OCTANE

ACTIONABLE INSIGHT
REMARKABLE TOPICS

THE VOICE OF

enrollmentFUEL®

A TEACHING-LEARNING ORGANIZATION

VOL. 8, ISSUE 2, 2024

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A LETTER FROM THE
VICE PRESIDENT OF UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

The waning days of this enrollment cycle are a perfect time to remember our most powerful tool: personal connection with students.

Dear Colleagues,

As summer gets underway, we're kicking off the final push to solidify the next incoming class ahead of a new academic year. Enrollment teams across the country face challenges, but with strategic foresight, flexibility, and a willingness to innovate, we can emerge stronger and even more capable of meeting the needs of our students and our institutions.

The latest issue of *Octane* is here to help you identify new and creative ways to approach Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM). One of our highlights in this edition is Vice President of Client Relations, Lisa Branson's interview with Cheryl Boeckman, SVP of Education at LeadSquared. She shares her view on technology's role in minimizing the impact of the enrollment cliff and how today's solutions strive to avoid the frustrations of "perpetual implementation."

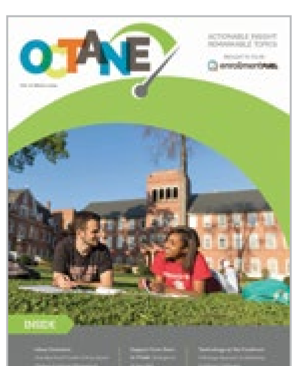
Tori Simon, MS, Associate Vice President for Digital Marketing Strategies, offers suggestions on building long-term trust through influencer marketing. In "Train to Retain," Dr. Laralee F. Harkleroad, one of our learning experts, shares best practices for designing impactful training experiences. Aaron Porter, MA, highlights the significant changes affecting email marketing in "Inbox Evolution: How New Email Provider Policies Impact Strategic Enrollment Management." Rina Campbell, MS, Director of Strategic Enrollment Planning, recommends strategies for elevating your institution's career centers in "Best-in-Class Centers for Career Development." As we head into the season where melt becomes a top concern, I offer my tips for success in "Support from Start to Finish: Methodologies to Reduce Melt."

The waning days of this enrollment cycle are a perfect time to remember our most powerful tool: personal connection with students. The right outreach from the right people at the right moment can transform moments of uncertainty into bold, hopeful decision-making.

Thank you for being part of the *Octane* community. If there is anything I can do to help you, or if you'd like to hear more about what other schools are currently doing to increase yield, please get in touch with me at *Jay.Fedje@enrollmentFUEL.com*.

Yours in partnership,

Jay Fedje, MA
Vice President of University Partnerships



enrollmentFUEL would like to thank Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, North Carolina, for allowing us to feature this photo on the cover of our magazine.

***Octane the Magazine:* A publication of enrollmentFUEL**
A collection of innovative thoughts and ideas from leadership in all areas dedicated to improving your Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Search strategies. Our goal is to fuel creativity and release positive energy among enrollment professionals.

inside OCTANE

SCAN HERE TO SEE PAST ISSUES OF OCTANE

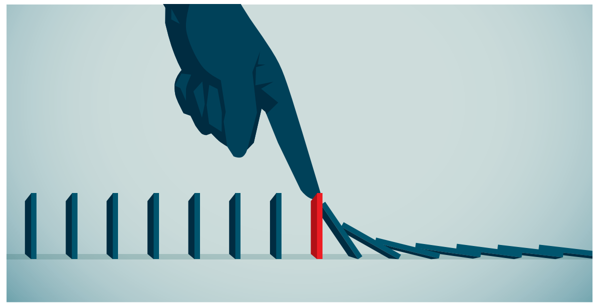
QUICK TAKES

FAST *reads and* ***INNOVATIVE*** *ideas to* ***BOOST*** *positive results*

Quick Takes: FAFSA Chaos Could Cause Domino Effect

The much-anticipated updates to the 2024-25 FAFSA are here, and its streamlined elements were quickly overshadowed by a rocky rollout that left millions of students and families stuck in limbo. While the latest version of the form touts time-saving features like the ability to automatically collect tax information straight from the IRS, families still found themselves behind schedule when the form, usually available by October, didn't launch until Dec. 30. Even then, it was plagued with downtime, glitches, and long processing times—all without adequate user support to help families solve their problems.[1]

These FAFSA difficulties are having a domino effect on institutions. Many students found themselves unable to complete the necessary forms for scholarships and other financial aid, which in turn delayed their ability to receive aid offers until late spring. Universities may need to be flexible in dealing with a significant number of late decisions and later fall enrollment finalization. In a year where financial stressors already loom large for many families, universities may need to make temporary or adjustable offers, push back decision deadlines, and otherwise prepare for an admissions season with an unexpectedly different timeline.



1 Dickler, Jessica. "Rocky FAFSA rollout leaves millions of students, families frustrated." CNBC. 9 Jan. 2024. https://www.cnbc.com/2024/01/09/issues-with-the-new-fafsa-rollout-leaves-students-families-frustrated.html.

Retention Strategy: Checking in On Students Who Took Out-of-Town Internships

Students with internships are almost twice as likely to graduate as those who don't, and they're also significantly more likely to land post-grad jobs[1] and earn higher salaries.[2] When students head out of town for internships, however, those benefits may pale in comparison to a feeling of frustration or loneliness. Isolated from their on-campus community, they may even feel abandoned by the school that sent them there, which can impact retention rates.

To provide the best possible experience—and ensure students return after completing their internships—check in on your temporarily out-of-town students. Have someone from your office or their program call them once or twice a month. If you have an alum network in their location, try to tap into that network to find a local mentor to connect with. The little things build connections, and ensuring students don't feel alone can make a big difference.

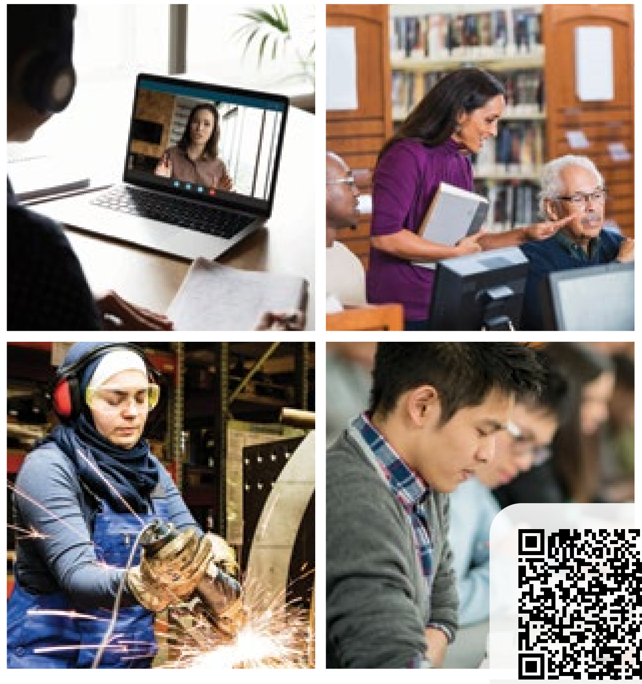
1 McDaniel, Anne, and Matthew Van Jura. "High-impact practices: Evaluating their effect on college completion." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research*, Theory & Practice, vol. 24, no. 3, 2020, pp. 740–757. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025120947357.

2 Margaryan, Shushanik, et al. "Do internships pay off?" *Journal of Human Resources*, 2020. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.57.4.0418-9460r2.

4 Trends That Will Shape the Future of Higher Education

According to the World Economic Forum, four key trends are most likely to shape the future of higher education:

1. **Learning from everywhere:** immersive, flexible education, including practical, purpose-driven learning
2. **Replacing lectures with active learning:** a shift to teaching methods beyond "lecture and listen" and toward active, emotional, and applied learning
3. **Teaching relevant skills in a changing world:** focusing on timely and timeless skills for well-prepared students
4. **Using formative assessment instead of high-stakes exams:** wider-ranging methods to assess competency and improvement instead of standardized tests



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ACCELERATE SLATE
an enrollmentFUEL podcast

Ready To Make Your CRM Work Harder for You?

Tune into *Accelerate Slate*, the podcast from enrollmentFUEL dedicated to all things Slate, the versatile and powerful CRM for higher education.

Hosts Susanna Lehman and Katie Jordan share their experiences navigating Slate and learning to use it to its highest potential. Over 20 episodes (and counting) provide an honest look at the realities of becoming a Slate captain, what that role means, and how to manage its unique changes and challenges. Along with the occasional guest speaker, Susanna and Katie share insightful stories, valuable lessons, and encouragement for those working in the Slate ecosystem.

Topics include:

- Organization techniques for your Slate instance
- Managing schedules and travel in Slate
- Choosing the right Slate captain for your organization

Accelerate Slate is a must-listen for enrollment professionals looking to boost their knowledge and enhance their CRM usage.

START STREAMING
Tune into *Accelerate Slate*, the podcast from enrollmentFUEL dedicated to all things Slate, the versatile and powerful CRM for higher education.

INBOX EVOLUTION:

How New Email Provider Policies Impact Strategic Enrollment Management

Aaron Porter, MA

Email marketing is a cornerstone of recruiting in higher education, but big changes are having significant ripple effects. If you could talk with over 100 enrollment professionals about these changes, what would you want to know?

That was precisely what we did in February at enrollmentFUEL's virtual roundtable on optimizing email communications. Higher education professionals from across the country gathered for a frank discussion of the challenges and opportunities in email, marketing, and communications, giving everyone a chance to share their unique insights, learn from each other, and walk away with a clearer picture of what their institutions need to do next. Here are four key takeaways from that day and our ongoing research on the rapidly evolving state of email marketing.

1. TECHNICAL SHIFTS ABOUND

One discussion among email marketers from all industries centers on recent changes by Gmail, Yahoo!, and other email platforms to combat spam. These changes are a response to the increasing amount of spam and other unwanted messages sent in today's digital-heavy world—Gmail alone reports blocking nearly 15 billion unwanted messages every single day.[1]

In response, starting in February 2024, bulk email senders (including most educational institutions) are now subject to several new regulations. If your domain does not comply, it can result in any emails sent from your main ".edu" domain—and any subdomains—going straight to spam. These include, but are not limited to, the following protocols.

- The use of SPF, DKIM, and DMARC is now required. SPF confirms that the sender is verified through the sending domain, DKIM guarantees the sender is who they are and verifies the contents of the message, and DMARC gives senders the ability to define how their domain will treat any discrepancies (i.e., delete emails, quarantine them, etc.).
- A one-click unsubscribe header is now required.
- Staying under a specific spam rate is now required. Senders will begin receiving warnings at 0.1% and have limiting actions taken against them if they consistently hit 0.3%.

1 "5 scams to watch out for this holiday season." The Keyword at Google, 22 Nov. 2022. https://blog.google/products/gmail/holiday-season-scams/.

Adjusting to these technical shifts requires teams to pivot strategy in several areas, from double-checking email content to avoid commonly flagged terms to working with tech to ensure all DNS records are correctly set up.

Not sure what these terms mean? Or are you feeling a bit overwhelmed by the sheer number of regulations to keep up with? You are not alone. Among our event attendees, 60% reported not knowing their institutions' DNS records' status, and 82% didn't know whether they had access to a Google Postmaster account for monitoring domain reputation and spam rates. If you are aligned with that majority, make sure you take the necessary steps and bring these questions to the attention of the appropriate IT team.

SETTING UP A GOOGLE POSTMASTER ACCOUNT

It's surprisingly simple to set up a Postmaster account to help monitor your domain!

1. Sign in with your Gmail account at postmaster.google.com/managedomains.
2. Click the "+" sign and enter your authentication domain (either your DKIM or SFP domain).
3. Verify your domain when prompted.
4. Once verified, you can log in and add individual users to your Postmaster account as long as they have a valid Gmail.

2. WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

One key point about these updated email regulations might not be as obvious, but it might make or break your strategy. These regulations—spam rates, unsubscribe requirements, etcetera—are at a *domain* level, not an individual address or department. This means that even if your enrollment team does a great job at adjusting to align with these requirements but the athletics department or Advancement doesn't, everyone pays the price.

Among our attendees, 55% said they don't currently coordinate communications efforts and performance with other departments, while 12% weren't sure. It's a good indicator that enrollment departments must be more proactive in reaching out, ensuring everyone understands the stakes, and creating strategies or task forces to address it. Many of our attendees confirmed this is a "cabinet-level" discussion at their institutions, highlighting a growing awareness of their departments' interconnectedness. If we don't cooperate and collaborate, we risk lowered effectiveness and a reputational hit for all.

3. FOCUS ON QUALITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Avoiding spam and bounceback penalties requires a more strategic focus on what is in the emails you send and how you determine where to send them. Make sure your lists are current and free of unnecessary data, your emails are both relevant and engaging, and that they avoid triggering spam filters. Consider some of these recommendations compiled from our expertise at enrollmentFUEL and the roundtable attendees' own experiences:

- Ensure that you have multiple processes in place to maintain list quality. That includes catching dupes, monitoring and removing inactivity, and handling bounce management.
- Use a data hygiene tool to scrub lists at least a few times yearly. This can help you avoid spam traps and improve delivery rates.
- Avoid putting too many links or CTAs in a single email.
- Consider using bullet points or bolding to distinguish content.
- Segment your audiences to send more tailored content.
- Optimize content for mobile and dark mode reading to increase engagement.

You may also want to try using some of the many free antispam, copy-checking tools available to help avoid "spammy" wording. In some cases, it may be hard to prevent; some attendees noted that financial aid emails are challenging to write without triggering filters. Talk to our team at enrollmentFUEL to find out what resources we're using to identify trouble spots before they happen.

4. LAYER MULTIPLE OUTREACH CHANNELS

Many enrollment teams, including those represented at our roundtable, acknowledge that they rely on email as their primary means of marketing and communications. When we polled our attendees, a whopping **77% reported using email for more than half of their recruitment communications.** These changes, however, are making it increasingly difficult to reach the desired audience without triggering automated consequences. Several attendees expressed this concern and shared how their teams have begun looking at ways to better integrate multichannel marketing into their strategies. 17% reported looking at investing more in digital and social media, 8% said they were considering calling, texting, and ringless voicemail, and 33% were interested in all of the above, plus print collateral.

This approach considers how multiple channels and their respective messages might layer and intersect. Our roundtable brought up interesting ideas and strategies based on their experiences. For instance, one question discussed among attendees was: if your enrollment team sends a text message with certain information, how might the same information be reiterated through a different channel? Or how might a printed piece intersect with or lead to an interactive digital experience? Studies have shown that reaching audiences across multiple channels leads to better recall and connection. So, turn these email concerns into an opportunity for a broader, more effective strategy.

Other integrated marketing tools were discussed to offset the potential decline in inquiries generated through email marketing. enrollmentFUEL, for example, offers inquiryDETECTOR, a digital identity verification tool designed to track and verify IP addresses to better target and convert "stealth" visitors to websites. Regardless of the tool, attendees agreed: it's time to focus on diversifying outreach and building more integrated, multichannel strategies.

At enrollmentFUEL, we send millions of emails every cycle, and our clients send even more on top of that. No two cycles are the same, but a smart and effective email strategy is flexible enough to address the unique needs of each year while maintaining careful compliance with shifting rules. As a teaching-learning organization, we are committed to tracking new developments, learning best practices from the experts, and connecting with enrollment teams to pass that knowledge along. If you'd like to learn more about our insights, contact us. We want you to succeed and welcome the opportunity to share information.

Aaron Porter, MA, is enrollmentFUEL's Associate Vice President for Client Relations and Enrollment Strategist. He has spent his career devoted to enrollment management with positions including the Director of Admission at Tusculum University, Director of Admission at Bryan College, and most recently, Vice President for Enrollment Management at Carson-Newman University. Over the past 16 years, Aaron has helped close to 25,000 students gain access to transformational experiences at four-year private institutions. Connect with Aaron at Aaron.Porter@enrollmentFUEL.com.

SUPPORT FROM START TO FINISH: METHODOLOGIES TO REDUCE MELT

Jay Fedje, MA

Once a prospective student has applied and been accepted by a college or university, it can feel like the "hard part" of recruiting is over, but that's not always the case. The "melt" phenomenon, in which students go through all the steps of applying, accepting, and even submitting their deposit, but ultimately do not show up for classes in the fall, poses challenges for enrollment professionals across the board.

As with most concerns, understanding the root cause—or causes—of the problem is critical to effectively addressing it. Melt can stem from a number of underlying reasons, but tailored, effective interventions can reduce its impact on your institution.

Personalized Support

Not all students' journeys to college are alike, and that is especially true for those without a high level of expertise and guidance from their pre-college support system. That includes those from historically underrepresented demographics, those from lower-income families and school districts, first-generation students, and others. Melt among these groups may be a function of simply not *knowing* what to do or feeling overwhelmed by the perceived complexities and pressures of navigating this largely unknown system without much guidance.

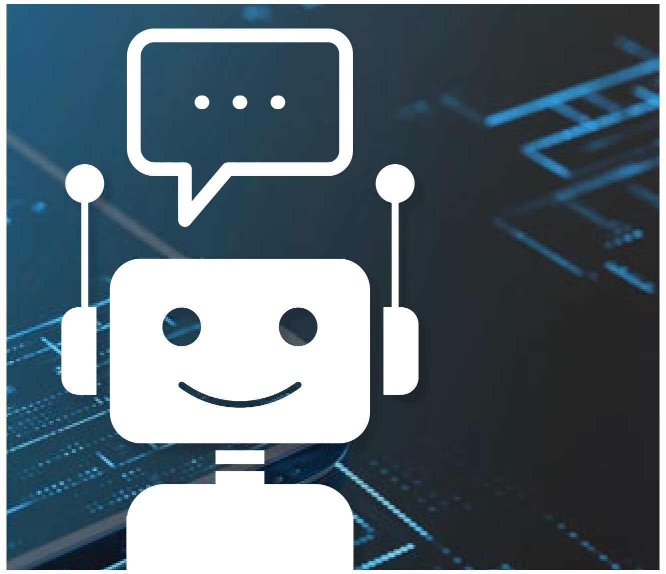
Personalized support campaigns can help these students feel more confident in managing the experience and reducing melt along the way. This may include techniques such as:

- Program-specific outreach focused on what students in particular majors need to take care of before arriving in the fall
- Text messaging, calls or ringless voicemail, and email messaging to remind students of administrative tasks they need to complete
- Connecting students with college counselors or program advisors and helping them schedule meetings
- Connecting students with peer mentors

In a 2015 study, researchers tracked the effects of two different interventions geared at providing more personalized support to intended students. One approach used automated, personalized text messages to remind students of required tasks and to connect them with counselors to assist, while the other approach used peer mentors to provide outreach and support over the summer. Both were found to increase college enrollment among students with less access to quality advice and information from other sources, and both were especially effective among student populations described as having "less access to college-planning supports and who were not as far along with their college planning at the completion of high school."[1]

Notably, these interventions are also quite cost-effective approaches, highlighting the potential for low-cost behavioral "nudges" that can lead to significant improvements in overall outcomes. It's also worth noting that the study was from 2015; since then, there have been enormous improvements in technologies that allow for more streamlined, cost-effective, and tailored communications. From leveraging multimedia outreach to using interactive and personalized print and digital tools (such as custom QR codes, interactive direct mail, SMS messaging, ringless voicemail, and more), today's enrollment professionals can build on the basic idea of individualized support to develop targeted strategies for today's students.

1 Castleman, Benjamin L., and Lindsay C. Page. "Summer nudging: Can personalized text messages and peer mentor outreach increase college going among low-income high school graduates?" *Journal of Economic Behavior Organization* vol. 115 (2015): 144-160. doi: 10.1016/j.jebo.2014.12.008. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0167268114003217.



Leveraging AI Tech

One of the technology categories that can help with that is, of course, artificial intelligence. The AI boom can provide solutions for various issues that may lead to melt. AI-powered solutions can assist with the previously-described personal support, making it easier than ever to personalize communications to specific segments and individuals. Its customization options, however, aren't the only area where it can work to reduce melt.

AI chatbots can be used to automate some of the basic parts of the outreach and pre-enrollment process, such as deadline reminders, course registration, financial aid, links to schedule meetings with counselors, and similar messages. A 2021 study analyzed the use of proactive AI chatbot outreach to would-be college students, ultimately finding that the intervention reduced melt, improved enrollment, and increased financial aid successes and course registrations, particularly among first-generation students.[2] Among targeted first-generation students, the AI outreach program increased loan acceptances by eight percentage points, success with course registration by three points, and fall semester enrollment by three points.

Targeting the students who need help the most—such as first-generation students or other groups that may not have as much support elsewhere—can significantly reduce melt. AI solutions allow for more outreach at scale, while human counselors and other admissions and enrollment professionals can then take the reins and provide one-on-one support to students once the "automated" phase is over.

Digital Strategies and the Buying Journey

As your enrollment team plans how best to avoid melt, it's worth considering how the college decision-making journey parallels the general customer "buying journey" as seen in other marketing fields. This approach can intersect with other strategies, such as the leveraging of AI tech and machine learning.

A 2021 study on B2B marketing focused on an idea that enrollment teams may find useful: tailoring digital marketing strategies to the individual stages of the overall buying—or, here, enrollment—journey.[3] In this approach, machine learning analyzes user (or student) behavior and uses that data to predict what stage of their buying journey they're in. From there, teams can tailor strategies more directly to match those stages, providing more useful information and context.

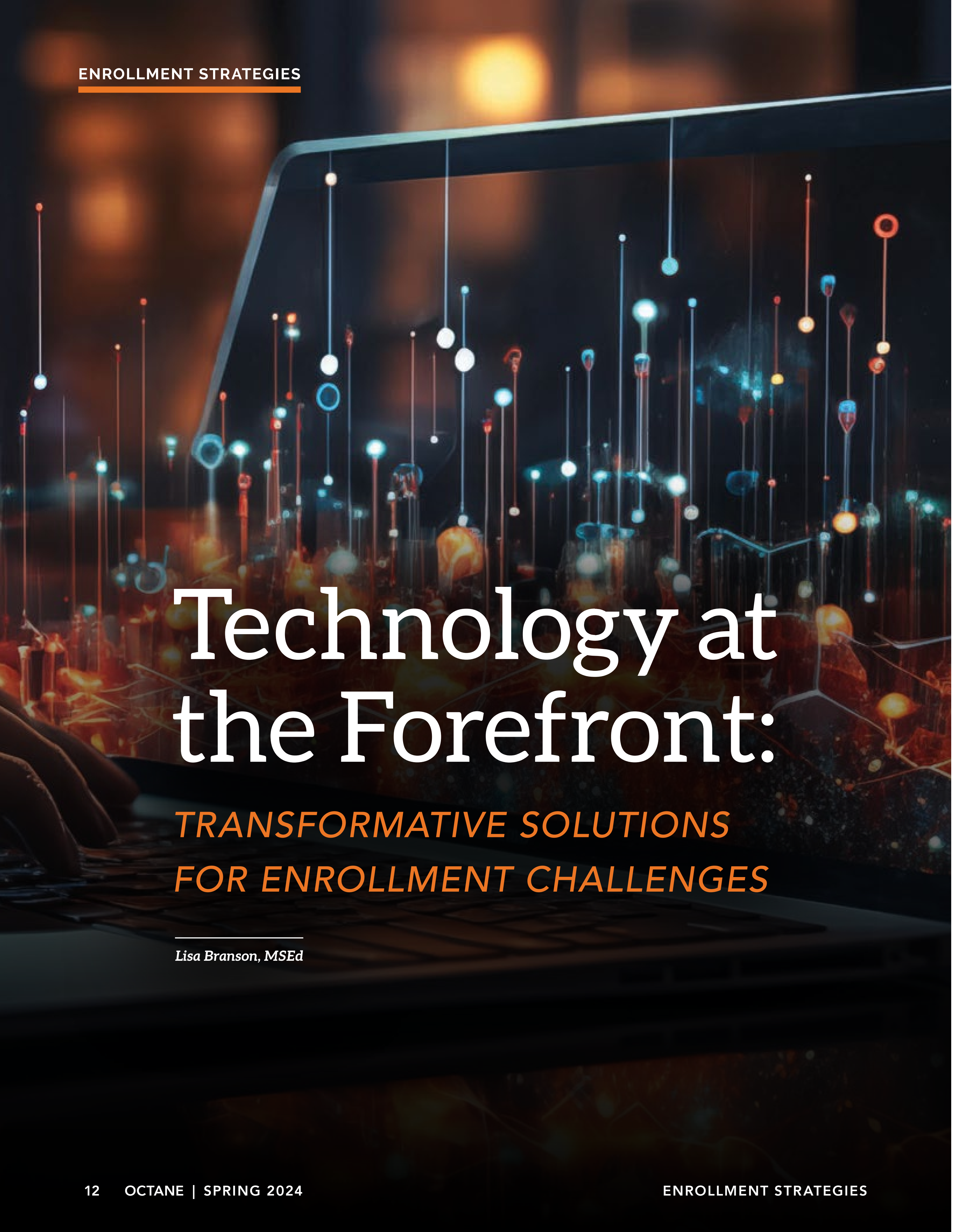
An increase in personalization and relevance can, in turn, increase the likelihood that these students will act on the information they're given and continue along the journey to full enrollment. It's easy to put all outreach in the same bucket with the same ultimate goal in mind: getting students to enroll. However, by providing individualized, digital support and aiming at moving students along to the next stage in their journey, enrollment teams have a greater chance of reducing melt overall.

Combatting melt is more important than ever in today's complex enrollment landscape. enrollmentFUEL is here to ensure your team has the information and ideas you need to keep your institution thriving. If you want to brainstorm, please reach out to our team at *Support@enrollmentFUEL.com*.

Jay Fedje, MA, is the Vice President of University Partnerships and host of the Enrollment Edge podcast. Before joining enrollmentFUEL, he worked in higher education for three decades. Jay is a seasoned leader with expertise in enrollment management, strategic planning, funnel development, university branding, targeted student search, CRM implementation, predictive modeling, financial aid leveraging, communication plan development, retention modeling, and market expansion. He has helped multiple institutions with strategies to reduce melt and welcomes conversations on all topics. Contact Jay at Jay.Fedje@enrollmentFUEL.com.

2 Nurshatayeva, Aizat, et al. "Are Artificially Intelligent Conversational Chatbots Uniformly Effective in Reducing Summer Melt? Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial." *Research in Higher Education* vol. 62 (2021): 392-402. doi: 10.1007/s11162-021-09633-z. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11162-021-09633-z.

3 Marvasti, Neda B., et al. "Is this company a lead customer? Estimating stages of B2B buying journey." *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 97 (2021): 126-133. doi: 10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.06.003, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S001985012100105X



Technology at the Forefront:

TRANSFORMATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR ENROLLMENT CHALLENGES

Lisa Branson, MSEd

Higher education recruitment and admissions teams are navigating considerable pressure, underscored by looming demographic challenges. Flexible thinking and creative tech solutions will be vital to mitigating its impact. Technology can create a competitive advantage—even in a people-centric world like a university—and it may be the key to combatting the upcoming demographic and enrollment challenges.

LeadSquared is a global software company focused on providing CRM solutions, and higher education is one of its main markets. We interviewed Cheryl Boeckman, SVP of Education at LeadSquared, to get her first-hand view on what's working and how she sees technology creating a sense of connection among your institution's students.

What's Causing the Enrollment Cliff?

The "enrollment cliff" is a challenge that feels imminent for many institutions. It refers to a significant stagnation or decline in college and university enrollment, typically predicted to begin in earnest within the next year or two. Several factors, from economic to socio-cultural, require enrollment teams to rethink their approach to recruiting from a smaller and, in many cases, very different pool of prospective students than in years past.

"Most institutions are looking at historically declining enrollments overall. Students these days might be more interested in being a TikTok influencer and maybe think that they don't need college," says Boeckman. "If you go back to the recession of 2007-2008, there were a lot fewer babies born. Now, that generation is becoming college-age students, so the available pool of prospective students will take a significant dip."

Today's skills-driven economy, in which many companies are prizing experience and demonstrated skills over "on paper" qualifications, is also funneling many students toward alternative options, like specialized certifications or even trade apprenticeships, instead of traditional four-year degrees.[1] Economic worries also play into many would-be students' decisions. Despite a "soft landing" that avoided a major recession, robust job growth, and cooling inflation, many students and families aren't yet feeling relief when they look at their budgets.

"The economy right now and the affordability of things definitely come into the mind of these students when they're thinking about, 'Hey, can I afford to go to college?'" Boeckman explains. It's not just students for whom finances are a concern—it's universities, too. Like other experts, Boeckman predicts a significant double-digit enrollment drop, potentially resulting in a loss of hundreds of thousands to millions in tuition revenue at institutions already operating on slim budgets. Solutions that some institutions use to address budget shortfalls, such as cutting programs, can then simply compound the effect by "chasing away" more prospective students than those who remain. It's a challenging situation and one that requires innovation to overcome.

> "The economy right now and the affordability of things definitely come into the mind of these students when they're thinking about, 'Hey can I afford to go to college?'"

1 Dickler, Jessica. "Apprenticeship programs are becoming more popular as an alternative to college." CNBC. 15 Feb. 2023. https://www.cnbc.com/2023/02/15/alternatives-to-college-apprenticeships-are-becoming-more-popular.html.

Reaching Students Where They Are

Today's students are often looking for a seamless journey with plenty of personalized information. Whether through social media, text messaging, or other common avenues, Boeckman says it's all about connecting with students where they already are. That also requires reconsidering different demographics.

"Email marketing is a good way to reach prospective continuing education or distance learning students because they tend to be in a different age demographic," she says. "The incoming freshman to a typical university is part of a demographic that does not read email, so you must have an alternate way to reach out. You've got to figure out how to get that information out there in a way and in a medium that resonates with them—WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, whatever it might be—and it needs to be personalized."

Along with personalization, immediacy, and use of technology, Boeckman suggests focusing communications on three key questions that prospective students care most about:

- What programs do you offer that they would be interested in?
- How much is it going to cost them?
- How much money can they make after they graduate?

It's also worth considering how non-traditional programs may affect your outreach strategy.

"Many of the CRM systems that have been out there for a while were intended to fit the traditional undergraduate process, and they don't flex well to support the non-traditional [populations]," says Boeckman. "If your systems and communications don't support your non-traditional programs, they're going to fall flat because you're not communicating with potential non-traditional students in a way that resonates with them."

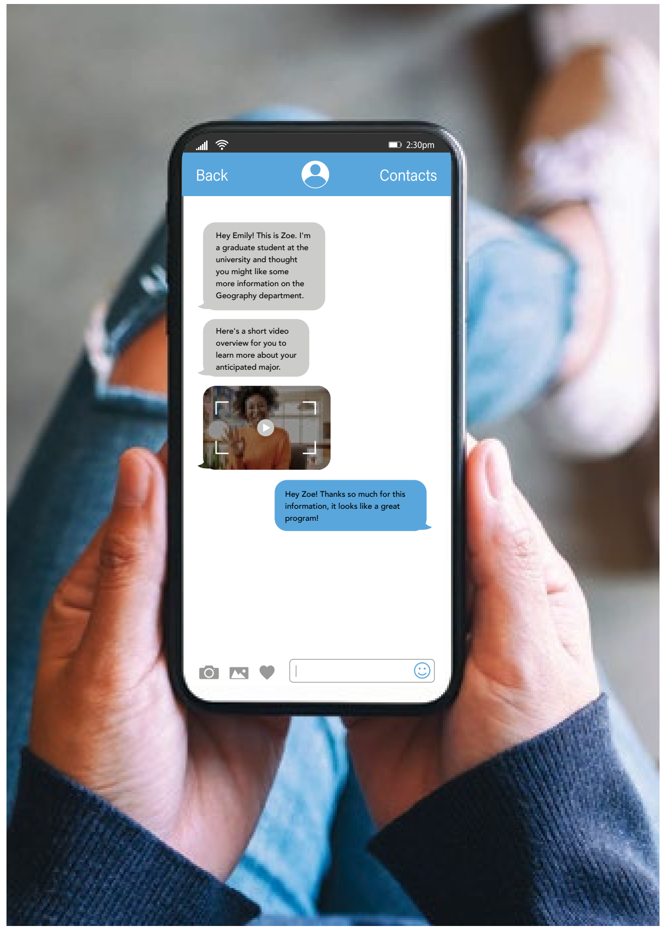
How Technology Can Help

Even as new technologies are introduced that are specifically designed to help with outreach, many universities are looking for a way to reduce the number of systems that need to be integrated and maintained. The idea is to find the right solutions that control training and maintenance costs, reduce strain on your staff, and provide students with the personalized attention they need.

"You want to give your staff the tools they need so that they can spend as much time as possible face-to-face or talking with students," Boeckman says. "They shouldn't be entering a lot of data. Things should be automated in the background. You want to be able to see every touch point you've had with that student so you can better relate to them. When you make that engagement as personal as possible, that's where you're going to shine above their other choices."

An omnichannel or multimedia approach, streamlined within a single CRM, can play a role. For example, you might not be sending as many emails since this generation of traditional students hardly ever checks them; instead, you're sending a text message, or a WhatsApp with an embedded video testimonial from one or more alumni from a relevant program. It's all about tailoring the message more precisely and having the systems in place to allow that to happen at scale.

This approach also has another benefit: it reduces the stress on your staff, which improves morale, lowers turnover, and allows them to spend more time connecting with students.



"Improving your yield is still about the personal connection between that recruitment team and that student. That's always a top reason students select an institution: they feel like they've established that personal relationship. A recruiter will be more effective in building those connections if they're not highly stressed," says Boeckman. She also points to the importance of reducing stress on IT departments: fewer systems and integrations allow IT to focus more on security, data governance, and strategy (to name a few) and less on constant upkeep and upgrades.

According to Boeckman, the most successful solutions bring the entire lifecycle of a student's interaction into a single, streamlined system, reducing stress on enrollment staff, IT, and students alike. With the enrollment cliff on the horizon, the institutions that stand out and succeed will be the ones that chart a flexible approach and use the technology available to craft a more efficient and personal strategy. Embrace change and keep the focus on the people at the heart of it all, and you're well-positioned to navigate these changes with aplomb.

The Perils of the Perpetual Implementation

We've all been there: buying into a shiny new solution that promises to address critical issues in a new and exciting way. Then, that excitement fades when it becomes clear that the solution isn't intuitive, requires a ton of external help to get set up, and can't be updated by your team.

That's what Boeckman calls "perpetual implementation," and it's a real struggle that often leads to higher costs and more frustration than the original issue.

Solutions like LeadSquared, in contrast, are designed to be more responsive and pivot to meet today's changing needs without costing exorbitant amounts to make those changes. When considering a new solution, remember to consider the long-term capabilities to evolve and the cost associated—not just the short-term ability to solve a singular problem.

About Cheryl Boeckman and LeadSquared

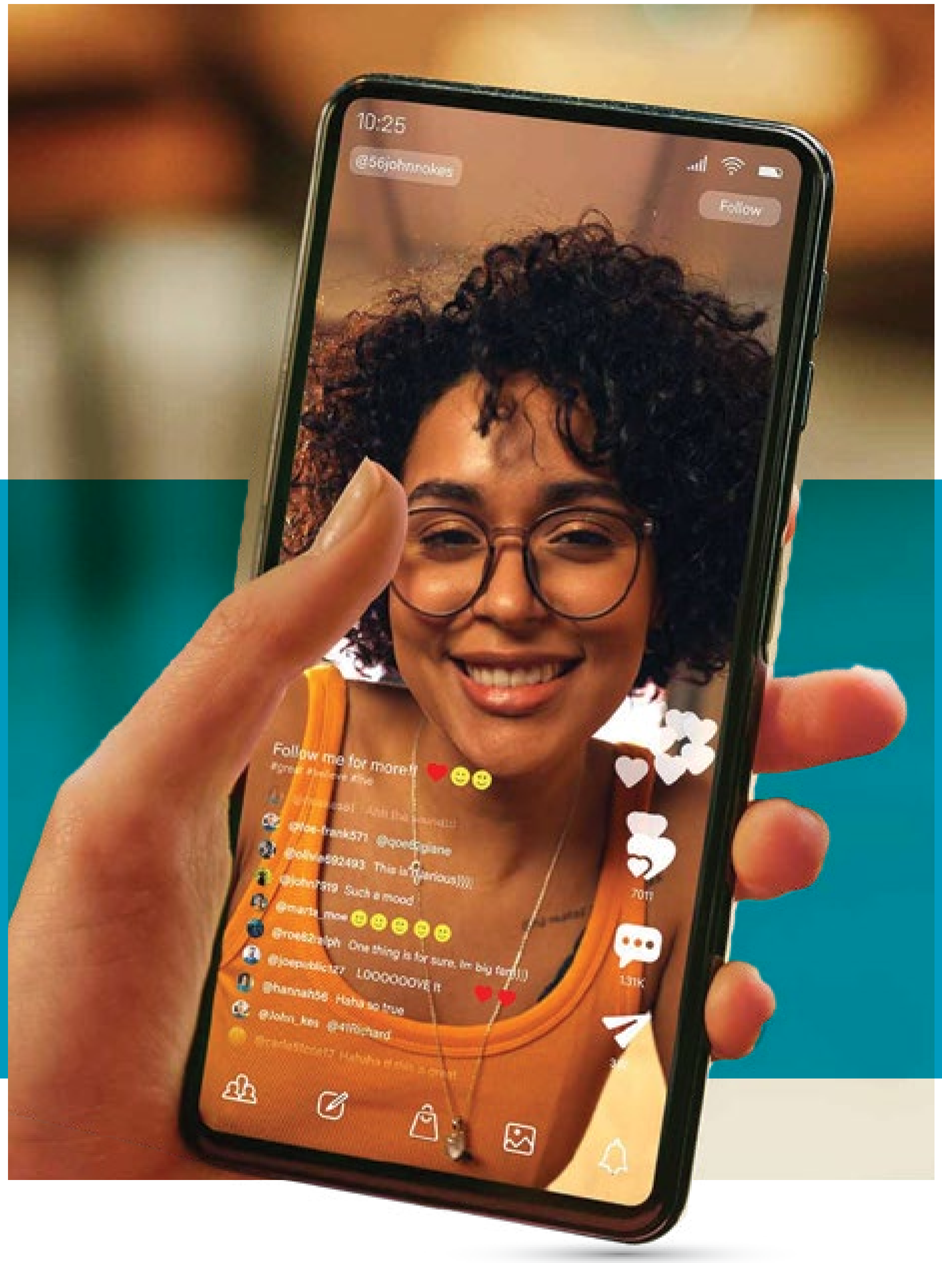
Cheryl Boeckman is a dedicated and results-oriented EdTech, SaaS executive with a passion for education, bringing over 20 years of experience in education-focused technology solutions that encompass the entire student journey. She has partnered with institutions for international recruitment/admissions and study abroad programs; undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate and continuing education recruitment, admissions, student success, advancement, and development. Cheryl is known for her exceptional leadership skills, problem solving through collaboration, relationship building, and expertise in the field. Contact Cheryl at *Cheryl.Boeckman@LeadSquared.com*.

LeadSquared (www.LeadSquared.com/higher-education-crm/) is a comprehensive student lifecycle CRM that streamlines the recruitment, application, enrollment, and completion process through innovative technology and personalized support. Their trusted community of customers includes over 2,000 colleges, universities, and other educational institutions of all sizes. They strive to remove barriers to education and create a frictionless journey from recruitment to alumni and beyond.

Lisa Branson, MSEd, is enrollmentFUEL's Vice President for Client Relations and is currently enrolled in a doctoral program. She is an expert in recruiting, financial aid, and all aspects of Student Search, including adult and online learners. Lisa has worked with many schools to develop comprehensive strategies to grow in their market, and she is happy to share her experience with you. Feel free to contact Lisa at Lisa.Branson@enrollmentFUEL.com and start a conversation.

FROM TRENDS TO BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH *Influencer Marketing*

Tori Simon, MS



In our 2021 Enrollment Marketing Edition of *Octane*, I spoke about three reasons why higher ed needs influencer marketing. At the time, I had heard of maybe one institution that believed influencer marketing could make any impact on their enrollment efforts.

I get it—moving away from traditional advertising approaches, especially those with a measurable ROI, can be daunting.

But here we are in 2024, and influencer marketing is more relevant than ever! What's even more exciting is we've seen these efforts prove successful in several client-partner campaigns. (There's even one influencer-created video that shows up at the top of TikTok results when you search the school's name—talk about a win!)

Maybe you're part of the crowd worrying about brand safety or aren't convinced that using your marketing dollars on influencer marketing is the right option. Hopefully, after you read this article, you'll have better insight into where influencer marketing is today and whether it's something you want to consider trying.

Nano- and Micro-Influencers Are In

I brought up this point several years ago, and the data is finally showing that the majority of brands prefer these lower-follower influencers as well. In fact, *Influencer Marketing Hub's 2024 Benchmark Report* shows that 44% of brands have a strong preference for nano-influencers and 26% for micro. Celebrities came in at only 13%.[1]

So, what's the big deal with these nano- and micro-influencers? To start, they have more personal relationships with their followers. These people (often students or alumni of your institution) may not have the elevated profile that comes with celebrity-star power, but they are trusted with a personal approach that connects with their followers.

They also don't bring a lot of added baggage. When you work with a macro-influencer (hundreds of thousands of followers) or celebrity, odds are you'll run into the following:

- Negotiations with agents
- Timing issues
- Inauthentic content
- High costs

Nano- and micro-influencers are affordable. They often go above and beyond what you'd normally require from an influencer marketing campaign because they *believe* in what they're talking about. Plus, they come with ready-made, closer relationships with an audience who views them as authentic and relatable figures who are "just like me" rather than inaccessible celebrities.

1 "The State of Influencer Marketing 2024: Benchmark Report." *Influencer Marketing Hub*. 1 Feb. 2024. https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report/.

AI is Making a Big Introduction

Most people weren't throwing the term "AI" around a lot in 2021, but now it seems to be all people talk about. While the digital marketing industry is still trying to figure out exactly how AI will fit into influencer strategies, there are plenty of opportunities to use AI now—including finding the right influencers.

In the past, many platforms offered ways for people to create search criteria to find their "ideal" influencer, but advances in AI capabilities can help narrow these results. AI can also aid in evaluating campaign data and weed out fake influencers or those who artificially inflate their followers but lack organic engagement.

AI-powered data analytics can also be a highly effective tool for audience segmentation to further boost your micro- and nano-influencer strategy. You can use this technology to refine your audience data and find the most promising potential segments, then use AI again to help narrow your results to match these powerful segments with the best-fit influencers in those specific spaces.

Keep in mind all this technology is very new. It will need testing and refinement. If you have questions about using AI in your influencer marketing strategy or want to explore options, please contact the enrollmentFUEL team for up-to-date information.

User-Generated Content (UGC) is More Important Than Ever

When I first entered the influencer marketing space, all anyone ever asked was, "How many sales can I expect from this campaign?" In the past few years, we've seen a massive shift in this mentality, especially with the rise of TikTok and Instagram Reels.

According to *Influencer Marketing Hub*, 45% of survey respondents reported that UGC was the main reason for running an influencer campaign. In contrast, only 29% of the respondents reported running a campaign to generate sales.[2] By having influencers create fun and engaging content that highlights the brand rather than focusing on a sale, content is more likely to be shared and interacted with by other users.

The moral of the story here—don't see influencer marketing as strictly a way to get more leads, applications, or the like. It's an opportunity to get your brand out there and have relevant content that lives on for months—or even years—on end!

Influencer marketing is an ever-changing avenue, so it's important to pivot and stay in the know about what's happening.

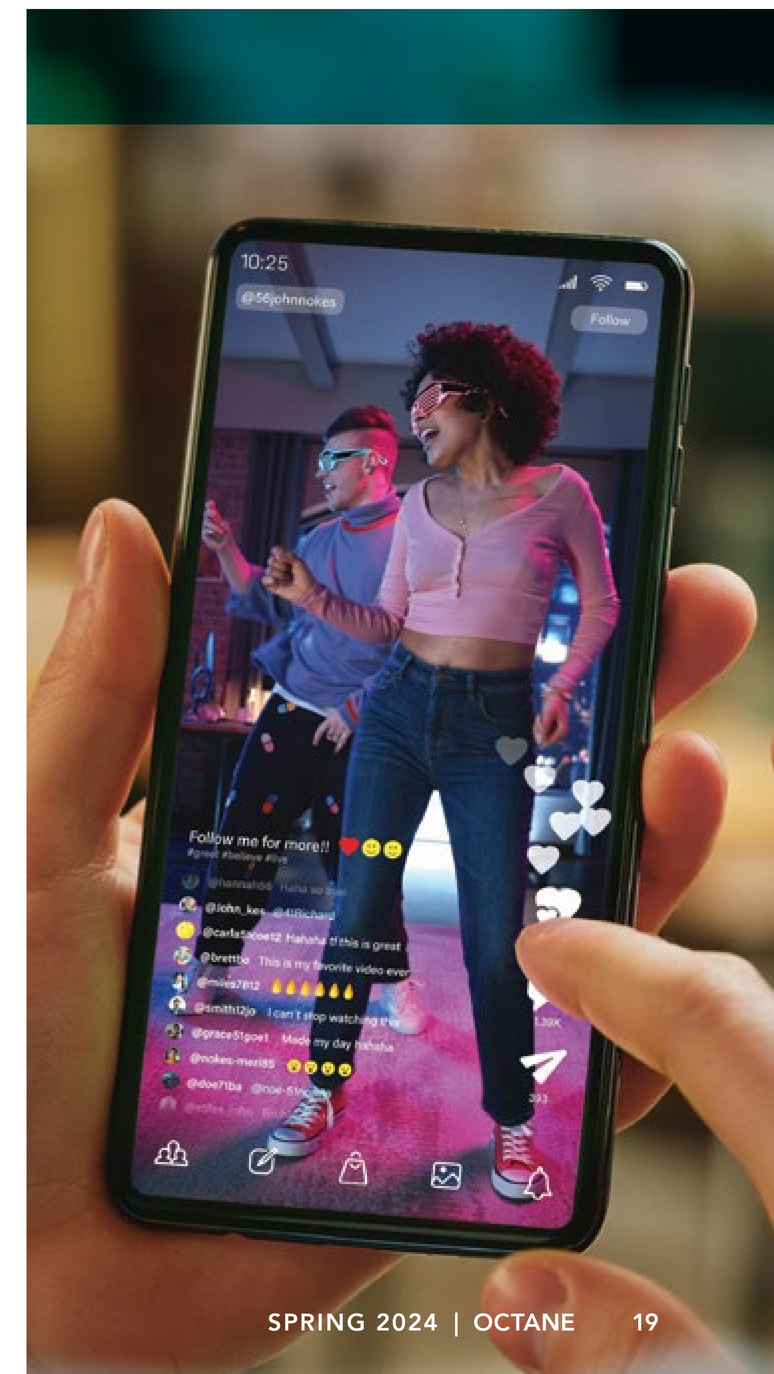
As always, make sure you follow these tips for any influencer campaign:

1. Pay influencers for their work.
2. Follow FTC guidelines.
3. Set realistic expectations.
4. Most importantly—let influencers have creative freedom.

I can't wait to see where this industry is in 2030!

Tori Simon, MS, serves as the Associate Vice President for Digital Marketing Strategies at enrollmentFUEL. Prior to joining the team in February 2021, Tori began her digital marketing career in 2014 when she started her first blog, which she built with the sole purpose of inspiring students to reach their higher education goals. After achieving success in content creation, digital marketing, paid advertising, and SEO, Tori joined a marketing agency where she executed campaigns for some of the world's largest brands, including Georgia-Pacific and Unilever. Tori lives in North Carolina with her husband and rescue dog, is an avid TCU fan, and would live off of ice cream if she could. Reach out to Tori at Tori.Simon@enrollmentFUEL.com.

2 *Influencer Marketing Hub*, 2024.



Train to Retain:

THE BEST PRACTICES *for* DESIGNING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Laralee F. Harkleroad, EdD

Designing learning experiences for busy professionals can be a complicated but rewarding endeavor. After all, even (or, perhaps, especially) education professionals need to continually learn and grow! It's a tricky demand to craft experiences so that attendees will retain and use the information after the session.

enrollmentFUEL has spent a considerable amount of time researching and exploring key principles of learning and different methods of curriculum development, all of which underlie our signature REV courses. Whether you're planning a quick refresher workshop or preparing for a major staff retreat, these same principles can help you train your employees and ensure that the information "sticks" in the long term.

Build Experiences Based on Existing Concepts

Teaching young students and crafting complex learning experiences for professionals both benefit significantly from building on an existing foundation and will almost always produce better results than starting from square one. As one expert put it, "Background knowledge is necessary for cognitive skills," and combining new information from your environment with your existing long-term memory is the basis of deep learning.[1] Neurobiological research has found that memory itself often follows a predictable pattern, with the initial exposure to new information followed by a "consolidation" period, "when new information becomes fixed at a cellular level and interleaved among already existing memories to enrich our body of personal and factual knowledge."[2]

When developing training, start by determining how this new information connects to concepts and facts the trainees already know and understand. Those links are critical to helping them understand—and, even more importantly, remember—the new items on the agenda. Consider how to create a logical progression between these pieces of information so that trainees are more likely to retain the contents of the training and be able to apply it in the future.

1 Willingham, Daniel T. *Why Don't Students Like School*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2009.

2 McKenzie, Sam, and Howard Eichenbaum. "Consolidation and reconsolidation: two lives of memories?." Neuron vol. 71, 2 (2011): 224-33. doi:10.1016/j.neuron.2011.06.037 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3145971/.

Make First (And Last) Impressions Count

If you've ever attended a presentation before, you've probably noticed that many follow a similar format: start with a bang and end with a lasting impression. It's not just a style choice—research has shown that information given first and last is typically recalled more easily than what comes in between. In other words, make a great first impression and leave them on a high note.

In their book *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn,* John Hattie and Gregory Yates list their six principles of memory retention, including the idea that memory is a "highly constructive process" that depends heavily on the focus of our attention at the time learning is taking place.[3] At the beginning of a training presentation or other event, most people's attention is firmly on the topic at hand. Likewise, in the end, you're grabbing everyone's attention one last time. Strategically structure your training to place the information you most want to emphasize at the beginning and reiterate it at the end for maximum attention and retention.

Embrace Forgetting

Forgetting will happen—there's no way around it—so embrace *how* it happens and use what seems to be forgotten as a basis to build stronger memories now. Hattie and Yates highlight two other key facts about learning and recall:

1. The mind tends to "shed" or forget isolated facts more quickly than connected information.
2. When re-exposed to topics, we re-learn material more rapidly than learning it the first time, even if the initial round of information is consciously inaccessible.[4]

We can apply these two principles to constructing training sessions for maximum learning and long-term retention. First, connect information to what people may have been exposed to in the past. This helps to trigger old memories and build more in-depth connections to aid with memory in the present. Second, present information as parts of a whole rather than individual "facts" that must be memorized. Lean into the fact that things get forgotten and use that to your advantage rather than worrying about lost memories.

Focus on Core Objectives

Developing a professional training curriculum is different from designing other curricula types. Here, the goal is to give trainees the tools they need to achieve a specific goal or set of goals rather than a pure focus on knowledge for its own sake. In Josh Bersin's *The Blended Learning Book: Best Practices, Proven Methodologies, and Lessons Learned,* he identifies a "tiered" system of objectives, moving from big-picture strategic objectives down to individual behaviors and, ultimately, to individual learning objectives.[5]

3 Hatte, John, and Gregory Yates. *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn.* Routledge: New York, 2014.

4 Hattie and Yates, 2014.

5 Bersin, Josh. *The Blended Learning Book: Best Practices, Proven Methodologies, and Lessons Learned.* Pfeiffer: San Francisco, 2004.

In the development stages, consider applying this hierarchy:

1. Start by focusing on the strategic objectives for the whole institution, then narrow them down to the objectives for a specific department, such as enrollment.
2. Determine what actions must be taken to support and achieve those objectives.
3. Identify any skill gaps between what is necessary to take those actions and what your current staff (i.e., your potential trainees) currently are able to do.
4. Develop training specifically focused on closing those gaps while continually tying it back to the specific actions and objectives.

Get Participants Involved

Finally—and perhaps most importantly of all—the most memorable training is the one that gets the participants involved. Using more senses and increasing interactivity improves the likelihood of recall. There are myriad ways that facilitators and curriculum developers can encourage trainees to get more involved, including:

- Starting with a fun activity that introduces key points
- Incorporating multimedia components
- Including stories, Q&As, and other narratives
- Structuring learning elements around problem-solving
- Inviting trainees to share their input, experiences, and knowledge

Training is a critical part of any successful professional development effort, as it ensures that everyone remains up-to-date with the latest opportunities and tools to do the job right. enrollmentFUEL puts education and training as one of our top priorities, and our REV courses—including our upcoming session for admissions counselors—are designed to keep the information flowing all the time. Check out our REV offerings at REV.enrollmentFUEL.com, and try some of these strategies when developing your team's next training!

Dr. Laralee F. Harkleroad serves as enrollmentFUEL's Associate Vice President of Marketing & Learning, overseeing the REV Learning Series and enrollmentFUEL's marketing strategy and execution. Her career spans enrollment management, strategic planning, marketing, advancement, and programmatic design. Dr. Harkleroad enjoys working with tomorrow's leaders in the classroom and has served at various universities as an adjunct professor and guest lecturer. She holds a Doctor of Education degree in leadership and learning in organizations from Vanderbilt University's Peabody College. Contact Laralee at Laralee.Harkleroad@enrollmentFUEL.com.

Best-in-Class CENTERS FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

RINA CAMPBELL, MS

Securing the first job after college can be daunting for new graduates, and it often sets the trajectory for their future careers. A recent study by The Burning Glass Institute and the Strada Institute for the Future of Work underscores this, revealing that if a graduate's initial job is in a low-paying field or doesn't align with their true interests, they could find themselves "stuck" without a clear path to redirect their career. Furthermore, over half of degreed employees report being in jobs that either don't require a degree or don't use the skills they acquired in college.

That's why a world-class campus career center is so critical: to give students the resources and skills they need to land jobs that become careers they love. A strong career development program communicates and affirms the value prospective students will get from their institution of choice, especially in a job market where investing in a college degree is under increased scrutiny.

RESUME WRITING: TEACHING THE SKILL

Writing a standout resume is a skill every career center should teach. Be sure your seminars or resource guides include the following topics:

- Tailoring their resumes to individual job postings
- Formatting for readability, consistency, and focus
- Using action verbs and quantifiable achievements
- Listing both hard and soft skills and aligning them with job requirements
- Knowing how and when (and when not) to use a summary statement
- Choosing the most relevant information and communicating concisely

KEY CAREER CENTER COMPONENTS

Supporting your students in their transition from academic to professional life is one of the most important responsibilities for any college or university. While many institutions already have some resources, today's competitive and fast-changing workforce requires more than resume review services or internship applications.

Here are just a few of the elements that should be present in a career development center that truly prepares students for their next steps:

- **CAREER COUNSELING:** Provide both individual counseling and group sessions to help students explore career options, understand their interests and strengths, determine the potential careers linked to their degrees, and plan prospective career paths in both the long and short term.
- **WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS:** Offer workshops on resume writing, cover letter preparation, interviewing skills, job search strategies, networking, personal branding, and using LinkedIn effectively. You might also include sessions on industry trends, job market insights, emerging career fields, or frequently overlooked (but worthwhile) topics such as professional etiquette.
- **INTERNSHIPS:** Facilitate connections between students and real-world companies through internships or co-ops that allow students to gain real-world experience, make critical connections, translate their skills to practical applications, and discover more about the jobs they want after graduation.
- **EMPLOYER NETWORKING:** Connect students with corporate partners and potential future employers, whether through networking events, career fairs, exclusive site visits, or other avenues.
- **ALUMNI NETWORKING & MENTORSHIP:** Leverage a robust alumni network to connect successful past students with your current students for mentorship, professional advice, or even assistance with job placements and recommendations.
- **JOB SEARCH SUPPORT:** Offer services directly tailored to search assistance, including job-matching programs, on-campus recruiting, and access to job listings. Career support may even extend to alumni for "lifelong" career support services.
- **ENTREPRENEUR SUPPORT:** Along with traditional career support and job search services, consider offering resources tailored to would-be entrepreneurs in your student body. This could include workshops, startup incubators, funding opportunities, and networking events to connect with potential partners or investors.
- **VIRTUAL SERVICES:** With so many students choosing remote or hybrid learning, supporting off-campus students is vital, too. Offer virtual advising and networking opportunities, comprehensive online career guides, instructional videos and webinars, and up-to-date resources.

Of course, these suggestions are just a starting point. Plan to consistently check in to ensure your career center offerings meet market demands and students' needs. It's also essential to ensure the career center is equipped to address the needs of your diverse student body, with adequate support and expertise to meet the unique challenges of different groups and demographics.

A strong career development program can set your institution apart from the rest. With an innovative, multifaceted approach that focuses on the evolving needs of today's students, your career center can be one more selling point to attract students and help them reach their potential!

Rina Campbell, MS, is the Director of Strategic Enrollment Planning at enrollmentFUEL, with over 20 years of work in enrollment management across multiple universities before turning to consulting. She holds a master's degree in organizational leadership, which she has used to help increase efficiencies within organizations and guide them through change. Rina has extensive experience in research and analysis of enrollment issues, trends, and models, and has presented at many higher education conferences. She chaired a consortium group of Southern California enrollment leaders and most recently served on the board of directors of NACCAP as the VP of Governance. In her free time, Rina likes spending time with her two daughters and cooking for friends and family. Connect with Rina at Rina.Campbell@enrollmentFUEL.com.

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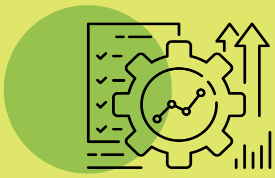

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