

## **KICKSTART HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING WITH EMAIL**

Opt-in Email Marketing for Colleges & Universities

Learn how to increase Return on Investment using highly targeted emails in this step-by-step guide.



By Joe Soltis  
Director of PBM

216.369.2220  
866.RANK.YOU(726.5968)

## **Kickstart Higher Education Marketing with Email**

What do Harvard, Oregon State, California State, Oxford, The University of Texas, Colorado State, North Park University, Cornell University, University of Phoenix and a host of other colleges and universities have in common? They all use email marketing to communicate with prospective students, current students, parents and alumni.

### **Email Marketing as a Communication and Sales Medium**

The Direct Marketing Association found that email marketing generates a Return on Investment of \$57.25 per \$1 spent. In addition, email marketing offers an instant way to deliver highly relevant content that is dynamic and targeted to the individual. This use of dynamic content can increase the usefulness of an email to the recipient and will result in an increase in open rates, click-through rates and desired actions, such as contacting the admissions office, registering for an event or class, obtaining a donation, or applying for financial aid.

With the tremendous communication tools that email marketing provides along with its great earning potential, higher education is catching on to the possibilities of opt-in email marketing.

Every department within a college or university has a need to communicate both internally and with its constituents, whether those constituents are potential students or future parents, current students or current parents, alumni, or career services contacts.

### **A Cost-Effective Way to Dramatically Increase Enrollments**

Every school needs to acquire new students and enrollments. Email marketing has proven to be a tool which can dramatically increase both inquiries as well as the enrollment-per-inquiry ratio. The process of building the foundation for a successful email marketing program to increase enrollments includes the following steps:

#### **1. Building a Quality Opt-in Database**

The most important part of building your marketing database is asking for affirmative consent to email your prospective students and parents. This should be built into a process within your call centers, at the admissions office, the financial aid office, for all snail mail campaigns, at counselor's offices, and on your website. Ask for the recipient's email address either verbally or on a form by asking, "Would you like to receive email updates from us about X, Y or Z?"

Everyone who gives a positive answer should then be placed into a central database which can be used for your marketing purposes. A reputable email marketing vendor can help you to synchronize the data between various departments within your academic institution.

[Click Here to Watch the "Guide to Email Marketing for Higher Education" Video](#)

Make certain that all opt-ins are either labeled as a parent or a prospective student, as you will market to them differently. Also, be sure to ask for the student's academic degree(s) of interest, as using that information in your email marketing can dramatically improve enrollment rates. In addition, ensuring that you get students' first and last names will allow you to personalize your email subject lines and message body, which can help to improve enrollment rates. Do not ask for more information, such as physical address, phone number, etc., unless you need it for other in-house purposes or if you plan on using geo-targets for your email marketing campaigns. Remember that the more information you ask for, the fewer the number of opt-ins you will receive.

Opt-ins can be generated through your website as well. There should be a prominent call to action on every page of your school's website which takes visitors to a sign-up page for all school email newsletters. At that Web page, users should be able to choose which newsletters they want to sign-up for.

If you already have a database of email addresses from people who have inquired about your school – but who did not give affirmative consent to be emailed because you never asked – you can do a one-time email campaign asking them to “confirm their subscription.” When you team up with a trusted email marketing vendor, all visitors need to do is click on a link within the email to confirm their subscription and the software will know who clicked on the link. In other words, you will not have to ask them to fill out a form again.

Lastly, opt-ins can be generated through third-party opt-in lead generation vendors. Make sure that the lead generation vendor has a reputable client and testimonial list, as there are many unethical players within the lead generation industry. Be sure that you never purchase a list, but get quality leads where people opt-in specifically to receive information about your college or university. A reputable email marketing vendor can help you determine which vendors offer quality leads and which do not.

## **2. Creating Event-Triggered Emails**

Once a new lead comes into your system, an immediate welcome email should be sent to the recipient welcoming them to your academic institution. All emails should be sent in a visually appealing email-compliant HTML template. The welcome email should contain links to important Web pages on your site, as well as important contact information. This information includes admissions and financial aid information, a professional online video about your school to appeal to your recipient, and information related to the recipient's academic degree(s) of interest. Other follow-up emails should be sent to the recipient at pre-determined increments over the next few weeks.

This entire process can be completely automated by a trusted email marketing vendor.

Special announcements can be programmed into your opt-in email system in advance. These announcements should cover topics such as application deadlines, financial aid deadlines or any major development about the school.

[Click Here to Watch the “Guide to Email Marketing for Higher Education” Video](#)

### **3. Setting Up Monthly Email Communications**

A good rule to follow when doing email marketing is that one contact per month is about right. Emailing your recipients more than that can cause them to feel over-contacted and it will hurt your response rates. However, emailing a recipient only quarterly or once in a while can result in your recipients forgetting that they once opted in to receive email from you, which can hurt response rates.

It is important to remember that the content of your monthly communication should be fresh and exciting. It should provide some hard sells, but it should be predominately informational. Prominent calls to action should be placed within your email template to apply for admission, apply for financial aid, and contact admissions with questions. The rest of the emails should speak to topics like why attending the school is great, personal stories of students, alumni, or instructors, advantages of the school, the school in the news, etc. Using video in your emails also significantly improves enrollment rates, but is technically complicated due to limitations at many ISPs. Also, using dynamic content that is targeted to what the individual told you upon sign-up and what the recipient clicked on in past email campaigns should be used to dramatically increase results.

#### **Using Email for Non-Enrollment Purposes**

In addition to using email to communicate with prospective students, email can be used to fundraise, communicate to alumni, current parents and current students.

Successful email newsletter topics include:

- 1) Email communications to current parents to keep them involved in the school and see the value that the school provides to their son or daughter.
- 2) Email communication to current students to let them know about campus events and keep the students involved in and excited about the school.
- 3) Email communications to students in a particular major or department in order to keep all parties up to date about opportunities and successes at the school.
- 4) Email communications to current students about the day's menu for campus dining. This will help to draw students to the campus dining who may not have gone otherwise.
- 5) Email communications to prospective students and current students about financial aid deadlines and opportunities.
- 6) Email communications to current students and recent alumni about career services assistance from the school.
- 7) Email to alumni and alumni's parents for fundraising and purposes.
- 8) Emails to past donors for philanthropy purposes.

[Click Here to Watch the "Guide to Email Marketing for Higher Education" Video](#)

## **Knowing Your Return on Investment ... And Your Recipients**

Using advanced tracking allows you to know what your recipients are interested in. For example, if a prospective student clicks on a link within the email about obtaining a degree in Political Science when they originally told you that they were interested in Business, you will be able to send them emails with more detailed information about both Business and Political Science, thus increasing your chances that the student will choose to enroll at your school.

Using A/B testing, you will be able to see what keywords, slogans and information results in the most enrollments or signups for an event, and you can then roll that information out to your other forms of advertising.

Tracking can be set up so that you know how many users and which ones opened an email, clicked on a link about a certain topic, filled out a form, or enrolled in your school. This can help you to define your exact Return on Investment in real time and get up-to-the-minute results showing how your promotions are performing.

## **Technical Requirements**

There are other components of email marketing that must be taken into account, such as sending out your email campaigns with good ISP relationships so that ISPs will accept your commercial email, monitor black lists, get white listed, design your emails so that they maximize click-throughs and appear correctly on many different computers, filter bounces and removals from your list, and much more. For these types of scenarios, it is best to consult with a reputable email marketing vendor.

## **Bringing it All Together**

The strategy outlined above is a proven plan that has worked very well for some of the most innovative colleges and universities. Adopting this plan means having a solid advantage over competing colleges and universities.

## **About the Author**

*Joe Soltis is the Director of Permission-Based Marketing for Fathom SEO, a leader in Internet Marketing. Fathom SEO specializes in opt-in email marketing, search engine optimization, paid search, online PR, link building, and online video production and marketing. Joe and his staff have successfully managed the opt-in email marketing campaigns of more than 80 colleges and universities. Joe has worked in the Internet Marketing arena since 1997.*

[Click Here to Watch the "Guide to Email Marketing for Higher Education" Video](#)