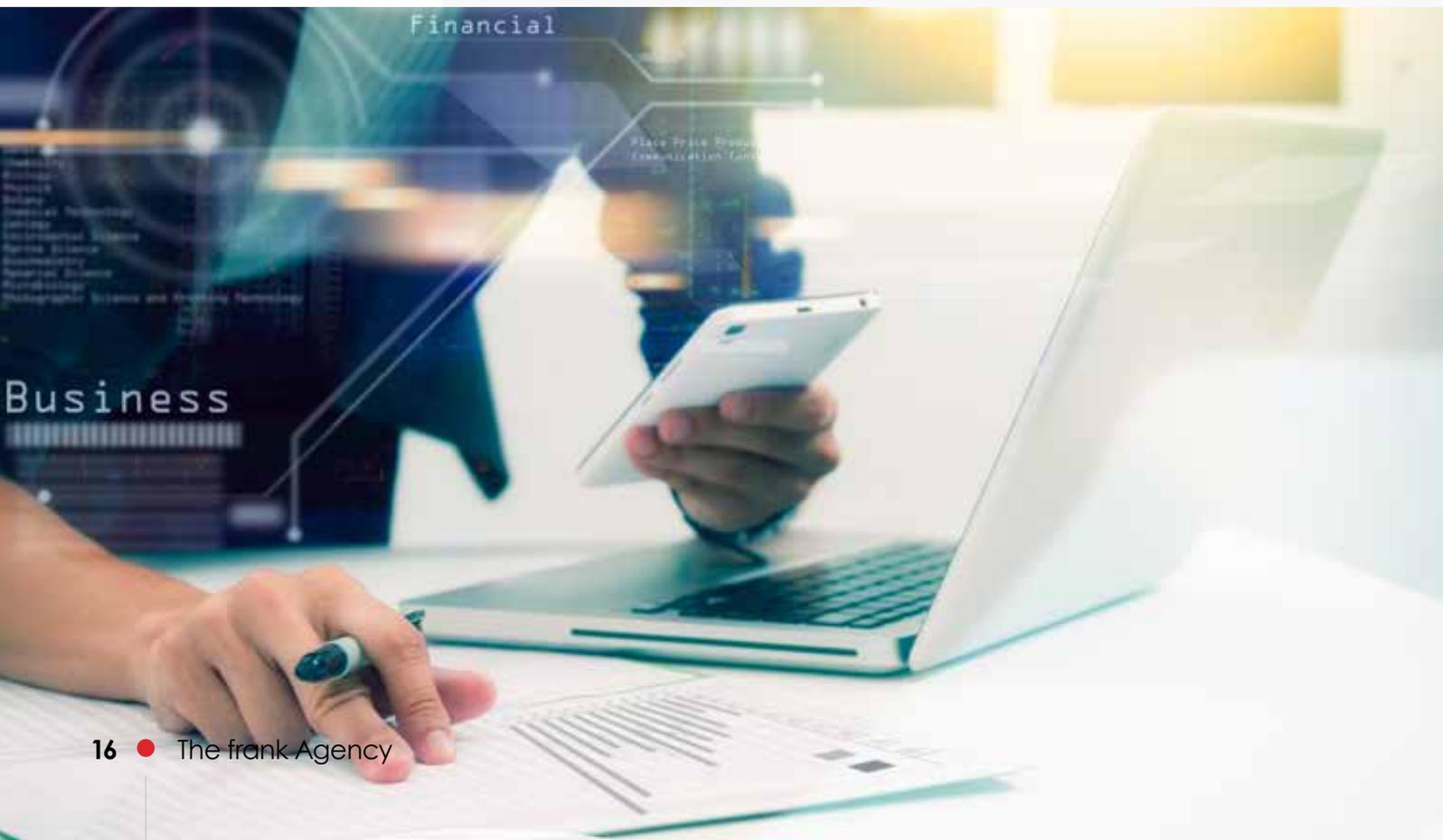
4. Optimizing. Finally, a custom model is only strong if it is able to adapt. The more you track how your students interact, which channels they touch most, and which channels hold the most influence, the more accurate your model will become. In short, **testing, tracking, and analyzing data lead to a smart attribution model – one that changes as your prospects do.**

Assessing the Outcome

The constant data-gathering and tracking that go into developing a custom model may seem high-maintenance. And it's true that an effective attribution model cannot remain static, but needs to be consistently tweaked for maximum efficiency. However, the benefits of custom models are so great that any ongoing effort pales in comparison.

With a custom attribution model in place, one that is able to track traditional and digital channels accurately, you curb the need for constant trial and error. You can

know with certainty where your money is going, which channels are performing, and how to shift your focus to better meet your target audience. Gone is the guesswork – instead, you gain a tool that has the ability to help you achieve a more effective marketing spend, a better return on investment, and greater peace of mind. ●





**HALF THE MONEY I SPEND
ON ADVERTISING IS
WASTED; THE TROUBLE IS,
I DON'T KNOW WHICH HALF.**

John Wanamaker couldn't figure it out, but today you can. Attribution U tracks all your channels, both traditional and digital, getting smarter with each use. So you can tell exactly where your marketing dollars are best spent, and know they're not being wasted.

LET'S TALK.

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WHAT YOUR INSTITUTION CAN LEARN FROM AMERICA'S STRUGGLING SEMINARIES

Earlier in 2017, the Wall Street Journal reported some unsettling shifts taking place in religious higher education institutions.

A downward trend in enrollment can be traced over the past decade – an average of a 25% drop overall. The mainline seminaries that are experiencing this decline aren't just suffering a temporary setback; some are closing their doors for good.

The past year has shown a number of seminaries closing or merging with other institutions as they struggle to cope with dwindling enrollment numbers. While some of the factors behind this are unique to religious institutions, others are universal to all higher education, and could be viewed as a premonition for other institutions if steps aren't taken to avoid the same fate.

But to discover exactly what all institutions, both religious and secular, can learn from this very specific trend, we first need to know: What is causing the downturn in America's seminaries?

The Source of the Downturn

The enrollment dropoff in religious higher ed is a result of a number of factors, not the least of which being a lower demand for pastorate roles. The once-popular Master's of Divinity program, a requirement for most aspiring pastors, has decreased in popularity as there are simply fewer pastoral positions to be filled nationwide.

Instead, students who are interested in theological studies are pursuing more versatile degree programs such as a Master of Arts or Master's in Theology. This gives graduates more career options besides a pastorate, but it also leaves less need for the specialized M. Div. program for which seminaries are known.

However, limited career options are not the only influence behind the decline. A whole demographic changeover is occurring in the student body, which means prospective seminarians are rethinking how they achieve their education, and through whom.

The student body is more diverse than ever, in ethnicity, age and values. This shift has unearthed a landscape of students with far more varied needs and goals, and in most cases, the average seminary has not been able to keep pace with the changes. Students have turned to broader institutions that can offer more flexibility, more variety, and ultimately, a more versatile credential.

If You Can't Stem the Tide, Swim with It

This is where the universal application hits. Though we're discussing seminaries as an example, the problems that these institutions are experiencing are not unique to religious institutions. Schools of every size and background are struggling to keep pace with the change in culture and demographics, and could very well suffer the same sweeping decline if change is not actively pursued.

Just as theology students adapted to their changing climate (i.e., decreasing pastoral roles) by pursuing more versatile

degree paths, so do schools need to adapt to the changing student climate in order to thrive and continue moving forward. Catering to a student body's need for versatility requires *becoming more versatile*.

For institutions, both religious and otherwise, creating a more versatile student experience will play out in a number of ways.

1 Offering more degree paths

We've seen that a main drawback for seminaries was their credentials fell out of vogue as one particular job market waned. The more variety a school offers in degree paths, the wider a net it can cast – providing students opportunities to pursue their various goals, all within the same halls. Additionally, this allows schools more margin of error if a particular program becomes less favored.

For both religious and secular institutions, the new focus should be on creating a more versatile student experience.

2 Offering more diverse classes

The modern American student body is not just diverse in its ethnicity and goals, but in its values. As belief sets and value models change, it's important for all schools to approach these changes carefully, but still address them by offering students the chance to explore and better understand the various facets that make up their attitudes and beliefs.

3 Providing more methods of study

On a practical note, and as you'll read later on (see page 22), the student body has become more and more "newtraditional" in the sense that there are growing numbers of adult and online learners. These students need methods of learning that are

mobile and flexible – in short, they need a schedule that they choose. Branching out into more online or hybrid learning methods allows you to bring in a growing group of prospective students that may not be able to pursue a degree otherwise.

4 Marketing your strengths in a way that speaks to the current demographic

It's not enough to have strengths if no one knows about them. Once your school has established programmatic changes, it needs to establish its credibility through marketing. For the current student demographic, this will be done through the combined use of online and traditional channels, using enrollment strategies driven by advanced targeting methods.

Overcoming the Odds

Though the enrollment situation is pressing for religious institutions, steps can still be taken to avoid further decline – and the same applications can be used in secular schools to prevent them from reaching a similar junction.

In an age of rapid change and increasing diversity, the new school mission will be to reach students in ways that appeal to their unique needs and circumstances. By creating an environment of versatility and flexibility, institutions can do just that – and ensure their own future in the process. ●



MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE

NEW/ TRADITIONAL STUDENT

The Great Recession of 2008 changed a lot of things for Americans. But even as the economy struggled, in true American fashion many individuals pressed forward with the belief that we can change our circumstances if we're willing to work hard and adapt with the times.

During the fallout of this economic crisis, thousands of adults flocked to higher education institutions to restart their careers and give the economy a chance to stabilize before they rejoined the job force.

For the first time, adult learners made up around 40% of college students, and this percentage remained fairly consistent even as the economy recovered.



We've now reached a point where we see a new "traditional" student population – one that is, essentially, an older and more diverse body, and one that will require new approaches to reach them effectively.



The Newtraditional Learner

In 2016, students over the age of 25 made up 40% of the student body, so it's clear that institutions are still enrolling high numbers of adult learners. But age isn't the only difference in the "newtraditional" student body.

Women have outnumbered men in college settings since the 1980s, but now the margin is wider than ever. Women hold a high majority, at around 11.7 million enrolled compared to only 8.8 million male students.

Additionally, in 2014, almost 45% of all college enrollees were minorities. We're rapidly seeing a more diverse and unique student population, and one that won't settle for being pigeonholed into categories such as "traditional" or "nontraditional."

IN 2016 40%
of students were over 25

IN 2014 45%
of students were minorities

Source: National Center for Education Statistics



Beyond the Numbers

Implicit in the demographic shift is a shift in student needs.

The newtraditional student base requires more flexibility, as they often have families and jobs to work around. Additionally, they look for different programs than their younger counterparts; rather than more generalized liberal arts degrees, they are more inclined to look at paths of study that will further their career or provide more financial security.

The "old traditional" 18-24 year old college student is still as much in the picture as ever, but even their goals are much more closely aligned with the newtraditional mindset that looks at college as a route to a career and wants a schedule that revolves around other activities. So we can see that beyond just a demographic shift, the overall outlook on school and careers has changed over to a newtraditional view.

It seems that it's time to appeal not just to age and demographic groups, but to this new outlook as well.

The New Normal

In an age where individuals expect convenience and immediacy, the best way institutions can accommodate their newtraditional student base is by creating a school atmosphere that works around the lives of students – not the other way around.

This will translate into providing flexible classes (whether online, hybrid, evening, or a combination) with degree paths and certifications in burgeoning industries where more job opportunities can be found.

But, in addition to changing courses for the institution itself, schools can also appeal to newtraditionals through how they communicate – again, centered around meeting the students where they are. Despite the multitude of channels available now for schools to communicate with prospects, many institutions still resort mainly to email and direct mail. Yet, surveys increasingly show that students are performing their own research through social media, and 59% of prospects visit college sites on their mobile devices (Chegg). With the vast amount of messages bombarding students daily, it's critical for schools to cut through the clutter and be seen on as many platforms as possible.

Newtraditional prospects are often busy multi-taskers, so advanced mobile strategies are critical for reaching this group. Intuitive mobile apps and push notifications can keep your institution top-of-mind, while paving the way for easy engagement with the student.

Your messaging should follow the same student-centric approach through targeting that is tailored to personas and designed to reach specific segments of prospects.

Beyond just reaching these newtraditionals, however, your institution should also develop plans to help these students succeed.

Giving Value, Gaining Value

Newtraditional students often have a difficult path to tread. Many have families or work full-time, with innumerable other responsibilities weighing on them. So it's no surprise that this segment can be particularly hard to retain.



Beyond simply reaching newtraditionals, your school needs to develop plans to help them succeed.

However, it's also well known that the students with high retention rates offer the best overall lifetime value for the school, so it's in the best interest of institutions to make efforts to retain their students. Another way to say this would be: You made a marketing investment to enroll the student; why wouldn't you seek a return on that investment by ensuring their success?

Many schools have implemented data-driven targeting and retention programs to enroll students who have a high probability of completion and then assist these students in their schooling so

there's less chance of dropout. Through predictive modeling and data analysis, schools can not only see a higher return on investment, but also create an environment that's dedicated to student success, both throughout their schooling and into their careers.

Reshaping the Culture

With the drastic culture and demographic shifts that have occurred over the last decade, it's unlikely that the higher education landscape will ever be the same again. Yet, with these changes has also come opportunity for institutions to adapt their strategies, embrace the future ahead of them, and create a system that provides more accessible education for individuals of all types. In this way, schools themselves will soon reflect this new traditional student body – marked by uniqueness rather than uniformity. ●



ENSURE your students' success

SECURE your return on investment



SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF

Declining International Enrollments

International students are a significant source of revenue for higher ed institutions. On average, these learners make up about 12% of the student population, but provide 28% of schools' annual tuition revenue (*The Washington Post*). But even more than this, international students are also major assets to the U.S. as a whole – contributing \$32.8 billion and more than 400,000 jobs to the economy in the 2015-16 school year alone (Association of International Educators).

International students contributed \$32.8 billion & more than 400,000 jobs to the U.S. economy in the 2015-2016 school year.

While not all schools saw a drop in international enrollment, others showed steep declines that call for closer examination.

Foreign-born workers are indispensable members of the U.S. workforce. 31% of employed immigrants work in management, business, science, or another related field (Migration Policy Institute), and a staggering 74% of Silicon Valley technology professionals are foreign-born (*Washington Examiner*). Schools bear a unique responsibility for equipping these individuals, and are often their gateway to opportunity and advancement in the United States.

Thus, it was no small point of concern when the 2017 fall enrollment numbers for many institutions showed a decrease in international students. Foreign enrollments have been steadily on the rise in the U.S. over the past decade, so the sudden downturn this past school year has raised questions. And, while not all schools experienced the loss to the same extent (or at all), some schools, such as Indiana University, showed a drop of about 50%, according to *Inside Higher Ed*. These types of steep declines call for a close examination of causes and implications.



The Points of Origin

With the changing of the political guard in 2016 came a number of foreign policies that have had a significant effect on international enrollment. The travel ban and uncertainty regarding the H1-B program created a general impression that the U.S. would be less welcoming to foreign students, especially those from predominantly Muslim nations. Many potential students, concerned about their safety in this tense environment, opted to forego pursuit of a U.S. education.

Cost, too, is a growing concern for international students. U.S. institutions have struggled lately with keeping costs affordable for local students, let alone their international counterparts. This has resulted in many foreign students opting to study in other countries like Canada. Along these same lines, a few countries such as Saudi Arabia enacted stricter scholarship guidelines which dissuaded prospective students from enrolling abroad.

With cost and safety such looming points of concern, the U.S. may no longer seem ideal for prospective international students. These are precisely the points that need to be addressed by schools if they wish to recover their lagging international enrollments.

Making Up Lost Ground

Before any other work can be done on this front, some weighty misconceptions must be dispelled.

Many schools have created campaigns to let international students know they are welcome

and wanted, and these messages must continue to help foreign students feel accepted. Any marketing sent to foreign students must be inclusive and personal, and convey that schools are willing to take whatever measures are necessary to ensure their international students' safety and success.

Institutions will also need to take more care to eliminate any enrollment hindrances that stand between a prospective international student and their education. This means streamlining the enrollment process to make it as simple as possible for students to get into their school of choice, and clearly laying out financial aid options so that students can achieve their education affordably.

Finally, advanced targeting measures must be used to gain and nurture inquiries. With data gathering and predictive modeling, you can more easily find those international students that will be most receptive to your messages – making your lead nurturing process more effective and helping you secure the students that will best fit your school.

Regaining an International Image

Whether your school suffered from an international enrollment decline or not, it's undeniable that this sphere of prospective students needs more attention and encouragement. Making foreign students a priority through thoughtful messaging, personal connection and consistent nurturing can help your school either regain ground or maintain your student stream – while boosting your overseas image. ●

Marketing sent to international students needs to be inclusive and personal, and convey that schools will do whatever it takes to ensure their students' success and safety.



Make international students a priority by:

- sending personal messages
- removing enrollment obstacles
- using advanced targeting strategies



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