



BEST PRACTICES GUIDE:

# Higher Education Enrollment Marketing & Admissions Alignment

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# Enrollment Marketing Requires a Structured Approach

Higher education enrollment marketing is under real pressure. [Smaller prospect pools](#), uneven program demand, and tighter competition for both domestic and international students have made [growth harder to achieve](#).

At the same time, the role of marketing has expanded, taking on responsibilities that once fell with admissions. Today, the same marketer may be responsible for managing the campaigns that generate leads, nurturing those relationships through the enrollment process, and reporting on performance.

This expansion in responsibility means that marketers must have clear visibility into the entire lead lifecycle, tracking which initiatives result in an actual enrollment application. But all too often, leads come in but aren't consistently tracked, attributed to a campaign or source, and followed through to enrollment in measurable, scalable ways. This becomes especially true for institutions that have yet to make sustained strategic and financial investments in their enrollment marketing infrastructure.

In some cases, targeting and attribution systems are in place, but because they rely on fragmented or short-lived signals, such as clicks or single website visits, they often fall short of providing a clear, consistent understanding of which campaign audiences are actually driving results.

Given the smaller pool of prospective students, the need to sustain growth, and the lack of visibility into how leads move through the enrollment process, institutions need a more structured approach to enrollment marketing.

This guide outlines seven best practices to help address these challenges. These practices build on each other. Some institutions already have pieces in place, while others are still working to establish a foundation. But without core elements, including tracking, attribution, and structured follow-up, more advanced tactics will not deliver results.

Whether you are building that foundation or refining an existing system, this guide is designed to help you identify where to focus next.

# Best Practice #1: Know Where Every Lead Comes From

If marketers can't see where leads come from or what happens to them after they're generated, they can't make informed decisions about how best to spend their marketing budgets.

Some institutions generate leads successfully but can't properly track, label, or connect those to enrollment outcomes. When this happens, performance becomes impossible to measure.

In many cases, institutions' questions lead to quality but lack the systems needed to evaluate it. Without proper tracking and follow-through, it's impossible to determine whether a lead was truly low-quality or simply not worked on effectively.

## Lead Visibility by Source

Visibility into lead data depends on where the lead is captured. The table below outlines what marketing teams and their agency partners can typically access across common lead sources:

Lead Source	Visibility	Where Data Lives	Limitations
Website Form Fills	Lead counts, conversion events	CRM	No access to full form details
In-Platform Leads (Meta, LinkedIn)	Lead details (name, email, etc.)	Ad platform (up to 90 days), CRM (if exported)	Data expires if not saved
Organic / Direct Traffic	Lead counts (if tracked)	CRM, analytics tools	Source attribution may be incomplete or unclear

Leads enter the CRM without a clear source, making it difficult to distinguish campaign-driven activity from organic or event-driven interest. As a result, marketing and admissions often end up working from different sets of numbers, with no consistent view of performance.

### **What to Prioritize to Fix:**

This becomes especially important when managing multiple lead sources, including website form fills, in-platform leads (e.g., Meta or LinkedIn), and organic or event-driven inquiries. Each source is captured differently, but all must ultimately be unified within your CRM.

- Every lead should have a clear, consistent source (paid, organic, event, etc.).
- All lead sources (website forms, in-platform leads, events) should feed into a single system.
- Both your internal team and your agency should be able to access and report on consistent, shared performance data.
- You should be able to pull a report showing leads by source and campaign.

If this foundation isn't in place, everything that follows, optimization, budgeting, and forecasting, becomes guesswork.

# Best Practice #2: Follow-Up Must Be Structured, Not One-Off

Generating leads is only the first step. What happens next determines whether those leads ever turn into enrollments.

A common challenge is inconsistent or minimal follow-up. In some cases, leads are contacted once, or not at all, and then written off as low quality.

Without a defined process, follow-up becomes inconsistent and dependent on individual effort.

In practice, leads may receive a single email with no additional outreach, or there may be no defined follow-up cadence or clear ownership. Outreach is often limited to a single channel, typically email, rather than a coordinated, multi-channel effort.

### What to Prioritize to Fix:

A defined follow-up sequence, rather than a single touch, is essential, along with multiple channels such as email, phone, and SMS. Organizations should establish clear ownership of lead follow-up and ensure consistency in execution across programs and campaigns.

A structured follow-up sequence doesn't have to be complex. It just needs to be consistent, multi-touch, and aligned to the level of intent shown by the lead, based on signals such as engagement type (e.g., form submission vs. ad click), source, and program interest.

<b>Day 0</b>	Lead submits form; confirmation email sent immediately
<b>Day 1-2</b>	Personal outreach (email or phone)
<b>Day 3-5</b>	Follow-up via alternate channel (e.g., SMS or second email)
<b>Week 2</b>	Program-specific content or invitation (webinar, info session)
<b>Week 3-4</b>	Final outreach attempt + nurture track if no response

Without structured follow-up, even high-quality leads will underperform, and marketing will be blamed for outcomes it doesn't fully control.

# Best Practice #3: Marketing and Admissions Alignment

In organizations where marketing and admissions are separate teams, alignment between the two is critical for understanding which enrollment marketing tactics work, enabling teams to improve performance over time. Without a clear feedback loop between the two, marketing has no visibility into outcomes.

You know marketing and admissions are aligned when admissions can provide clear answers to the following questions for the marketing team:

- How many total enrollments are we generating?
- How long does it typically take for a lead to convert to enrollment?
- How many times is a typical lead contacted before converting?
- Which communication methods are actually driving engagement (email, phone, SMS, events)?
- Which types of leads or programs are converting at the highest rate?

When these questions are answered, marketing can optimize campaigns at the right cadence, from day-to-day and week-to-week performance to longer-term program trends. Budget decisions become clearer, based on what consistently drives qualified applicants and program acceptances. Over time, marketing can identify which audiences and tactics produce applicants who are not only interested, but accepted.

This creates a continuous feedback loop between admissions and marketing. As admissions shares what drives qualified applicants and successful enrollments, marketing can refine its targeting, messaging, and channel strategy to generate more of the right leads over time.

## What to Prioritize to Fix:

To support this, organizations should prioritize regular reporting between marketing and admissions, shared definitions of success (lead vs. qualified lead vs. enrollment), and a clear feedback loop from enrollment outcomes back into marketing strategy.

# Best Practice #4: Website Conversion Readiness

Driving traffic is only valuable if that traffic has a clear, trackable path to action. In higher education enrollment, it's surprisingly common to send paid traffic to pages that are difficult to navigate, lack clear calls to action, or don't capture user information at all.

When that happens, interest doesn't translate into inquiry, and marketing performance is difficult to measure.

In practice, this shows up as pages with no form or clear next step, or with multiple conflicting actions that make it unclear what to do. The experience may also vary across programs, creating inconsistency that makes it harder for prospective students to navigate and move forward.

## What to Prioritize:

Every campaign should lead to a clear, consistent path from interest to inquiry. That means a defined next step, a simple way to take it, and a system that captures and tracks the interaction.

At a minimum, this includes clear calls to action on every campaign landing page, simple, trackable forms tied to your CRM, and a consistent user journey across programs and campaigns.

If you're paying for traffic, there should always be a clear and measurable action associated with that spend. A clear example is when a prospective student clicks on a program ad and is taken to a page that:

- Clearly explains the program and who it's for
- Presents a single primary call to action (e.g., "Request Information" or "Start Application")
- Captures basic information through a short, trackable form
- Provides a clear next step after submission (confirmation, follow-up, or additional content)

Each step is easy to understand and complete, and connected to a system that allows the institution to track what happens next.

# Best Practice #5: Conduct a User Experience Audit

Even when a website includes clear calls to action, it may still create friction in the enrollment journey. Without regular evaluations or audits, it's difficult to identify where prospective students are getting confused, dropping off, or failing to take action.

In higher education enrollment marketing, this challenge is often compounded by the complexity of program pages, inconsistent structures, and multiple paths to inquiry or application.

A user experience audit helps uncover these issues and ensures that your marketing efforts lead to consistent, measurable outcomes.

In practice, these issues often show up in subtle but impactful ways. Prospective students may land on pages but fail to take action, not because they lack interest, but because the next step isn't clear. Program pages may vary in structure, requirements, or calls to action, creating an inconsistent experience that makes navigation more difficult. Key actions such as requesting information, starting an application, or scheduling a visit may be hard to find or buried within the page. In many cases, users drop off at certain points in the journey, but without clear visibility into why.

## What to Prioritize:

- Review key landing pages and application paths from a user's perspective
- Identify friction points in the journey from the first visit to the inquiry
- Ensure consistency across programs and entry points
- Align page experience with campaign goals and user intent

Even small improvements in user experience can have a meaningful impact on conversion rates and overall enrollment performance.

# Best Practice #6: Application Path Visibility

Higher education enrollment marketing is complex. Different programs often have different application processes, platforms, and requirements.

That complexity isn't going away, which means teams need to adapt to it.

In practice, this manifests as fragmented application paths. Some programs use internal applications, while others rely on third-party systems. There may be different processes for undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs, each with its own requirements and steps. In many cases, once a prospective student leaves the institution's website to begin an application, visibility into what happens next becomes limited or disappears entirely.

## What to Prioritize:

- Clear documentation of all application paths by program
- Understanding which parts of the journey can be tracked and which cannot
- Alignment with your agency on how success will be measured for each path

You don't need perfect tracking, but you do need clarity on where visibility starts and stops. This may include mapping each program's application path step by step, identifying where users leave your site, and documenting which platforms or systems limit visibility so expectations can be set accordingly.

# Best Practice #7: Privacy and Platform Constraints

Data usage rules, whether institutional, legal, or platform-driven, directly affect what marketing tactics are possible. When those constraints aren't defined early, campaigns can be disrupted mid-flight.

In practice, these constraints often surface in ways that limit execution. Institutions may restrict how lead data can be shared with partners or platforms, preventing certain campaign types from running as planned. Some targeting methods, such as lookalike audiences, may not be permitted, reducing the ability to scale efficiently. In other cases, internal policy decisions made during a campaign can force sudden changes, requiring teams to adjust strategy midstream.

## What to Prioritize:

- Clear internal guidelines on how prospect data can be used
- Alignment with your agency before campaigns launch
- Understanding how restrictions may impact targeting and performance

This may include confirming what data can be shared, which platforms can be used, and how success will be measured within those constraints.

Defining these constraints upfront allows for better planning and fewer surprises.

# Getting Started

Enrollment marketing doesn't break down because of any single tactic. It breaks down when the system connecting those tactics isn't in place.

Across these seven best practices, the pattern is consistent: when leads can be tracked, follow-up is structured, and outcomes are shared between marketing and admissions, performance becomes visible. Once performance is visible, it can be improved.

That requires more than campaigns. It requires systems that connect lead generation, follow-up, and enrollment outcomes in a way that is consistent and measurable over time.

For most institutions, this means ensuring a few core components are working together:

- A CRM that captures and organizes leads from all sources
- Marketing automation that supports structured follow-up
- Reporting that connects marketing activity to enrollment outcomes.
- Alignment between the teams responsible for generating demand and those responsible for converting it.

The goal isn't perfect tracking or complete visibility at every step; it's clarity. When teams understand where visibility starts and stops, and have systems in place to capture what matters, they can make better decisions, allocate budget more effectively, and continuously improve results.

That is what turns enrollment marketing from a set of activities into a system that drives growth.