



Attracting and Enrolling the Online Student

A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

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Introduction

If you are looking for financially stable enrollment growth in distance education, this blueprint is for you!

Students today are seeking programs that are 100 percent online. They want the ability to study anywhere, anytime. More than 1,500 degree-granting institutions in the U.S. offer online programs, and the number of programs (associate through doctorate) totals more than 26,200. Competition for online students is greater than ever before. Therefore, if your institution offers online programs, or is planning to launch new online programs, one of your greatest challenges will be to attract and retain students.

The goal of this document is to help you learn from the challenges other institutions have faced as they have grown their online enrollment so you can focus on educating students—without hiring an OPM.

What is an OPM? Some higher education providers hire Online Program Management organizations (OPMs) to implement and manage their online degree programs. When outsourcing to an OPM, institutions assign critical functions required to manage and enroll students into these online degree programs. OPMs do provide some advantages—and in certain cases, they may be right for an institution—but ask most institutions that have worked with an OPM, and you'll hear many key drawbacks as well.

In general, OPMs create a “black box” of practices for recruiting and enrollment management. Strategies and operations are walled off because keeping institutions in the dark is a way for the OPM to maintain their business. At no point do OPMs teach their clients how to completely manage enrollment themselves.

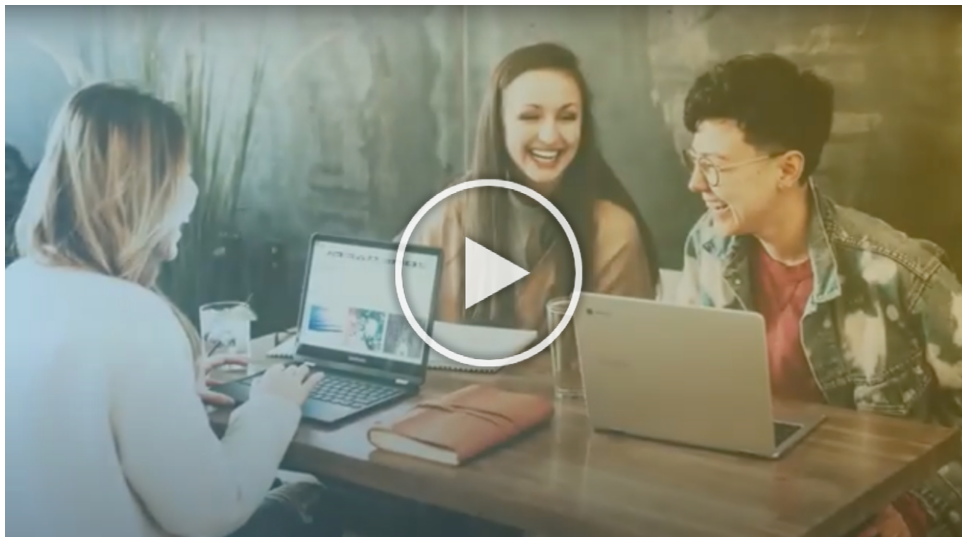
That's where Perdia Education excels. For over 30 years, GetEducated.com has assisted more than a million students in their quest for online degree programs. With nearly 500,000 students placing their trust in Perdia each month, we have a pipeline of students ready and waiting for you.

At Perdia, we are student-centric. Our goal is to serve students with the best possible care while providing services to institutions looking for enrollment growth through online program promotion.

Take this journey with us as we share our years of online student success with you.

Perdia offers three services that are alternatives to OPMs:

- 1 Online program advertising, including GetEducated.com.
- 2 EMMA™, our patent-pending mobile enrollment solution.
- 3 A unique OPM-type bundled solution pairing the above items with the addition of program management consulting that is non-exclusive, completely transparent, and purely performance-based with NO long term commitment.



[Watch EMMA™ Overview](#)

Managing Online Programs – Learning Outcomes

GOAL

Demystify the OPM “black box”

At Perdia, we focus on two key areas of managing online programs; we seek to understand your target demographic and we work with students to ensure successful enrollment and degree completion. In this document, we will examine and explain how to achieve the following outcomes:

ADVERTISING / MARKETING

Attract prospective students by addressing the needs of today’s online-degree-seekers

- Know the full online-student cycle versus the cycle for traditional campus students.
- Understand key differences between online students, traditional campus students, and online students pre-exposed to your brand.
- Identify critical aspects of digital marketing, including what to insource and what to outsource.
- Recognize the factors involved in deciding whether or not to use an OPM.

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Manage online student enrollment models with financially stable recruitment, admissions, and student success approaches

- Build and implement a strategic online enrollment management plan.
- Construct recruitment, admissions, and student success operations targeted toward the online learning community.
- Develop an understanding of internal cultural challenges associated with the online learning modality.
- Utilize new data points; analyze and manage enrollment data.
- Recognize the factors involved in deciding whether or not to use an OPM.

Advertising / Recruiting

GOAL

Share basic digital advertising strategies for all budgets

Effective digital advertising strategies require you to take the following steps:

- 1 Understand your target audience
- 2 Set the stage with basic advertising
- 3 Leverage the PESO model (Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned)

ENSURING YOUR ONLINE PROGRAMS ARE “ALL RIGHT”

Perdia’s President, Tony Huffman, Shares a Story

In the late 90s, I was working for what was, at the time, a small start-up company called Audible.com, now owned by Amazon. My boss was Guy Story, Audible CIO and Chief Scientist through 2015. He had a great saying that is relevant in many lines of business and is relevant to how your institution runs all phases of its online program management. Guy would say, “Tony, if it’s not all right, it’s wrong.”

And he was right. Imagine the million lines of code used in a critical software program, and then imagine a single mistyped digit in that code—it could render the entire platform non-functional. (As a side note, Guy Story has an entertaining Ted-x video [here](#).)

Another way to illustrate Guy’s saying is to open the hood of your car and randomly find and disconnect a single wire in the engine bay. That one missing component could bring an otherwise perfectly engineered engine to a complete stop.

We’ve seen similar issues with universities in the design and execution of their online programs.

One breakdown or misaligned function, which might even be outside your direct control, could significantly limit the success of your online programs.

All the components we will discuss in this paper must therefore be functioning properly and in harmony to achieve your overall goal of growing online enrollments to succeed.

This Blueprint is your guide to making sure your online enrollments program is all right!

Understanding Your Target Audience

A student considering an online degree program or certificate has concerns and constraints that are drastically different from those of a traditional college student.

Recruiting efforts therefore need to be attuned to the criteria that are important to the online degree-seeker. Many factors commonly emphasized in securing traditional, campus-based students are still important but will come into play only after the student has been drawn to you.

We have worked with thousands of prospective students, and they all ask the following questions, in this order of importance:

1. How much will this degree cost?

- How many transfer credits will you accept?
- Are tuition discounts available for veterans?
- Are grants available?
- What is the cost per credit hour?
- How many credits does this program consist of?
- What are the additional fees?

2. Will I be accepted (i.e., what are the prerequisites for acceptance into the program)?

- If graduate program: Is the GMAT or GRE required?
- If undergraduate program: Is the SAT or ACT required?
- What GPA is required?

3. How long will it take to complete the program?

- Is the program cohort-based or continuous enrollment?
- How quickly can I start?

4. What can I use this degree for, and how will it help me in my career?

- Is the degree accepted for professional licensure?
- Is there an internship or practicum involved?
- Have others who earned this degree from your institution gone on to be successful in the field or industry I'm interested in?

This list of questions provides critical insights into what matters most to your intended audience.

Knowing what your students are looking for is key to differentiating your recruiting and enrollment functions for the non-traditional online learner. Coupling the above questions with a clear understanding of the different demographics you are trying to reach will propel you toward successful online program recruitment and enrollment.

Let's consider a traditional campus student compared to the non-traditional online learner.



TRADITIONAL CAMPUS PROSPECT

Typically age 16–18 and arriving straight from high school:

The student's decision criteria includes

- Campus life
- Dining and housing options
- Inclusivity and diversity
- Sports

The university's considerations include

- Receiving as many applicants as possible is key—e.g., 10,000 applicants to fill 1,000 spots. The advantage to having many applicants lies in being able to turn away as many as possible. A lower acceptance rate increases the school's "selectiveness," which plays into the all-important rankings made by external sources.
- Recruiting done through the College Board, through emails, college fairs, or postal mail campaigns.
- Supporting campus visits.
- Following the annual cadence that drives fall enrollments.



ADULT ONLINE STUDENT

Typically age 28–45, works full time, and has a family to support:

- Cost
- Likelihood of acceptance
- Time to completion
- Effect on career/earnings

- Enrollments, not applicants, are key. The goal is to fill as many spots as possible since there are usually more spots than there are applicants. This is the opposite of a campus-based program.
- Recruiting done mostly through digital means, in a competitive environment both within the EDU space and within the digital landscape of multiple advertisers vying to sell products.
- Following a continual enrollment cycle, with term starts that are driven by the student's desire to begin immediately.

Let's look at two real-life examples of prospective students based on the above information.



TRADITIONAL CAMPUS UNDERGRAD STUDENT

Age: 17

Background

Family very interested in the student being accepted at an Ivy League or reputation-specific school (or close equivalent). Family is providing most of the student's education funding.

Student lives in Hawaii and desires to live in a different part of the country (in this case the Northeast), yet is looking for a rural setting.

Key decision factors

- College reputation and exclusivity
- Location
- Campus life



ADULT ONLINE CONTINUING ED STUDENT

Age: 35

Lives paycheck to paycheck and wants more security for retirement. Has pets and family. Is paying a mortgage.

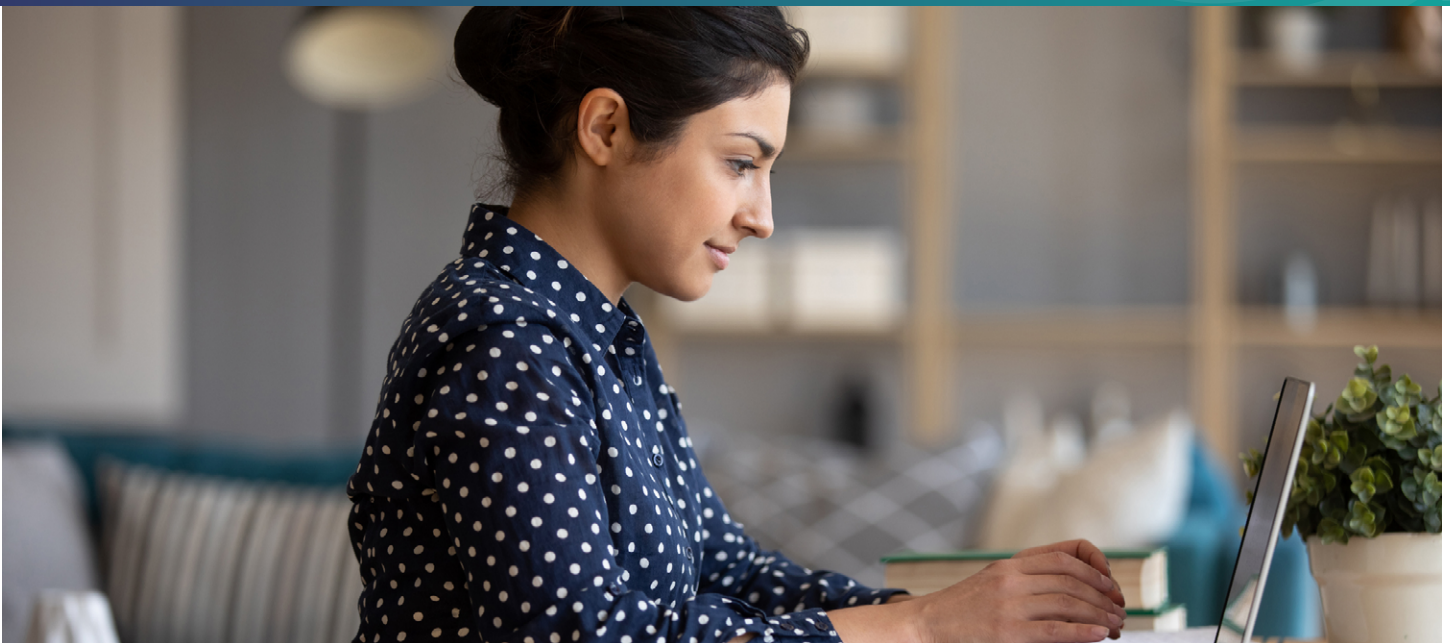
Needs a program/school that fits their life, increases competitiveness in the job market, and will result in a job with higher lifetime earnings before retirement.

- School offers financial assistance
- Flexible schedule
- Ability to transfer credits

The student examples above are indeed real—and the same person **but at different points in the student's life**. As you can see, the student had very different goals and needs at different times. To ensure the success of online program enrollment, everything you do, from communicating with prospective students to providing support to enrolled students, must be tailored to meet the needs and expectations of an adult learner.

Online education candidates have fundamentally different priorities from their traditional counterparts. What isn't as important to online students as you may think:

- How your institution's programs or instructors are better than those at other schools
- How respected or elite your institution is
- How many accolades the program of interest has received
- How philanthropic your institution is
- How wonderful your campus is



These factors just aren't as highly valued, especially if they come with higher costs than charged by other institutions offering similar online degrees.

Adult learners have a shorter professional career ahead of them, and their finances are empirically different. They have more debt (including mortgages and credit cards) than younger, traditional college students, and less time in which to pay off that debt.

Adult online learners thus prioritize a strong return on investment for their educational program.

Understanding this has far-reaching implications for your enrollment strategies in today's competitive landscape. If there are ten equally fine institutions offering the same program, the online adult student is more likely to make their choice based on cost, speed to starting classes (and therefore graduating), and/or an easier enrollment pathway or process.

Setting the Stage with Basic Advertising

High-level administrators as well as the individual teams responsible for recruiting and admission need to understand the principles of advertising.

This comes down to answering the following question: How do you generate your desired number of enrollments while achieving a Cost Per Enrollment (CPE) metric that is financially sustainable?

Polling your current online students (by degree offered) will help you to build what is known in digital marketing as your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP).

This data can then be used in combination with other marketing principles to find people who are more inclined to respond to your recruiting efforts.

If you are launching an online program and have no data on which to build your ICP, you should actively gather data as you gain students. What you learn will better prepare you for the future. You already know that your target audience tends to be working adults, and that segmentation alone is useful for starting your advertising efforts.

Given that you'll be utilizing basic marketing methods to start, you'll be able to build an ICP before you start spending larger budget amounts in recruiting potential students. Knowing your ICP will help with targeted advertising (e.g., Facebook) based on more specific demographics.



TRADITIONAL MARKETING

Traditional marketing includes print, direct mail, outdoor advertising (billboards, etc.), and broadcast media, such as television and radio. While not generally recommended as a starting point for your advertising program and not the focus of this document, any article on marketing would be incomplete without mentioning the type of marketing that universities have been using for years for traditional campus-based student acquisition. While conventional marketing is useful for large-scale brand-building and campus-based recruiting initiatives, it entails heavy costs and performance evaluation to determine the return on your marketing investment.

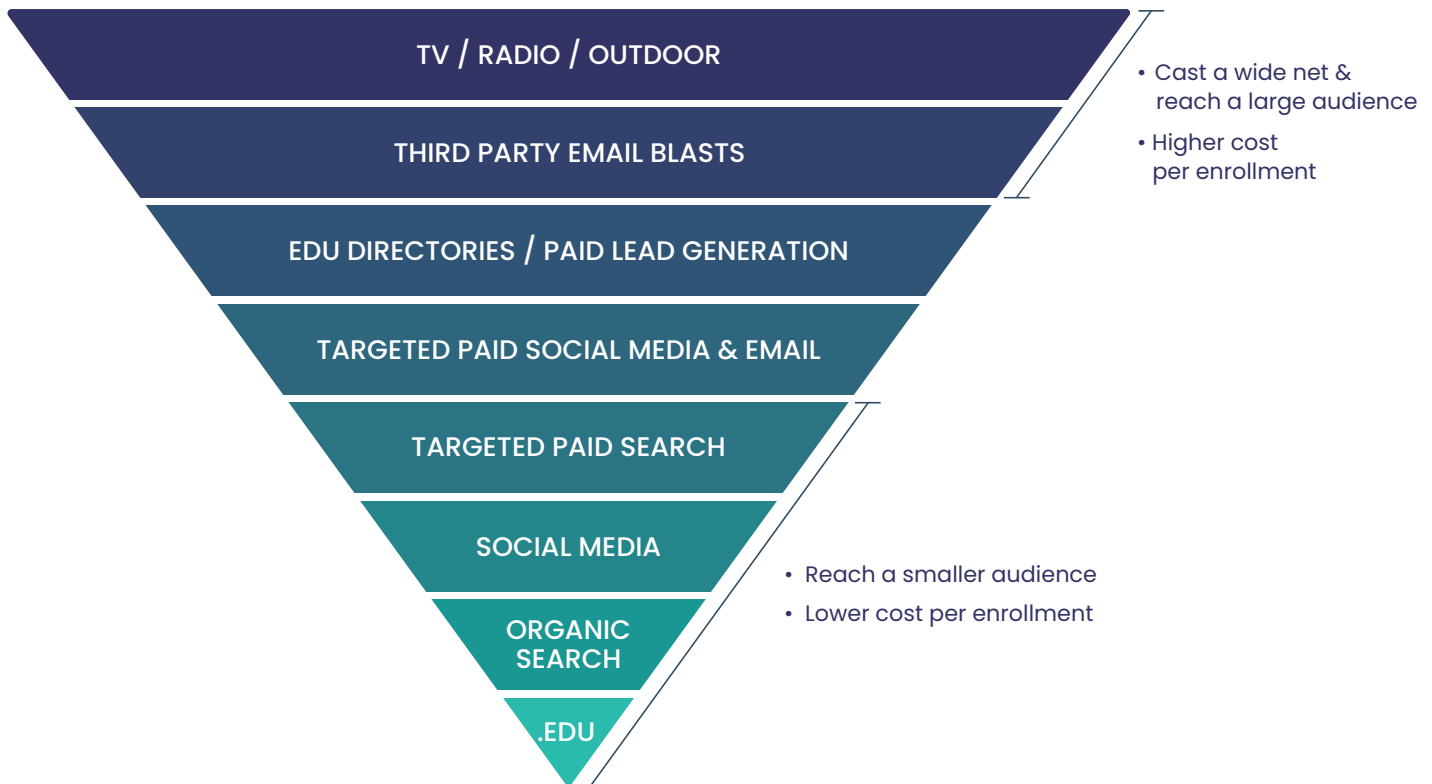
THE PYRAMID OF POTENTIAL STUDENTS AND COST-PER-ENROLLMENT

Mining for precious metals is an apt analogy for finding good students. The easiest, most cost-effective mining occurs where there are large, concentrated deposits of ore. It is less economical to mine where there are fewer or less concentrated deposits—unless a new technology makes it easier to access and extract these deposits. Just as with mining, outside circumstances can change the scenario for finding students. In the online education industry, a once unproductive layer of marketing could suddenly become viable if, for example, you were able to change your enrollment processes to double the student lead-to-enrollment ratio.

It is important to understand that situations can change, and you should never permanently rule out any marketing options.

The image below represents prospective students who are visiting or could visit your website to inquire about your online programs. At the bottom of the upside-down pyramid, you will find a limited number of students with very high motivation/enrollment intent. These students might arrive at your website through a basic Internet search, resulting in a very low cost per enrollment (e.g., \$500). But they are in limited supply. To garner more enrollments, you must move up the pyramid to broader-based marketing, which involves a higher cost per enrollment (CPE).

As we will discuss elsewhere in this document, your marketing efforts and opportunities can be multiplied by streamlining and optimizing other processes in the student enrollment cycle.



CRITICAL TAKEAWAY

The number of highly motivated students is finite and likely cannot be increased. Time and time again, we've had discussions with university leaders who state how successful they are in recruiting and enrolling students with very low cost per enrollment metrics. They mistakenly believe that this pool of students is unlimited, and that all they need to do is "get more leads" to keep their metrics constant.



As you move up the pyramid, the targeted audience has less motivation to enroll, and thus carries a higher cost per enrollment. The very top stratum targets a large number of individuals, but they will have very little interest in enrolling.

Every stratum contains students who will enroll, and a diversified marketing outreach program should include all levels if the budget allows.

Some advertising strategies are better at targeting the bottom of the pyramid, but all recruiting strategies should address each stratum starting at the bottom, only moving up when enrollment goals have not been satisfied.

Note that as you move up to new levels, the cost to generate an enrollment will likely rise. You will need to closely track analytics because there will

be a point (based on budget, internal processes, type of program, tuition, etc.) where it simply costs too much to acquire an additional enrollment from the population to which you are advertising. At this point, you should stop additional marketing spend, work to improve your internal processes (covered in this paper's Enrollment Management section), and build additional programs. Larger audience advertising mediums work better if you have more online programs available because there are more options to choose from. Understanding how much marketing to implement is critical to financially stable enrollment growth, as is the order in which you implement different strategies.

At all times, you will be spending ahead of revenues, so you need to be diligent and conservative, testing and evaluating always.



THE PESO MODEL OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital marketing is so much more than advertising online. Some elements of digital marketing to consider include using current students as ambassadors to refer a friend to your institution or getting reviews of your programs from current and former students for inclusion on your website. **One of the most important and most overlooked elements of digital marketing is your website, its content and structure.** We'll touch on all of these in more detail later when we go over the many types of digital marketing techniques.

Benefits of Digital Marketing:

- A higher level of customer engagement
- Highly effective
- Easy-to-measure performance
- Extensive—yet targeted—reach
- Less expensive (due to segmentation and targeting)
- Assessable results for faster optimization
- Ability to easily retarget and enroll your most engaged prospects

Potential Drawbacks:

- Involves digital marketing know-how that current staff may not have
- Requires time and investment in creative assets (including optimizing for mobile), video marketing, and technology to track and measure performance
- Requires regular testing and optimization, along with healthy budgets for testing narrow audience segments
- Online education is a competitive field—recruiting costs can be high and are typically paid before seeing revenue from the efforts

All digital marketing fits nicely in what is known as the PESO model.

PESO is an acronym for Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned media.

This image shows how different types of content and marketing fall within the PESO model.

The overlap in some areas is an important part of understanding digital marketing because work in one specific area often supports and enhances other marketing efforts.

THE PESO MODEL

• PAID MEDIA

• OWNED MEDIA

• SHARED MEDIA

• EARNED MEDIA

REPUTATION

- Credibility
- Thought Leadership
- Authority
- Trust

MARCOMM

- Influencer Marketing
- Experiential Marketing
- Event Marketing

PAID MEDIA

- Paid Social
- Display
- SEM/PPC
- Retargeting
- Video Ads
- Fan Acquisition

CONTENT DISTRIBUTION

- Affiliate Marketing
- Sponsored Articles
- Off-page SEO
- Forums/Groups
- Aggregators
- Native

CONTENT MARKETING

- On-page SEO
- Technical SEO
- Ungated Content
- Blog
- Structured Data
- Reviews
- Domain Authority

EARNED MEDIA

- PR & Publicity
- Media Relations
- Investor Relations

INFLUENCER ENGAGEMENT

- Influencer Relations
- Brand Advocates
- Consultants

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Organic Social Content
- Social Listening
- User-generated Content (UGC)

PARTNERSHIPS

- Sponsorships
- Charity
- Community

BRAND EXPERIENCE

- Gated Assets
- Visual Content
- Webinars
- Infographics
- Videos
- Audio/Podcast
- Email
- Testimonial

An example of the PESO model can be seen in the benefits that paid media can create for your owned media. Studies by the award-winning marketing services company Jornaya have shown that paid affiliate marketing (i.e., using third-party websites to drive student inquiries) can increase traffic to and inquiries generated on your website. But if there is no way to trace where the increase in inquiries is coming from, schools mistakenly think their website promotional efforts are fueling the additional inquiries. They don't realize the halo effect that other types of marketing create.

The goal of a fiscally sound digital marketing campaign is to create student prospects using methods in the PESO model. Website traffic and prospective students are then segmented into retargeting efforts based on user engagement, email address acquisition, and other behavioral factors, nurturing the prospective student from site visit to inquiry to enrollment.



THINGS YOU SHOULD MASTER AND ALWAYS DO

Leverage your website for the basics!

The lower-cost bottom rungs of the upside-down marketing pyramid should be thoroughly explored before you consider spending any additional funds. And one of the easiest ways to take advantage of a resource you already have is to make the most of your website.

Think of your .edu website as the base upon which all of your advertising is built.

Search engines are predisposed to show .edu websites as top-line results for search engine queries.

That's because educational sites rank high in authority and history, which are priority elements targeted by the search engine algorithms. When a prospective student searches for online programs, you want your school's website to appear at the top of the results list.



The value of your .edu website is a key point that OPMs understand and utilize to their advantage. Typically, the very first step taken by an OPM is to make simple tweaks to your .edu to:

- 1. Make the website rank better for key terms related to your programs**
- 2. Streamline the process for using your website and for requesting more information related to your programs**

Perdia's mobile enrollment solution, EMMA™, provides simple tactics that you can master, and they result in student inquiries that we want YOU, not an OPM, to receive credit for. Furthermore, this work can generally be done by your current staff, so you can keep track of the costs involved and factor them into your cost per enrollment (CPE).

The goal at this point is to ensure your website and content pages for online programs rank well in search engine results. This can typically be checked by searching your brand name plus variations of key terms, such as "university online degrees" or keywords, such as the name of the program you offer.

Next, your site should be organized to be extremely easy to navigate. The absolute worst case scenario is to have a high-intent prospective student on your website only to lose them because your website design, structure, and content does not meet their expectations. Your site therefore has to display correctly on all device types, whether that's a computer, tablet or phone, and in fact, you should assume that most student candidates today will use a phone or mobile device to look at your web pages.

Clear site navigation is crucial since many prospective students won't have the time or patience to search for relevant information.

Content must be displayed in a way that makes sense to the student's decision-making process. Keep in mind who you are trying to attract, the questions they want answered up front, and most importantly, their lack of time to search your website. If you can't quickly get them to what they need (ideally in just a few seconds), then they are likely to "bounce" from your site, never to return.

All pages need prominent contact information and some way for students to request more information.

Make sure you also have a solid plan to follow up on those inquiries, which we will discuss in the Enrollment Management section.

The process of site optimization is relatively simple to describe but will take persistent work to accomplish.

Even when you believe you are done optimizing your website, ongoing analytics and re-evaluation will remain critical.

You should continue to test and measure to see if you can make your site more effective. At GetEducated.com, for example, we constantly formulate new ways of presenting information, then test this content and webpage design/functionality. The world in which we live, the students we are targeting, and the tools and information available are continually changing, so there's no guarantee that what works today will work tomorrow.



Recruiting will not be as successful as it can be without a strong, underlying Customer Relationship Management tool (CRM)—such as Perdia's EMMA™ product—ready to field student inquiries. A good CRM provides prospective students with important information in a cadence that is helpful and supportive to their decision-making process.

Too many schools, however, seem to believe that one or two automated emails that dispense general information will suffice to answer questions and transform prospects into students. Though emails are a crucial part of the PESO model, their cadence, messaging, and calls to action are often overlooked.

Yet these messages cannot be configured on a "set it and forget it" model. Instead, emails, like all elements of the recruitment and enrollment process, should undergo continual evaluation and fine-tuning. Only then can they serve their fullest purpose as tools for digital marketing.

STARTING OUT WITH PESO

Let's now look at defining the various parts of the PESO model, which stands for Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned media. The acronym is PESO because it's easy to remember, but the real order in which we approach marketing is OSEP. Marketing efforts should logically begin with your owned media, as we just discussed, because you already control and pay to maintain these assets.

We'll focus on the basics of PESO since the intermediate and advanced sections should be initiated only once the basics have been successfully implemented.

The material presented here is not meant to be a set-in-stone guide outlining exactly what you should do. Instead, this information is intended to brief you on what an OPM is likely to do on your behalf. It is our goal to demystify the OPM black box so that you can make informed decisions and perform additional research on your own. The steps you take will depend on your specific short and long-term goals, budget, technical expertise, and development assets.

**Owned Media is essentially your .edu website.
It is the best starting point for recruiting and digital marketing.
It is the area where OPMs typically take advantage of assets you have but don't understand how to effectively utilize.**

Focus areas include:



Brand strategy

What it is: How you portray your institution to prospective students (color palette, typeface, logo, voice, etc.). It also includes how your content mirrors these items.

Why it's important: Being attentive and responsive to prospective students reinforces the “brand” you are trying to establish with them. Building a brand strategy typically banks on the brand equity you've built over the years, while also being approachable and helpful to students.



Keyword strategy

What it is: Relevant, targeted, high-intent keywords that you would like search engines to associate with each page of your website, thus directing searchers to that page when searching for the term(s) you have identified.

Why it's important: This strategy identifies the keywords that are being used to find programs such as yours, then develops a plan to have those words optimized on your website so that search engines associate them with your program's web pages. For example, if you offer a Master of Education with a concentration in Elementary Education, people who are searching for “Masters of Education in Elementary Education” or some variation of those words would be prime candidates for enrollment in your program. Knowing this, you can develop content on your .edu website that features those keywords.



Unique content

What it is: Relevant, easy to understand information designed for human consumption—not engineered for search engines. It can include infographics, videos, and user reviews, all of which can be helpful in a student’s decision-making process.

Why it’s important: Unique content reinforces your keyword strategy with associated copy. For an online degree program, this content might be a description of your program or how someone could use the degree professionally. High quality content is a critical factor in determining how search engines rank sites.



Technical Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

What it is: The technical on-page data and practices for making your website pages resonate well with the elements that search engines look for. This puts your keyword strategy and unique content strategy into a format that enables search engines to read and make sense of what is on each page.

Why it’s important: SEO boils your keyword strategy down to the underlying code that search engines read and index to “learn” what a page is all about. Results are used to build the search engine database for future users searching for keywords relevant to your site. SEO involves technical expertise that can be found externally—or potentially even internally, with current technology or marketing students.



Email marketing

What it is: Email marketing refers to automated communications that contain relevant information based on known attributes of the prospective student, such as their program of interest. It is one of the pillars of communication with prospective students.

Why it’s important: Email marketing serves many purposes, including providing information directly and promptly to prospective students. It is important to stay visible and relevant to them as they work through their personal enrollment decisions. Not every prospective student is going to apply and enroll right away, but you should stay in touch with them for future enrollment potential. Additionally, by using a CRM, the automated email content and cadence can adjust in response to different actions taken by the student. For example, if the student applies, an entirely new set of emails should kick off, while the previous emails aimed at a prospective applicant should cease. It is critical to keep in touch with prospective students throughout their stages of interest. A preset communication plan that can be implemented automatically is key to success.



Analytics

What it is: Broadly, analytics refers to collecting, tracking, and analyzing metrics related to your website. This information allows you to better understand your site visitors, inquiries, applications, enrollments, retention, and financial data, such as the cost of recruiting efforts. You can also establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to gauge performance and make educated decisions about how to improve your recruiting efforts.

Why it's important: Without analytics, you are effectively driving blind—at 70 MPH. Only by maintaining records and monitoring performance can you identify areas that are working well and areas that need improvement. Google Analytics is a great way to watch and improve your recruiting efforts, especially when combined with information from your CRM or Student Information System (SIS). You should be analyzing these critical items: site and page visits, time on site, bounce rates, and visitor actions, such as information requests. You should also monitor trends in website visits translating to actions:



Over time, these metrics will help you to identify areas for improvement, suggest and implement changes, then track the results to see if the changes lead to positive trends.



Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO) techniques

What it is: CRO techniques are the foundation upon which all PESO model recruiting efforts are built. Measured using Google Analytics, CRO ensures that your website is fully functional and accessible, regardless of the device used (computer, mobile or tablet). With effective CRO, your website provides the information visitors are seeking and enables them to request more information or take a similar trackable action, so you can then start a dialogue with them.

Why it's important: OPMs are proficient in CRO techniques and continually work to improve website metrics to minimize recruiting expenditures, while maximizing conversion rates. If your website isn't being continually streamlined for greater efficiency and performance, you will find that you are spending more to acquire new students.

PESO: NEXT STEPS

Only after mastering your owned media assets, and only if your goals call for further growth in enrollments, should you move on to paid media strategies. This would also be the right time to explore earned media and shared media opportunities, which we'll touch upon briefly here.

Shared media includes all of your organic (i.e., non-paid) social media accounts, such as your institution's LinkedIn or Facebook profiles, and should be viewed as an extension of your brand.

Key considerations include creating strategies for your shared media audiences and content, fostering cross-promotions with other brands or partnerships, and establishing community and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Earned media refers to generating publicity through PR, media relations and investor relations, if applicable. Some focused effort on PR will be valuable but if you are operating well across your owned, paid, and shared media channels, this can happen naturally or with minimal effort.

Paid Media strategies are the important next steps to focus on after you've optimized your website and mastered the essential owned-media tactics. Factors to take into account with paid media include:

Paid social and video ads

offer flexible creative options for targeting audiences using age, current education level, career characteristics, and more.

Paid search ads

allow you to pay to be positioned higher in a search engine's results, and can be leveraged as a top or mid-pyramid strategy, helping to reach high-intent users more quickly through search queries and retargeting. These ads generally have a higher conversion rate than social ads.

Retargeting

earlier email recipients or site visitors helps to convert mid-funnel and bottom-funnel prospects to leads.

Content distribution

includes link building; affiliate marketing; sponsored content outside of owned media; off-page SEO efforts; content contributions to forums and group pages; partnerships with high-value aggregators, and some native advertising. Done well, these efforts can generate SEO benefits and scale that are similar to display advertising.

SUMMARY

When you understand your target audience and how it differs from an audience of traditional campus students, you can make your website, content, and communications far more impactful and useful. Once you understand how to optimize your owned assets and learn the basic steps of tracking and advertising, you are well on your way to handling online recruitment and enrollment without an OPM.

Enrollment Management

GOAL

Reduce the gap between ambitious goals and the attainment of those goals through performance.

To ensure financially stable growth, your recruitment and marketing plans must be executed in conjunction with sound admissions processes and student success plans—otherwise known as enrollment management.

As an institution shifts from a local audience to a nationwide approach, enrollment management often presents internal challenges. We will address some of these challenges and provide strategies for overcoming them. Most importantly, we will cover the data and analytical framework that is critical to success and to gaining the greatest growth benefits from your marketing efforts.

MANAGING COST PER ENROLLMENT

Knowing your cost per enrollment by program for every advertising channel is the first step toward an effective enrollment management plan.

To advance as an institution within a competitive landscape, you must understand how much it costs you to enroll and educate your students, as well as how to obtain the most effective returns on your investment after educating them.

Student recruitment and online marketing investments represent most of the cost per new student acquisition, which is why it is critical to track admissions and marketing activities. Marketing and admissions teams are necessarily intertwined and they must work together to improve campaigns based on performance data.

Brand status, campus amenities and local recruitment are important for traditional student enrollment, but digital marketing campaigns coupled with deliberate outreach and engagement activities are vital for online student enrollment.

The following charts may seem simple—and they are. They demonstrate how to accurately track costs and distribute this information across your institution. Employees need to understand what it costs to acquire a student, how many students are targeted per program, and how many students are graduating from each program. Understanding the data enables your team to better manage costs per enrollment.

COST PER ENROLLMENT (by Program)

MM/DD/YYYY - MM/DD/YYYY

Program Name	Marketing Spend	Inquiries Generated	Cost per Inquiry	Applications Received	Cost per Applicant	Credit Hours Enrolled	Cost per Enrolled Credit	Cost per Enrollment
A	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled
B	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled
C	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled
D	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled
E	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled

MARKETING & RECRUITING CHANNEL COST PER ENROLLMENT

MM/DD/YYYY - MM/DD/YYYY

Recruiting Effort	Spend	Inquiries Generated	Cost per Inquiry	Applications Received	Cost per Applicant	Credit Hours Enrolled	Cost per Enrolled Credit	Cost per Enrollment
A	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled
B	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled
C	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled
D	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled
E	Y	X	Y/X	Z	Y/Z	V	Y/V	Y/#Enrolled

How Many Students Do You Have?

Perdia's VP of Student Engagement, Patti Franz, Shares a Story

I was recently asked to visit a university to discuss their enrollment growth goals. It was the week before graduation ceremonies. Everyone was excited and anxiously planning the event. I naturally asked my host how many students were walking that year. The answer was, "I'm not sure." I asked the same question of each staff member I met, and I received the same answer.

This spoke volumes to me in terms of the scale and type of assistance the institution required to be in a "growth" state. So here's a challenge: Does everyone at your institution know how many students you plan to graduate? And do they know how much it costs to get them in your door?

A solid enrollment management strategy addresses the competitive nature of online higher education by aligning a number of tactics with the institution's brand, including communication, customer service, student demographics, student success, and technological innovation. These strategies become the culture of the institution, impacting all internal departments and functions within the student cycle.

The primary mission of strategic enrollment management is to attract, enroll, graduate, and empower students throughout their educational journey. Our aim in this section is to help you reduce the gap between ambitious goals and the attainment of those goals through performance. We will explore how to implement an enrollment management plan with oversight and continuous improvement methodologies.

To be effective, your enrollment management plan should:

- 1. Assess the demand for your offerings** from a prospective student's viewpoint and from an employment standpoint on the national, state, and local levels.
- 2. Clearly communicate services**, processes, and procedures for all staff, current students, and prospective students.
- 3. Research and anticipate changing demands** and emerging needs at the program level, with enrollment solutions tailored to each program.
- 4. Leverage technology** to meet both the needs of the student and the institution. Technology ultimately drives the enrollment management strategy.
- 5. Be data-driven** to inform sound decisions and evaluation.



Perdia offers a patent-pending mobile enrollment solution called EMMA™. This technology represents a radical departure from existing enrollment management tools, and provides significant improvements over the entire enrollment management process. Perdia can help you decide if EMMA™ may be right for you.

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

The competitive nature of today's online learning environment requires institutions to undergo a cultural transition in order to deeply engage with online students and prospective online students. All staff members must become invested in nurturing and empowering the online learner.

The most effective online enrollment management plan is one that is student-centric at every stage and with every interaction, from recruiting to graduation.

The goals of this approach can be accomplished by correctly fitting technology, processes, and training to drive quick follow-up with prospective students and establish the institution's value and benefits.

But the goal is to maintain student-centricity throughout each encounter.

From a cultural perspective, the implementation and acceptance of this approach should be non-negotiable. And as you will see below, Perdia's enrollment model encourages this type of outreach with empathy, active listening, and continued follow-up—with the right communication at the right time.

The implementation plan should redefine the institutional focus by framing students as:

- Your first priority
- Deserving the best service you can offer
- Owed prompt, respectful responses
- The reason every staff member has a job

The plan needs to ensure that all staff appreciate and share this same focus by expecting team members to:

- Work with integrity
- Become student advocates, at every level and in every department
- Respect the student's decision-making processes
- Know the value of each prospective student inquiry
- Align student enrollment with employee growth and achievement

The overarching goal of an online enrollment management strategy is to deliver sustainable growth within the online marketplace.

Recent problems in admissions, including the celebrity bribery scandal, the Harvard discrimination case, and for-profit university misrepresentation

issues, mean that a focus on admissions as an online growth area can be uncomfortable for some employees. But cost-effective growth in the online marketplace can only be successful if the entire institution embraces a student-centric recruitment culture.



PROVIDE STUDENT CARES

Follow the CARES acronym to deliver great customer service at every point in the student enrollment cycle.

C
Communication

Clearly communicate pre-enrollment processes and set reasonable expectations.

A
Accountability

Take responsibility for finding solutions to assist all prospective students and always work toward enrolling each student who reaches out.

R
Responsiveness

Prospective students should not have to wait for you to answer them or provide them with a solution. Become a resource and advocate for each inquiry.

E
Expertise

Know the procedures and system. Always work to provide the student with an opportunity to secure enrollment.

S
Solution

At the end of the day, make sure to solve the issue or answer the question—go the extra mile on behalf of the inquiry.

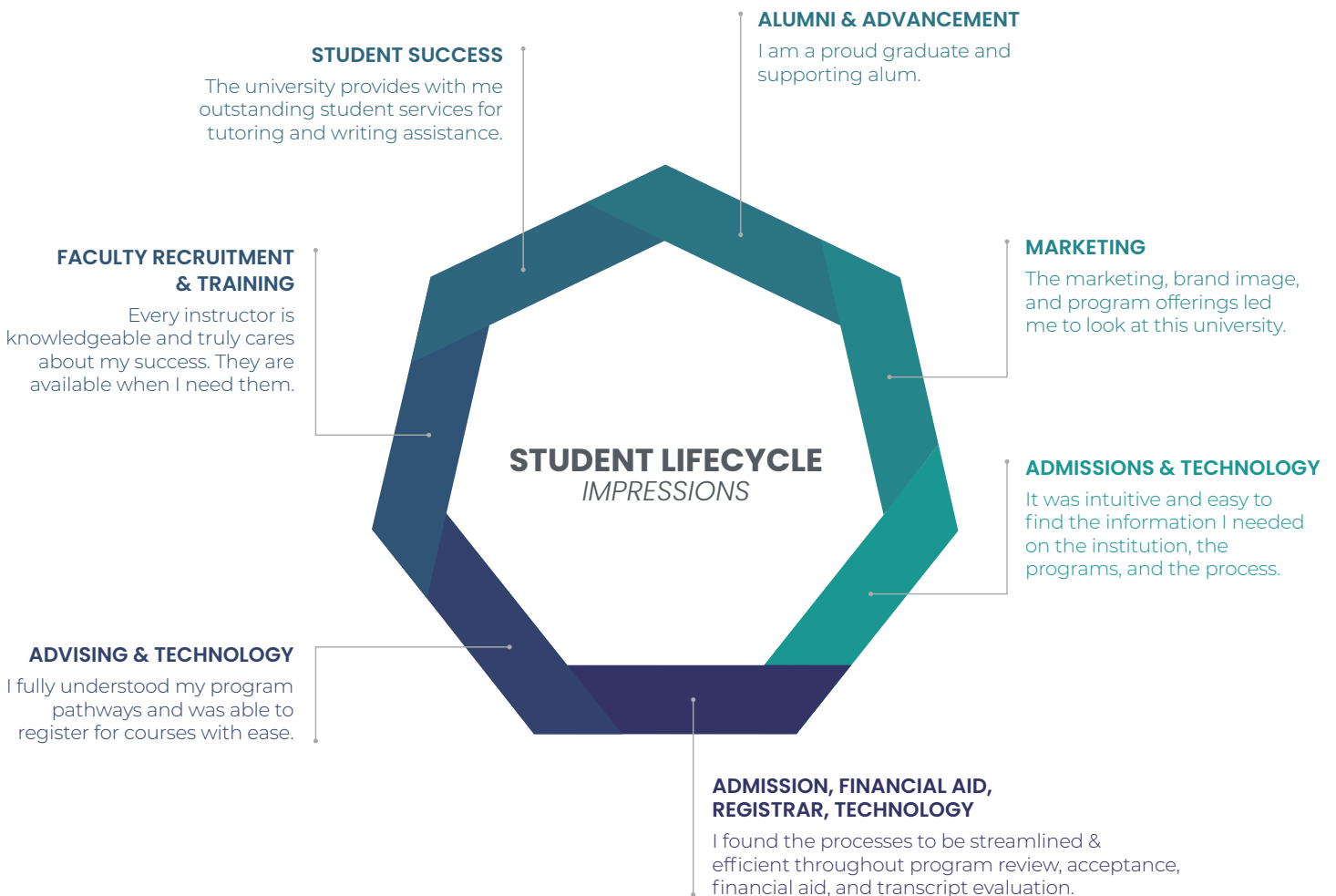
STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Strategic alignment refers to lining up all back-office support departments, including financial aid, admissions, student success and the registrar, in support of the acquisition and retention of new online students.

This singular focus becomes the backbone of cost-effective growth. The functions of your supporting departments remain the same, but now these teams interact differently with online students because they understand how different this population is from traditional campus-based learners.

In strategic alignment, recruiting, admissions, and student success teams need to work closely together, with all interactions driven by the institution's technological infrastructure. A deep integration across functions must be executed through communication, accountability, and cultural assimilation. And this integration is necessary to ensure success in the competition for online students. The one major differentiator that will drive online enrollment success is how well a student's needs are met, not how well you think they are being met.

What do your students say about their experiences?





The true test of your efforts lies in how students perceive your performance. The old adage of “the customer is always right” is true within the higher education sector, especially within this highly competitive landscape.

Your enrollment mission, as well as the mission of every university employee, needs to center around student perceptions and testimonials.

When admissions and recruiting are separated from each other, and then financial aid and the registrar are further segmented, the person harmed most is the prospective or new student. This type of segmentation results in lapses in communication, gaps in processing, a loss of student-centricity, and ultimately, reduced performance. OPMs often step in to fulfill the back-office functions of an institution because they know how important it is for these areas to be integrated. Otherwise, the tasks involved can be mishandled, the process may be disrupted, and the goals might be challenged by staff that cannot or will not believe there is a problem.

But remember:

If it's not ALL right, it's WRONG.

For-profit institutions may better understand the stakes involved. In the late nineties, they began addressing enrollment by building “pods” within their student outreach centers. To serve prospective students quickly and efficiently, representatives from admissions, financial aid, and advising literally sat together with the sole purpose of breaking down internal barriers and working as a cohesive unit. This direct engagement with potential students became the engine for their exceptional enrollment growth.

Pods may not be the right model for your institution, but bringing the various enrollment functions closer together is critical for a successful online enrollment growth plan.

Departments from across the institution must work together to identify, attract, recruit, retain, and graduate new online students.

And the most critical element to doing so is the technological foundation that underlies all these processes. It is only with an interwoven technology infrastructure that the departments can work together.

TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Technology, specifically the infrastructure of an institution's support operations, must become a core competency of any educational institution.

The primary purpose of this technology must be to serve each employee engaged in its use by gathering data and providing analytics to drive decisions. Technological infrastructure must enable effective communication between the institution and its potential students. And technological advances are the catalyst for operational enhancements that lead to enrollment growth.

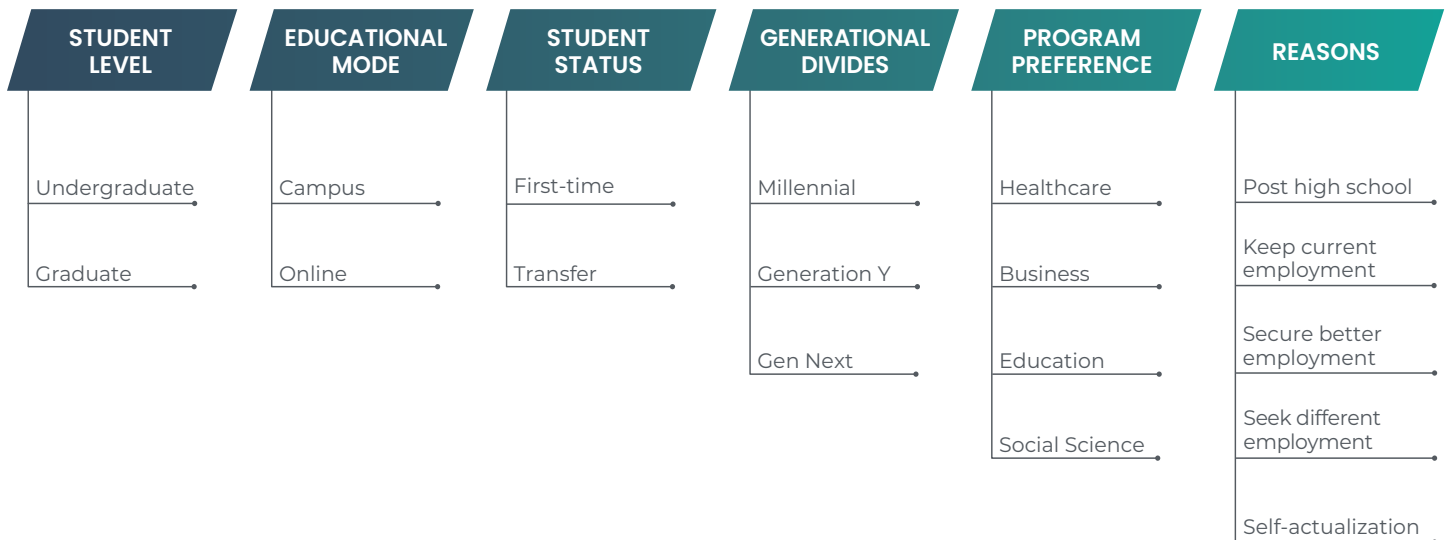
Investing in technology is just as important as investing in curriculum and faculty. Arguably, it is more important because, without sound technology, the number of students available for faculty to educate will dwindle, and without good faculty and academic credentials, there is no product for the student.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

We earlier highlighted the importance of knowing your customer for successful marketing initiatives, and this knowledge is just as relevant for enrollment management. A full understanding of your student demographics will allow you to identify different types of communication and technological support products that fit the population you are serving.

THE MANY TYPES OF STUDENT CLASSIFICATIONS

There is no one-size-fits-all population



For years, institutions have divided students into binary categories: first-year and transfer or undergraduate and graduate. These categories refer back to the traditional on-campus educational model, and technology and processes are typically established in accordance with them. But the online student population contains many more distinct categories, and each group requires different methods of communication and service.

How then does an institution effectively overhaul processes and practices for the online population while continuing to effectively serve its campus-based students? The answer is with student-centric technology. The only way to truly respond to the broad range of needs found in the prospective online student population is to capture accurate data, develop cross-institution strategies, and harness flexible technology. Together these actions will deliver positive results by enabling you to anticipate changes and plan for future growth.

Here are three ways schools can leverage technology to remain relevant and competitive in today's rapidly changing landscape, while also serving future generations of students:

1 Mobile is the New Medium:

If you're not in front of your students on their mobile devices throughout the entire enrollment process, you're simply not in front of them. Go beyond putting your admission application in a mobile responsive environment. Instead, create an experience that personally guides students through the online enrollment process on their device of choice.

2 Right Message, Right Time:

Send personalized "just-in-time" messages through the pre-enrollment process to match the behavioral and thought processes of your online students at each stage. You can stand out as the institution that is both timely and relevant to your students' needs. Messages should be highly focused, rather than general, responding exactly to where the student is in their decision-making process and their pre-enrollment cycle.

3 Empower Students, Don't Pressure:

By proactively providing the information students need at every stage of the decision process, you can gently "pull" them through the enrollment cycle instead of "pushing" them into a decision. This makes it easier for prospective students to say "yes" to what your institution has to offer.

The bottom line is that investing in efficient technology will reduce financial and operational risks, better serve internal stakeholders, and drive student satisfaction.

Research suggests that the acceptance of technology depends how well the new technology fits a particular task (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995). For institutions, this means that when technological systems are fully aligned with an enrollment strategy, the organization can more successfully move toward its goals.

Through years of experience across multiple types of post-secondary educational institutions, Perdia has encountered countless institutions struggling to match their information technology infrastructures to the needs of their online students. CRMs, student information systems, and, to a lesser degree, learning management systems are not built to address the requirements of online student acquisition. Instead, these tools are built to solve traditional recruitment and enrollment needs. The systems are inherently ill-equipped to deliver the integrations and analytics required in online higher education. Perdia's patent-pending EMMA™ platform, however, was designed to deliver positive student experiences through its student-centric technological infrastructures .

The chart below compares traditional technology designed for campus-based functions versus integrated technology for online learning environments.

Segregated Technology

Each department has their own communication technology, which triggers actions independently of other departments. Information from one department is not accessible to other departments.

Integrated Technology

Each department utilizes a common technology platform. Triggers and actions work with each other, and information is available for everyone to see. The student record contains communications and action across all departments.

RECRUITING

- Welcome email from a pre-defined email drip campaign.
- A postcard and a copy of the current viewbook are sent via mail.
- All questions are directed to admissions. The student will need to call admissions or check the website.

- Student receives welcome text, email, and phone call from an admissions advisor.
- Student is encouraged to pursue their dreams. The admissions advisor asks questions to make sure the program is right for the student's goals.

ADMISSIONS

- If a student submits all documents as stated on the website, their file will be reviewed and processed for admission.
- If all documents are not received, student may receive reminder emails.
- An admission decision will be sent via email.
- All questions on transfer credits, financial aid, and registration will be directed to the appropriate department, and the student will be directed to call each department separately.

- If student applies for admission and submits all documents as stated on the website, the file will be reviewed and processed.
- Multiple calls and texts are sent letting student know what to expect during the process of applying for financial aid/ assistance. Student is introduced to their start coach.
- If student has questions on financial aid, admissions will know the status and will be able to provide up to date information or transfer the student to a financial aid officer.

FINANCIAL AID, REGISTRAR, BURSAR, ETC.

- If student is accepted and submits all required documents, they will receive an email with the financial aid decision. The student will need to go to the website for any further information.

- Student knows the process of applying for aid or securing funding. They have received support and encouragement throughout the process.

STUDENT SUCCESS

- Student success is not a function of a segregated technology platform.

- With the student start coach, the student goes through orientation, selects courses, and is excited to start classes.



RECRUITING

Whether online or campus-based, a recruiting team’s role is the same: to secure interested students. The strategies and approaches in the execution of this charge are, however, vastly different.

Online recruitment efforts are separate from admissions; they fall within the marketing function and utilize digital media. An online admissions team is accountable for generating x number of applicants from y number of inquiries, which results in what is known as the lead-applicant conversion metric.

The pursuit and management of inquiries generated from online recruiting initiatives should represent 90 percent of the online admission representative’s focus, with the remaining 10 percent allocated to functional processing of applicant information. This can be an extremely hard concept for traditional recruiting teams to embrace. Admissions representatives are often apprehensive about the amount of outreach that is needed to work with online students. Admissions representatives for online programs must also become responsible for “selling” the school via phone outreach and relationship building.

TRADITIONAL RECRUITER

Attend recruitment events

Answer inbound calls

Conduct campus tours

Schedule face-to-face interviews

ONLINE RECRUITER

Outbound reach (phone, text, email)

Conduct phone interviews to advise on degree options

Generate follow-up calls

Create relationships



EMPHASIZING SERVICE

Online admissions representatives need to enact service concepts at every level.

They must be accountable for outreach quantity and follow-up metrics as well as lead conversions. Skills and experience in consultative or adaptive recruitment techniques are essential because these skills will enable representatives to build the types of relationships required to secure new online student enrollments that are prepared to succeed and graduate.

Once a student is engaged in a conversation, whether it's by phone, text, or email, they should rarely be told to call back or to call another department for an answer. All questions should be addressed by one contact person. Some institutions call this a one-stop-shop but what this approach really represents is a level of service that addresses all needs efficiently while nurturing relationships through service and results.

“The admissions office as an organizational unit must develop a strong, clear focus on service. Focus on service is not about meeting the demands of a student so much as it is about anticipating the needs.”

GYURE & ARNOLD, 2001

To be successful with online marketing campaigns, admissions recruiters must connect with each new student inquiry quickly, efficiently, and effectively through targeted messages that are delivered both verbally and in writing.

It is essential to utilize multiple communication channels, including SMS texts and push notifications, to deliver messages that resonate with the prospective student. From a technology standpoint, all communications, calls, and interactions need to be attached to the prospective student's record and accessible to everyone interacting with the student. This type of dynamic messaging is critical to success and cannot be accomplished through websites and CRMs alone.



At Perdia, we continually refine and advance the technology delivered by EMMA™, our mobile enrollment solution. This type of constant evaluation and analysis is required to keep up with the changing needs of students and their adoption of new technologies and contact desires.

When schools invest in a CRM, they either set it and forget it—or don't use it at all. Believing that a CRM is your school's recruitment solution and that it will provide all the information a student needs to move forward usually turns out to be a false hope!

A CRM used incorrectly or complacently can lead to a false sense of security.

Never become convinced that you have a function “solved” but instead, analyze specific concerns and areas for improvements in your technology within and between individual departments.

These efforts should always center on student-centric improvements. Every interaction with a student is an opportunity to better understand their wants and needs. Online students are usually balancing work, families and now school. They are doing this in order to keep a job or move to a new position, and ultimately, increase their earnings. How your institution recognizes and addresses these concerns when marketing new or existing online programs will make the difference between growing enrollments or flatlining them— at a high cost.

Student needs evolve and should be re-evaluated after every enrollment period. These assessments can serve to measure technology and process improvements and should include individuals from all areas of student enrollment.

Admissions is not a 9 to 5 job, and your messaging must be able to connect with students at their convenience, 24/7.

Team members must comply with regulations regarding student communications and should treat every inquiry as if it comes from the most important student they will ever enroll.

The entire educational recruitment system exists to provide engagement, offer action items in response to decision-making processes, and respond continuously with valid, timely information.

Technology and team training are key to implementing these forms of communication outreach.



Built with behavioral science and artificial intelligence and available 24/7, 365 days a year, EMMA™ is designed to promote your online programs while allowing prospective students to move at their own pace. With EMMA™, the admissions team has the technology they need to perform their duties and maximize their performance potential, thus reducing human capital and overhead costs.

SPEED-TO-LEAD

As soon as a prospective student inquiry is received, every second counts. Typically, the prospective online student has many choices available to them, and they are proactively engaging with several institutions at once.

For your institution, the length of time it takes for an admissions representative to connect with an inquiry, along with the intensity of the follow-up actions, the type of communication, and the overall efficiency of the follow-up, will determine whether the inquiry continues to be interested in your program. In the OPM world, how long it takes to initiate this contact is called “speed-to-lead.”

Research has shown that anything more than 2-5 minutes from the time of initial inquiry drastically decreases your ability to secure the inquiry as a student and increases the chance of the student moving on to another institution.

An empirically validated study published in the Journal of Business Research demonstrates speed to “be a major factor and significant component of lead follow-up” (Ohiomah et al., 2019). Following the concept of speed, the study provides evidence of a correlation between adaptive selling skillsets and positive inquiry conversions.

TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW

Post-acceptance

Often face-to-face with an advisor

ONLINE INTERVIEW

Immediately after an inquiry is received

Cross-matches educational history with program requirements

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

It is human nature to make instant judgments and first impressions are about likeability and confidence. When promoting traditional programs, these judgments are relatively easy to control in person—for example, by shaking hands, body language, and eye contact—and through media, backed by brand recognition. When connecting with new online student inquiries, a good first impression is harder to control, yet more important than ever.

Successful online admissions representatives will always engage with active listening skills.

They offer their undivided attention, take a dynamic interest in the prospective student's goals, and are enthusiastic about the institution.

They must persuade the student that the institution and the program are a good fit for them, and they must do so while matching the student's previous educational history to the program requirements and the student's goals to the program outcomes.



With EMMA™, Perdia Education deploys best practices in mobile enrollment for universities to harness. This technology assistant engages, interviews, and provides accurate information 100 percent of the time. The behavioral science built into the system understands the online student demographic, their decision-making processes, and the information non-traditional students seek.

FOLLOW UP INTENSITY AND ENGAGEMENT

First impressions, of course, are only the beginning. Follow-up and engagement are the main job responsibilities for an online recruiter.

An online admissions recruiter must walk the line between engaging with prospects enough to prove an institution's value while not being so persistent that they drive prospects away with incessant outreach.

The time immediately following initial contact is the most sensitive. This is when the student decides whether to move forward with your institution or to seek out a different option. It is essential to have systems in place to provide multiple communication and outreach channels, employ strategic verbal and written content for messaging, and solidify relationships through follow-up and engagement.

Specific actions that are needed at this point include:

- Thanking the prospect for their time and for allowing the admissions representative to better understand and fulfill the student's educational goals
- Continuing to build rapport with weekly check-ins
- Ensuring that communication lines are available to the student 24/7
- Making sure the prospective student knows you are an advocate for their educational journey



Again, follow-up and engagement techniques for online inquiries must align with the needs and wants of this student population.

Brand recognition does not carry the same weight online as it does with campus-based institutions. Along with cost issues, what does make a difference is your ability to establish relationships and provide quick and easy access to needed information.

For non-traditional students seeking online learning options, life issues are their biggest obstacles to enrollment. Work, family, financial, medical, and emotional concerns can all get in the way of their educational goals. And their primary support along the way to degree completion is the admissions recruiter.

Analysis of our data from multiple institution types, program levels, and student demographics consistently shows that:

85% *of inquires don't enroll anywhere*

Not everyone who inquires is ready to become a student.

15% *will enroll at your institution*

The 85 percent loss is generally beyond your control because it has more to do with the prospective student than with you.

Engaging with the 15 percent who do end up enrolling is within your control.

Optimizing your processes can make a huge difference in how many of that 15% group will enroll with you, and how many will enroll with another school or program.

ADMISSIONS

Traditional admissions strategies focus on collecting unofficial and official transcripts, matching candidate backgrounds to program admission requirements, and producing admission letters.

These tasks serve an essential function, but they have little importance when it comes to generating online enrollment growth. Instead, the time allocated to outreach and securing new student applicants should far outweigh the time spent processing admission paperwork.



In a 2019 article in *College & University Journal*, Michelle Sandlin described the importance of non-empirical data in the acquisition and retention of students. Traditional admissions rely to a great extent upon empirical data, such as test scores and grades, but online programs benefit from what Sandlin calls a “holistic” approach.

A holistic admissions process looks beyond scores and grades and considers attributes that are not readily measured as data points. Students and institutions benefit from a holistic approach because taking these factors into account increases student retention and success. Perdia’s EMMA™ platform supports this approach as the first and only higher education solution to collect and manage non-empirical data.

Relationship management is one of the fundamental elements of a successful online growth strategy.

With cost, time to completion, and degree outcomes being the critical concerns of online program applicants, admission staff should be trained to address these issues as their top priorities. Team members should be able to thoroughly explain the program curriculum, provide temporary transfer credit evaluations, and secure official transcripts as quickly as possible.

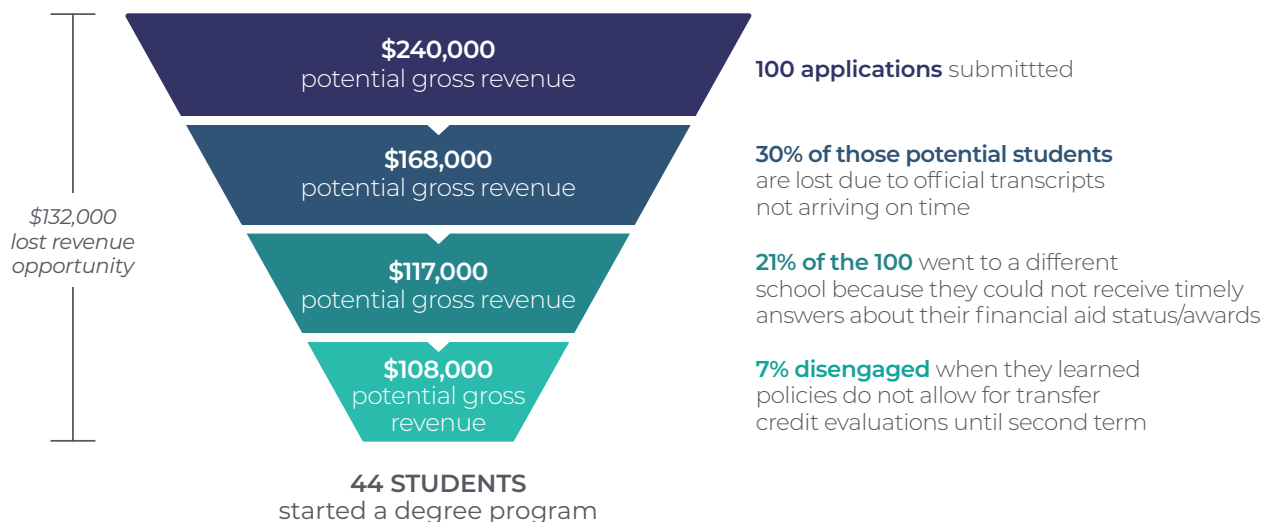
Technology infrastructures should support admissions processing, facilitate receipt of official transcripts, and provide context for temporary transfer credit evaluations. Only then, will true enrollment growth occur.

Analysis of multiple enrollment cycles reveals that new student acquisition succeeds when 90 percent of admissions efforts focus on relationship management and only 10 percent is devoted to processing.

To illustrate the impact of these investments, we can look at numerous real-life examples of institutions we have worked with.

THE COST OF AN APPLICANT FUNNEL

Based on \$400 per credit hour / 3 credit hour courses / 2 course registrations per student per start



This institution **lost more than 50 percent of its potential business primarily due to processing and relationship management issues**, a highly unfavorable applicant-to-start ratio by any standard.



Emma

Perdia Education's technology improvement products available through the EMMA™ platform include:

- Inquiry management
- Student start coaching
- Student relationship management
- Retention/early alerts
- Application management



STUDENT SUCCESS

What is student success? And what role does a student success department have in the strategic enrollment management plan for online growth?

The short answer is that student success representatives serve as the bridge between a new student applicant and the first-term faculty—and all points in between.

They nurture applicants through the start, engage with students during the transition between first and second terms, and prepare new students to be successful from acceptance to graduation. More specifically, online student success teams are accountable for generating x number of starts from y number of applicants, otherwise known as the applicant–start conversion metric.

A student success team has two components: the student start coach and the academic success coach. The goal of the student start coach is to

bridge the gap between acceptance and start—they help students get to their first class.

An academic success coach, on the other hand, is tied directly to academic departments and instructors and facilitates early alert systems for retention. The goal of an academic success coach is to bridge the gap between term 1 and term 2, and oftentimes between year 1 and year 2 to prevent attrition.

Just as a start coach for traditional students will help them get settled in their dorms, success teams for online students need to facilitate a sense of comfort with the online experience. Offering to “walk” these students to class prior to the start date is often very helpful and can help to build the relationship between the start coach and the new student. This can involve scheduling a meeting on the phone to help the student log into the system, find their classroom, access the course syllabus, order books, and understand the technology.

TRADITIONAL STUDENT SUCCESS COACH

New student orientation

Term 1 registration

Housing applications

Initial retention phase

ONLINE STUDENT SUCCESS COACH

New student orientation

Term 1 registration

Walk to class

Initial retention phase



For both online and traditional students, early alert systems can be highly effective solutions for reducing attrition. A good early alert system will notify faculty members and academic success coaches of student performance problems. If, for example, a student fails their first exam, an alert system will trigger the academic success coach to reach out proactively to the student, offer encouragement, and connect the student with the appropriate help, such as tutoring, writing centers, etc.



PROGRAM OFFERINGS

It is sometimes difficult to know how to expand course offerings into an online marketplace and how to create new courses that will be effective in securing enrollments. We do know that having a good mix of programs, both undergraduate and graduate, leads to a stable online position and a sound return on your marketing investment.

The more programs you have, the wider the net you can cast, and the greater your possible returns. Online student demographics are also important to consider when evaluating course offerings.

There has been a dramatic increase in higher education institutions moving to 8-week academic cycles for online courses, with two start periods in a 16-week semester, and moving away from cohort entry.

SUMMARY

You can do this! When you understand your target audience and how it differs from an audience of traditional campus students, you can make your website, content, and communications far more impactful and useful. Once you understand how to optimize your owned assets and learn the basic steps of tracking and advertising, you are well on your way to handling online recruitment and enrollment without an OPM. If your vision and goals are larger in scope or could benefit from our bundled services model, please reach out so we can learn more about your needs and how we can help you exceed your goals.

This shift addresses the preferences of online applicants, who want to start right now. Unlike traditional campus-based students who expect spring, fall, and winter starts, online students want to know how quickly they can finish their degrees. The frequency of your program offerings should therefore be a key consideration when migrating to a growth model through online program development. It is not simply the programs you offer, it's how often you offer them.

Finally, any good marketing plan has to start with knowing how you'll manage the last steps: how you will track, measure, communicate, and implement the results of the plan. A plan without data analysis is sure to fail, but a plan with effective data analysis and visualization of this analysis throughout the process and across the institution has a far greater chance of succeeding.

Key Term Definitions

CPE: Cost Per Enrollment

A key benchmark in the overall effectiveness of your marketing and enrollment processes. It can be calculated solely on the marketing costs associated with generating an enrollment or it can include enrollment management costs.

CRM: Customer Relationship Management

A program, often separate from a Student Information System, that helps gather and disseminate information to prospective students. As the name implies, it is used in higher education, but has roots in sales and business.

CRO: Conversion Rate Optimization

CRO is a critical metric to keep in mind when advertising or attempting to enhance how well your website is converting visits into requests for information. In addition to setting benchmarks, it is important to work continually to improve CRO over current levels.

ICP: Ideal Customer Profile

This term comes from advertising but can be applied to distance education as well. The ICP defines your typical student, including their age, background, geography, and any other related demographic characteristics that can be used to offer a more customized advertising and communication process. The more detailed your ICP, the more effectively you can target and attract the ideal students for your programs.

KPI: Key Performance Indicator

A benchmark for good operations and marketing performance. For example, a 50% application–enrollment rate is a tangible metric that your marketing and operations can be measured against. Analytics are critical but only if they are actionable. Developing KPIs helps you stay focused on what is working and what isn't.

OPM: Online Program Management

Used as a general description of third party, for-profit entities that contract with universities for part or all of their online programs on a tuition share basis. These organizations (such as Wiley, Pearson, 2U, Hotchalk, etc.) provide services to help grow online enrollment.

PESO: Paid - Earned - Shared - Owned Media

A common method for describing types of media as they relate to one another.

PPC/CPC: Pay-Per-Click or Cost-Per-Click

The tactic of paying to be listed highly in search results based on the user's keyword search. Typically, you are charged a fee each time a person clicks on your ad and is transported to your website.

Retargeting

The process by which website visitors are tagged electronically and later provided advertising through various third-party partners. For example, Google Retargeting places a cookie on the user's browser and then follows the user across other sites while displaying your advertising to them.

SEM: Search Engine Marketing

A broad-based term that includes Search Engine Optimization and Pay-Per-Click because both are functions of search engines.

SEO: Search Engine Optimization

The process of optimizing your website to have a higher rank in search engine queries. SEO is both back-end (how your website is designed, including underlying technical programming) as well as front-end (the content displayed on the website).

SIS: Student Information System

The system your institution uses to store student application information and other information as the student matriculates (e.g., PeopleSoft, WorkDay, Ellucian, etc.).

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