

# Two Key Priorities Accelerating Higher Ed Marketing

Building an Effective Student Journey and 360° Student Profiles



# Industry Perspective

Higher-ed marketers are spread thin, and the industry as a whole is undergoing significant changes in the way it communicates with prospective students. University decision-makers thus face many challenges—ranging from unpredictable enrollment models to lack of internal cohesion among departments and divisions, and an inability to differentiate their brand in the crowded higher-ed space.

For any marketer, addressing the sum of these areas may feel like an insurmountable task. What's needed, is a way to simplify and refocus on the most important factors to success—the students.

Universities that deliver personalized, relevant and compelling digital experiences to students as well as influencers—parents, guidance counselors, coaches and peer networks—will command attention, gain market share and drive results. That's exactly why customer experience management has become the number-one marketing priority for universities and colleges.

However, delivering effective digital experiences requires a fundamental cultural shift, where universities start thinking of themselves as a business and their students as customers—just like any other industry. To accomplish this mission, higher-ed marketers must prioritize on building two important forces:

## **A CUSTOMER JOURNEY STRATEGY**

### **360° STUDENT PROFILES**

The impact of these forces increases with automated processes. Automation streamlines marketing tasks and workflows so marketing teams can focus on each student engagement activity.

# Priority #1 - Build a Customer Journey Strategy

Higher Education has a diverse customer base. From students to parents, alumni, faculty, college counselors and other influencers, these audience segments create a unique problem for universities in terms of tailoring brand messaging and executing marketing campaigns.

What complicates this further is that the wants, needs and tendencies of these audiences change over time. Students and influencers do not operate in a linear or predictable path. Instead, their journey is an experience, punctuated by moments of need and moments of brand opportunity.



High school seniors rank college websites #1 among most influential information resources<sup>2</sup>



Cost of recruiting a single undergrad student at private institutions<sup>1</sup>



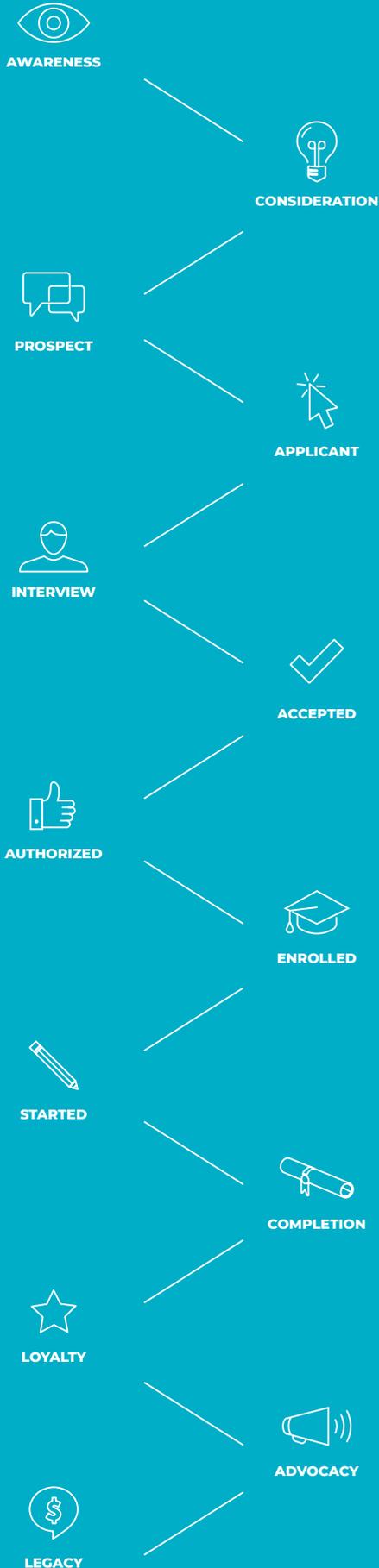
40% of students who feel passively about their college, signaling a need to improve brand images<sup>1</sup>

By developing detailed customer journey strategies for students, universities can identify these intersection points, which enable marketing teams to reach students in their moment of need and deliver useful, targeted content to spur students toward early consideration and application enrollment.

Many say that content marketing should be the main focus when creating compelling digital experiences. While content is a fundamental element of customer experience management, great creative is only great if it's delivered at the right time.

What higher-ed marketers must prioritize is the student lifecycle—matching content with audience decision stages in order to nurture more strategic, impactful impressions.

## MAPPING THE STUDENT JOURNEY



# Priority #2 - 360° Student Profiles

Business decisions are not made on speculation—they're made on data. For universities, customer analytics and 360° views of students can eliminate bias, improve campaign outcomes, and most importantly...determine where, when and how target audiences will interact.

**61% of institutions rank analytics as one of their top three projects for the next 18 months.<sup>3</sup>**

The good news for higher-ed marketers is that they already know a lot of information about their prospective students, including data collected from admissions offices, general demographics, financial-aid files, and various digital engagements across web and social platforms. The problem, however, is that far too often this data is isolated in silos throughout these channels and their respective technology systems—thus leaving marketers with a fractured view of prospective students and the inability to turn insights into action.

In order to provide customer journey strategy planning with more accurate information, universities need a 360° view of prospective students. By combining a strong analytics strategy, reporting structure, centralized CRM, and tracking tools to integrate data from multiple channels, university brands can build advanced student profiles based on known and implicit behavior to help optimize recruitment, increase retention, and of course, differentiate their brand through better digital experiences.

# Driving Graduate Enrollment

Seattle University provides a prime example of a higher-ed institution that leverages a student journey strategy and 360° student profiles. These approaches are necessary given that only 9.8% of college seniors intend to immediately enroll in graduate school the following semester.

Graduate enrollment was a major challenge for the university's marketing team. Convincing students to continue their education can be a much longer, inconsistent process than traditional undergrad marketing. It requires universities to take a vastly different approach with their graduate recruitment efforts.

As a marketing partner, R2i helped Seattle University develop digital campaigns to demonstrate the value and credibility of its graduate programs and to influence prospective students to take action. R2i has helped more than 25 of Seattle University's graduate programs develop, launch and optimize multi-channel campaigns to reach target audiences at strategic times in their decision-making journey.

By understanding the motivations, characteristics, needs and digital tendencies of graduate student audiences, R2i has delivered audience personas, customer journey strategies, and a strategic media mix. This combination helps Seattle University reach target student populations and create distinct digital experiences that motivate potential students to apply for admission.



## Impact

**7**

Schools

**25+**

Programs

**7**

Tactics

**160+**

Campaigns

**99M+**

Impressions

**788K+**

Website Engagement



CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

# Fostering Alumni Engagement

William & Mary is another higher-ed institution that applied a student journey strategy and utilized 360° student profiles. This is key because far too often, universities treat alumni relations as a stand-alone activity. The fact is, alumni relations is an advanced stage of the student journey that requires its own unique strategy, content, technology, and a set of connected customer experiences.

The College of William & Mary realized that to build lasting, profitable relationships with alumni, they must deliver digital experiences that appeal to alumni at this point in their student journey. The college also wanted to remind alumni of the emotional attachment they have to the school.

After migrating the content management system to Adobe Experience Manager, William & Mary approached R2i to launch both a new alumni association site as well as an alumni giving site. These two properties featured refreshed visual identities to improve alumni engagement and encourage ongoing affinity by connecting alumni with the content that matters most to them. This includes events, meet-ups and relevant university news. By creating digital experiences that positively influence the alumni community, William & Mary not only improved digital engagement, but also strengthened donation opportunities with its constantly-growing alumni network.



**\$92 MILLION** in William & Mary scholarship funding came from private donors in 2019.\* [\\*https://giving.wm.edu/](https://giving.wm.edu/)

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hanover Research, 2020 Trends in Higher Education

<sup>2</sup> Ruffalo Noel Levitz, "How to Amplify Digital Engagement of High School Students During the College Search Process, 2019  
E-Expectations® Trend Report

<sup>3</sup> Ovum, 2019 Trends to Watch: Higher Education