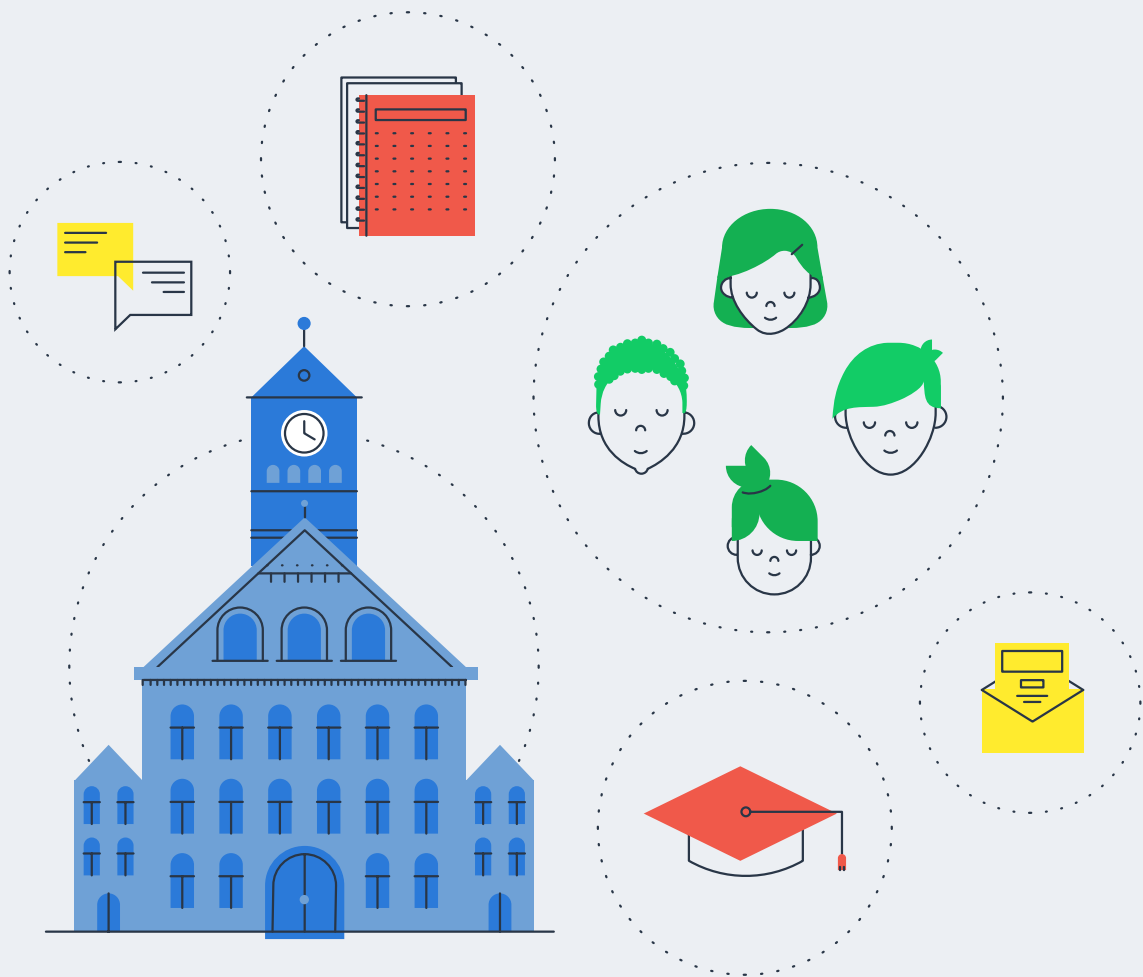


# Increase College Admissions Numbers With an Effective Inbound Marketing Campaign



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Strategy .....	4
Identify Your Audience .....	5
Your Digital Presence.....	6
Website Copy	
Website Design	
Blog Posts	
Social Media	
Email Marketing & Workflows	
Premium Content	
Microsite Creation	
Consistent Analysis & Reporting.....	11
Best Practices of Inbound Marketing.....	12

# Introduction

Did you know that there are currently more than 7,000 colleges and universities in the United States? With that kind of competition, increasing your college admissions numbers can seem quite difficult. So as a higher education institution, how can you differentiate yourself to attract a higher volume of students? By utilizing a creative inbound marketing strategy.

With inbound marketing, you have the ability to create awareness, educate prospects, generate potential leads and nurture them to become customers – or in this case, students. According to a [Pew Research Study](#), almost 93 percent of young adults between the ages of 18-29 go online. With inbound marketing, you can meet your target audience online. In today's digitally-centered landscape, traditional marketing initiatives can no longer fulfill your goals. **Traditional marketing speaks at your audience, while inbound marketing speaks with them.**

In this ebook, you'll learn about the components of an effective higher education inbound marketing campaign and how to execute each of these components, allowing you to attract your target audience and generate high quality leads ready to take action. While there are many different components to an effective inbound marketing campaign, we will highlight the most important and impactful ones.

# Strategy

A successful inbound marketing campaign starts with a well thought-out [content strategy](#) where you plan, develop and implement strategic and targeted content. Every action you take stems from this, so it's extremely important to create an effective and attainable content strategy. Everything from blog topics to social outreach should align and connect with a central goal outlined in your strategy. Whether your goal is to increase admissions numbers, or simply address any problem areas, your content strategy serves as the foundation of your inbound marketing efforts.

**According to the Content Marketing Institute, content marketing generates three times the amount of leads than paid search advertising.**

The objective of a successful inbound marketing strategy is to identify your audience, set attainable goals and create a tactical plan. Doing so will allow you to acquire new leads and nurture them so that they establish trust and a relationship with your brand. Once the relationship is built and you've reached that place in the [buyer's journey](#), you can engage with them on a deeper level, gently nudging them towards your end goal. The buyer's journey is a critical component in your inbound marketing campaign. Think of the buyer's journey as a roadmap that allows you to understand how and when to talk with your audience.

You should establish the buyer's journey for your audience early on in your content strategy, so that when you acquire a potential student, you can seamlessly nurture them to closure. This allows you to better target your inbound marketing efforts and focus your attention on deploying the right tactics at the right time. Then, you can confidently speak to potential students based on where they are in their buyer's journey. For example, you wouldn't want to send an email about campus visits to a potential student who is just beginning the college search process. **Personalizing the communication with your audience is key to reaching your goal.**

# Identify Your Audience

The inbound methodology focuses on both attracting and reaching your target audience. However, before you can reach your audience, you'll need to identify who they are. Do you want to reach juniors and seniors in high school or all high school students? How about parents? It's important to identify your audience, because the content you create and tactics you choose to include will depend on who you're trying to reach.

If you aren't sure where to start when identifying your target audience, we recommend [creating buyer personas](#). Buyer personas are semi-fictional representations of your ideal customers based on market research and historical data about your existing customers. So think of them as the "average" person in your target audience. When establishing your buyer personas, consider demographics, location, interests and motivations—how you can help them achieve their goals and common objections they might have about your institution. The more detailed you are, the better. Once your buyer personas are created and your target audience is established, you are perfectly positioned to craft a successful tactical approach to reach them.

Also, creating buyer personas will allow you to identify where your audience lives online. Do they prefer Facebook or Twitter? Do they like to read blog posts or would they prefer to get emails? Then, consider their pain points—offering solutions to their problems will give them a reason to engage. This is a crucial step when creating your tactics and action items moving forward.

# Your Digital Presence

Your website is an integral part of your strategy and inbound marketing campaigns. In other words, building an online presence and having an active website should be a top priority. Not only will this help with brand awareness and provide helpful information to those looking for it, but your website will also be the location where many inbound marketing activities will live and push traffic to in order to capture lead information. Begin by creating original and engaging content for both your website and inbound marketing activities. Strong content will bring potential students to your site and give them a reason to keep coming back. It's important to both humanize your brand and to create content that helps engage potential students. Additionally, your content should include strong [calls-to-action](#) (CTAs) to help convert your traffic into leads. For example, all blog posts should have a CTA at the end asking readers to contact you, and landing pages should have a CTA prompting potential students to download an eBook about your school. Keep in mind, this content leads back to your end goal of turning potential students into admitted, paying students.

**The following are examples of content that should be included in your digital presence:**

- Website Copy
- Website Design
- Blog Posts
- Social Media
- Email Marketing
- Premium Content
- Microsite or Landing Page Creation



# Your Digital Presence

## Website Copy

When crafting content for your website, think about information that's both engaging and helpful. This is a great time to look back over your buyer personas and craft your content to serve that audience. To create high-quality content, always use action-oriented verbiage and speak with a purpose—clearly communicate who you are and what you do, hitting on key areas that differentiate you from other institutions. And while you want to be interesting, remember to keep content concise and to-the-point.

Implementing search engine optimization, or SEO, is a great way to increase your online visibility and generate more traffic to your site. You'll want to optimize your content for SEO purposes so that your website ranks high organically on Google. For example, if you're a tech university in Texas, you'll want to appear early in students' search results for "engineering school Texas" so they come to your site. The first step to effective SEO is writing with specific keywords in mind. Research keywords and phrases your audience might be using, then take those and incorporate them throughout your website copy.

## Website Design

When designing a website, it's important to align your design elements with your content pieces. A strong website design is on brand, attractive and responsive. According to Adobe, almost 40 percent of users will stop engaging with a site if the content and layout is too complex and unattractive. When it comes to web design for higher education, remember to keep your target audience in mind. Consider what users will visit your website—parents, prospective students, faculty, etc. It's likely that your site will be their first impression of your institution, so it's important that exceed their expectations in terms of information and functionality.

# Your Digital Presence

## Blog Posts

Blogging is a great way to offer valuable content to your audience. The more often you blog about relevant topics your audience is searching for, the more likely your website will appear in the top organic search results. Plus, you'll keep them coming back! However, it's not enough to simply start a blog. You have to maintain it by providing consistent, relevant content that aligns with topics and subject matter your audience is interested in. This will keep your school top-of-mind when it comes time for them to make a decision.

When writing blog posts, make sure you keep a conversational, relatable tone. This isn't the place to show off your expert vocabulary—write to inform, not impress. This is where the relationship-building aspect of inbound marketing kicks in, because potential students will be able to learn valuable information from you. This may be intuitive, but we think it's important to hammer this in—correct grammar and punctuation is always a necessity. Proofread your content, then proof it again before posting. You will be glad you did. And remember, be concise and write about topics your audience is interested in so you can engage them.

## Social Media

According to a study published by Common Sense Media, 90 percent of high school students are on social media, so don't want to miss out on reaching your audience on their preferred platforms! Social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow you to publish content on a daily basis where your audience spends the most time. Plus, you can use social media posts to link back to popular blog posts or premium content on your website to drive more traffic. Social media also allows you to interact with your potential students and engage with them on a deeper level, showing them that there's a person behind the brand. Again, the relationship-building ramps up here, adding additional touchpoints to users' ongoing digital journeys.



# Your Digital Presence

## Email Marketing & Workflows

To continue nurturing potential students through the buyer's journey, we recommend using [marketing emails](#) and automated workflows. Marketing emails, when executed correctly, act as consistent touchpoints with your audience and give you another opportunity to communicate and offer value. Emails can be used to send popular blog posts, important event dates and other useful information.

### Here are a few tips we've found to significantly increase open and click rates:

- Email consistently but don't bombard them. We've found around two emails a week to be a happy medium.
- [Create compelling subject lines](#). This is the first thing they see, so make it interesting! If you aren't sure what to do, [try A/B testing](#) to see what kind of subject line gets the best response rate from your audience. A/B testing is available through marketing tools like HubSpot.
- Stimulate them visually. No one wants to spend time reading emails that look like they were written in 2009.

Another way to nurture your audience with email is through [automated workflows](#). Workflows are highly structured and allow you to set them up and watch them play out. Not only do they help nurture potential students through their journey, but they also educate along the way, further establishing a trusting relationship.

Automated workflows show that you understand their specific needs and are always prepared to help them. This all ties back to the importance of knowing which step of the buyer's journey your audience is currently in to serve them the most timely and relevant content. Workflows are typically a string of four to eight emails that are created and set-up to send to a certain contact list with a specific timeline between each email. Workflows rely on triggering relevant and timely actions based on where your potential students are in the buyer's journey. Your audience might not yet be in the "Decision" stage of their buyer's journey—ready to apply to your school and put down a deposit—but they may be in the "Awareness" or "Consideration" stages, looking for educational content, such as eBooks or checklists.

By understanding what stage your audience members are in, you will be better positioned to provide quality, timely and contextual content that relates to their specific needs, and thus move them down the funnel towards becoming an enrolled student. We recommend using a platform like HubSpot to create automated workflows and scale your lead nurturing process.



# Your Digital Presence

## Premium Content

To continue moving potential students through the buyer's journey, it's important to offer interesting and relevant premium content in exchange for contact information. Premium content comes in many forms – eBooks, white papers, checklists and more. When creating a premium content piece, start by considering what interests or questions your audience might have. You should also consider any hot topics relevant to your organization that potential students might be currently searching for.

Once your premium content is designed, you'll want to create a landing page for each piece of content. Your landing page should accurately reflect the content you're offering and give the user no other option but to convert on your offer. There shouldn't be a navigation bar or any distractions that could direct them elsewhere. You should also create a form to live on the landing page along with the associated call-to-actions to download your premium content. This is where you want potential students to give you more information about themselves—name, state, email, graduation year, etc. Once you acquire this information, you not only know that potential student is engaged and interested, but you also will be able to store and use their information to nurture them further.

## Microsite Creation

According to [Microsite.com](https://www.microsite.com), “A microsite is a website, distinct and separate from an organization's main site, that delivers more focused, relevant content about a specific topic or to a targeted audience or even just requiring a defined action.” A microsite is a great way to reach a wider range of students. For example, we created a responsive microsite for [Maryville College](https://www.maryville.edu) to house their inbound marketing activities like blog posts and interactive quizzes. The site served as a way to reach students that may not be familiar with Maryville College. **Since the launch of the microsite, it has generated a 225% ROI and received more than 5,000 visits each month.**

## Consistent Analysis & Reporting

Lead-generating and lead-nurturing activities such as blogs, premium content and email workflows push potential students through the buyer's journey to reach your end goal. The ROI of your inbound marketing campaign depends on the goal(s) you set during your initial strategy phase. Through data tracking and analysis, there are many conclusions and results you can pull that will relate back to your end goal. At Pyxl, we generate monthly reports with detailed data analysis using information from HubSpot, Google Analytics, PPC dashboards and more. Critical numbers like open and click rates, page views and downloads are monitored daily. As we look at the data, we continually adjust areas as needed in order to deliver the best results possible. Data analysis is a fluid process that should always contribute to your end goal.

# Best Practices of Inbound Marketing

With these inbound marketing activities, you'll be able to reach your audience with valuable, educational and interesting information that they'll use throughout their entire journey. Now that you know the basics of inbound marketing, let's take a look at some of our tried and true best practices:



## Speak to Your Audience

The point is to engage them – find out what they are really interested in, not what you think they are interested in. And like we talked about earlier, know where they are in the buyer's journey.



## Fresh, Original Content

Original content will bring people back to your site, while fresh content and regular posting will increase the return on your SEO efforts. Do both!



## Provide Value

Think of questions your audience might have about the admissions process. Provide value by answering those questions through your site content.



## Don't be Afraid to Experiment

Try a few different things to see what works best with your audience – there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach! Does your audience prefer posts with tips for admissions exams? Or, maybe they respond better to information about applications? You won't know until you try a few things and analyze the results.

# Best Practices of Inbound Marketing



## Keep Devices in Mind

It's important to know which devices your audience uses most. If they primarily use smartphones or tablets and your site isn't responsive, you're missing out on a big opportunity. Implement Responsive Web Design (RWD) to ensure that your site is compatible with all devices.



## Track Performance Across Multiple Channels

When every inbound marketing activity contributes to your end goal, it's important to analyze your activities on multiple channels. Did data from Facebook correlate with data from an email you sent? Analyze it from every angle to ensure you're seeing the big picture.



## Keep Your Eye on the Prize

Let your end goal drive the decisions you make. Every action should stem from your goals and lead straight to them.



## Think Inbound, Not Outbound

Cut costs on traditional marketing activities that generally aren't that effective. It's time to move away from billboards, direct mail and cold calling, and embrace the inbound methodology.

# We Want to Talk to You!

With an ever-growing community of colleges, universities and students seeking higher education, it's important to not only match your competition, but to rise above them. Start by creating an inbound marketing campaign that speaks to your potential students and draws them in to apply. You have the ability to reach your target audience with content they actually want to see, when they want to see it – why not take advantage of this opportunity?

At Pyxl, we take a more personalized approach to inbound marketing in order to drive better results. Before we begin implementing your ideal inbound marketing campaign, we start by creating a comprehensive strategy. How do you create goals and measure your success without first identifying them? Once our strategy is established, we begin the implementation phase to reach, nurture, convert and delight your target audience with the perfect combination of digital marketing tactics. These tactics can include, but are not limited to, email content and workflows, blogging, social media, SEO, PPC and more. We take the time to become an extension of your brand and fully understand your audience in order to know what will be the most effective way to communicate with them.

Pyxl has extensive experience and proven success in inbound marketing clients across the higher education industry. We help our customers attract their ideal potential students, nurture them along the decision process and convert them into qualified applicants. We are a full-service digital firm, where our content strategists help develop your strategy and curate content, our designers bring your visions to life and our developers bring your site to life. We are driven by results and believe in becoming an extension of your team.

Interested in learning more? Read more about the success we had with [Maryville College through our case study](#). If you have questions or are ready to begin increasing your admissions numbers, please contact us today at [info@pyxl.com](mailto:info@pyxl.com).



Pyxl is a collection of creatives on a passion and results-driven mission to design, write and code custom digital marketing solutions not just for our clients, but for their clients. We're where the right brain meets the left brain and our strategy-based services are built on real relationships, not egos.

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