The 2019 Digital Insights for Graduate
Enrollment Report, developed in partnership
by Carnegie Dartlet and NAGAP

2019

DIGITAL
INSIGHTS FOR
GRADUATE
ENROLLMENT
REPORT

NAGAP
The Leader in Graduate Enrollment Management

CARNEGIE
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Executive Summary

EXPECTATIONS HAVE CHANGED

In last year's first annual Digital Insights Report, we described a world where we don't just go online—we live online. Where we work and communicate and socialize and research from our computer monitor, tablet, or mobile phone. This reality is particularly important when we think about prospective graduate student audiences and how we can reach and engage them, as well as get them to take action, in a digital world.

As we look at our digital lives today, and with our prospective graduate audiences in mind, perhaps the most significant factor to consider is that expectations have changed dramatically across all facets of online experience, engagement, and preference.

As Carnegie Dartlet and NAGAP sought to explore and answer some of the most significant factors in digital marketing for graduate enrollment, we put priority on understanding how so many of these expectations continue to change and evolve and how we as graduate admission and marketing professionals need to be responding. For this second edition of our Digital Insights Report, you'll see some common threads that follow the prospective student throughout their online journey toward enrollment and what that all means we need to consider at each stage.

Like last year, the contents of this report are built from three critical sets of data:
1. NAGAP results from a survey of over 175 graduate enrollment professionals that includes data on how graduate programs are engaged in digital media and their digital budget, strategies, metrics, resources, constraints, and questions
2. Information drawn from some of the most significant online platforms and resources like Google and LinkedIn, focused on graduate and adult audience online behaviors and interests as they relate to researching and pursuing graduate school opportunities
3. Carnegie Dartlet data from graduate digital marketing campaigns at colleges and universities, identifying benchmarks, trends, and behaviors associated with digital strategies such as Pay Per Click, social media, mobile activity, Display advertising, and Retargeting

Drawing from the merging of these three data sets, this report includes the current landscape of what's being done in digital marketing for graduate school programs as well as where and how potential graduate students are spending their time online; key insights into the most important strategies and foci for digital marketing; and our best recommendations for how to engage those strategies to improve enrollment for your graduate program.

News flash: Graduate marketing is not the same as undergraduate

We still seem to be living in a world where many schools' strategies and budgets for graduate recruitment marketing are tied to or piggy-back off what's being done for undergraduate. While many times there are valid reasons for this to need to happen, the result is often a bit of a square peg and round hole scenario. Particularly when it comes to the strategies and capabilities that exist for reaching the unique and diverse populations that represent prospective graduate student audiences, opportunity can often be lost if it's not approached in a way that is very specific to those needs and opportunities.

The realities of resources and budgets

The NAGAP survey showed that the #1 barrier to implementing digital strategies is budget; in fact, there was a 7% increase in respondents pointing to budget as their primary barrier. With the vast majority also looking for outside help to fulfill their digital marketing needs, making the right decisions for allocations and making the right cases for additional budgets when appropriate is that much more important. With these two realities in play, schools need to become more informed and savvy with their digital strategies as well as smarter and more efficient with how and where they invest their marketing dollars.

What value are you providing?

This year, when we asked the question about what online behaviors you're most interested in learning about, we added a new response option that focused on the type of content prospective graduate students engage with. This choice stood out significantly above the other survey answers as the top choice at 73.3%. In general, the significance of content within marketing continues to increase, and a major reason for that is that consumers have higher and higher expectations around the value of information marketers are providing. We can no longer simply scream "Look at me, I'm here!" We need to offer valuable information and answers to things as an intrinsic part of the marketing we're putting out there.

Know thyself and know your audience

We can't be all things to all people. Yet when it comes to marketing for graduate programs, in an effort to reach as many prospective students as possible, that is often overlooked. By understanding who you are as an institution and the authentic personality you have, you can create much stronger connections with the students you need. Understanding who those right-fit students are for the programs you offer, where they spend their time, and what will resonate with them will focus any strategies you apply much more effectively.

Time to catch up

Many institutions think who they need to keep up with is their competition. While that is important, the ones we all need to make sure we're keeping up with are our audiences. It's our audiences who are dictating where we need to be focusing our attention based on where they are spending their time and how. From emerging and developing social media platforms to new worlds of digital consumption like OTT, we can't afford to be left behind.

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

A NAGAP SURVEY OF GRADUATE ENROLLMENT PROFESSIONALS ON THEIR DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES, CONCERNS, AND QUESTIONS

In preparation for this graduate admission digital report, NAGAP surveyed their membership of graduate enrollment professionals about their digital marketing practices, budgets, successes, and questions. With 176 responses, the survey included professionals from both private and public institutions of all sizes for graduate schools that are both stand-alone programs or attached to undergraduate universities. Those surveyed included a few individuals with less than a year in the position as well as plenty of field-tested veterans.

WHO RESPONDED?

SAMPLE SIZE: 176

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	%	OFFICE TYPE	%
<1	7.4%	Centralized	40.3%
1–5 years	34.1%	Program Specific	48.3%
5–10 years	25.6%	Hybrid	9.7%
10+ years	33.0%		

WORK AREA (ALL THAT APPLY)	%	GRADUATE ENROLLMENT	%
Recruitment & Marketing	89.8%	< 1,000	24.4%
Admission Operations	80.7%	1,000–3,000	36.9%
Financial Aid / Grants / Scholarships	25.0%	3,000–6,000	23.9%
Student Support & Services	38.1%	6,000+	14.8%
Advising & Retention	26.1%		
Graduation & Alumni Relations	25.6%		
Other	5.7%		

INSTITUTION TYPE	%	INFLUENCE ON MARKETING STRATEGIES	%
Public	53.4%	Primary Influence	36.4%
Private	47.2%	Some Influence	56.8%
International	1.7%	No Influence	6.8%
Graduate Only	11.4%		

After identifying the demographic makeup of participants, the survey had several key components. Like last year, we wanted to identify who makes digital marketing happen, how it's funded, what you're doing, what's working, what barriers you face, and what you most want to learn.

This first segment outlines those results. It is in essence a summary of what you as graduate program enrollment professionals are telling us, followed by several sections of recommendations based on our databases, strategy testing, and field expertise, paying particular attention to those strategies and questions raised by the NAGAP survey.

SURVEY RESULTS

WHO MAKES YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING HAPPEN?

This year, we saw a slight increase in the percentages reported for digital marketing being handled in-house versus last year. In fact, 25.6% reported that all of their digital marketing is done in-house (versus 24.4% last year); 52.3% reported some blend of in-house and outsourced, and just 9.1% reported completely outsourcing their digital marketing entirely.

Also worth noting is this year, 13% of survey respondents reported not knowing what the breakdown was at their institution versus 20% saying so last year. This points to a trend of graduate admission professionals being more informed and involved with the digital marketing that happens for grad on their campus.
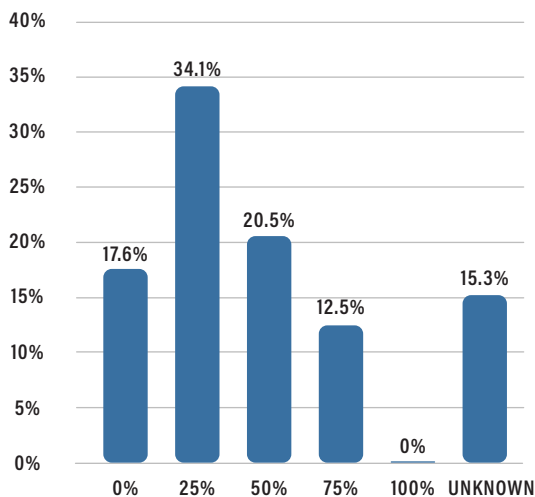
HOW MUCH OF YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING IS HANDLED IN-HOUSE?
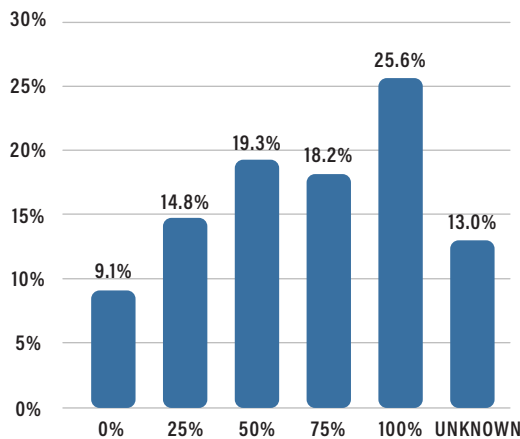
More respondents had insight into how much of their digital was handled in-house this year versus last year (13% unknown versus 20% last year).

There was a slight increase in digital marketing being handled in-house this year versus last year.

## WHAT IS THE BUDGET FOR GRADUATE DIGITAL MARKETING AT YOUR INSTITUTION?

Once again, the majority of those surveyed reported spending less than half of their marketing budget on digital communications. And most schools are reporting allocating about a quarter of their budget to these strategies. Similar to what we saw with the in-house versus outsourced question, there was a notable decrease in "Unknown" responses, continuing the theme of people being more tuned in to what is happening related to digital marketing for grad on their campuses.

WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH WITH YOUR DIGITAL MEDIA?

In last year's report, we stressed the need to start with your goals first when thinking about digital marketing and that the tactics and specific strategies should come much later. In our survey this year, we asked respondents to select all of the goals that applied to what they're looking to accomplish. The stack-ranking of goals fell in the same order as last year in terms of goals selected, and we saw roughly a 10% decrease in respondents simply selecting all of the above.
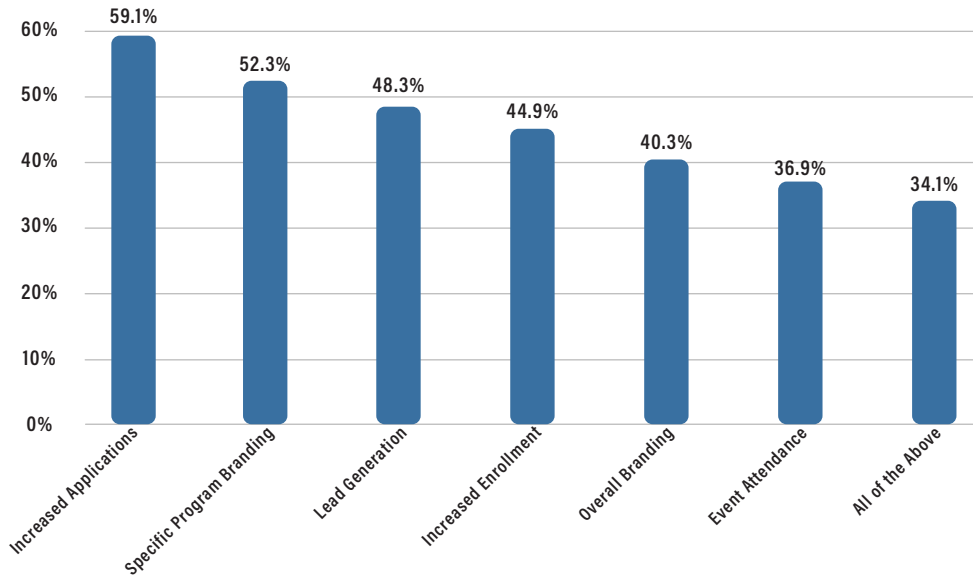

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS?
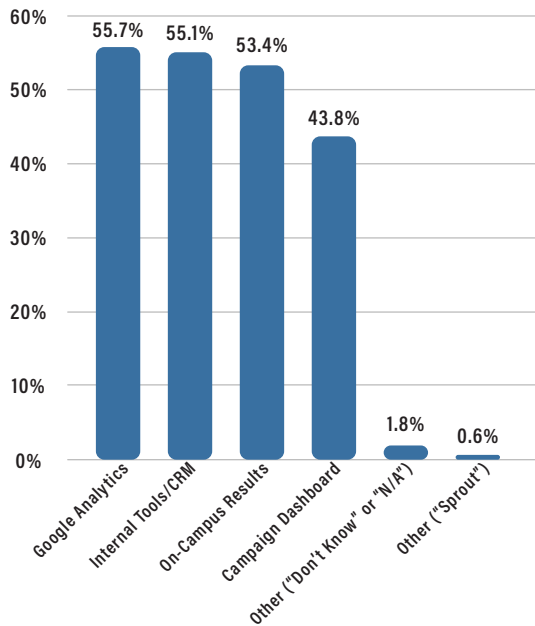
Given the goals listed, we wanted to know how programs are measuring their success in reaching these goals. While Google Analytics and on-campus results remained roughly similar to last year's dominating answers, the most notable jump in response this year was internal tools/CRM, which increased 12% and put it higher than on-campus results this year. Over the last year, many schools have implemented and adopted more sophisticated CRM solutions to help them define and measure success, and it's clearly playing a role in their digital marketing efforts.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING AND IS IT SUCCESSFUL?

Given the stated goals and measurements of success, what digital strategies and platforms are being utilized by graduate programs, and are those strategies successful for meeting program goals? Paid social tops the list by a wide margin, while Search Engine Optimization (SEO) comes in as a distant second. Worth noting is the variance in being used versus most impactful with SEO and then Pay Per Click. Both fall within the world of Search Engine Marketing, but the report of impact versus usage on Pay Per Click is significantly lower.
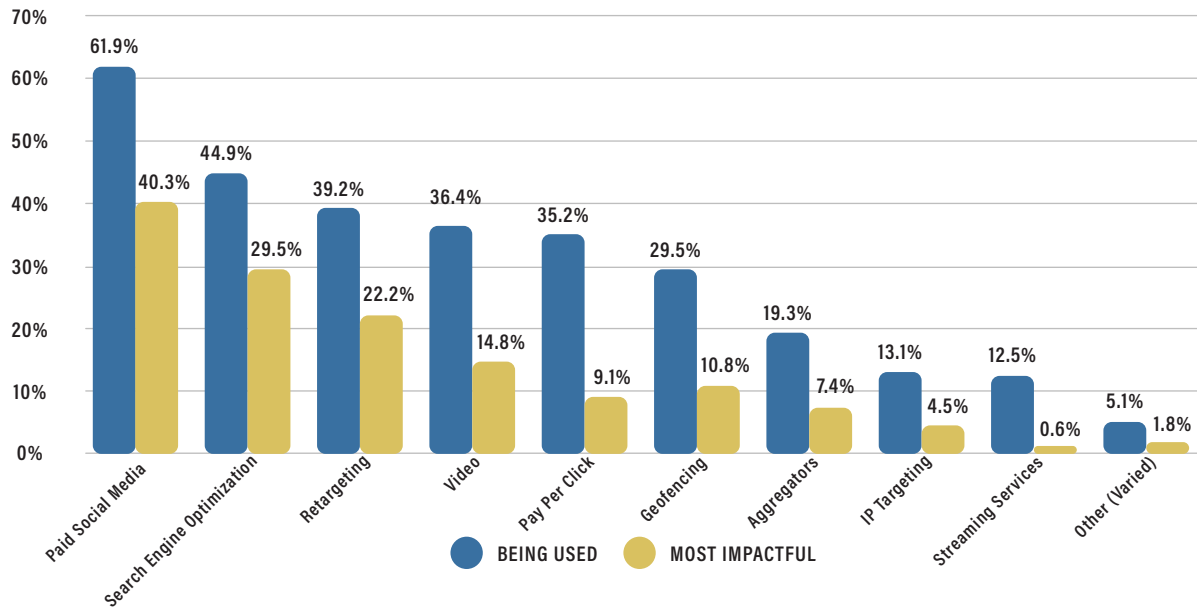

WHAT'S BEING USED MOST WHEN CROSS-REFERENCED WITH IN-HOUSE VERSUS OUTSOURCED?

As schools navigate the seas of managing digital marketing on their own versus looking to partners to help, we compared the strategies being used versus the percentages of digital being managed in-house versus outsourced. The tactics that skew higher as the percentage of "in-house" rise are paid social, video, and directories, whereas the tactics that skew higher as percentage of "in-house" decrease are PPC, geofencing, IP Targeting, Retargeting and Display, and streaming.

IN-HOUSE	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
Paid Social Media Advertising	50%	80.8%	79.4%	81.3%	53.3%
Video	18.8%	42.3%	41.2%	65.6%	31.1%
SEO	18.8%	57.7%	70.6%	59.4%	35.6%
PPC	31.3%	57.7%	35.3%	43.8%	33.3%
Geofencing	18.8%	50%	44.1%	34.4%	20%
IP Targeting	6.3%	26.9%	23.5%	18.8%	0%
Retargeting & Online Display	43.8%	69.2%	67.6%	37.5%	15.6%
Directories	6.3%	26.9%	14.7%	34.4%	20%
Streaming	12.5%	23.1%	14.7%	15.6%	6.7%

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

With the discrepancy between the strategies programs report they are using and those reported as successful, we also asked what barriers respondents encountered when implementing digital strategies. By far, budget is the most common answer, with know-how and internal resources coming in second and third, respectively. These barriers, combined with the goals described earlier and with the variance in strategy use versus impact reported, is the continued purpose for this report and the focus it has on ensuring you're investing your valuable dollars and internal resources most effectively to achieve your particular departmental objectives.
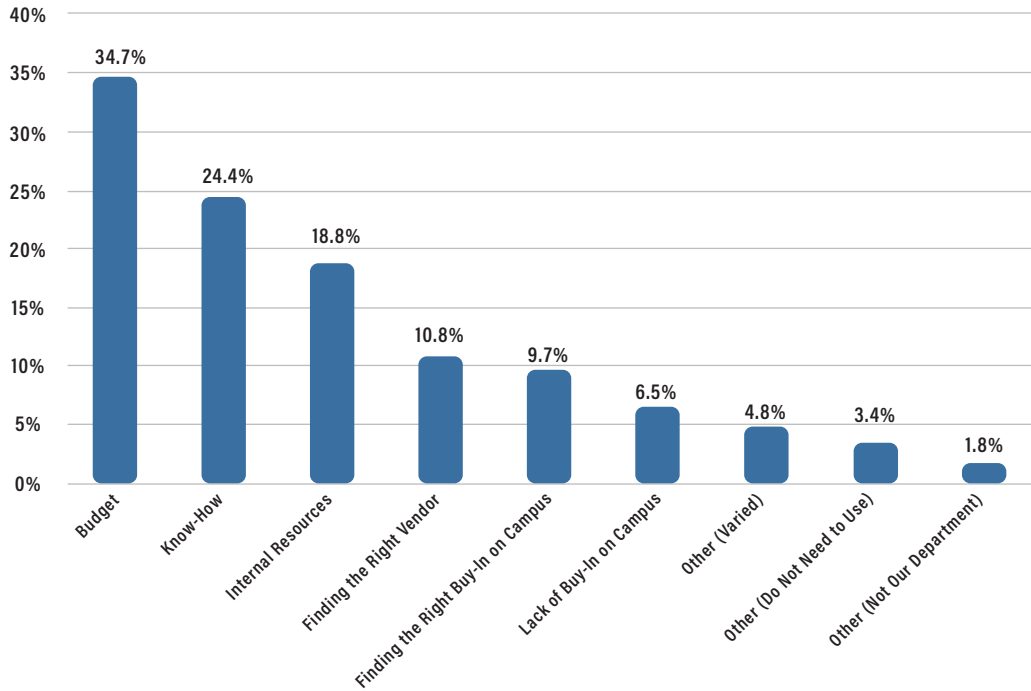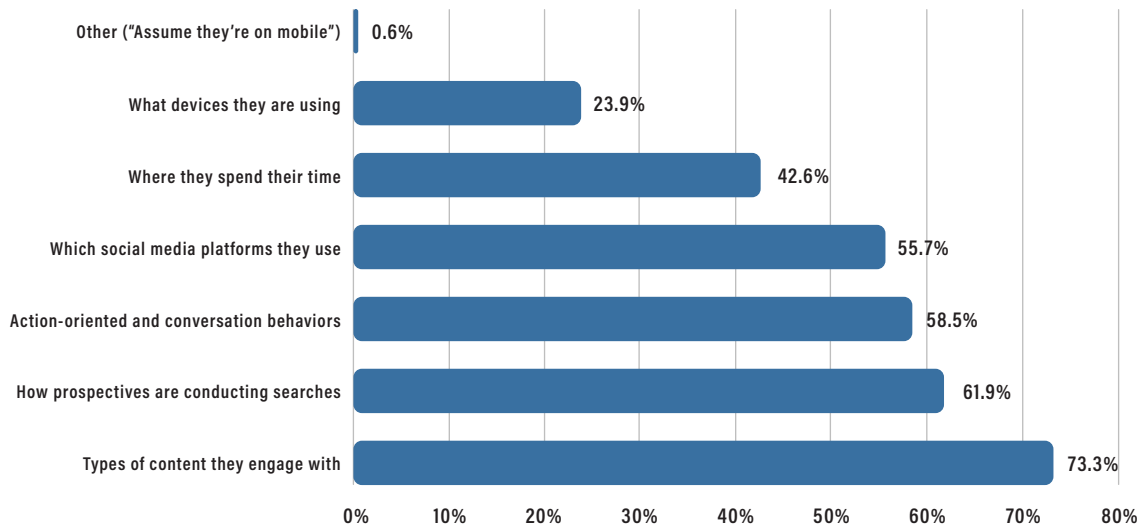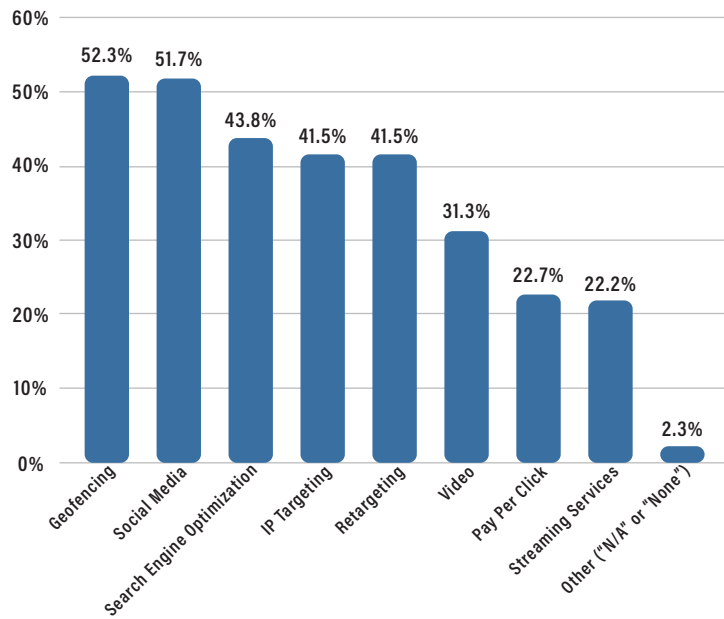

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO LEARN?

We ended our survey asking what enrollment specialists think they need to know. Digital marketing is a constantly evolving world, and the continuous need to keep up requires constant focus. At Carnegie Dartlet, we work day in and day out to ensure we're staying on top of the needs and goals of graduate enrollment marketing and recruitment needs and in front of the strategies, best practices, and innovations available for digital marketing success.

The most heavily requested information surrounding online behaviors areas were:

+ The type of content they are engaging with
+ How prospective graduate students are conducting searches
+ How to drive action-orientated and conversion behaviors
+ What social media platforms they are using

Category	Percentage
Other ("Assume they're on mobile")	0.6%
What devices they are using	23.9%
Where they spend their time	42.6%
Which social media platforms they use	55.7%
Action-oriented and conversation behaviors	58.5%
How prospectives are conducting searches	61.9%
Types of content they engage with	73.3%

WHAT TYPES OF DIGITAL STRATEGIES ARE YOU MOST INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT?

Strategy	Percentage
Geofencing	52.3%
Social Media	51.7%
Search Engine Optimization	43.8%
IP Targeting	41.5%
Retargeting	41.5%
Video	31.3%
Pay Per Click	22.7%
Streaming Services	22.2%
Other ("N/A" or "None")	2.3%

In terms of specific digital marketing tools and strategies, "geofencing" (Mobile Location Targeting) experienced a significant jump this year and overtook paid social media as the top tactic/strategy that respondents wanted to learn more about.

The following sections combine data and insights direct from Google and various social media/networking platforms, along with Carnegie Dartlet data on successful campaign execution and case study examples, to bring you graduate recruitment strategies for each of these topic areas.

WORK WITH WHAT WORKS FOR GRAD

Digital marketing for graduate and undergraduate are two completely different worlds. While they may look the same as platforms and strategies are considered (Pay Per Click, social media, etc.), the nuances behind them and what specifically is possible and needed for graduate is vastly different. Audience development, targeting options, messaging and calls to action, tactical approaches—these all have very specific opportunities for graduate across every digital platform.

What's more, the complexity of audiences and programs, combined with the budget realities for graduate recruitment and marketing, creates the need to identify opportunities for the most efficient approaches in any place possible.

WHAT ARE SOME OPTIONS?
1. LOOK-ALIKE AUDIENCES

Identifying audiences for graduate recruitment can often feel like a "Where's Waldo?" puzzle. With availability of prospect lists being much different than undergrad, it's typically a challenge to find the audiences needed for the various programs and recruitment goals so many grad admission professionals need. Look-alike audiences offer an effective way to build new audiences across various digital platforms based off factors and characteristics already known to be successful and relevant.

Some of the audience possibilities to develop look-alike audiences from include:
+ Website visitors
+ Inquiries/applicants/accepted students
+ Current students/alumni
+ Engagement activities from existing campaigns

Platforms that you can implement "look-alike audiences" on include:

 FACEBOOK

 INSTAGRAM

 TWITTER

 LINKEDIN

 YOUTUBE

 GOOGLE

 SNAPCHAT

2. AUDIENCE TARGETING AND RELEVANCE

Sometimes the simplest way to accomplish better targeting and more cost-effective approaches can come from simply aligning the right tactic with the right audience and message. Various digital platforms offer all sorts of targeting capabilities that enable you to improve your chances of reaching the right audience at the right point in their process.

Perhaps the best example of this is with Retargeting. Keeping in mind that Retargeting is focused on those who have been on your website and demonstrated interest by doing so, it's imperative that your messaging and calls to action are reflective of that. Make sure the "ask" in these ads are to push toward a next step based on the behaviors they've expressed: visit campus, apply now, etc.

This is also an opportunity to think about personality—not just of your audience, but also of your institution and the platform on which you're advertising. People visit certain channels for particular reasons. How those align with your message makes a difference. Personality and purpose need to be considered across social media, in Search Engine Marketing efforts, and throughout your website. By authentically representing who you are and making that relevant for who your audiences are and where they're spending their time, you can make much more powerful connections with prospective students that drive response and engagement.

For example, after implementing a personality-based approach in one institution's graduate marketing targeting and messaging, they experienced some of the following impacts:

DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS (OVERALL):

CLICK THROUGH RATE ACROSS CAMPAIGNS UP	**45%**
DIRECT CONVERSIONS UP	**62%**
VIEW THROUGH CONVERSIONS UP	**46%**

DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS (GRAD SPECIFIC):

LEAD GENERATION COMPLETIONS UP	**42%**
PPC CONVERSIONS UP **177%** AND CTR UP	**15%**
DISPLAY CAMPAIGNS CTR UP	**8%**

WEBSITE:

|	
INDIVIDUAL SITE USERS UP **25%** AND SESSIONS ARE UP	**32%**
OVERALL PAGE VIEWS INCREASED	**39%**
NEW USERS ARE UP	**26%**
MORE SESSIONS THAN UNIQUE USERS (PEOPLE MAKING MULTIPLE TRIPS TO SITE)	**20K**
BOUNCE RATE DECREASED	**3%**

3. BUCKETING

Grad schools have programs, and often lots of them. When trying to manage budgets, running campaigns that are specific to every individual program and audience can lead to ballooning budget scenarios that can be unrealistic for many schools. At the same time, it is often the case where the audiences for certain programs would be relevant for other programs, particularly if they're within the same school. In cases like these, the ability to bucket or group campaigns can be a way to address the campaign needs for the school and present options and possibilities to audiences where they can make some choices on their own.

Example: Bucketing programs like this allowed one school to push over 100 programs through roughly 10 bundles. This led to more effective outreach targeting where audiences are a large enough size to analyze and optimize (compared to small, separate, niche program audiences).

Also consider:

Carousel Ads: Many platforms offer "carousel" ads, which enable you to present multiple program options within one ad that audiences can essentially scroll through. Carousel ads also have proven to work well with lead generation advertising for grad programs.
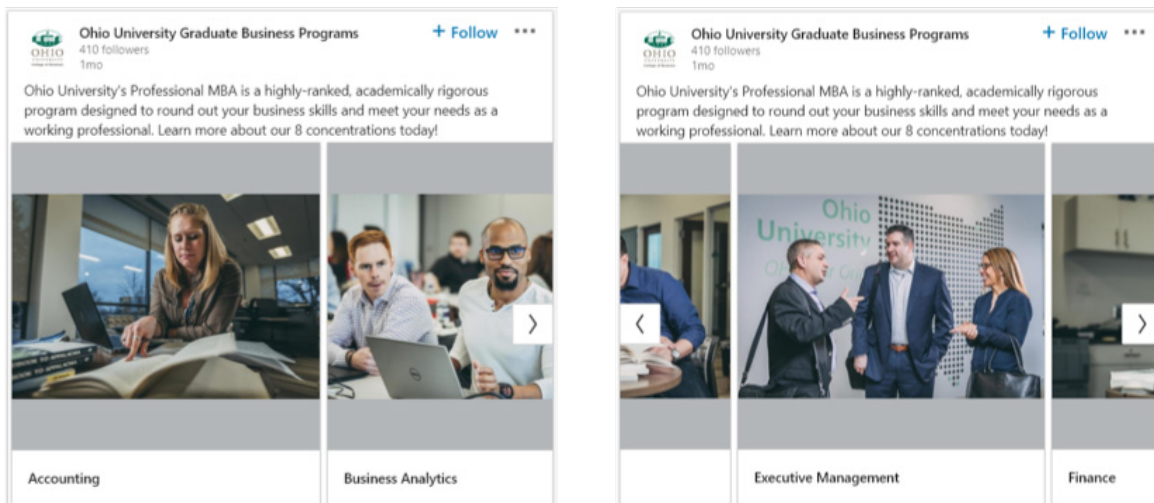
Site Links: Within paid search results (PPC), you can leverage site link options to offer links to different program options to those who are searching for terms that are relevant for all.

4. RECONSIDER TRADITIONAL

The world of TV and radio has changed. Streaming media, YouTube, and OTT represent the new way audiences are consuming what was once considered "traditional" media. They also represent enormous opportunities for graduate recruitment marketing. For those not as familiar, OTT (or Over-The-Top) refers to streaming media/TV offered directly to viewers via the Internet ("cutting the cord" from cable) and is typically delivered via streaming devices like Roku, Google Chromecast, Apple TV, or Amazon Fire TV.

    a. **Targeting**: The ability to target audiences by all sorts of parameters with streaming and OTT means that your advertising can have a much higher likelihood of reaching the most important and relevant audience for your goals. Rather than a market-based, broad-brush option that traditional media requires, these platforms enable you to get down to demographics, behaviors, and interests in all sorts of ways.

    b. **Budget**: Based on audience options and more precise targeting, campaigns can be run across streaming platforms and OTT in ways that don't require the budgets often needed for traditional TV and radio. The result: you can be much more efficient with your advertising dollars than what was available across these types of channels in the past.

THE UNREACHABLES:

47% of A22–54 don't watch video on traditional TV platforms

66%	**-30%**	**1/3**
of A22–54 TV and video consumption isn't captured by traditional measurement platforms	drop in time millennials spend with traditional TV over the past 6 years	young households do not have a cable or satellite subscription

MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE

As we saw earlier, NAGAP survey data reported that Mobile Location Targeting ("geofencing") was at the top of the list when it comes to strategies graduate enrollment professionals want to learn more about. As digital marketers, we're often talking about the need to be thinking about goals and audiences first, then thinking platform or tactic. Today, this is particularly important when thinking about "geofencing."

Why? Because there are now many different ways that you can reach and engage audiences beyond simple "geofencing," and each has their own pros and cons.

Mobile Location Targeting allows you to build an audience of mobile devices at specific locations, such as feeder schools, businesses, or hospitals, then deliver Display advertisements to those devices both while they are there and after they've left, wherever they go. With prospective graduate students spending a huge amount of time consuming content—and conducting graduate school research—on their mobile phones, geofencing can ensure a strong presence to reach them in those crucial moments.

Cautions:

1. Consider the location where you plan to advertise. Geofencing does what it can to capture all of the devices that enter the "fence," so if there are significant populations that aren't the right fit for what you're advertising, you'll potentially waste a lot of impressions and money on the wrong audiences.

2. Consider the duration. If you're targeting a single-day event or a conference or fair (as an example), you'll experience challenges building a scalable target audience to gain traction for advertising to. EXTRA CAUTION: make sure your marketing partner isn't loading in look-alike audiences into a geofencing campaign just to get to a manageable audience size. Look-alikes with geofencing can be completely irrelevant for higher education in many cases.

3. Think branding when exploring geofencing. Geofencing is much less of a conversion-oriented tactic. So if that's your primary goal for a campaign, geofencing might not be the best answer.

CONSIDER SOCIAL & PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS WHEN THINKING ABOUT LOCATION

While geofencing is typically the most talked-about option when thinking about how to reach audiences based on their location, it's important to consider some of the other channels that offer capabilities to do their version of the same.

With so much of Snapchat's purpose being focused on where people are, it should be no surprise that they offer their own version of geofencing audiences and delivering ads. If the audience for your graduate programs is one that is likely spending their time on Snapchat, this is a platform to consider for location-based advertising. You can reach prospective students who are frequently visiting colleges or businesses within your recruitment geographies and serve them relevant content where they're most active.

LinkedIn offers options to reach their users based on their location, where they work, or where they attend school. Location options include where they are living or visiting, the location specified in their profile (for permanent/long-term locations), and their IP address location (for short-term visits). You can also target by company name that a member lists as his or her employer or the school, college, university, or other learning institution where a member completed a course.

Facebook and Instagram offer a variety of location-based targeting options. Options include:

a. Everyone in this location: People whose home or most recent location is within the selected area.

b. People who live in this location: This includes people whose home is within the selected area.

c. People recently in this location: People who have recently visited the selected area.

d. People traveling in this location: People traveling in the selected area (as determined by the device and connection information) who are more than 125 miles from their home location within their home country.

SOCIALLY SOCIAL

It's becoming cliché to say that the social media landscape is always changing and evolving, and you need to keep up. But it should be known that the social media landscape is always changing and evolving, and you need to keep up.

Consider this: according to recent data from the Pew Research Center, Snapchat has risen to be one of the top three platforms used by 18–24-year-olds. For many graduate schools, that's their primary target audience, which means a smart strategy that considers Snapchat is needed now when it wasn't as much the case last year.

In our own digital campaign data for graduate marketing at Carnegie Dartlet, we're seeing some of the same trends emerging. While Snapchat was not identified last year as being one of the platforms to make sure you were watching for grad, this year it is. As will always be the case, this isn't true for all grad program marketing or all grad audiences. But it is important to consider for certain goals.

THE TACTICS

Within most of the primary social/professional networking platforms we see as most effective for graduate marketing, you do have some common tactics and campaign options to consider. Each has their own purpose and advantages:

1. Sponsored Ads: Cost-effective outreach and natural appearance of social ads encourage high engagement rates. Great for brand awareness and a strong complement to other social strategies in a comprehensive plan.
2. List Targeting: Match email address list to social accounts for one-to-one targeting and full-funnel messaging.
3. Lead Generation: Segment individuals and target them with an ad containing a built-in, pre-populated lead generation form without leaving the site or app.
4. Retargeting: Using customized audiences and behaviors exhibited on your website, stay in front of prospective students when they navigate away from your site and onto their favorite social media platforms.

SOUND ADVICE FOR SOCIAL

1. Don't ask too much of them. Audiences are on a platform for a reason, and often times it's not to click through your ad and navigate around pages and pages of your website. Keep this in mind and lean on Lead Generation ads where it makes sense. You'll experience the conversions you need while enabling them to spend their time doing what they were on that social media channel to do in the first place.
2. Help them picture themselves at your school. More and more, social provides an opportunity to visually represent the "experience" of what it will be like to be a student at your institution. Don't overlook this opportunity to stand out and establish that feeling that is so important in their decision-making process.
3. Cater to the platform and the audience. As audiences scroll through their social feed on different channels, it's important that their experiences with brands feel appropriate for the platform they're on. Some call for a more organic look and feel. Others practically require you to make sure it's a current student coming through in your advertising. And some need to match the professional dynamic of the time they're spending in their feed.

LINKEDIN STATS TO KNOW

Perhaps the platform where the most assumptions are made about audiences and possibilities is LinkedIn. With its origins having been more in the recruitment and job hunting space, LinkedIn still carries certain perceptions that don't do it justice when it comes to opportunities for grad recruitment marketing…in virtually all professions and industries.

Also important to consider is LinkedIn's evolution from a job search site to a platform where audiences visit routinely for content consumption and information sharing.

With over 242 billion pieces of content, it is a destination site where visitors spend significant time engaging with companies, information, schools, and advertisers.

THE ECONOMIC GRAPH

575M	**26M**	**15M**	**50K**	**60K**	**242B**
MEMBERS	COMPANIES	JOBS	SKILLS	SCHOOLS	KNOWLEDGE

As part of Carnegie Dartlet's partnership with LinkedIn, we conducted some research on LinkedIn user behaviors that were very telling and informative. A few key takeaways from prospective students and graduate on the LinkedIn platform:

+ 3 out of 4 grad students and recent grads are interested in continuing their education.
+ Prospects are twice as likely to use professional networks over social networks to research programs.
+ 60% of grad candidates say they are very open to communicating with admission via professional networks.
+ 67% of grad prospects said they were still very early in the decision process.

When thinking about US LinkedIn users and the different industries represented on the platform, some striking examples of industry depth where institutions might not be considering LinkedIn for are nursing and teaching.

2 Million RNs
70% of all registered nurses

3 Million Teachers
96% of all teachers

NURSING AND TEACHING DEGREES ARE GROWING **1.9x** AND **1.8x** FASTER THAN BUSINESS DEGREES.

CONTENT: WHAT WAS KING IS NOW EVERYTHING

As we saw from the NAGAP member survey results, the online behavior that people were most interested in was the type of content prospective graduate students engage with. The significance of content, and all that's connected to it with the digital marketing universe, requires us all to be thinking about how we're addressing it in a variety of ways. The most important way to think about content is around adding value. Prospects have high expectations that websites, search results, blogs, posts, etc. be the answer to the questions they have and provide genuine value in their research. Obvious product pushes or selfish motivations are seen right through. Their trust and your credibility are earned through offering valuable content, answers, and insights that will help them.

Search: when prospective students have questions about graduate school possibilities, they most often turn to Google for the answers. This means you need to be accomplishing a number of things as a result:

1. Be there: First and foremost, are you even appearing in the search results for the audiences you're wanting to reach?
2. Provide answers: They're asking questions. It's imperative to do more than just show up in their search results–make sure you're providing relevant and informative answers to what they're asking.
3. Deliver the right experience: Expectations are high. If you've succeeded in getting someone to click through your "answer," ensuring the user experience throughout your website is a positive one is equally as important as showing up in results and answering their questions.

A first step in success within search is to do all you can to anticipate the questions someone is going to ask. Keywords are the most important piece to telling us what questions your students are asking and what information they want to know. But how do you know what keywords prospects are using?

A few helpful resources to use:
+ Google Keyword Planner
+ AnswerThePublic.com
+ Trends.Google.com

Knowing these keywords means you can integrate those into your Search Engine Marketing strategies and website content.

+ Are the keywords you've incorporated into your Pay Per Click efforts reflective of those that people are actually using? While your program may be named one thing, is the market thinking of and searching for something else?

+ Weave those keywords into your existing content on your site, including paragraph headers. Google likes when there's consistency between your keyword strategy and search results and the content on your website. Are people using "flexible" MBA, "part-time" MBA? Consider these things as you review your existing content.

+ Create new content that includes these keywords. If your prospects are searching for things and your website doesn't have content that answers that, you won't be the answer. Think blogs and new pages that can offer value-added content reflecting of their interests and search behavior. If people are searching for "online learning," a blog about "6 Benefits of Online Learning That Will Make You Want to Earn Your Next Degree Online" could have an impact.

The **SERP (Search Engine Results Page)** is a landscape that has changed dramatically over the past couple of years. There are now numerous ways and opportunities to gain the presence you need in the search results of your prospects, each of which requiring different forms of Search Engine Optimization to be successful.

Adding a blog and other added-value content to your website can help your brand gain visibility in the modern dynamic search landscape.

+ Rich Snippets
+ Knowledge Cards
+ Related Searches
+ People Also Ask

Google My Business: Make sure you've claimed and optimize your Google My Business property and that it's distinctly reflective of your graduate school if possible.

Some of the main areas to check for optimizing GMB:
+ Add categories
+ Update photos
+ Set up tracking on the website click button
+ Ensure hours and phone number are correct
+ Link up with social accounts
+ Manage reviews

And make sure you're taking advantage of the (free) posts in your Google My Business property. These seven-day posts enable you to highlight important and/or time-specific events or deadlines to audiences that are searching on your brand or location.

Make It Personal: Expectations from prospective student audiences continue to increase for personalization and customization. Their experiences across the web and on the majority of other sites they visit are specific to them, their history, and their interests. Your site should respond in as much of the same way as possible.

+ Think Funnel: How is your website responding to visitors who are at different stages of the enrollment journey? As a first-time visitor who is trying to get some initial information, does your site provide the answers I need and in the right ways? As someone looking to connect with you, register for an event, or hopefully apply, is your website set up to steer me toward those opportunities and accomplish those action-oriented tasks? Take a step back yourself and approach your website as a visitor in each stage. By conducting some of this type of auditing, you're certain to identify areas to improve the user experience and the engagement of your site visitors.

+ Investigate Technologies: Opportunities exist today to plug in technology on your website to personalize the experience for each individual visitor. These are no longer big budget or enormous technical undertaking situations. And the difference it makes for the visitor, as well as for conversions and actions on your website, has significant. Imagine a visitor who has been to your website six times already, visited your MBA pages each time, and never been to an information session being served up content based on that digital footprint that steers them toward identifying themselves and registering for an event.

CONCLUSION

It's about the individual. Establishing connections at the personal level makes all the difference.

Yes, the focus of what's covered in this report is about marketing to prospective graduate students. But the common thread throughout the marketing process is that we're talking about human beings. The prospective students are all on their own individual journey, and it's imperative that we as admission or marketing professionals factor that into our strategy and approach.

+ **NAGAP Member Survey:** The survey of NAGAP members about the role of digital marketing at their institution and how they're focusing their efforts revealed a need to better understand the behaviors and interests of the prospective students they need to connect with.

+ **Doing All We Can for Grad:** With a major focus on constructing strategies that are best for grad marketing and not piggy-backing off undergrad, it was clear that being as efficient and targeted as possible, down to the individual person, is what's needed.

+ **It Doesn't Get Much More Personal Than Social:** Prospective graduate students are living much of their professional and personal lives on social media. Engaging and connecting with them in the right ways across each of the different social platforms is one of the purest ways to have an impact.

+ **Your Website and Content Builds the Bond:** Providing students with value-added content, a positive user experience, and answering the questions they need answers to helps build the bond that's needed for them to develop a genuine interest in what you have to offer. If you can speak to them as an individual and in a personal way, even through digital channels, you've broken through a barrier that many others are unable to.

Looking forward, we will continue to explore the evolving digital universe where our prospective graduate students are living and working. There are constant changes and innovations, the bulk of which are dictated entirely by what those prospective students are showing us through their behaviors and time spent across different channels and mediums. Students are the ones we need to keep up with. They're the ones that will lead the way for where we need to focus our efforts. And they're the ones who will let us know how we are doing in our pursuit to connect with them in the most effective ways possible.

It's this universe where we need to step back and think about the human beings who are our prospective graduate student audiences. By thinking about them throughout their entire journey as individuals, our tactics, strategies, and results will be more successful.

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