

Targeted campaign boosts enrollment

A campus survey pinpoints the channels most used by students and helps bring positive results for a fraction of the budget

The research made clear that the most costly elements of the previous marketing campaign were the least effective in gaining students' attention.

In 2008, three different situations combined to push the Arizona State University (ASU) College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to undertake a first-time marketing effort to increase enrollment in its summer session courses. First, ASU decided that its academic colleges would begin assisting with student recruitment, a process previously handled by a central office. In addition, the university and the college invested to significantly increase online class offerings, while at the same time recognizing that severe budget cuts from the state necessitated new revenue-enhancement measures.

Previously, there had been little or no effort to market summer session courses. However, tuition from the summer session went directly into college budgets, unlike tuition from fall and spring semesters, which went to the university provost to appropriate. Thus, increasing summer session attendance was an ideal way for the college to increase its revenue stream and restore some of the funding lost as a result of budget cuts.

Following a highly effective marketing effort in 2008 that increased enrollment in summer session courses by 22 percent over the previous year, the college conducted a survey of all students enrolled in the college's winter session courses. The survey's purpose was to learn more about the students who take classes during condensed sessions, and the most effective ways to reach them.

Findings from the survey, conducted in January 2009, clearly showed that e-mail and the ASU web site were the most effective means of getting students' attention. Nearly half the respondents first learned about winter session classes from the Internet, and 86 percent recalled seeing messages about the winter session on ASU's web site. Sixteen percent of respondents first learned about the winter session from an e-mail message sent by the college, and almost half of respondents

recalled seeing the e-mail messages.

Face-to-face communication was also effective. Nearly 30 percent of the respondents said they learned about winter session classes from another person, typically a friend or classmate (66 percent) or an adviser (19 percent). Print materials such as posters, flyers and banners were less effective.

The least effective means of getting students' attention was through ads in the student newspaper and on Facebook. Only 1 percent of respondents first learned about winter session courses from the student newspaper, and none from Facebook.

The primary reason the majority of students took a winter session class was to complete major or general studies requirements. About one-fifth of the respondents said they took the class because they liked the three-week condensed session.

Goals and objectives

The goal for the 2008 summer session marketing campaign was to increase direct revenue to the college by boosting enrollment in its summer session classes. In 2009, recognizing both the economic downturn and a 53 percent increase in undergraduate tuition, the college sought to match the enrollment numbers from 2008 while spending less money on marketing. Specific objectives for the 2009 program were to:

- **Attain enrollment** of at least 14,554 students in Liberal Arts and Sciences summer classes.
- **Capture at least** a 44 percent share of the total university summer enrollment.
- **Roll out an effective** and targeted marketing campaign for less than US\$20,000.

Solution and implementation

The winter session marketing survey provided a wealth of information about how best to market

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"You can
get ahead on
your major."

"Why not
take a class
that fulfills
more than one
requirement?"

"I work and
needed an
online class."

"I knocked
off one of my
general studies
requirements."

"I finally get
into this really
popular class."

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LIBERAL ARTS
& SCIENCES
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

The most effective on-campus displays of marketing messages were flyers or posters in or near an adviser's office.

about the author

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the condensed-session courses. Among the highlights were the following:

- **Students were most likely** to see marketing messages posted on the ASU web site or delivered via e-mail. Paid advertising on Facebook or the online student newspaper did not get students' attention.
- **Students who learned** about condensed-session courses through face-to-face means most likely learned about them from a peer.
- **The most effective** on-campus displays of marketing messages were flyers or posters in or near an adviser's office.
- **The primary reason** students take condensed-

case in point

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session courses is to complete academic requirements. Many also prefer the compressed time frame.

Strategy development for the marketing campaign included an analysis of e-mail statistics and web traffic from the winter session campaign. The communication office used a bulk e-mail service, Bronto, that allowed them to conduct tailored e-mail campaigns and track the results. The results of marketing efforts for the winter session campaign demonstrated that e-mail messages had performed best both in driving people to the winter session web site and in producing a corresponding bump in registrations. Print materials had produced almost no web traffic. Facebook advertising had driven some people to the web site, but the majority left the site without clicking on links that would indicate further interest (such as catalog, registration or application links).

Taking all of the above into consideration, the team developed the following strategies for 2009 summer session marketing:

- **Deliver messages primarily** via the Web and e-mail, with some supporting print advertising and marketing materials.
- **Create key messages** that focus on how summer courses can help students fulfill academic requirements in a compressed time frame.
- **Use peer-to-peer marketing** by featuring students touting the benefits of summer courses in marketing materials.
- **Take advantage of** the bulk e-mail service Bronto to target specific student segments based on their responses to prior messages.
- **Direct students**, where possible, to Liberal Arts and Sciences summer course listings (rather than the entire ASU summer course catalog) to increase the share of total ASU summer enrollment.

Although the team had an approved budget of US\$20,000 for the campaign, they spent less than US\$4,000. The research conducted among winter session students was key to their ability to undertake a successful campaign at such low cost. The research made clear that the most costly elements of the previous marketing campaign—ads on Facebook and in the student newspaper—were the least effective in gaining students' attention. The team was able to focus the 2009 campaign on more effective free promotional vehicles such as e-mail and the web site.

Measurement and evaluation

The most telling evidence of the success of the marketing campaign is in comparing the college's enrollment to the university's as a whole. ASU's summer enrollment declined by almost 2 percent from 2008 to 2009, while enrollment in Liberal Arts and Sciences classes increased by 5 percent.

- **A total of 15,242 students** enrolled in Liberal Arts and Sciences summer classes, surpassing the goal of 14,554.
- **The program captured** a 47 percent share of the total university summer enrollment, exceeding the goal of 44 percent.
- **The marketing campaign** was conducted for less than US\$4,000, well below the US\$20,000 budgeted. •

The advertisement features a woman with curly hair sitting on the grass, looking up at the sky with her arms outstretched. She is wearing a blue patterned top and blue jeans. A laptop is open on her lap. The background is a clear blue sky with some clouds. The text is overlaid on the image.

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