

FROM RESEARCH TO ENROLLMENT: UNDERSTANDING, ENGAGING, AND INFLUENCING YOUR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS ON LINKEDIN

Carnegie Dartlet and LinkedIn partner to deliver insights on how the platform influences the prospective student journey

The Carnegie Dartlet logo is centered within a dark blue circle. The word "CARNEGIE" is written in a red, sans-serif font, and "DARTLET" is written below it in a yellow, sans-serif font. A small trademark symbol (TM) is located to the right of "DARTLET".

CARNEGIE
DARTLET™

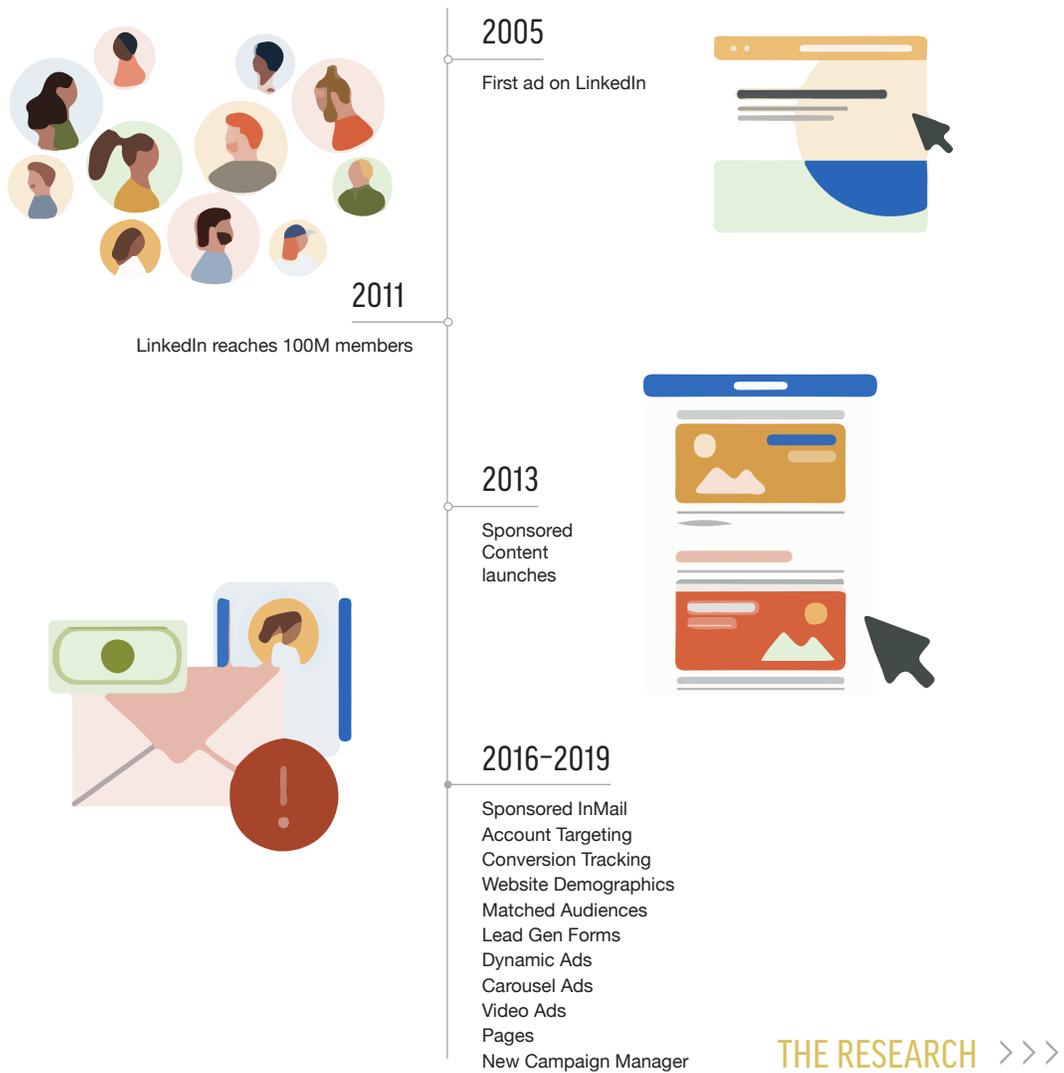
The LinkedIn logo is centered within a blue circle. It consists of the word "Linked" in a white, sans-serif font, followed by the word "in" in a white, sans-serif font inside a white square icon.

LinkedIn

Since its first days in the early 2000s, LinkedIn has evolved from a small job search platform to the world's largest professional network. Today, marketers are able to tap into a network of more than 645+ million users in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide to reach prospective students at all stages of the enrollment marketing funnel.

Advertising on this platform, especially for higher education marketers, has evolved throughout the years and is now considered a critical component of any integrated digital strategy for reaching adult learners, graduate students, and those interested in continuing or executive education programs. With more than 64 million students and recent graduates on LinkedIn, having a presence on the platform is essential for building brand awareness, driving leads, and converting prospects to enrollees.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ADVERTISING ON LINKEDIN



THE RESEARCH

How are prospective college students—at the graduate, adult, and continuing education levels—interacting with colleges and universities on LinkedIn?

This was the question that Carnegie Dartlet and LinkedIn set out to answer in our recent research endeavor. To find the answer, we sent out a comprehensive survey designed to identify the preferred methods prospects seek when being contacted by a particular college or university. To develop a deeper understanding on how prospects view LinkedIn specifically as part of their overall landscape of digital communications, we separated LinkedIn into its own category in the survey from other social platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. But at the end of the day, LinkedIn is still a social network—and an important factor to remember when crafting any organic or paid social media strategies.

We also wanted to know the impact digital platforms can have for marketers when it comes to nurturing prospective student leads. Our survey asked questions designed to uncover roadblocks or objections that held prospects back from enrollment. We also sought information on why prospects might choose one school over another, with an aim to identify opportunities for higher education marketers to use LinkedIn to tell their school's authentic story and help reach prospects much earlier in the decision-making process.

More than 950 LinkedIn members responded to our online survey, with 46% of respondents categorized as current graduate students and recent alumni (those who graduated with their master's within the last 12 months), 40% of respondents categorized as prospective graduate students, and 14% of respondents categorized as bachelor's degree completion prospects/current students.

“Now more than ever, it is critical that higher education institutions understand the best way to engage, nurture, and offer unique value to prospective students. In a rapidly evolving landscape, LinkedIn continues to think about the ways we can best offer the right contextual environment in which to reach the right students (those with the highest propensity to not just click an ad but to enroll and ultimately graduate). The institutions who best understand the prospective student journey and speak to audiences with a consumer-centric message, in the right medium and at the right time, are the ones most likely to see ROI across marketing and admissions. Working with wonderful partners like Carnegie Dartlet ensures that we can continue to deliver impactful marketing to best convert prospect interest to action and ultimately advance the interests of your institution.”

— Jessica Naeve, Senior Director, Education Vertical, LinkedIn Marketing Solutions

WHAT WE FOUND

This project uncovered valuable insight into prospects' decision journeys and the ways in which prospects use LinkedIn and other forms of social media to inform their decision-making process. From what stage of research these students were in to the marketing implications that exist when looking to communicate and engage with prospective students, the results of our study can inform marketing decisions for higher education programs across the board.

PROSPECTS WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU ON LINKEDIN

It should be no surprise that in 2019, prospects at all education levels are turning to digital platforms more than ever before in order to research and communicate with higher education institutions.



ONLY 10% OF PROSPECTS WANTED TO BE CONTACTED
VIA PHONE OR TEXT IN THE RESEARCH PHASE.

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS WERE NECK AND NECK
WITH EMAIL, PREFERRED ONLY 2% LESS THAN EMAIL.

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While we found that email and phone are still the top preferred mode of communication, LinkedIn is closing the gap, currently coming in at #3.

"Dedicated professional networking sites like LinkedIn are on par with emails in my eyes as the 'right' place for graduate conversations."

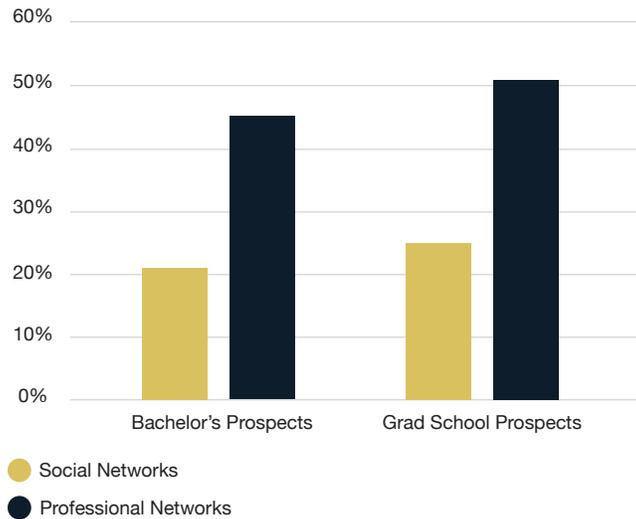
TAKEAWAY: One way to leverage this shift is to have your marketing and admission teams work together to use LinkedIn alongside email outreach to nurture leads from inquiry to enrollment.

At many institutions, marketing and admission handle communication outreach separately across digital channels at different touchpoints in the funnel. By collaborating more closely, marketing will be able to reach prospects who may not be in-market yet with content that could push them toward becoming an inquiry. With a collaborative approach, colleges and universities can speak to prospects at the very beginning of their research and put content in front of these users that addresses and anticipates their pain points, such as cost, flexibility, and career concerns. By interacting with these users early on social channels like LinkedIn with targeted content, marketing and admission teams can help prospects enter the inquiry stage more quickly and encourage them to push forward toward enrollment.

LINKEDIN CAN BE THE FIRST TOUCHPOINT AND BEYOND

When looking more closely at how prospects view communication on digital platforms, we also discovered that LinkedIn is the preferred outlet over other social networks when it comes to the process of researching and enrolling in bachelor's degree completion and master's degree programs.

PREFERRED METHOD OF COMMUNICATION



FOR GRAD SCHOOL PROSPECTS IN THE RESEARCH STAGE, PREFERENCE FOR PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS IS 2X THAT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS.

FOR BACHELOR'S COMPLETION PROSPECTS, THAT NUMBER IS EVEN HIGHER.

Prospects begin their graduate or degree completion journey with research. The industry assumption has long been that prospects begin their research through organic searches or word of mouth. However, through this survey, we discovered that many students also begin their research within their professional network—on LinkedIn. This represents a major opportunity for institutions to stand out from the crowd and guide prospect's decision-making process as they're engaging with digital content and spending time on social networks.

These students are relying on personal and professional connections throughout their journey, and LinkedIn is uniquely able to bring that professional context to personal networking—something other social networks are unable to provide. One respondent even compared the value they find from LinkedIn connections in line with those you can make when enrolling in a graduate program:

I see networking communities like LinkedIn as one of the best tools for professional connections, and essentially that's what graduate school is.

TAKEAWAY: If you are only relying on a lower funnel tactic like search as your first touchpoint with a prospect, you could be missing a large percentage of prospects who haven't even begun starting their research or who are still in the very early stages—these prospects aren't going to appear in your search campaigns' target audiences, but they can when you use LinkedIn.

LINKEDIN: BEYOND BUSINESS PROGRAMS

When the platform launched, LinkedIn’s vision was to “create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce,” and we’ve seen many adjustments made to the platform as LinkedIn has worked toward this vision since its inception. These changes have made LinkedIn a default professional networking platform for all industries and workers of various skill levels.

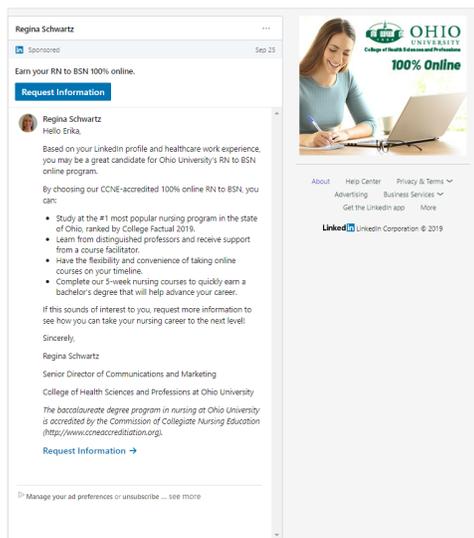
As LinkedIn has grown its audience base, new pockets of industry depth have emerged. The two biggest areas of member growth have been in the nursing and education industries. There are over two million nurses on LinkedIn, which makes up 70% of all registered nurses in the United States. For education, 96% of all teachers (three million) have profiles on this professional network.

Seeing these LinkedIn member numbers can be impressive, but how does that translate to a successful enrollment marketing campaign?

Ohio University College of Health Sciences and Professions put these numbers to the test when it recently wanted to reach RN-to-BSN prospects—individuals who currently hold an RN license but haven’t yet earned their Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

The Ohio team worked with Carnegie Dartlet to develop an integrated digital strategy that included two of LinkedIn’s advertising products: Sponsored Content and Sponsored InMail. By taking a multi-product approach, the Ohio team saw stronger results running both Sponsored Content and InMail compared to running just one or another product.

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We chose Sponsored Content as one of the ad products since this tactic allows institutions to build awareness with prospects who may or may not know about the particular school or program being advertised. Since Ohio’s RN-to-BSN program is offered online and we were introducing this degree to a target audience that is outside of Ohio University’s traditional recruiting footprint, we made sure to allocate a significant portion of our overall LinkedIn budget to the Sponsored Content ads (~80% Sponsored Content compared to ~20% InMail).

We launched Sponsored Content first to build prospect awareness then launched InMail one month later. This ensured that when the InMail was delivered, we were reaching a warmer audience that already had some familiarity with Ohio's RN-to-BSN program and in turn would be more ready to move down the funnel to the inquiry and application stages.

The results speak for themselves: since launching last January, these campaigns have driven more than 700 new leads. The strategy featured a layered approach: showing Sponsored Content ads to the market first then following up with InMail messages. This strategy resulted in 475 leads from InMails.

Even more impressive than the program's lead volume numbers was the lead form completion rate. For all LinkedIn campaigns, the lead form completion rate is 16%, above LinkedIn's education benchmark of 4%–15%. When taking a deeper look at the InMail messages, that lead form completion rate jumps up to 76%—certainly something we wouldn't have accomplished had we launched these messages to a cold audience that wasn't thinking about earning their BSN or hadn't heard of Ohio's RN-to-BSN program yet.

TAKEAWAY: Make it easy for prospects to inquire about your school or program without asking them to leave the platform. Prospects today not only expect to hear from you here but are increasing their levels of engagement to prove this fact.

WE'VE SEEN A 250% INCREASE IN EDU PROSPECTS SUBMITTING LEAD FORMS.

PROSPECTS EXPECT TO HEAR FROM YOU ON LINKEDIN, AND THEIR INCREASING ENGAGEMENT AND ACTION PROVE THAT.

250%



LINKEDIN USERS WITHOUT DEGREES ARE JUST AS ACTIVE

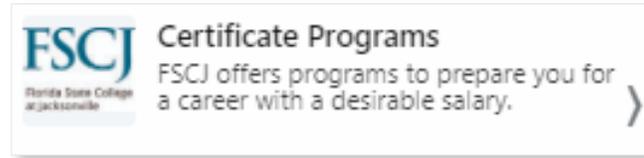
It's easy to remember a time when the vast majority of LinkedIn users were those who had a bachelor's degree or higher. However, that is no longer the reality of LinkedIn's extensive audience base of over 645+ million.

We put this new reality to the test when we began to promote the certificate programs offered by Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ). This institution near downtown Jacksonville offers more than 40 workforce certificates in some of the most sought-after careers in the country. These certificates allow skilled workers a way to further their career without having to commit to earning an associate or bachelor's degree.

Our LinkedIn strategy for this campaign had two main goals: increasing the awareness of the workshop certificates FSCJ offers and driving new inquiries from this adult learner audience.

We chose to use Sponsored Content, Sponsored InMail, and Text Ads as our product mix for this campaign.

TEXT AD



SPONSORED INMAIL

A screenshot of a LinkedIn Sponsored InMail. The header shows "Allan Case" and "Sponsored" with a date of "Sep 23". The main text reads: "Change your life in one year or less. Lets Get Started". Below this is a personalized message from Allan Case, Director of Student Recruitment & Admissions at FSCJ, mentioning affordable certificate programs. To the right of the message is a promotional graphic with the FSCJ logo, a teal background, and the text "advance your career in 1 year or less." with a "LEARN MORE" button. At the bottom of the graphic are links for "About", "Help Center", "Privacy & Terms", "Advertising", "Business Services", "Get the LinkedIn app", and "More".

SPONSORED CONTENT

A screenshot of a LinkedIn Sponsored Content post. The post is from "Florida State College at Jacksonville" (10,059 followers, Promoted). The text of the post says: "The demand for skilled workers has never been greater. Learn more about the affordable workforce and technical certificates we offer." Below the text is a photograph of a woman and a man looking at a laptop in a library. At the bottom of the post, it says "Change Your Life in One Year or Less With a Certificate From FSCJ" and "fscj.edu". There is a "Learn more" link, and interaction icons for "Like", "Comment", and "Share". At the very bottom, it shows "135 · 5 Comments".

First step: boost branding. We dedicated 70% of our total LinkedIn budget toward Sponsored Content ads to ensure the market was aware of FSCJ and were drawn to their brand name. Next up: drive inquiries. In order to move the target audience down the funnel from brand awareness to inquiry, we dedicated 20% of the budget to targeted InMail messages, encouraging users to learn more about the certificate programs. Finally, we used the remaining budget on Text Ads, a product similar to Google's text-based search ads that appear for users who are on desktop computers only. Desktop users are far more likely to convert than mobile, so this kind of tactic helps us move them further down the funnel toward enrollment.

Running these three tactics simultaneously proved to increase the overall engagement and lead volume. Throughout the eight-month flight, we drove more than 660 leads with a lead form completion rate nearly two times higher than LinkedIn's education benchmark.

TAKEAWAY: Run multiple types of ad products on LinkedIn in order to engage your audience through every stage of the funnel. Stagger your launch dates so you are thoughtful about when your ads are showing up for prospects. This way, you can interact with your audience in the right way and at the right time, motivating them to learn more about you and complete the enrollment journey.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL LINKEDIN CAMPAIGNS

1. LinkedIn is the preferred channel for research, so put your authentic story out there proactively. Don't hide what's great about your school behind a click.
2. Prospects not interested in completing their bachelor's or getting a master's do not think it will help their career (46%), don't have the time (34%), or feel that it's too expensive (33%). There's an opportunity to be the school that changes these perceptions. Work this type of messaging into your campaigns.
3. Remove phone number as a requirement for first point of contact. For each additional piece of data you are asking of someone, you'll receive fewer form submissions.
4. If you're not nurturing your leads post-capture, you're missing out: 70% of unnurtured leads enroll elsewhere. Prospects tell us they want to have admission conversations on LinkedIn, so upload your leads and promote open houses, info sessions, and application deadlines to support and enhance your admission efforts at scale.



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