PIVOTING ON A DIME TO SURPASS ENROLLMENT EXPECTATIONS

Delivering a connected and personalized communication strategy is never more critical than it is in a time of uncertainty and change. Like most higher ed institutions, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) needed to quickly adjust its marketing approach when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Given that the college was already well into the process of transforming its manual marketing approach to a digital strategy, though, campus leaders found themselves well prepared to tackle the challenges that lay ahead.

With more than 70,000 students from around the Washington, D.C., metro area, NOVA’s leaders long valued the importance of understanding their audiences and found targeted messaging fundamental to their enrollment success. As such, NOVA’s marketing team made a concerted effort to transform its previously manual efforts into a highly automated digital-marketing powerhouse.

Using Education Cloud, the marketing team deployed automated and measured marketing strategies and tactics that: broadened its audience; identified prospective students earlier; discerned where each was in the student lifecycle; and, nurtured them to take the next step towards enrollment. The college successfully launched numerous prospective student campaigns and was gaining momentum.

The college’s marketing and enrollment professionals used the platform to optimize their digital spend and deepen their understanding of their target audiences.

“We achieved visibility we previously had only dreamed of,” shares Toni Angelo, NOVA’s Director of Marketing. “For example, we now know which digital platforms give us the best return on investment for each of our target audiences, and we are able to identify where students get stuck in our nurture—and quickly fix it. We were making meaningful progress in advancing our enrollment efforts.”
COUNTERING RAPIDLY CHANGING DYNAMICS WITH AN IMMEDIATE MARKETING REALIGNMENT

When the pandemic struck, NOVA marketers suddenly found themselves having to rapidly re-think their strategies and update their tactics. The priority immediately shifted to keeping current students informed, minimizing their confusion, and prompting them to stay on track.

As the focus expanded to include prospective students, the marketing team recognized the imperative of adjusting existing in-market campaigns. Language was added that was more sensitive to the situation and messaging was augmented to ensure prospective students knew how to access all enrollment and advising support teams remotely.

Shifting dynamics also introduced the opportunity to expand the college’s reach beyond those traditionally identified as likely candidates. Those who suddenly needed to re-train, were sent home from their four-year institution, or were nearing the end of high school yet uncertain about the reality of moving on to a four-year institution were all added to the prospective student target audience pool. Using Pardot, Angelo and her team swiftly launched new campaigns targeting each of these specific audiences within just a few short weeks.

POSITIVE ENROLLMENT PERFORMANCE SECURED WITH RESPONSIVE MARKETING EFFORTS

Signs signaling success were immediately apparent. Marketing emails jumped to an open rate of 5-10% greater than NOVA’s historical average and click-through rates for prospective students rose to 18% above the industry average. NOVA enrolled more than 2,500 high school students in their summer dual enrollment program, 37% of whom went on to take classes in the fall. And, most importantly, at a time when public, two-year schools on average are experiencing a 7.5% decrease in enrollment, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, NOVA is experiencing an enrollment increase.

“"Our prioritization of transitioning our marketing efforts to ones that are automated, streamlined, and measured was fundamental to our ability to pivot quickly to adapt to changing times and new opportunities,” concludes Angelo. “With Salesforce, we are confident we will be able to successfully acclimate to whatever the future holds.”