



BEST PRACTICES GUIDE:

Higher Education Enrollment Advertising

 **Orange 142**[®]
A Direct Digital Holdings Company

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1. The Challenges Facing Higher Education Enrollment Marketers

Higher education enrollment marketing is more competitive than ever as colleges and universities must compete for a [smaller pool of prospective students](#). Today's campaigns must do more than generate inquiries. They need to connect the right program with the right student at the right time with messaging that captures attention and drives action.

At the same time, the enrollment journey is changing rapidly. Paid search, paid social, display advertising, and streaming media continue to play a critical role in building awareness and generating inquiries, but prospective students increasingly use AI platforms to research programs that fit their schedules, career goals, budgets, and personal circumstances. AI has become another step in how students compare schools, evaluate outcomes, and narrow their options.

Success now depends on more than choosing the right marketing channels. Enrollment marketers need coordinated campaigns, accurate measurement, and a clear plan for turning inquiries into enrollments. They also need to understand how AI is reshaping both the student journey and the advertising platforms used to reach prospective students.

This guide, a product of the Orange 142 Higher Education Enrollment Marketing Council, explores the marketing channels driving enrollment today, how AI is changing campaign management, what happens after an inquiry is generated, and the best practices institutions can use to improve enrollment outcomes.

About The Orange 142 Higher Education Enrollment Marketing Council

Orange 142 launched the Higher Education Enrollment Marketing Council to examine the evolving challenges facing college and university enrollment marketing teams and to develop best practices, strategic guidance, and operational frameworks to support more connected and measurable enrollment marketing strategies.

2. Four Marketing Channels That Drive Enrollment

No single marketing channel reaches every prospective student. Students discover colleges and universities through search engines, social media, streaming video, websites, and countless digital touchpoints as they research programs and compare schools. Each channel plays a unique but pivotal role in building awareness, generating inquiries, and supporting enrollment decisions.

The most effective enrollment strategies don't rely on a single platform. They combine multiple channels that work together throughout the student journey, all while using data to drive performance.

Paid Search

[Paid search](#) remains one of the most effective ways to reach prospective students who are actively researching degree programs. Search campaigns help institutions appear when students look for specific programs, career paths, online learning opportunities, or schools in a particular location.

Search marketing has evolved beyond traditional keyword targeting. Campaigns increasingly rely on [audience signals, landing page relevance, and AI-powered optimization](#) to reach prospective students at the right moment. [Strong campaign structure](#), compelling program messaging, and accurate conversion tracking remain essential to success.

Paid Social Media

Social media helps institutions reach prospective students long before they begin searching for a specific school. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and others build awareness, generate interest, and keep programs visible throughout the enrollment journey.

Authentic, creative student stories, campus experiences, and career outcomes often outperform highly promotional messaging. [Paid social works best](#) when it complements search and other channels rather than operating independently.

Want to learn more? See our [Social Media Marketing Best Practices Guide](#).

Programmatic Display

[Programmatic display](#) advertising keeps institutions visible across the websites and digital content prospective students use every day. Display campaigns support awareness, reinforce brand recognition, and help schools stay top of mind throughout longer research cycles.

Modern display strategies combine audience targeting, first-party data, geographic targeting, and ongoing optimization to reach the right prospective students while maximizing their media budgets to deliver the strongest possible results.

Connected TV

Streaming video has become an increasingly valuable channel for higher education marketing. Connected TV allows institutions to tell richer stories about campus life, academic programs, student outcomes, and institutional culture in highly engaging video environments.

While [Connected TV](#) may not generate immediate inquiries, it often strengthens awareness and supports the performance of search, social, and display campaigns by increasing familiarity with an institution before prospective students begin actively researching schools.

See our [CTV Best Practices Guide](#) for tips and strategies for driving performance.

3. AI Changes How Campaigns Work

Artificial intelligence is reshaping digital advertising. Platforms such as Google AI Max, Performance Max (PMAX), and Meta Advantage+ increasingly automate targeting, bidding, audience expansion, creative delivery, and campaign optimization.

These tools can improve efficiency and uncover new opportunities, but they don't eliminate the need for strategy. AI determines how campaigns are delivered, not what success looks like. Institutions still need clear enrollment goals, well-organized campaign structures, compelling messaging, and accurate conversion tracking to guide automated systems toward meaningful outcomes.

Google AI Max

AI Max expands traditional search campaigns by using Google's AI to identify additional search opportunities, match ads to broader queries, and optimize performance based on user intent. It can help institutions reach prospective students who may not search using traditional keywords, but campaign structure and landing page relevance remain critical.

But be warned: AI Max isn't just a checkbox. It demands a solid strategy, as [Orange 142's Pay-Per-Click Manager explains in this Q&A](#).

Performance Max (PMAX)

Performance Max delivers ads across Google's entire inventory, including Search, YouTube, Display, Discover, Gmail, and Maps, using a single AI-driven campaign. PMAX can increase reach and simplify campaign management, but institutions should continue organizing campaigns around programs, enrollment goals, and audience segments to maintain control over performance. PMAX campaigns rely on [intent-based assets](#) to help Google identify users who may have an interest in a particular higher education program.

Learn more about PMAX in our [Best Practices Guide: AI-Driven PPC Campaigns](#).

Meta Advantage+

Meta Advantage+ automates audience targeting, budget allocation, and creative optimization across Facebook and Instagram. Rather than relying on highly detailed audience definitions, the platform uses AI to identify users most likely to engage and

convert. Success depends on strong creative assets, clear messaging, and ongoing performance review.

Automation Demands Strategy

AI can optimize campaigns faster than any human team, but it cannot define institutional priorities or enrollment goals. Different academic programs have different audiences, timelines, budgets, and success metrics. Regular monitoring, thoughtful campaign structure, and continuous optimization remain essential to improving lead quality and enrollment outcomes.

See how Orange 142 designs thoughtful campaigns through our [onboarding strategy](#).

4. Turning Inquiries into Enrollments

Generating inquiries is just the first step. What happens after a prospective student submits a form often determines whether that inquiry becomes an application and, ultimately, an enrolled student. Effective enrollment marketing requires close coordination between marketing, admissions, and technology.

Here are the things Orange 142's experts in higher education enrollment marketing recommend:

Know Where Every Lead Comes From

Every inquiry should be tied to its original source. Accurate source tracking helps marketing teams understand which campaigns, programs, and marketing channels generate qualified applicants. This insight allows you to spend your marketing budget wisely.

Follow Up with a Structured Process

Prospective students should receive timely, relevant communication in response to their inquiries. A consistent follow-up process, supported by automation when appropriate, helps ensure inquiries receive the right information and ultimately reduces the risk of lost opportunities.

Align Marketing and Admissions

This is one of the most important initiatives recommended by Orange 142. Marketing and admissions should be fully aligned, sharing common goals, reporting, and definitions of success. Regular communication between teams improves lead quality, strengthens the prospective student experience, and streamlines the enrollment process.

Optimize Your Website for Conversion

Advertising can drive traffic, but the website is where prospective students decide whether to take the next step. Clear calls to action, intuitive navigation, mobile-friendly design, and streamlined inquiry forms all contribute to stronger conversion rates.

Evaluate the Student Experience

A user experience audit helps identify barriers that prevent prospective students from moving through the enrollment process. Reviewing the experience from initial research through inquiry and application often reveals opportunities to improve engagement and increase conversions.

Create Visibility into the Application Process

Enrollment marketing teams must understand how prospective students move from inquiry to application to enrollment. Tracking each stage of the process helps identify bottlenecks, improve follow-up, and better measure marketing performance.

Define Privacy and Platform Constraints

Marketing and admissions teams should establish expectations around privacy regulations, CRM capabilities, reporting limitations, and advertising platform constraints before campaigns launch. Clear processes reduce confusion and improve data quality.

These best practices help institutions connect marketing performance with enrollment outcomes. For a deeper look at admissions alignment, CRM integration, lead management, and workflow optimization, read our companion guide, called [Higher Education Enrollment Marketing & Admissions Alignment](#).

5. Best Practices for Enrollment Marketing Campaigns

Successful enrollment marketing depends on more than choosing the right advertising platform. Institutions that consistently improve enrollment outcomes share several common practices.

Build Campaigns Around Programs

Different academic programs attract different audiences and require different messaging, budgets, and enrollment strategies. Organizing campaigns by program allows institutions to optimize performance and better understand the drivers of inquiries and enrollments.

Coordinate Marketing Channels

Search, social media, display advertising, and Connected TV each play a different role in the enrollment journey. Coordinating these channels creates a more consistent experience and helps reinforce institutional messaging throughout the decision-making process.

Give AI Clear Direction

AI-powered advertising platforms perform best when campaigns have strong structure, high-quality creative assets, accurate conversion tracking, and clearly defined goals. Automation improves execution, but it cannot replace strategic planning or ongoing oversight.

Measure Enrollment Outcomes

Clicks and inquiries provide valuable insight, but they're only part of the picture. Enrollment marketing teams should also measure application rates, enrollment rates, cost per enrollment, and return on marketing investment to understand which campaigns deliver meaningful results.

Continuously Review and Optimize

Enrollment marketing is never static. Student behavior, advertising platforms, and institutional priorities continue to evolve. Regularly reviewing campaign performance, testing new approaches, and refining strategy help institutions remain competitive in a changing landscape.

6. How Orange 142 Helps Higher Education Enrollment Marketing Teams

Enrollment marketing has become too complex to manage through disconnected campaigns or siloed teams. Orange 142 helps colleges and universities build coordinated enrollment marketing strategies that connect media, technology, reporting, and admissions into a single, measurable system.

Multi-Channel Enrollment Marketing

We plan, manage, and optimize campaigns across paid search, paid social, programmatic display, Connected TV, and other digital channels to reach prospective students throughout the enrollment journey. Learn about our [media solutions](#).

AI-Powered Marketing

We help enrollment marketers leverage [AI-powered advertising platforms](#) such as Google AI Max, Performance Max, and Meta Advantage+, while providing the strategic oversight needed to keep campaigns aligned with enrollment goals.

Search Visibility for an AI Era

Students increasingly use AI platforms alongside traditional search engines to research colleges and universities. Our [SEO, GEO, and AEO services](#) help institutions improve visibility across both search results and AI-generated recommendations.

Marketing and Admissions Alignment

Generating inquiries is only part of the equation. We help institutions connect their marketing, admissions, and CRM systems with reporting so they can understand which campaigns generate qualified applicants and enrolled students.

Performance Measurement

Our reporting goes beyond clicks and lead volume. We help institutions connect marketing performance to applications, enrollments, and return on investment so budget decisions are based on measurable outcomes.

A Partner With Exceptional Higher Education Marketing Enrollment Experience

Orange 142 has extensive experience helping colleges and universities recruit students across undergraduate, graduate, certificate, online, and professional programs. We combine strategic planning, media expertise, AI innovation, and enrollment marketing best practices to help institutions attract the right students and improve enrollment outcomes.