

The Marketing Communications (MarCom) Matrix and Higher Education: How It All Works Together

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Many of us who read this journal are employed at a college or university. Others may also have positions that interact with individuals employed at a higher educational institution. So, I thought framing this editorial around marketing and advertising for colleges and universities would be timely because May 1st is the national notification day for students to decide which higher educational institution they will attend. The number of students attending a school is extremely important these days, especially given the reduction in federal and state aid that most colleges and universities are experiencing, and the declining number of college age students in certain states across the country [1].

When evaluating the consumer decision-making process, or as it is better known in higher education, the recruitment process that colleges and universities around the country utilize for securing the incoming freshmen class, students and their parents or guardians are the buyers and higher educational institutions are the sellers in this example. The consumer decision-making process is comprised of eight steps that a consumer, or student, goes through in order to purchase and re-select a product, a college or university, to attend. The eight stages are: need, awareness, preference, search, selection, purchase, use, and satisfaction [2]. The recruitment process usually begins when the college or university purchases PSAT or SAT names from the Educational Testing Service or when the student, parent or guardian, or interested party requests information about the school for a particular student. Then, the recruitment begins!

Because the selection of a higher educational institution is a complicated process, it may take a student several months or a few years depending on when the recruitment process began for that student [2]. Every buyer or student is different based on how and when they entered the recruitment process. Throughout this lengthy process students will read literature from many colleges and universities, visit various campuses, apply for admission, attend overnight programs, file for financial aid, and ultimately decide if college will be in their future by May 1 of the year they are graduating. So why is the MarCom matrix so important to higher education? First, let's review what the MarCom matrix is.

According to Bendinger [3], the MarCom matrix is comprised of: advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, event marketing, new media, and direct marketing. Now that we know what the MarCom matrix is, how is it really relevant to the recruitment process at a higher educational institution? Well, it's vital to the success of the recruitment process.

Various examples of the MarCom matrix can be found in the recruitment process that higher educational institutions use. Let's review an example of how a student moves through the admission process. First, the student fills out an inquiry form on the college's website requesting more information. Here, the college's website, or *new media* according to the MarCom matrix, was used by the student. The college then sends out more information to the student in the form of a viewbook, which is an overview of the school. The viewbook is an example of *direct marketing*. Now that the student is on the college's mailing list, he/she continues to receive direct mail information about the school and days which the student can visit to learn more. In the meantime, the school decides to host an Open House program, so the public relations office sends a press release about the event to the local newspaper and also buys a few ads in the hopes that parents of prospective students will see an ad and encourage them to attend. *Advertising, public relations and publicity, and event marketing* are hard at work in this example trying to get the word out about the program. The student decides they want to attend the Open House program, so they register on the college's website (*new media*) to attend the program. When the student arrives for the Open House, they are greeted by welcoming admission officials ready to engage in conversation about the features and benefits of the institution. Wow, we just added the final component of the MarCom matrix, *sales promotion*, to the example.

I'll stop here with my examples, but you can just imagine how many more times the MarCom matrix is used throughout the student recruitment process. Many companies strategically choose not to utilize the six components of the MarCom matrix or simply do not have the money to do so. However, it is vital for higher educational institutions to effectively use the MarCom matrix in the recruitment of new students given the funding reductions and declining number of college age students in certain states.

References

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