FATHOM®

EDU STANDARD 5.0

THE STUDENT JOURNEY ED.

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Higher education institutions today are all asking one challenging question: How do we grow student enrollment in an increasingly competitive collegiate environment?

Many schools have student retention issues at a time where alumni donorship growth has been stagnate. It would seem the outlook of the average higher education admissions office has been bleak.

Enter the refinement of student journey marketing.

From helping schools communicate more effectively (and efficiently) with prospective students, to driving alumni engagement, student journey alignment and marketing automation have cemented their place within higher education as a way to engage students across all channels. It's about delivering the right content at the optimal time to keep prospective applicants engaged in the admissions process, enrolled at your school, and engaged as an alumni.

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INTRODUCTION

Education marketers are brand ambassadors. This responsibility extends to the entire community of higher education personnel responsible for attracting and retaining students. A school's marketing materials help welcome or reject students.

Whether cognizant, unaware or in denial, we are all brand ambassadors now. And we are all accountable for reporting marketing successes. Students need to feel an authentic connection to a school before attending, and website design and content strategy are integral to conveying such an identity.

In a recent study, the Nielsen Norman Group found that 48% of students researching college didn't realize that a specific university offered their program of choice, even when it did. (Sherwin)

Given the current state of technology, students passing over your school because they simply failed to interact with the relevant content is no longer acceptable.

Enterprise institutions today need full-fledged marketing automation systems, revenue attribution models, and a governing content strategy to communicate effectively with prospective students throughout the research process as they decide the next steps in their lives.

Sherwin, K. (n.d.). University Websites: Top 10 Design Guidelines. Retrieved May 24, 2016, from https://www.nngroup.com/articles/university-sites/
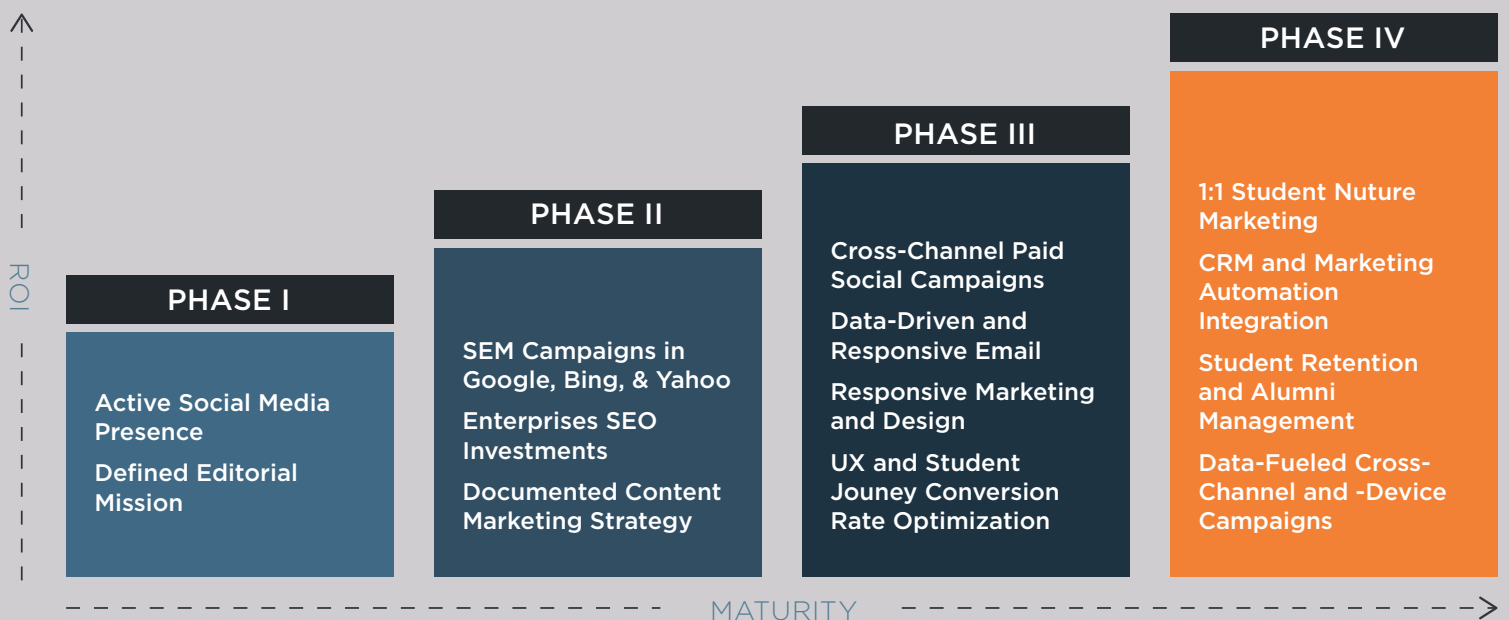
THE HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING MATURITY CURVE

Where is your school on the higher education marketing maturity curve?

Each year, Scott Brinker of ChiefMarTec.com releases a snapshot of the current state of marketing technology. When he started in 2011 the list had 150 companies offering different MarTech services, this year's edition features almost 4000 companies. (MarketingLand)

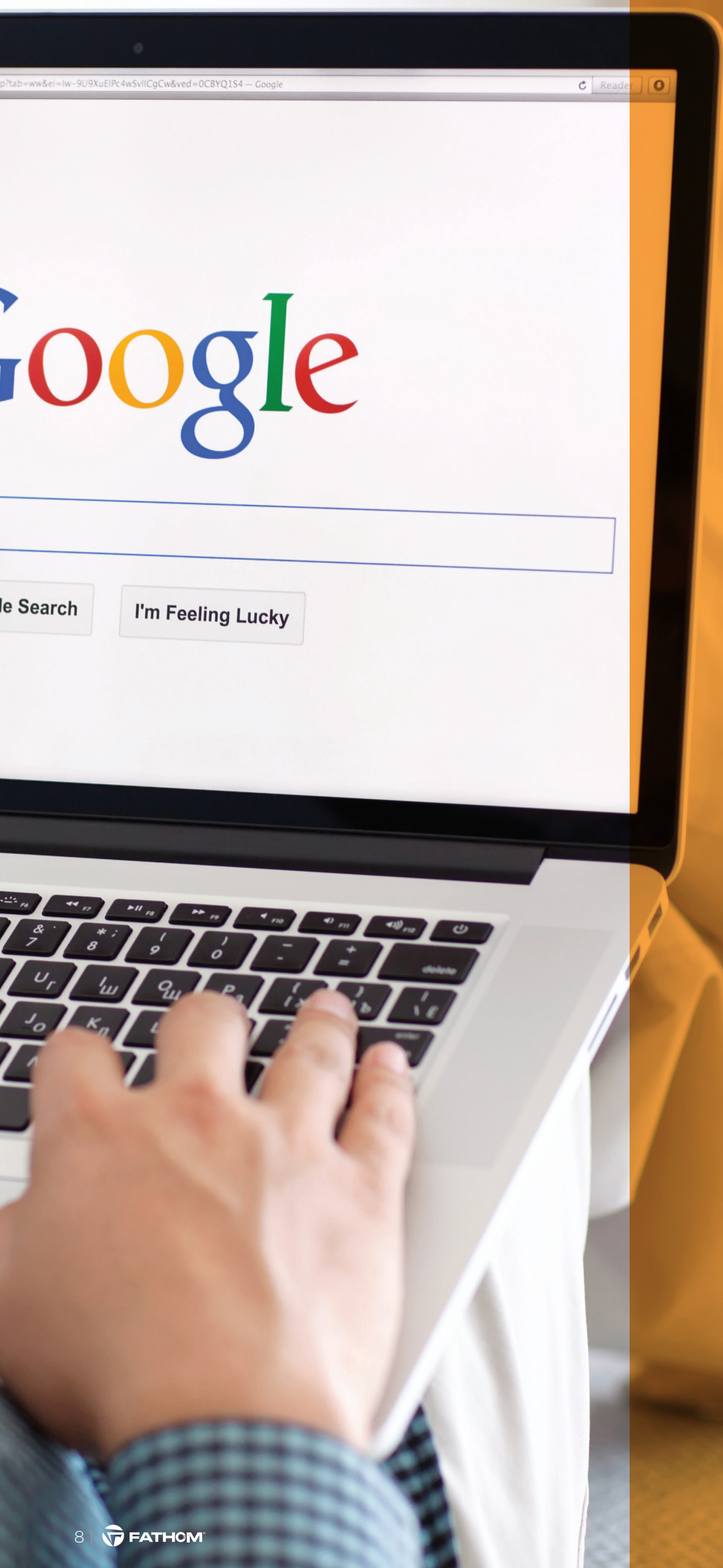## EDU Maturity Curve - Graduate Your Marketing Strategy
THE LINK BETWEEN ROI AND MARKETING MATURITY

ROI

PHASE I

Active Social Media Presence

Defined Editorial Mission

PHASE II

SEM Campaigns in Google, Bing, & Yahoo

Enterprises SEO Investments

Documented Content Marketing Strategy

PHASE III

Cross-Channel Paid Social Campaigns

Data-Driven and Responsive Email

Responsive Marketing and Design

UX and Student Jouney Conversion Rate Optimization

PHASE IV

1:1 Student Nuture Marketing

CRM and Marketing Automation Integration

Student Retention and Alumni Management

Data-Fueled Cross-Channel and -Device Campaigns

MATURITY

It is difficult for every marketer to determine which platforms, channels, and media to put resources towards. Determining whether those efforts are effective tends to be even more daunting of an issue. When it comes to higher education, these marketing conundrums are often multiplied. There are a lot of, ahem, old-school ways of recruiting and retaining students. Students don't search for schools the way they used to, though.

Marketing integration for higher education is here to stay. And while the implementation can be complicated, the objective is clear: Engage prospective students with personalized messaging dependent upon their stage in the enrollment process by delivering the relevant information that fosters an authentic relationship.

M. (2016). Infographic: The 2016 Marketing Technology Landscape. Retrieved May 24, 2016, from http://marketingland.com/infographic-marketing-technology-landscape-113956

MAKING THE SHORTLIST

More students are using the web as an integral part of their college research process than ever before. Non-branded higher education related searches grew by 8% YoY in the first quarter of 2016, continuing an impressive streak of 9 straight quarters of continuous growth. (Google Internal)

As search queries like these continue to grow it's becoming increasingly important to be visible to the new generation of searchers using shifting resources and media to gather information. How your school depicts its programs online is becoming as, if not more important than a physical tour of campus.

THE DIGITAL SHIFT

In a recent study done by Eduventures, one of the leading higher education research and advisory services, 1,181 high school juniors and seniors currently considering attending a leading 4-year public institution* were asked the following question:
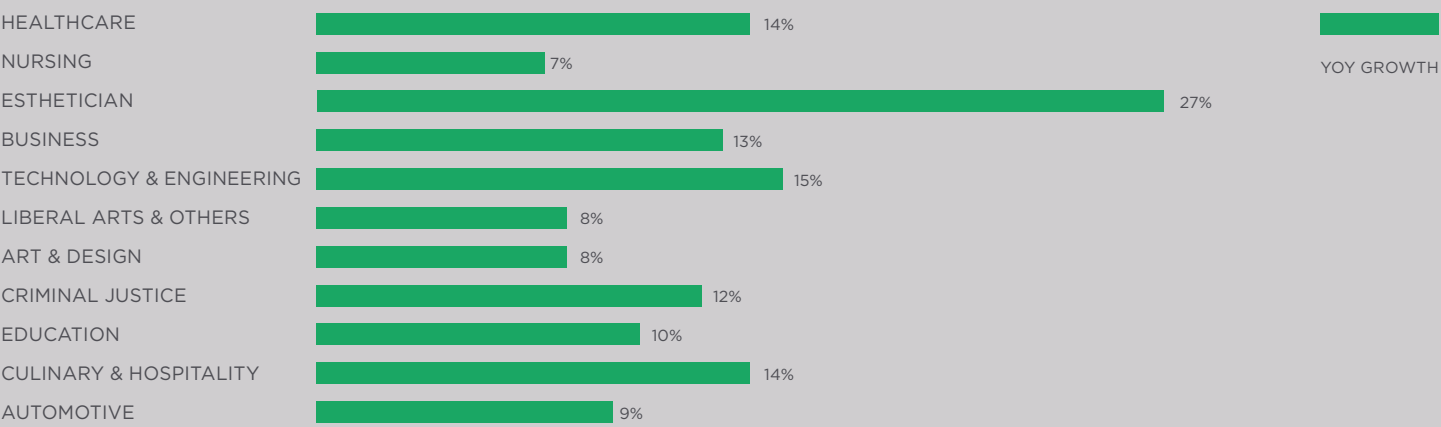
"Which of the following resources are you using right now to gather information on colleges?"

As might be assumed, approaches are leaning digital. Yet you may be surprised at how fast — and hard — that shift is occurring.
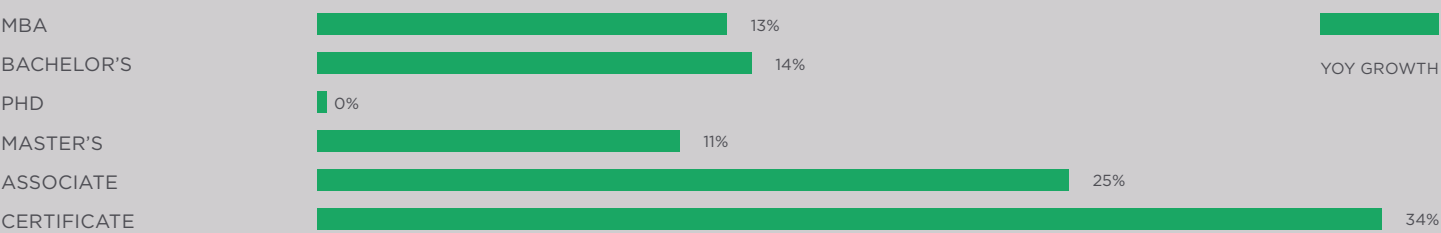
RESOURCES USED TO GATHER COLLEGE INFORMATION

College website: 87%

Google searches: 71%

College comparison sites: 63%

College fairs: 39%

College guides: 38%

1-1 with high school counselor: 18%

Campus visits: 59%

College publications: 49%

Query Growth by Program

Program	YOY Growth
HEALTHCARE	14%
NURSING	7%
ESTHETICIAN	27%
BUSINESS	13%
TECHNOLOGY & ENGINEERING	15%
LIBERAL ARTS & OTHERS	8%
ART & DESIGN	8%
CRIMINAL JUSTICE	12%
EDUCATION	10%
CULINARY & HOSPITALITY	14%
AUTOMOTIVE	9%

Query Growth by Degree Type

Degree Type	YOY Growth
MBA	13%
BACHELOR'S	14%
PHD	0%
MASTER'S	11%
ASSOCIATE	25%
CERTIFICATE	34%

Higher education search trends from Google reflect what the Eduventures data suggests, particularly in the growth of program-specific and degree search queries.

Program-specific searches are up 13% from last year. Education program- and degree-related searches have experienced double digit growth for the last 6 quarters.

A recent study from LinkedIn found that 72% of students develop a shortlist before reaching out to schools. Influenced by a variety of factors, the average shortlist contains only three schools. The same study found that 93% of students enroll in a school on that shortlist. (LinkedIn)

As more students begin to populate that shortlist through online research, it's imperative for your university to speak the language that resonates with them, offer information that they find valuable, and market to them at the right time.

72%
OF STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR SHORTLIST PRIOR TO REACHING OUT TO A SCHOOL

ONLY 3
SCHOOLS MAKE A PROSPECT'S SHORTLIST
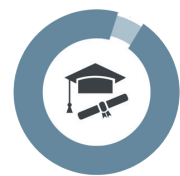
93%
END UP ENROLLING TO A SCHOOL ON THEIR SHORTLIST

L. (2015, November 14). Using LinkedIn to Deepen Relationships Throughout the Student Lifecycle. Retrieved from http://www.slideshare.net/LImarketingsolutions/using-linked-in-to-deepen-relationships-throughout-the-entire-student-lifecycle

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INTRODUCTION TO THE **STUDENT JOURNEY**

Students conduct college research in a multitude of ways and as the decision-making process of where to apply develops, so should your marketing strategy.

A series of tactics exists for schools to get students interested in their institution. **Acquiring** their attention and consideration as a potential choice is the first of these steps. Once interested, a whole new strategy opens up to **convert** these interested students into known leads, or applicants. And finally, once students are in the application process, it is vital to **nurture** these leads until that student decides to enroll in your school.
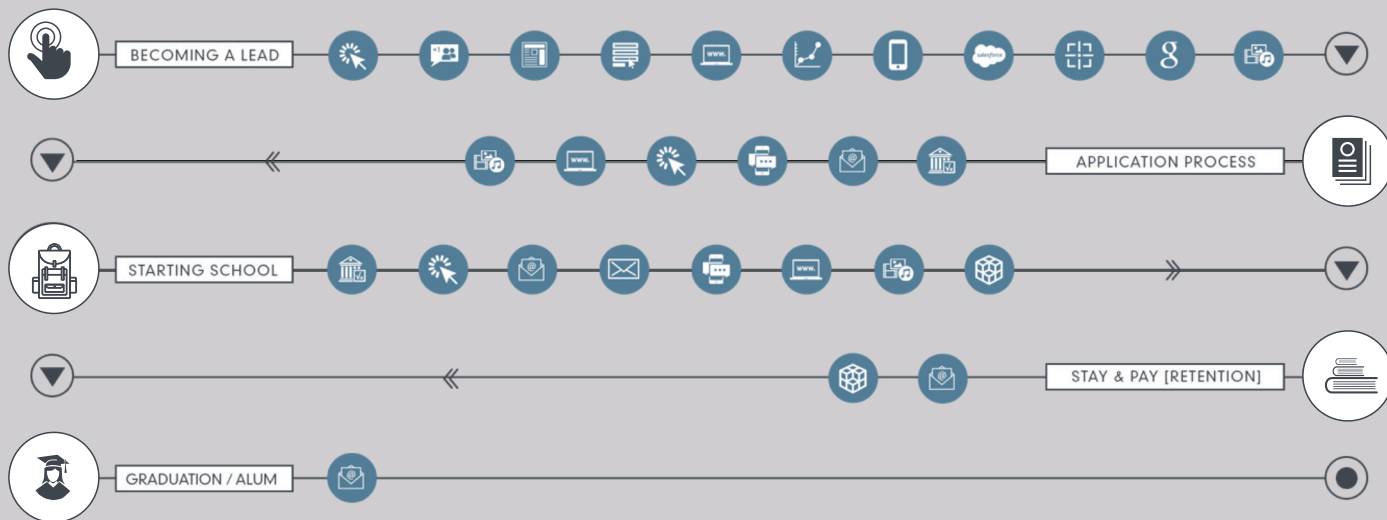
By identifying how your ideal applicants behave online, be they traditional or non-traditional, the marketing-savvy school can map an experience of their institution online, driven by content and personalized messaging.
We call this process "Mapping the Student Journey."

Mapping the Student Journey
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

By visualizing how students gather information online, the student journey acts as a map to help schools align marketing solutions with the student research process. Once they've considered the entire digital experience of their institution, schools can leverage the right tactics at the right time, keeping student interest high while nurturing leads to enrollment.

BECOMING A LEAD

Prospective students need to know what your school brings to the table and how the value of a degree from your university appeals to their unique needs and expectations. **Before a student can become an applicant, you must attract them to your institution with a sound outbound marketing strategy.**

ORGANIC:

Your Website's User Experience: According to the 2015 Ruffalo Noel-Levitz E-Expectations report, 77% of juniors equate the quality of an institution's website directly with the quality of the education offered at the school. (Noel-Levitz)

SEO: Are you showing up when prospective students enter relevant queries in Google? Is your website optimized for search?

Content: Does the content of your website reflect a deep understanding of the unique needs of your ideal prospective students?

Social Media: Does your school have an engaging presence on social media that accurately reflects the campus experience?

PAID:

Paid Search: Are you advertising directly within Google search results to respond to the types of research based-queries students use in Google?

Display: Do you use image-based advertisements to aesthetically demonstrate campus, student life, and university branding?

Paid Social: Do you use the advanced targeting powers and user base of popular social media platforms to showcase your institution?

2015 E-Expectations Report, Ruffalo Noel Levitz 2015 E-Expectations Report

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BECOMING A LEAD | ORGANIC ELEMENTS

SEO is aggressively evolving, and the same principles from 2006—even 2012—don't apply anymore. While keyword rankings are still vitally important, they must be served with a healthy dose of good content.

When we talk about taking students from the research stage to becoming a lead, SEO and content are a higher education match made in heaven. Time on page, bounce rate, average pages per session and other metrics that reflect how relevant your content is to a searcher's interest are becoming as—if not more—important than keywords when attempting to rank for relevant terms.

If you want to be visible to students researching higher education, you need to do more than simply use page descriptions and wording that match the search terms. The other half of the SEO equation is making sure interested students find what they're looking for on your webpages, building legitimacy in their eyes and nurturing further interaction with your website.

The technical elements of your website are also important during the "becoming a lead" stage of the student journey. Commonly referred to as "technical SEO," make sure the finer elements of your website—like meta descriptions and page titles—drive brand awareness. Optimizing technical SEO will empower your institution to increase search engine visibility and organic traffic

BECOMING A LEAD | PAID ELEMENTS

Within the "becoming a lead" phase of the student journey, there are many ways the paid media can assist in putting your school in front of students who are actively researching higher education.

Paid media is an excellent strategy to widen your brand's reach and take students that may have never previously interacted with your institution to your website. One of the most popular areas of paid media within higher education is Paid Search, or what many refer to as Search Engine Marketing.

Vertical Trends - All Devices
EVOLUTION FOR FURTHER EDUCATION
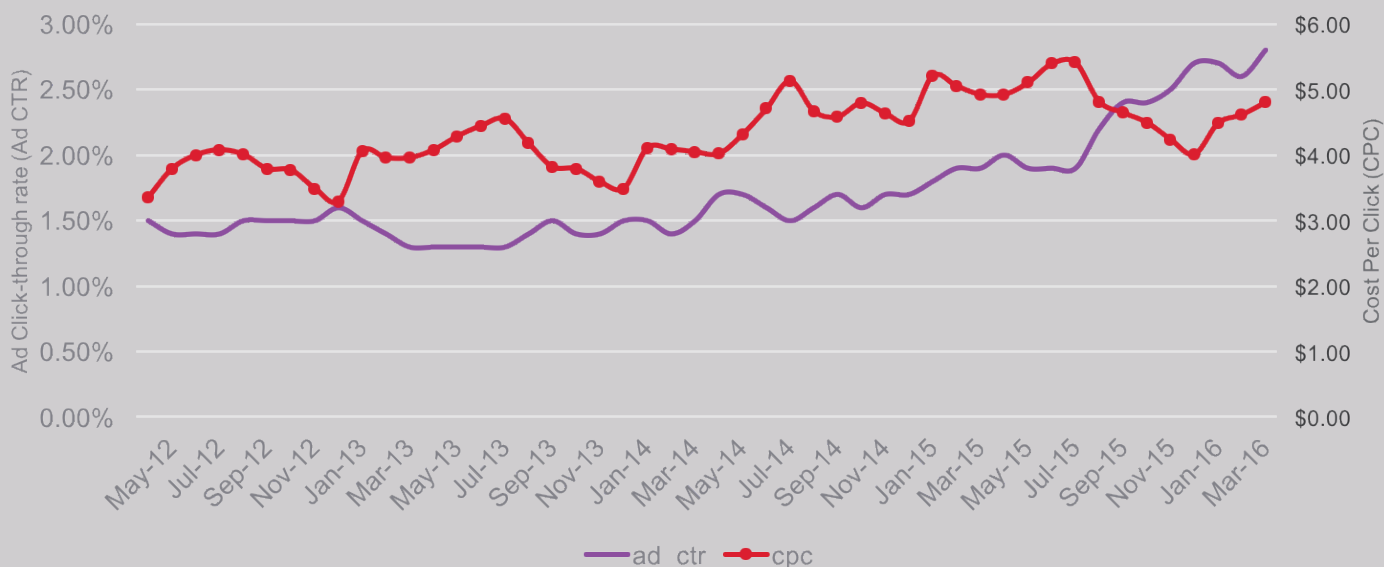
As more schools realize the possibilities of paid search and enter the market, the associated cost of higher education clicks is rising. Key terms related to higher education have never been more expansive than today, and the secret to success in this environment is the age-old doctrine: **Less is More.**

THE DIRECT PATH APPROACH TO PAID SEARCH

Many schools approach paid search with an ideology that the more search terms they can be visible for, the better. While the sentiment of appealing to the highest number of students is understandable, with over 10 years in the higher education space, we have come to one unwavering conclusion.

Students do not search as creatively as you think they do.

A LARGE PERCENT OF STUDENTS ARE SEARCHING THESE TOP 4-6 TERMS

With the current state of the market, the objective isn't to bid on every conceivable search term a student may use, but rather focus on the queries and keywords that deliver conversions. By focusing on the keywords that deliver conversions, a school can bid more aggressively on the high-performing terms while grouping the rest of keywords into buckets that can be targeted via modified broad-match keywords.

Extra keywords can lead to unnecessary work and most importantly, wasted money. Many campaigns with thousands of keywords could be covered with a couple hundred.

The paid and organic elements of the "becoming a lead" phase are so tightly entwined because once a student has been taken to your website or landing page via a paid source, it's up to that page's organic content to convince them to stay, fill out an application, or complete any other action deemed important by your institution.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Once a student is interested in your school or, at the very least has arrived at your website, how do you secure that valuable position on the shortlist? Universities must peak to the wants, needs and perhaps even fears of the student while utilizing remarketing advertisements and email nurture strategy to keep potential students engaged in your enrollment process.

When considering what type of content to feature on your website, the most important component to consider boils down to this; If a student arrives at your website, it should be effortless to find information this student deems critical. And once students have found this information and are prepared to apply, the application process should be thoughtfully optimized and equally uncomplicated.
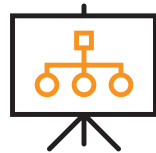
THE INFORMATION STUDENTS NEED:
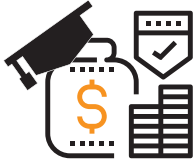
DEGREE ROI	STUDENT AID INFORMATION	CAREER EARNING POTENTIAL

ALUMNI CASE STUDIES	EXAMPLES OF JOBS WITHIN A PARTICULAR DEGREE	CAREER OUTCOMES FOR CERTAIN DEGREES OR PROGRAMS

Institutions need to put themselves in the shoes of a prospective student, identifying all aspects of their website associated with a particular degree or college and asking:

- What does the student-user experience of this degree feel like online?
- Are we presenting the right type of information to build legitimacy in the eyes of the searcher?
- Are we showing what graduates have gone on to do in the field after graduation?
- Are we showing the flexible nature of our class offerings?

Whatever the unique value proposition is for that degree, you need to make sure this sentiment is being communicated clearly and effectively to students who may be out of state or have never interacted with (or possibly heard of) your institution or program before.

When taking a prospect from **unidentified** to a **known** student, a host of paid advertising opportunities are available to keep students involved in the application process.

Remarketing: Show advertisements not only to students who have been on your website or filled out an application, but also show separate advertisements to students who started the application process and then abandoned. The true power of paid media during this stage of the student journey is its personalized, 1:1 nature. Individualized messaging is powerful, and an excellent way to keep students engaged in your enrollment process.

Email Nurture Marketing: Once a prospective student's user information has been collected, new ways of direct advertisement open up via email. Email nurture campaigns seek to keep students involved in the application process, encouraging them to take the next steps or even simply informing these applicants about the latest happenings around campus. Like its cousin remarketing, email nurture marketing has a powerful individualized nature. That is to say, rather than sending out batch-and-blast email campaigns, you're able to send individualized email messaging triggered by actions a student has taken on your website or their interest in a specific aspect of your college.

STARTING SCHOOL

As students narrow down their top choices, it becomes increasingly important to not only make it to the shortlist but also nurture student interest to position your institution for the final choice.

Remarketing: Personalized advertising, such as "start date" messaging campaigns, can keep students in the know about important enrollment deadlines or other information centered on getting them back in the application process.

Email Marketing: Much like the "application" stage of the student journey, personalized emails can be leveraged on a per-student basis to keep the enrollment conversation going.

STUDENT RETENTION

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has cast a startling prediction for the future. By 2025, the organization believes America will have a shortfall of more than 11 million skilled workers.

Want a Job in 2025? — Finish College

BY 2025, AMERICA WILL FACE A SHORTFALL OF 11 MILLION WORKERS

DEMAND
33 MILLION

SUPPLY
22 MILLION

Demand of career-ready credentials at the current pace

Supply of career-ready credentials at the current rate

Gates, B. (2015, June 3). Help Wanted: 11 Million College Grads. Retrieved from https://www.gatesnotes.com/Education/11-Million-College-Grads
Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

One of the largest reasons cited by the foundation for this shortfall is rising college dropout rates and nationwide issues with student retention.

While higher education marketing is traditionally concerned with attracting new students, a student only pays for four (or more) years of school, if they can stay enrolled for that long. Every campus has a host of services designed to help students stay enrolled, such as advisors, tutors, study hours, writing centers and a myriad of other support structures. Just as we can market to prospective applicants on a 1:1 basis, once enrolled, we can also promote the supportive aspects of campus utilizing the power of automated email and an institution's SIS (Student Information System).

SIS/CRM Integration & Email: Perhaps the most powerful tool at the disposal of universities today is their internal SIS. These systems hold immense volumes of data—data that can be leveraged to deliver predictive, personalized messaging. Does an engineering student currently struggling with their GPA have finals coming up? Deliver a messaging cadence that highlights engineering supports structures specifically to that student.

Being App-Ready: Does your school have a dedicated app that students can use seamlessly on the go to access institution-related and personal information? As more students browse mobile first, providing them with easy access to campus resources is a great way to foster student retention.

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GRADUATION & ALUMNI MANAGEMENT

2015 Eduventures Alumni Pulse Survey

WHICH ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN OVER THE PAST YEAR?	WHICH ACTIVITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE ENGAGED WITH?
ATHLETIC EVENTS	REGIONAL ALUMNI EVENTS
CAMPUS VISITS	ATHLETIC EVENTS
HOMECOMING	NETWORKING EVENTS
REGIONAL ALUMNI EVENTS	PROFESSIONAL SEMINARS
REUNIONS	CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR CURRENT STUDENTS

Once students walk across the stage at graduation and receive their diploma, this may be the end of their storied time as traditional students, but it doesn't have to mean the end of their engagement with and support of the university. A recent study via Eduventures outlines a widening gap between the engagement opportunities institutions offer   and those that alumni desire.

Email: One-on-one messaging campaigns can be created to nurture the relationship alumni have with your school. For example, a nursing graduate may be interested in the latest development or current initiatives within the nursing department, or eager to learn how fellow alumni and past professors are making a difference in the healthcare sector. Personalized email campaigns empower you to communicate with your alumni on an extremely detailed and engaging level.

Paid Advertising: When leveraging lists of email addresses, Facebook, Twitter, Google AdWords and many other platforms allow you to reach alumni via personalized, digital ads at a significantly lower cost than traditional paid advertising.

Content Marketing: Engage alumni with content designed to foster alumni involvement, engagement, support, and donorship. Efforts like an alumni magazine, an alumni blog, a career resource center, and designated alumni social media accounts help alumni feel valued and connected to their alma mater.

"The Alumni Engagement Gap," Eduventures Wake-Up Call, August 15, 2015.
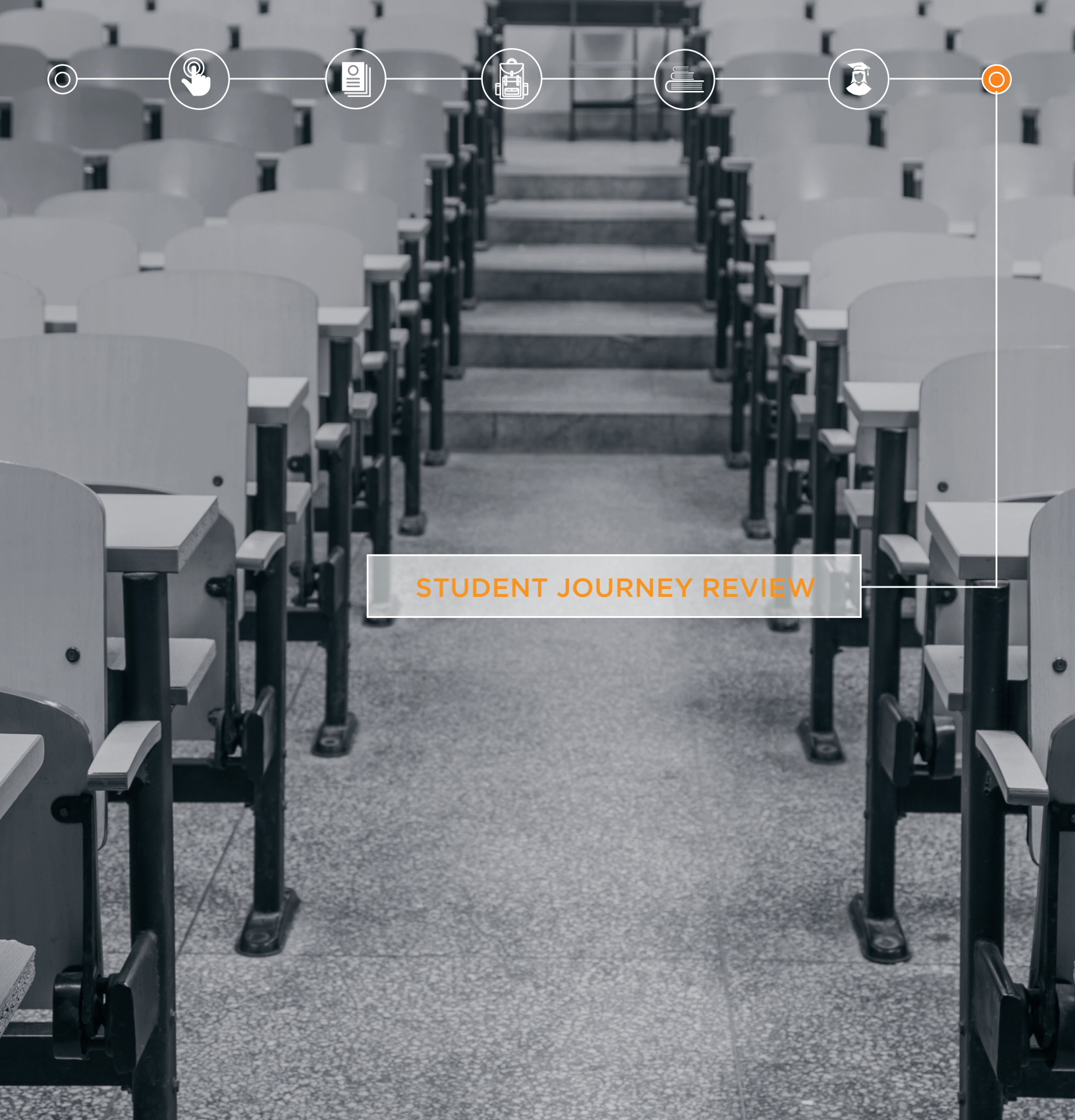
STUDENT JOURNEY REVIEW

The student journey is a map. A guide to the different touchpoints and stages an applicant progresses though on their way to enrollment. Just as this journey is made of many stages and levels, so too should the mix of marketing strategy employed by the university to walk alongside students and mature with them through the journey.
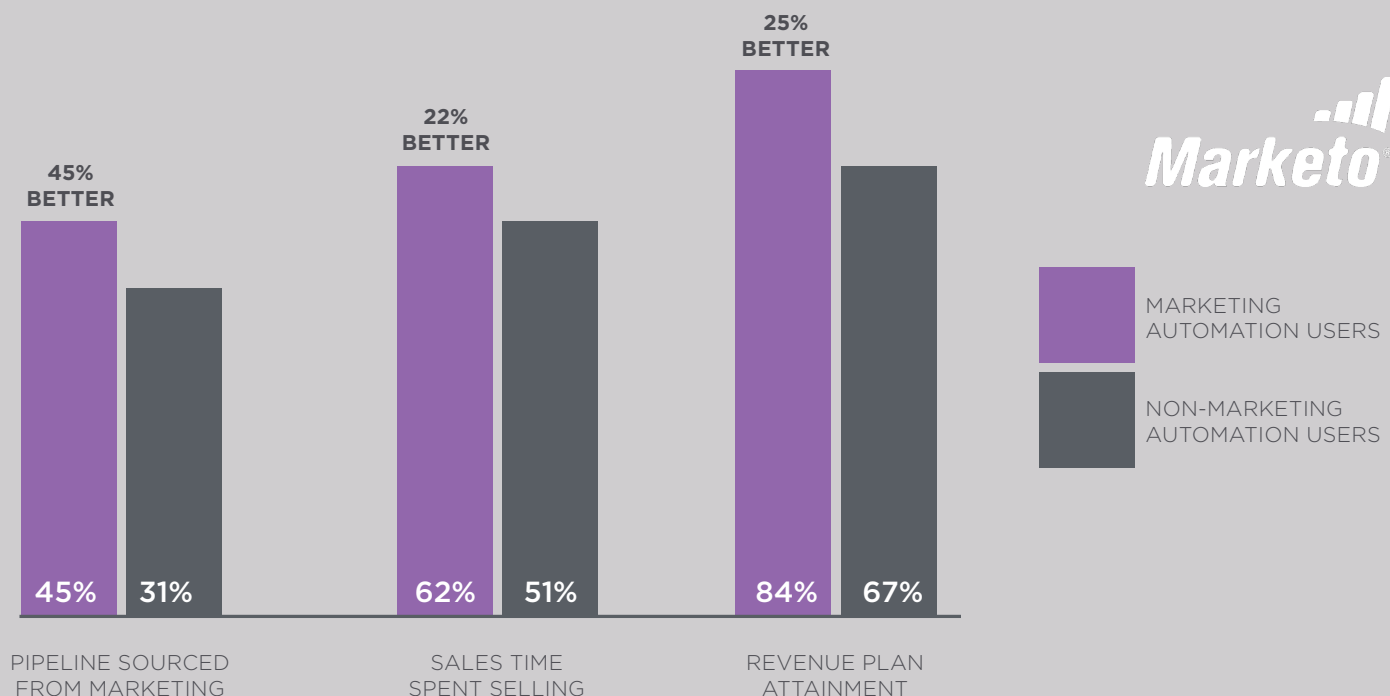
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MARKETING AUTOMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

IMPORTANCE OF BRANDING & MARKETING

Institutions are becoming more and more aware of the importance of creating a unique brand experience to differentiate themselves from their competition. There is an increased focus on digital channels, with 61% of education marketers stating that they began their branding strategies within the past five years. Colleges and universities are now investing in responsive design, analytics tools, social media, and marketing automation.

Marketo

45% BETTER — **22% BETTER** — **25% BETTER**

PIPELINE SOURCED FROM MARKETING: Marketing Automation Users 45%, Non-Marketing Automation Users 31%

SALES TIME SPENT SELLING: Marketing Automation Users 62%, Non-Marketing Automation Users 51%

REVENUE PLAN ATTAINMENT: Marketing Automation Users 84%, Non-Marketing Automation Users 67%

Marketo

MARKETING AUTOMATION USERS

NON-MARKETING AUTOMATION USERS

The strength of marketing automation provides a truly coherent student experience across all touchpoints, and institutions are starting to understand and act on the need for an integrated multichannel strategy based on student behavior. It's critical for them to ensure consistency among positioning, identity, strategy, stated goals, and personalized communications.

Takeaway for marketers: Integrate your marketing strategies across all channels to best target your messages based on prospective student behavior, online and offline.

All of these trends point at one core, oft-repeated theme: "student first." Private schools, public universities, and community colleges alike cannot ignore the importance of making everything student-centric, from branding and marketing to engagement and education. With the massive investment students need to make to earn a higher education degree, it's understandable that they're selective. And it's only fair that institutions provide them with the experience they need, from their high school years and beyond .

THE RIGHT **CONTENT**   THE RIGHT **STUDENT**   THE RIGHT **TIME**

The power of marketing automation within higher education is the ability to send the right content to the right prospective student at the right time. Keep them engaged in the admissions process by serving them the content they need in a 1:1 format.

These trends ring true for higher education and beyond, as marketing is now, more than ever, focused on putting the student first. The digital marketplace has put the power back into the students' hands, and it's up to you to convince them your school is the right choice.

Kapur, Vyoma. "Higher Education and Beyond: A Changing World for Marketers." Marketo.com. N.p., 4 Dec. 2015. Web.

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BENCHMARKS AND TRENDS

As the graph below suggests, queries for further education have been rising steadily over the past 4 years. Following this same trend, average CPC has also risen as more and more schools enter the paid space.

Impressions are down YoY, when taking into account all devices, but continue to grow on mobile. Advertisers need to focus on mobile-specific search optimizations to capitalize on this emerging trend. With paid ads taking up the majority, if not all, of a user's screen on mobile, showing up for both branded and non-branded searches is paramount.

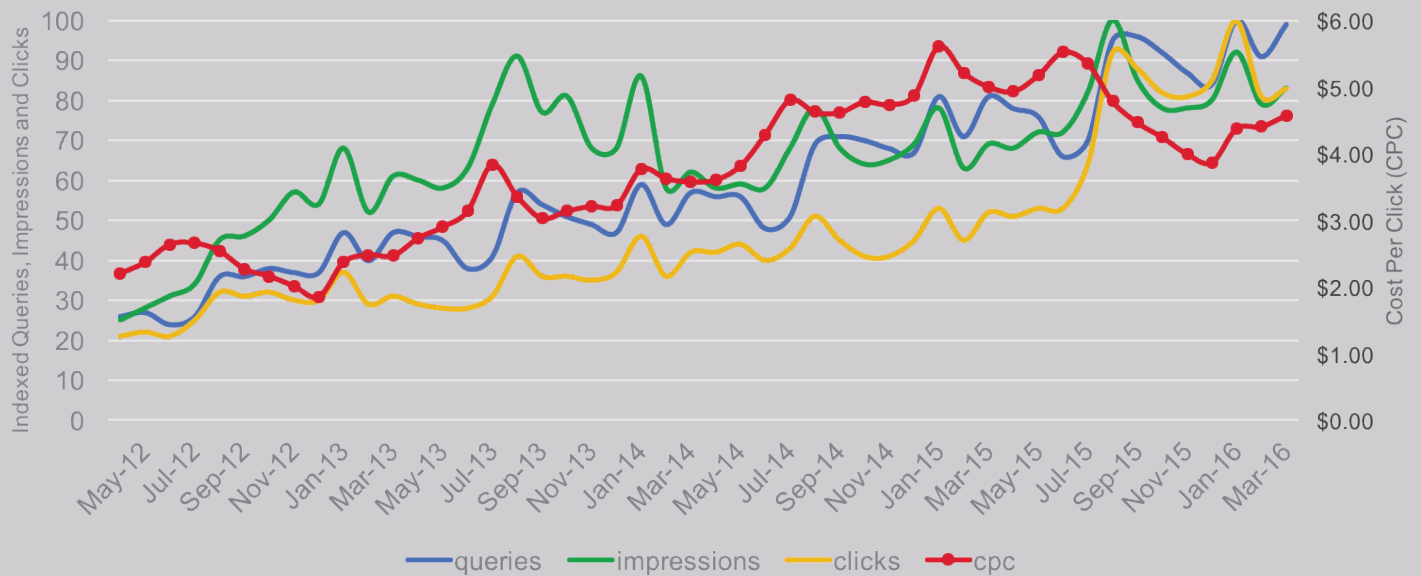## Vertical Trends - All Devices
EVOLUTION FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

Legend: queries, impressions, clicks, cpc
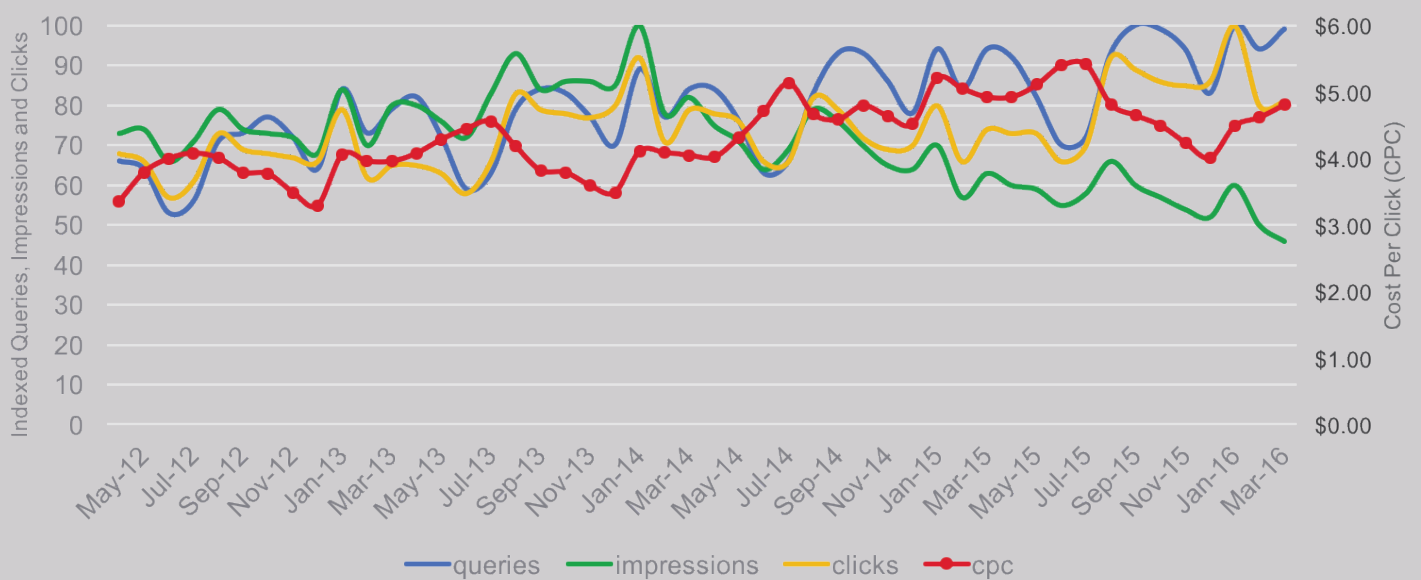
Google Education Search Analysis, Q1 2016. Internal data.'

Vertical Trends - Mobile Devices
EVOLUTION FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

Legend: queries (blue) — impressions (green) — clicks (yellow) — cpc (red)

Note the upsurge in queries, impressions and clicks beginning in April-May 2015. This aligns with Google's "Mobilegeddon" algorithm update and suggests these trends will only continue into the future as more schools place a focus on responsive/mobile-friendly design to meet the growing number of mobile-first searchers.

Vertical Trends - Desktop & Tablet Devices
EVOLUTION FOR FURTHER EDUCATION
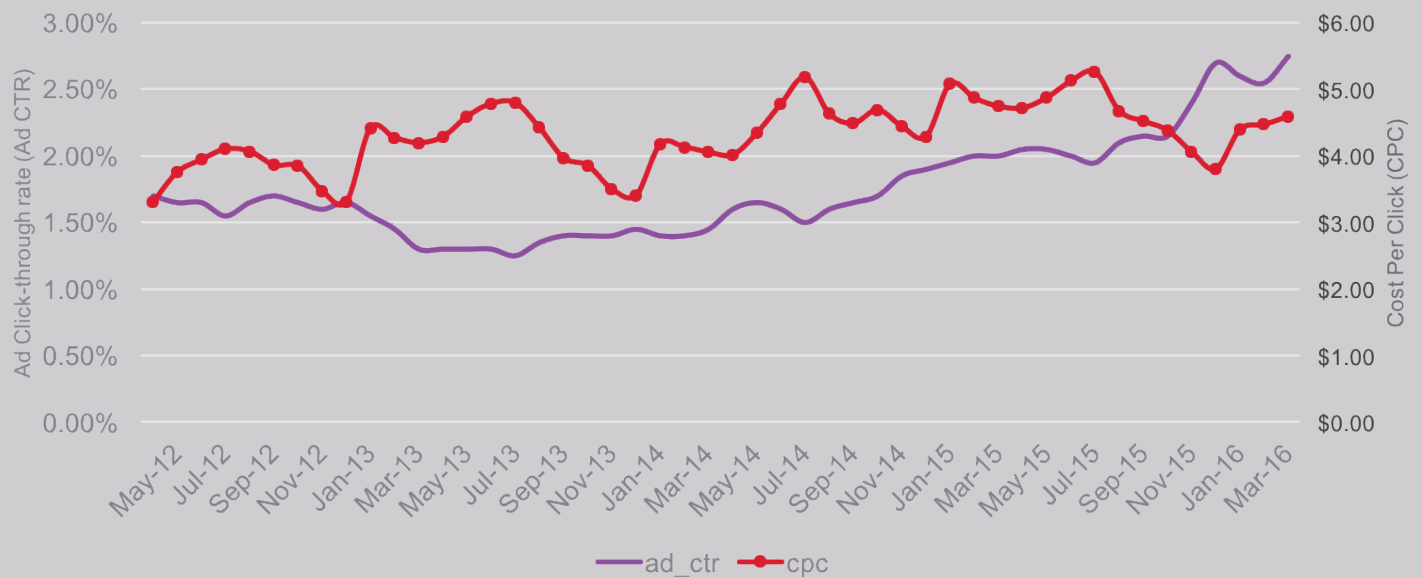
Google's choice to remove the right-hand search ads in the beginning of 2016 contributed to the sharp increase in click-through rate (ad_ctr) desktop and tablet advertisements are seeing. With as many as four advertisements populating the first page of results for certain keywords, it's often essential to use PPC to drive SERP visibility for your institution.

MOBILE FOCUS

MOBILE CONTINUES TO GROW

Mobile device usage increased dramatically over the last year. In 2015, Google announced that, "...more Google searches take place on mobile devices than on computers...," according to their internal search data.

This 'tipping point' in Google search signals a growing trend among younger demographics to access the internet and information through smartphones and tablets. Google also states that in the education space, mobile device usage continues to grow at 22% YoY. Mobile marketing is no longer just an add-on to an existing marketing plan – it's now an integral part of the of the entire omni-channel experience and plays a critical role in reaching and connecting with your target audience.

Google Education Search Analysis, Q1 2016. Internal data.'

STATISTICS TELL THE TALE

comScore, the global media measurement and analytics company, recently released their 2016 U.S. Cross Platform media measurement report. The report shows that smartphone usage among the 18-24 demographic has risen to 94% of the total population. In other words mobile marketing plays a major role in the life of your prospective students.

Similarly, the 35-54 demographic – the sector of the population mostly comprised of parents to the 18-24 demographic – has a smartphone saturation rate of 84%, according to the 2016 comScore U.S. Cross Platform report. (www.comscore.com)

THE FOLLOWING TRAFFIC AVERAGES REINFORCE THE FACT THAT FATHOM EDUCATION CLIENTS ARE EXPERIENCING THE SAME TRAFFIC SHIFT:

- **Art & Design Colleges:** 57% Mobile
- **Technical & Business Colleges:** 49% Mobile
- **4-Year Colleges:** 33% Mobile
- **Online Degree Programs:** 29% Mobile
- **Graduate, Masters & Doctoral Programs:** 28% Mobile

Percent of Mobile Traffic in Q1 2016

	0	25	50	75	100
ART & DESIGN COLLEGES			57		
TECHNICAL & BUSINESS COLLEGES			49		
4-YEAR COLLEGES		33			
ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS		29			
GRADUATE, MASTER'S & DOCTORAL PROGRAMS		28			

As reported by influential venture capitalist Mary Meeker of KPCB in her 2015 Internet Trends annual report, 87% of millennials responded, "My smartphone never leaves my side, night or day."

CONCLUSION

While higher education marketing is unique in many ways, it aligns with other organizations in at least one area: putting the audience first. In this case, the audience is, naturally, the student. Given that many colleges and universities are hoping to appeal to one of the most tech-savvy generations, advancing higher education marketing tactics is a must. This is possible, so long as your marketing team commits to taking a strategic, informed, and holistic approach to attracting and retaining students.

Though many education institutions have existed for a long time, times have changed. Accordingly, so has marketing. So, with an understanding of how to be stay ahead of the marketing maturity curve in a chaotic climate, you can help your school grow in service of its larger goals. Your organization's survival may depend on it.