

# 7 Strategies that Drive Enrollments Near & Long-term



By Pat McGraw & Dudley Stevenson

© 2018 by DWS Associates. All rights reserved.

Published by DWS Associates, Minneapolis, Minnesota

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act without either the prior written permission of the Publisher or authorization through payment of the appropriate per copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc. 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400 or on the Web at [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com).

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty. While the publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential or other damages.

**Follow DWS Associates on social media**



# CONTENTS

- Introduction ..... 1
- Strategy 1: Market Demand..... 2
  - The Job Market ..... 2
  - Student Goals..... 2
  - Institutional Expertise ..... 3
  - Institution’s Reputation ..... 3
  - The competition..... 3
- Strategy 2: Target Audience..... 4
- Strategy 3: Engagement strategy..... 5
- Strategy 4: Retention Strategy..... 7
- Strategy 5: Win-back Strategy for Lifelong Learning ..... 8
  - Drop-outs ..... 8
  - Graduates/Lifelong Learners ..... 8
- Strategy 6: Referrals..... 9
  - Know who can refer those you want!..... 9
  - All Programs Need Owners ..... 9
  - Process for identifying your ‘ideal customer’ ..... 9
  - Develop a formal program..... 10
  - Training your employees..... 10
  - Rewards and Incentives ..... 10
  - Reporting and Communication..... 10
- Strategy 7: Partnerships..... 11
  - Competition & Market Insight ..... 11
  - Requires an owner, measurable objectives and resources ..... 11
  - Other Things to Consider ..... 11
- About DWS Associates..... 12
- About the Authors: ..... 13
  - Dudley Stevenson ..... 13
  - Pat McGraw ..... 13

## INTRODUCTION

Your ability to achieve enrollment growth in today's competitive and dynamic market comes down to your ability to offer the right programs and services to the right people at the right price via the right channels.

The challenge, obviously, is making all that happen. Especially with shrinking department size and flat budgets placing a limit on what can be done.

The solution is to play to your strengths and leverage your resources to optimize your chance for greater success.

What follows are seven proven strategies for improving your recruitment and retention efforts that leverage data and use data to work smarter. For many, these can be effectively implemented by reallocating your existing resources rather than increasing your spend.

For some, it means investing in things you have been ignoring. For you, we have included suggestions for prioritizing the investments in a way that could allow you to see a return on your initial investments before making the next round of investments.

## STRATEGY 1: MARKET DEMAND

Less than 19% of institutions conduct market research prior to rolling out a new degree program<sup>1</sup>



Many colleges will focus on creating more and more new programs to attract new students – but the ‘process’ for identifying opportunities and deciding which suggestions get funded all too often falls on politics rather than data.

To improve your new program success, you need to really understand the following:

- The Job Market
- Student Goals
- Institutional Expertise
- Institution’s Reputation
- The Competition

### THE JOB MARKET

There’s been a lot written about how employers don’t feel college is doing an adequate job of preparing students for the workplace – that gap needs to close, and your college can take the lead in terms of working with local community leaders and employers to develop programs that meet agreed upon standards.

What expertise will the businesses, government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) require from their employees in the next 3 to 5 years? Where do they see the highest demand in terms of career opportunities?

And don’t stop with this level of intelligence – get them involved in curriculum development as subject matter experts so they have ‘skin’ in the game. This allows them to see your courses and programs, faculty and staff, up close and in rather unique settings so that they can have a deeper understanding and appreciation for what you do and how you prepare students for success in their professional careers.

Then take it to the next level – recruit them as adjunct faculty and guest speakers so that their involvement with you stays strong.

### STUDENT GOALS

What do your prospective and current students want to accomplish with their education from your college? Do they want to pursue a career – or do they have other goals and aspirations?

---

<sup>1</sup> \*Blackboard survey “Marketing Leaders in Higher Education,” 2013

### INSTITUTIONAL EXPERTISE

Does your college have the expertise internally or will you have to go out and “staff up”? It’s easier and more effective to focus on areas where you have some or all the expertise you will need to develop the programs and deliver a unique, valuable learning experience in that subject area.

### INSTITUTION’S REPUTATION

What does your audience believe is your area of expertise and does this new potential program offering fall into an area that your audience feels is appropriate? Or is this new focus viewed as a large departure from what your institutions is known for and believed to strong/expert in?

It’s tougher for a college with a strong reputation for business, accounting and finance to suddenly venture into the arts with programs in dance and theater because the art/dance/theater community doesn’t see them as having the expertise to be a leader in these areas, and the business community is going to wonder what in the world they are doing. What might work is [ex] a business program for artists/theater companies etc. but even then, it might be viewed as a “stretch”.

In this area, the need for research to gain insight is key.

### THE COMPETITION

Who else is offering what you are considering? What are their strengths and weaknesses in this area? What has the program been delivering in terms of enrollments and graduates? Has that been increasing, decreasing, flat over the past 2 to 5 years? What do those in the field feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the program? What is the pricing strategy for the program?

These are just a few questions you need to answer – and that requires competitive intelligence program that can gather and analyze the proper data so that decisions can be made with confidence. And it is also going to require market research because you are going to need to get input from employers/community leaders regarding their perception of the program as well as what they want graduates from such a program to have learned and experienced, so they are prepared to make a positive impact immediately upon graduation from the program.

## STRATEGY 2: TARGET AUDIENCE



You need to know who your audience is beyond broad demographics and geographic factors. You need to understand their wants, needs, expectations, perceptions as well as their decision-making process and criteria.

You need to understand where they go to gather information, whether they are a ‘reader’ or a ‘watcher’ or a ‘do-er’ so you can deliver information in the proper format via the proper channels.

This requires data analysis that starts with your current students. So, the best place to start is with your current student population. Start by identifying your students, by program, for the past [ex] 24 months. Then, depending on the data you have available, score them based on the following attributes:

- # of terms/semesters enrolled during the 24-month time period
- # of credit hours earned
- # of credit hours taken (total credit hours enrolled including withdrawals)
- GPA
- Most recent term/semester enrolled in

You might have other factors you will want to include – but the goal here is to identify your ‘ideal student’ so you can identify others like them for your recruitment efforts.

Why?

Because these students have done what you want a student to do and they have certain factors in common that can be used to improve the quality of your recruitment efforts.

The next step is to append data to the student records to identify additional shared characteristics. Demographic, psychographic and geographic data should be appended and, if you work with data firms such as Claritas (PRIZM) or Neustar (ElementOne), you will receive the following information.

### STRATEGY 3: ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



Who gets what message and offer at what time via what channel?

That’s the basis of your Engagement Strategy.

You have identified your segments/personas – that’s who.

Then with each segment/persona, walk through the process from Lead Generation to Graduation – and beyond. That’s the message and offer, time and channel.

You will want to map out what to do if they respond to your offers and what to do if they don’t respond.

		STAGES IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS					
		Pre-Inquiry	Inquiry to Start Application	Start Application to Submit Completed Application	Submit Completed Application to Enroll Term 1	Enroll Term 1 to Enroll Term 2	THRU GRADUATION
<b>Prospective Student</b>							
Program A	Segment 1	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers		
	Segment 2	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers		
	Segment 3	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers		
<b>Current Student</b>							
Program A	Segment 1					Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers
	Segment 2					Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers
	Segment 3					Preferred Channels Messages/Offers	Preferred Channels Messages/Offers

FIGURE 1 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY MAP – HIGH LEVEL

The above figure shows, at a high level, an Engagement Strategy Map. In high terms, you are defining the decision-making stages, the channels used during those stages and the messages and offers that will be used during the stage.



FIGURE 2 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY MAP - INDIVIDUAL TACTICS

Figure 2 shows the individual tactics with timing and messages/offers. Specifically [ex] prospect submits Adwords landing page form X and is shown Thank You Page X upon clicking Submit. Within 2-3 minutes, the prospect will receive auto-email X with message and Offer X-1. Within 24 hours/1 business days, prospect will be called by the Enrollment Adviser to discuss interests, motivations, concerns, and to schedule a follow up call to discuss, in detail, qualifying and qualification questions.

The tactics are mapped out, based on the action/inaction of the prospect at each stage of the process.

Your plan should address



- Owned Media: This is the content you are in control of – signage on campus
- Paid Media: This is your advertising – from broadcast to print, direct mail, out of home to AdWords
- Earned Media: This is media/public relations as well as word-of-mouth, so you are working with the media as well as key influencers.
- Social Media: This is Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and all the rest. Some will list social media under “Owned Media” but you don’t “own” it and with more social media platforms managing how many Followers can see your posts to drive up your advertising spend on their platform, we thought it wise to list this as its own unique media.

And your messaging and offers across all media need to be benefit focused for that segment/persona. For example in the “Inquiry to Start Application” Phase with a segment that is motivated by “Promotions/Advancing My Career”, your messaging might be about the benefits of your programs (“...internships with local businesses addressing real opportunities/challenges so you gain practical experience...”) and services (“...career services offers free training on resume writing, interviewing and networking so you can enjoy greater professional success...”)

The key to success is your ability to test and measure and innovate so that your messaging and offers become stronger, more effective at motivating prospective students to act and move forward with your institution from “Inquiry” through “Enrollment” and beyond.

## STRATEGY 4: RETENTION STRATEGY



Your retention strategy starts with your recruitment strategy – by clearly targeting those that are most likely to succeed and then providing them fast, easy access to relevant information that helps them make informed decisions and sets realistic expectations.

Then, once they have become a student, you need to have a process in place for gather key data and monitoring behavior so that you can provide them with the support and information they need to continue moving forward in their program. All too often, colleges will think that once someone becomes a student, faculty and staff will deliver the service and support needed to retain the student – but that ignores factors outside the class and off campus.

Develop a process for your academic advisers to contact the student each term to get insight into the student's life – personal and professional – because they can impact retention.

This is not to say that the academic advisor is expanding their role to include personal life coach – but it's important to understand that [ex] significant changes in the student's personal and/or professional life can impact retention.

So, the goal here is to understand what is impacting the student's world (personal, professional, education) and work with them to remain enrolled and making continuous progress towards graduation. And if the student is [ex] undergoing massive disruption in their personal and professional lives, it might help retention to recommend a more manageable course load. As you can see, to be able to accomplish this, you need to identify what information you need, how it will be acquired, where it will be stored, who will gather it, who will analyze it, who responds to those deemed 'at risk' and how do they respond – these are the questions you need to map out and solve.

## STRATEGY 5: WIN-BACK STRATEGY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING



This strategy addresses two possible scenarios. The first is for those that do not successfully complete their program – also known as drop outs – and is aimed at motivating them to re-enroll and complete their program.

The second is for those that do successfully complete their program – also known as graduates and alumni – and is aimed at motivating them to re-enroll and earn additional credentials (certificates, certification, digital badges, and degrees).

### DROP-OUTS

This includes students that stopped enrolling in classes prior to successfully completing the requirements of the program but have not requested official transcripts be sent to another institution. These are students that earned credits and are now at-risk of becoming part of the “some college credit, no credential” crowd that has all the debt and none of the diploma.

Many colleges place this audience on the back burner, but this can be an area of profitable opportunity, if done properly. We recommend reaching out to students that fail to enroll in their first semester to understand why and make sure the student understands that they are missed and that you will gladly welcome them back. Keep them in a drip campaign so that they continue to feel part of the program and institution. And invite them to relevant events – for example, if they were a student in your nursing program and you are hosting an event that features a speaker from the nursing professional, make the student aware of the event.

Be sure to identify their “desired date of return” so that you can make phone calls at the appropriate time. And when they return, keep them on a “high alert” status for that first term and make sure that includes special on-boarding and regular check-ins to confirm that things are going well.

NOTE: There may be some students in this category that the institution doesn’t want to ‘win back’ – for example those that still owe the institution money or were under disciplinary suspension. So you should have established criteria for this audience that allows you to determine who will be pursued and who will not be pursued.

### GRADUATES/LIFELONG LEARNERS

We are amazed by the number of colleges that turn graduates over to the alumni association and never think to go back and make sure their future educational needs are met by their old college. They are going to need workshops, courses, certification, digital badges and second degrees – why shouldn’t your college be their sole source?

This strategy requires a nurturing campaign that includes research into what their wants and needs will be so that you have the right programs for them when the time is right.

## STRATEGY 6: REFERRALS



A formal referral process that includes setting measurable objectives, understanding what your competitors are doing (and what is/isn't working) and having a very clear process and audience/persona in mind.

KNOW WHO CAN REFER THOSE YOU WANT!

When most hear the word “referral”, they immediately think of the student referring a family member, friend or colleague.

Think broader. For example

- Faculty
- Staff
- Strategic Partners/Vendors
- Community Leaders

Just remember that you would want all faculty and staff involved and aware, but with strategic partners/vendors and community leaders, you might only have the right relationship with one. And when it comes to strategic partners/vendors and community leaders, you might want to skip right over this strategy to the next one on Partnership which, for these groups, is a more traditional relationship for colleges.

### ALL PROGRAMS NEED OWNERS

Referral programs must have an owner that has the authority and responsibility to make the program a success.

Ideally, the owner may want to build a support team with key leaders in various departments across the institution to ensure that the program is a focus for all. This creates a culture across the institution where faculty and staff know the importance of the referral program and allow it to become part of their responsibility and, ideally, performance metrics.

The goal for your program is for it to be institution-wide in terms of awareness, support and participation. So the owner with a leadership team across your institution can consistently promote and support the referral program to all.

### PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING YOUR ‘IDEAL CUSTOMER’

As with referral programs for any audience, you need to start with a focus on who your ‘ideal student’ is so that you can clearly convey this information to every faculty member, staff member, strategic partner/vendor and/or community leader.

This should also include a set of qualifying questions with desired responses that can be used by these groups when speaking with a potential new student.

Develop a simple, effective process for faculty, staff, vendors, community leaders to refer.

Qualifying potential new students is important—but without a simple and effective process for making a formal referral that will be quickly and effectively managed, you will have a referral program that frustrates everyone and that will result in the death of your program.

## DEVELOP A FORMAL PROGRAM

Highly successful referral programs have specific goals and objectives, strategies and tactics. And they have the resources necessary to succeed.

One of the more common mistakes is to assume that a referral program is “... just another responsibility of all employees and will happen because all employees realize this and will do so automatically,”

To avoid this, successful programs have an on-going communications plan that keeps the program front and center in the minds of the employees as well as the vendors and/or community leaders that are participating. Messaging should reinforce the training, recognize performance and rewards so everyone remains focused and motivated.

## TRAINING YOUR EMPLOYEES

With your plan in place, now it's time to train your participants on how to qualify and escalate qualified referrals so the potential new student can be responded to by your enrollment team.

## REWARDS AND INCENTIVES

Remember to offer rewards and incentives that are compelling and properly aligned with the effort and value of the referral. And successful programs offer a mix of rewards to motivate desired actions ranging from participation to impact.

If your program requires the participants to simply escalate qualified leads, your rewards and incentives will be much different than a program that requires the participants to actually ‘close the sale.’

You might want to consider a reward and incentive structure that offers immediate rewards as well as rewards and incentives for performance over time. For example, one qualified referral earns the participant a reward while the participant with the most referrals per term receives a reward of perceived higher value.

## REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION

As with all campaigns focused on achieving key enrollment objectives, your program needs to have regular reporting that identifies the impact of the effort. Key metrics might include:

- Number of referrals
- Conversion of referrals to first time buyer
- Average order size vs. non-referrals
- Revenue generated from referrals
- Retention rates of referrals
- Referrals from referrals

Once the reports have been generated, share the appropriate information with everyone so that all participants understand the impact they are having on enrollments.

## STRATEGY 7: PARTNERSHIPS



We have been amazed to find so many colleges that have no formal strategy in place that's aimed at creating and growing formal relationships with local businesses, government agencies and non-profits (NGOs) that provide the organization and its employees certain incentives in return for employees of the organization enrolling at their college.

Some entrepreneurial departments or programs might head out and forge a partnership, but a college-wide strategy is rare.

### COMPETITION & MARKET INSIGHT

The first step is understanding what the opportunity is in the market. A competitive scan will help you understand what other colleges in the area are doing and what's working for them. It should give you a sense of the size of the market, so you can begin to set realistic goals and objectives. And it should also give you a sense of threats, obstacles and challenges you should avoid.

To round out this picture, you should speak with the decision makers at the local organizations, so you can understand their wants, needs, expectations and perceptions. You also want to understand their process for selecting education partners including who is involved in the information gathering, analysis, evaluation and selection process. And let's not forget to understand their goals for the relationship.

From this, you should be able to determine what the opportunity is so you can make a decision regarding moving forward, size of the opportunity and the resources you need to pursue and achieve those opportunities.

### REQUIRES AN OWNER, MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES AND RESOURCES

Partnerships require an owner that understands how to negotiate terms with businesses of all shapes and sizes and cultures, government agencies and NGOs. They will also need an appropriate budget and other resources to be effective. The other resources are going to include marketing support in terms of content on the website, collateral, lead generation/nurturing campaigns, events etc. Academic and services/support units will also become involved so that the decision makers can speak with and establish relationships with those that will be working with their employees.

### OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

This is a great opportunity for your college to gain insight into what programs and services these community leaders want from your graduates – their students. This could open a door to subject matter experts for updating current programs and developing new programs, as well as a source for adjunct faculty to help bring the expertise into the classroom.

Finally, this could help you differentiate your college and programs from the competition – something that can help with recruitment and retention down the line. For example, imagine an engineering program that was developed with input from engineers from NASA and Boeing, featuring classes taught by those same engineers?

## ABOUT DWS ASSOCIATES

Founded in 1982, DWS Associates is a full-service marketing firm that develops and implements multi-channel marketing programs for organizations targeting business-to-consumer and business-to-business audiences in global markets. Our focus is on data-driven, innovative lead generation, lead nurturing, retention, and referral programs that attract, engage and retain profitable customers. Our staff is highly experienced in market research, competitive intelligence, business intelligence and analytics, strategic planning and campaign management - so we help you increase sales and marketing performance while building strong, unique, differentiated brands.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

### DUDLEY STEVENSON



Dudley Stevenson, founder and CEO of DWS Associates, has over thirty-five years' experience in consumer marketing, business-to-business marketing, and direct marketing, including developing, planning, and implementing go-to-market strategies. He's also the author of "Marketing Direct: Breaking Through The Clutter." Working with organizations ranging from start-ups to Fortune 100 companies, he and his team have helped clients such as IBM, SAS Institute, Sony, Neiman Marcus, Arizona Highways, Marshall Field & Co., Mrs. Field's, UNICEF, SSA Global Technologies, Hartmarx, and Patagonia implement successful direct marketing programs. A longtime member of the Direct Marketing Association and the American Marketing Association, Stevenson is also a sought-after speaker. He's given hundreds of presentations and workshops on marketing and direct marketing. His "Marketing Planning 101" workshop alone has reached more than sixty thousand marketing and sales professionals.

### PAT MCGRAW

For more than 25-years, Pat has been developing and leading integrated multi-channel direct marketing campaigns targeting B2B and B2C audiences for non-profit and for-profit organizations in education, technology, retail and other industries.



Drawing upon his experience in market research, competitive intelligence, data analytics and strategic planning, Pat identifies opportunities for success - new audiences to pursue, new markets to enter, new programs, products and services to develop and launch, pricing strategies, etc. And with his operational experience, Pat launches and manages integrated campaigns (recruitment and enrollment campaigns that attract, enroll and retain students more effectively for colleges, and lead generation and retention campaigns for tech firms, retailers and service firms). The results include lowering the cost to enroll a new student/attract a new customer, increasing retention rates and more.

Within the education sector, Pat has worked with leading service firms including Noel Levitz, Hobsons, Aslanian Market Research, as well as a wide variety of institutions including Greenville College and Alvernia University to University of Maryland University College, Walden University, University of Chicago, Tulane University and others.

Outside of education, Pat has worked with leading corporations and service firms including Microsoft, IBM, Sears, Kmart, Insight, Barry Blau & Partners (currently Havas Worldwide) and more.

© 2018, DWS Associates. All Rights Reserved. Excerpted from our Book Marketing Direct: Breaking Through the Clutter.