Going Green in Recruitment & Admissions

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to present how colleges and universities are moving toward resource conservation and going green within their admissions processes.

If there is one overriding constant that colleges and universities across the country struggle with on a seemingly ongoing basis, it's their budget. Because this issue is always on the forefront of admission offices' minds, many higher ed institutions are turning their focus to technology to help cut back costs, and often are getting creative with their solutions.

• Institutions are significantly reducing costs across the board, and are greatly impacting how money is spent on recruitment. Areas such as travel, events, staff, printing and postage, and communication are all being scrutinized like never before.

• Colleges and universities are beginning to recognize that paper-based communications aren't always the most efficient means of communicating with students and instead have begun to understand the benefits of moving towards more waste-reducing means like e-communications.

• In response to green mandates at the institution level, more admissions departments are moving towards the use of technology to help make their efforts more resource-efficient, while retaining the level of student service and engagement.

In addition to CRM systems, other technologies are on the rise in popularity: online applications, Web-to-print brochures, social networking and social media tools, dynamic FAQ answer tools, and programs helping organize events and interviews all can contribute to cost-reduction in a college or university's budget and decrease institutions' environmental footprint.

Introduction

In a world of shrinking budgets, challenging economic conditions, and limited resources, an increasing number of higher education institutions face significant pressure to do more with less. Further, many colleges and universities are also taking a look at how their daily activities make an impact on the world around them.

Green initiatives are undoubtedly spreading across today's campuses, within every area—from energy consumption and campus infrastructure to food preparation and recycling... and even within student recruitment and admissions. According to the *College Sustainability Report Card 2010*, more than two-thirds of schools now have full-time staff dedicated to sustainability.[1] In addition, to date, more than 660 institutions have signed the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment, committing to neutralize greenhouse gas emissions, and to accelerate the research and educational efforts of higher education to equip society to re-stabilize the earth's climate.[2] In today's green-focused world, every aspect of the campus is taking a look at how they use our world's resources...and how they can begin cutting back, while still meeting their goals.

In the following, we will discuss the ways in which the entire college admissions process is being taken to task like never before regarding environmental sustainability, and how admissions offices are using technology to not only help become more green, but also save costs while still expanding their student reach.

The Call for Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability and social responsibility have undoubtedly risen to the forefront of the discussion in today's colleges and universities. Increasing attention is being placed on and within the whole of education to practice what it preaches to students and faculty alike—to become a true model for sustainability within green building design, operations, purchasing, investments, and integrating sustainable principles into the curriculum.[3] This adds another wrinkle to the mix for every college or university department that's also looking to maximize their shrinking budgets, save time, and make their staff more efficient.

With the amount of time, money, and resources spent on student recruitment and admissions processes, college administrators have set a focused eye on how the admissions office can best green its operations, leveraging innovative approaches and technologies to recruit and admit students...while making as little of an environmental impact as possible.

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The Admissions "Footprint"

With a new green mindset, administrations are beginning to scrutinize admissions activities in new and different ways. While it may seem everything in an admissions plan is essential to attract quality students, institutional demands—as well as student demands from a generation growing up amid the sustainability push—are forcing institutions to look at how to make their efforts a little greener. The following analyzes the impact of several admissions activities on the environment.

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Travel

Travel does remain a part of any institution's recruitment budget—especially for those responsible for recruiting out-of-state students. However, for many universities, travel budgets have been cut significantly in terms of both dollars and distance. Many major academic conferences this year have seen five to ten percent decreases,[4] indicating these cuts are impacting the normal travel activities of today's administrators. Many state universities' travel budgets are limiting nonessential travel, covering basic, one-day travel within a drivable distance from their institution. While there is a large cost associated with travel, air and car trips also make a sizable contribution toward the very carbon emissions that many universities are trying to reduce.

In a time when travel is being cut both for financial and environmental reasons, admissions offices must take a look at new and different ways of recruiting students without physically visiting.

Power

The technology used in admissions offices today is often mission-critical to its operations. Without some of the systems many offices utilize, such as online applications and contact databases, institutions would simply not be able to function efficiently or effectively.

However, running technology requires the consumption of natural resources such as energy—not just electricity to operate the system itself, but the power required to operate the datacenters in which the systems are housed. It is this precise issue that is forcing many institutions to look at ways to conserve energy within on-campus datacenters or move to outsourced datacenters that can provide more energy-efficient and hence, less costly, operations.

Events

Nothing in a recruitment arsenal resonates with students quite like an on-campus event. Students can see a campus and classroom up close and personal, and begin to imagine what it would be like for them to attend first-hand. However, while institutions typically host no more than a small number of on-campus events a year, students are not travelling to as many schools as they once were due to the economic climate. Some families are eliminating visits to long-distance or out-of-state colleges altogether, using virtual college fairs and

online tours to view the campus before their child has been accepted. (5)

As a result, many institutions have turned toward event management systems that bring the business of events online. Hosting online tours and events is easier than ever, while event management technology that handles registration, scheduling, and communication frees up staff time spent managing on-site events.

Staff
Although the staff size at colleges and universities can range from five to fifty people, admissions staff is universally overworked. While incoming class sizes have grown considerably in previous years, admissions staff has not.

Simply put, staff is the most vital ingredient to a successful admissions office. Admissions staff is charged with making the one-on-one connections with students that make a real difference in where they attend. This same staff also makes sure that the students they are unable to meet receive the consistent and meaningful communication they need.

The right recruitment and admissions technology will ensure that staff is spending its time on student service efforts, while also helping the entire admissions staff go green in its everyday activities.

Printed Materials
Finally, printed materials in any form continue to be both the biggest financial investment and the largest investment of environmental resources within the admissions office. From typical reminder postcards for events, interviews, and deadlines, to extremely expensive viewbook mailings, to multi-page applications and the physical archives of paper files, every admissions office inevitably has its battle with the mountain of paper.

Going Green... with the Right Technology

Once areas are identified where institutions can be greener, the business of finding alternatives begins. The goals of any new strategy are clear: provide meaningful student communication without a loss of functionality—and save time, money, and staff. A "green" solution has an additional goal: reduce the amount of resources used by the institution. While technology is the premier choice for many colleges and universities, the right mix of resources to make the maximum impact is not always so obvious. This section details the various ways in which a university can impact environmental efforts with the right resources, while ensuring functionality, efficiency, cost savings, and meaningful communication with students.

A university can impact environmental efforts with the right resources... ensuring functionality, cost savings, and meaningful student communication.

CRM Technology Makes Going Green Easy

The question of "which technology to use" often aligns with an institution's unique strategies, but a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is most commonly at the core of any admissions department's technology strategy.

CRM systems incorporate robust data management features with communication tools that can reach students in multiple ways: via e-mail, text messaging, and social media integration. These electronic communication methods often end up replacing paper-based strategies such as letters and direct mailings, while improving institutional efficiency and centralizing efforts in one place. This marks a CRM system's most useful purpose as sending out timely and cost-saving electronic communications to targeted groups of students.

With previous printing, mailing, and labor expenses in excess of $150,000 yearly, Hunter College's decisive move to a CRM solution has yielded unparalleled time-, cost-, and resource-savings results.

College administrators no longer send direct mail pieces to prospective students—directing them instead to complete and reference their own personalized Web pages. Hunter College officials can also easily target student e-mails, giving the right information to students who are freshmen, transfer, or high school seniors who need to be more deadline-conscious. Hunter College administrators estimate that they've saved more than $125,000 in marketing costs by sending via e-mail what they would usually mail out instead. In the admissions office, Hunter College has used their CRM tool to eliminate postage on admissions letters— since students now receive these via their personalized Web pages, Hunter admissions has saved more than $18,000 annually on postage, duplicating, and purchasing of paper across the admissions office.

Online Applications Make True Green Impact

A typical college application file can be 20–30 pages long, and include letters of recommendation, transcripts, essays, and test scores. In a recent NACAC survey, colleges report that the total number of applications received has risen by 62 percent[6]—meaning that every college admissions office is adding more and more to the mountain of paper. With more than 4,300 degree-granting institutions in the United States[7], the amount of paper produced can easily engulf the entire admissions office.

Fortunately, most colleges and universities have turned to online application technology, making the application process easier and more efficient for its students and staff, while saving a great amount of paper resources. In the last year alone, more than two million applications were processed online within Hobsons EMT ApplyYourself online application, eliminating the need to generate 60 to 90 million sheets—or almost one million pounds—of paper.

Electronic communication methods can often end up replacing paper-based strategies...

Most colleges have turned to online application technology... saving a great amount of paper resources.

In addition to the green benefits, many institutions have realized significant cost-cutting measures and better application processing times with online application tools:

• The University of North Carolina Wilmington Graduate School saved $6,200 in one year on paper costs since moving to a completely online application process. With a previously paper-based process that included photocopying applications and inefficient tracking, the school is now saving 20–25 sheets of paper per student.

• The Chicago School of Professional Psychology has cut application processing time by 60 percent, and saved $80,000 in printing, mailing, and application costs thanks to its use of online applications in combination with its CRM system.

Electronic Brochures Offer Personalization and Cost Savings

Some institutions are utilizing Web-to-print brochures to perform any truly necessary direct mail efforts, while saving the impact of printing and mailing on both their budgets and the environment. Web-to-print brochures give visitors to a school's Web site personalized information instantaneously in a PDF format, with a personalized, printed piece arriving in the mail days later. Web-to-print brochures help to send printed communications only to those students who truly want a physical piece—eliminating the environmental and paper impact of mass mailings; reducing the physical inventory of paper materials; and cutting costs to print, store, and send recruitment mailings—all while still providing personalized materials to the student.

• Thomas More College, a small private college, has eliminated the printing of mass recruitment materials and is sending out an average of 46 electronic brochures every month, saving print materials only for those students who specifically request them.

• The University of Dallas, Graduate School of Management sends approximately 100 electronic brochures to prospective students every month—in the first year, the school recouped 75 percent of its electronic brochure software with the money it saved in printing, storage, and mailing costs.

Social Media Reduces Student Travel

Social networking and social media tools have emerged as the frontrunners to communicate with today's prospective students. As the number and usage frequency of these sites (Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, to name a few) grows exponentially, many institutions are leveraging these low-cost and energy-efficient avenues to disseminate quick, easy communications to students, as well as host online open house and recruiting events.

Prospective students and their parents are logging on by the thousands to view online

Web-to-print brochures help send printed communications only to those students who truly want a physical piece...

campus tours, chat immediately with admissions officials, join a social network to talk with current and other prospective students, and attend online events that allow both the campus staff and its incoming classes to reduce the environmental impact of travel and on-site events coordination. Event management technology allows staff to coordinate event registration, scheduling, and communication online for both on- and off-campus events—freeing time for personalized student interaction. While students will inevitably want to physically visit a campus before making an enrollment decision, online events are one way to inform students about the campus experience and exchange needed information—making campus visits fewer and reducing the impact of student travel to and from the school multiple times before making a decision.

Choosing Green Technology

According to the *College Sustainability Report Card 2010*, more than two-thirds of schools surveyed have conducted a carbon emissions inventory, with more than half choosing to make a carbon reduction commitment on campus.[8] As administrators take a look at campus energy efficiency and conservation, more and more are not only evaluating their current systems, but also choosing new technologies with energy-efficient practices.

With IT infrastructure producing perhaps as much as 20 percent of the total carbon footprint of the campus[9], the move for many campuses to server virtualization starts now. Server virtualization allows an organization to create a virtual private server environment (VPS) to consolidate physical server resources. With server virtualization, multiple applications and systems can now be hosted on a single physical device—ultimately reducing the number of servers needed in on-campus datacenters, as well as the space and power needed for server operations. Based on information from the Energy Information Association[10], eliminating just one on-campus would reduce the overall power bill by about $400 per year—as well as the savings incurred by no longer needing to heat and cool that same server.

Many new technologies also offer the added benefit of operating within off-campus, energy-efficient datacenters—providing mission-critical applications while making an impact on the institution's emissions reduction goals. These Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) applications are on the rise as institutions look to balance their carbon reduction commitments with internal resources available to implement new systems. SaaS vendors host an institution's enrollment technology solutions on offsite Web servers, allowing full access by logging in to any Internet browser.

The benefits of SaaS make a significant impact on both the institution's green initiatives, and its bottom line:

• Web accessibility and offsite hosting do not require additional IT support or funding to monitor the servers, perform customizations, deploy upgrades and updates, or handle technical support. Resources used to travel and install hardware in multiple locations can now be redirected to other pressing projects.

• SaaS applications have a much smaller services cost because of the streamlined nature of not only the software, but its implementation and support. Virtual collaboration through SaaS applications also brings staff together not only from across campus, but from across the country—reducing power and energy resources needed for travel.

• Additionally from the resource perspective, SaaS providers have the ability to keep systems running consistently and "follow the sun" with their infrastructure, meaning that support resources are available at any time of day or night. This eliminates the typical overnight idle time of typical servers, as well as the daily energy and need for IT staff to power down and restart systems.

With all of the benefits listed above, there's no doubt that it is in the best interest of every school to embrace the unstoppable migration toward offsite technology, hosted and secure.

Conclusion

Overall, saving environmental resources has become a high priority across the entire college campus—the admissions office included. With the use of smart technological tools, the admissions office can make a significant impact on an institution's larger sustainability initiatives. Whether communications to prospects moves from physical mailings to e-communications, online events are scheduled to reduce travel impact, online applications are utilized to save thousands of sheets of paper, or electronic brochures replace the large inventory (and budget) slated for paper mailings, taking advantage of technology can have a great effect on a school's sustainability plan...while saving time, money, and staff resources in the process with personalized student communication.

About Hobsons

A global business with its headquarters in Cincinnati, OH, Hobsons supports education professionals in the preparation, recruitment, management, and advancement of students. With secondary school solutions, integrated marketing tools, enrollment management technology, and retention solutions, Hobsons provides innovative solutions that make it easy to help students make the best decisions throughout the entire education lifecycle. For more information, please visit www.hobsons.com.

Notes

1: "College Sustainability Report Card 2010," Sustainable Endowments Institute, October 7, 2009. Retrieved November 15, 2009 from http://www.greenreportcard.org/report-card-2010/categories/administration

2: "American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment," Retrieved November 19, 2009 from http://www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org

3: "Environmental Sustainability as a Strategic Policy Issue," Webcast Summary, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges & the Society for College and University Planning, February 11, 2009

4: Jeffrey R. Young, "Economic Downturn Limits Conference Travel," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 27, 2009

5: Alison Damast, "Saving on College Visits," *BusinessWeek*, November 6, 2008

6: "Effects of the Economy on the Admission Process, 2008–09 Fact Sheet, National Association for College Admission Counseling, June 2009

7: "Digest of Education Statistics, 2008 (NCES 2009-020), U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009, Table 5

8: "College Sustainability Report Card 2010," Sustainable Endowments Institute, October 7, 2009. Retrieved November 15, 2009 from http://www.greenreportcard.org/report-card-2010/categories/administration

9: Lev S. Gonick, "The Year Ahead in IT," Inside Higher Ed, January 7, 2010

10: Tia Jones, "Going Green? Check out SaaS Enterprise Software," Central Desktop, May 6, 2009