



DEVELOPING MESSAGES & OFFERS THAT INCREASE ADULT ENROLLMENTS

HOW-TO MANUAL FOR DELIVERING THE RIGHT MESSAGE AND OFFER, VIA THE RIGHT MEDIA AT THE RIGHT TIME

BY PAT MCGRAW AND DUDLEY STEVENSON



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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This manual has been created to ensure that a consistent process is in place for the development of message, offer, media and contact strategies associated with college and university efforts focused on recruiting adult students.

We, at DWS | Associates, have developed and implemented numerous adult student recruitment programs for colleges and universities, and that success is due to knowing the audience and having message, offer, media and contact strategies mapped out so they can be consistently implemented, measured, analyzed, and modified.

What follows is a brief introduction to our basic philosophy regarding content marketing and direct marketing, then specific steps to be taken that address:

- Data Necessary to Develop Personas
- What Personas Must Look Like
- Developing Positioning Statements for Personas
- Messaging and Offer Strategy Development for each Persona by Stage
- Media Strategy by Persona
- Contact Strategy by Persona by Stage
- Testing, Modifying and Improving Performance

ALSO INCLUDED WITH THIS MANUAL

In addition to this manual, you should have received the following:

- A complimentary copy of our *Content Marketing Communication Message Plan tool* and
- Access to “*How to Use Your Content Marketing Communication Message Plan Tool*” (video) and
- Access to “*Journey Mapping: How To*” (video).

If for any reason you did not receive or gain access to the above, please contact us at 651-315-7588 or marketingconnection@dwsassociates.com

INTRODUCTION

In this section, we discuss the underlying strategic thought that the message, offer, media and contact strategies will be built upon.

WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?



“Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.”¹

We like that definition – especially because it ends with “...drive profitable customer action.” Unfortunately, too many have lost focus of that and instead focus on creating more and more content. This manual will show you how to keep your eye on that ultimate prize.

Please remember that “content” is not limited to just the online/digital world – it includes direct mail, brochures, articles in print publications, manuals, advertising (broadcast, print, out-of-home) and more.

And for the purposes of this document, “content” refers to “right message” – so it goes beyond the more traditional definition of [ex] a blog post, white paper, ebook, video etc. and includes the messaging you use in your advertising, emails, direct mail, outbound telemarketing. The reason for this is simple – you can’t separate the messaging you use to capture their attention and engage them in one channel from the messaging you use in another channel to capture their attention and engagement them.

We don’t believe you can separate the white paper from the email you send to the individual in the information gathering stage of their decision making process. We believe that content is about the message you deliver in that email and white paper.

So as you move through this document, remember that what we are presenting is a step above a content marketing strategy that focuses on what white paper gets produced and distributed. Instead, we are presenting a ‘communication strategy’ that addresses who you target and why, what you need to address in order to motivate them to select you over other colleges and programs.

And remember that the goal is to drive profitable customer action – which goes well beyond ‘soft metrics’ such as ‘Like’, ‘Follow’, ‘Retweet’ and focus on the cost to generate a new student and the ability to lower the cost to graduate a student.

WHAT IS A CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY?

A content marketing strategy is a documented go-to-market plan that explains in detail:

- Your targeted segments by program (messages by segment)
- Specific features and benefits of the program for each segment (to be featured in messages)
- Media channels preferred by your targeted segments for each stage of their decision making process

¹ Downloaded from <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2014/05/where-content-marketing-fits-plan/> on February 24, 2016.

- Insight into the needs, wants, questions, objections that each targeted segment has to address at each stage of their decision making process
- Channel plan that addresses what communication channels will be used for each targeted segment at each stage of their decision making process
- Content Mapping and Scheduling

In the following pages, we will address these and other critical factors that must be part of a content marketing strategy in order for your college to see marked improvements in performance.

WHY DEVELOPING THE RIGHT MESSAGE, OFFER, MEDIA AND CONTACT STRATEGY IS KEY TO YOUR SUCCESS

The simple answer to this question is because a well devised content marketing strategy allows you to make better informed decisions based on hard data that will help you improve performance in recruitment and retention efforts in critical areas such as, but not limited to:

- Lowering your cost to enroll a new student
- Increasing retention and graduation rates
- Lowering your cost to graduate a student
- Increasing your referral rates (which helps lower your cost to enroll a new student even more)

THE 5 MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF YOUR CAMPAIGN

Your success across multiple communication channels will be driven by the 5 direct marketing pillars.

What are the 5 direct marketing pillars, you ask? Well, here you go – straight out of DWS Associates founder, Dudley Steven’s new book, *Marketing Direct: Breaking Through the Clutter*.

“The five most important things that you have to worry about when creating a direct marketing campaign are, in order of importance, target, offer, format, creative and timing.

1. **Targeting.** Targeting is about 7 times as important as other factors. The “who” is the most important aspect of creating and launching a successful direct marketing campaign. Locating and targeting the right prospects in the right way is absolutely critical. Sometimes, we as marketers spend more time worrying about the product than we do about the audience and this is absolutely backwards. The consumer, the prospective buyer or responder is number 1 and the more you know about the “who” the more likely your promotion is going to produce the desired results.
2. **Offer.** The Offer is about 2.5 times as important. The Offer is the whole proposition and incentives that you offer to generate a response. The Offer is made up of your product/service, your pricing strategy, your service and support proposition and any incentives you might include to get the reader/viewer to respond or buy.
3. **Format.** The Format is about 1.5 times as important. Format includes the medium and the physical shape, size, etc., of your advertisement. Choosing the right format is dependent upon a lot of factors including who you are trying to reach, what media are likely to be the best to reach them, and what media are going to allow you to present your message most effectively. Once you’ve selected the appropriate medium, you then have to select the appropriate physical characteristics. If mail, it is going to be a brochure in a number 10 envelope with a letter and BRC or a self-mailer or large format flat or dimensional mailing. The format is affected by cost

factors as well. What can you afford to spend on the format and achieve your breakeven or desired financial results?

4. **Creative.** Creative is about 1.35 times as important. These are the words, pictures...the bits people tend to get excited about. In direct response advertising, the words are the most important part of the creative. Copy is first whether it's in print or spoken words. The design, including pictures, is there to support the copy.
5. **Timing.** Timing is important, but is the last on the list. It varies from market to market. It can also vary from industry to industry and product to product. When do you mail, when do you launch your broadcast or digital campaign can depend on both internal and external factors. For example, there are better times of year to run certain types of B2C and B2B campaigns. Factors such as elections can impact the results of a campaign. As a rule, you never want to launch a campaign be it mail, broadcast or digital into an election. Email messages may do better at certain times of day or the week depending on the audience and the offer. There are some industry norms for launching direct response advertising campaigns depending on the medium, but in all cases it is best to test to find the best times to launch these activities.”²

Do you see the similarities between content marketing and direct marketing? Both are all about getting the right message and offer (offer) to the right person (targeting) via the right channel (media/channel/content mapping at the right time (stage in the decision making process) in order to motivate the right action (modification in behavior) in a way that's trackable.

The concept that some struggle with is that “offer” must be appropriate to where the individual is within the decision making process. For example, for someone that just contacted you for the first time and is interested in the cost of the program, the right offer could be information about tuition, financial aid, scholarships, payment plans – not ‘Apply Now’. The former addresses their needs, answers their questions and helps them determine if they should continue working with you.

² Dudley Stevenson, Marketing Direct: Breaking Through the Clutter, 2015, page 17.

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT AUDIENCE SEGMENTS/PERSONAS



Non-traditional students are the majority – they are the people that are going to help you achieve your enrollment growth goals moving forward.

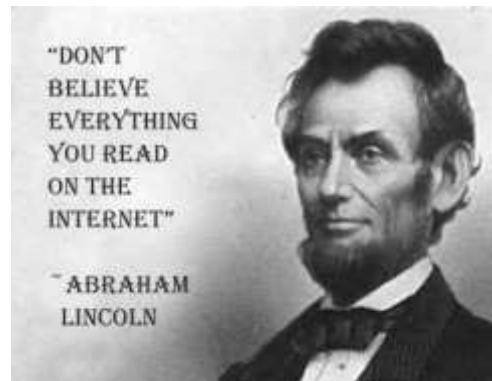
For the past decade, your non-traditional student has consisted of Boomers (52 to 69 years of age in 2016) and Generation X (36 to 51 in 2016). Yet as you read this, Boomers and Generation X are being replaced by Millennials (19 to 35 in 2016) and Generation Z (9 to 19 in 2016).

What do you know about these two groups – and what segments have you identified within these groups as the source of your greatest opportunities to achieve your enrollment goals over the next 5 to 10 years?

A changing target audience requires some research in order to understand them. Now, some might say that there has been plenty of research focused on Millennials (Ms) – and to an extent, they're correct. But most of that research has been extremely broad and filled with contradictions which makes it incredibly difficult for you to put together an effective strategy.

In this section, we will focus on the questions you need to answer and how you should go about getting those answers in order to develop your recruitment and retention programs.

GENERATION X, MILLENNIALS AND GENERATION Z



For the past decade or so, the argument has been made – typically by technology companies trying to sell you their 'solution' for digital marketing – that digital is it and offline is dead.

Unfortunately, this has motivated a great many marketers to act without testing the information coming at them.

Today, many colleges have reduced their spending on 'traditional' channels like television, radio, out-of-home, and direct mail in order to shift their budget to [a] marketing technology (CRM, marketing automation, email platforms) and [b] digital advertising.

Here's an example.

"29 percent of people aged 18 to 24 say they haven't read a printed newspaper at all in the last year."

That comes from a March 2013 [YouGov poll](#) commissioned by Guardian.

Scary, isn't it?

Ummm...no it isn't. Because it also says "71 percent of people aged 18 to 24 say they have read a printed newspaper in the last year."

Try this one on for size.

“The proliferation of online ad formats has not eroded trust in traditional paid advertising channels. Roughly six-in-10 say they trust ads on TV (63%), in newspapers (60%) and in magazines (58%).”

That factoid comes from September 2015 report from Nielsen entitled [*Global Trust in Advertising*](#).

We could go on and on...but the point we’re making is simple. You can rely on the potentially biased research performed by others that has been designed to help them sell you their products or you can talk to you own audience and learn for yourself how they wish to receive information.

We highly recommend talking with your audience and learning for yourself.

The key to your success will be segmentation and the development of personas – so that you can be as specific and relevant as possible in your messaging and offers in order to drive higher response rates, enrollments and more.

HOW TO CREATE PERSONAS & WHY

“Buyer personas are research-based archetypal (modeled) representations of who buyers are, what they are trying to accomplish, what goals drive their behavior, how they think, how they buy, and why they make buying decisions. (Today, I now include where they buy as well as when buyers decide to buy.)”³

Once you identified your segments, it’s time to sit down and ask questions, observe behavior.

- Who is this person?
- What is his or her need? (This is NOT why they need your product.)
- Why should she care about you?
- What unique value proposition (UVP) do you offer this persona?
- How do they buy from you?
- How many are there in your geographic market?
- What are their media preferences?

³ Downloaded from <http://tonyzambito.com/buyer-persona-original-definition-matters/> on February 24, 2016.

STEP 1: GATHERING THE DATA

In order to identify segments and develop personas, you need data and 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 gather the data necessary for you to better understand who they are, what they want, need, expect and perceive regarding their options in higher education and other key data points including selection process and criteria, media habits etc.

There are several ways to go about this – ranging from asking your students for the information to working with a reputable data firms to append data to the student records.

But before you can do either, you need to know what data you should acquire.

KEY DATA POINTS

What follows are a list of potential data points that you would want to collect information on so that you can create your personas. You may want to address all or some of these data points and you may have other that you want to add to the list.

We did not write specific questions or offer specific responses to this list because we did not want to bias you in any way – the key to your success will come from doing the best with the data you have and constantly searching for ways to become more effective.

Demographic

- Sex/Gender
- Gender ID
- Age
- Race/Ethnicity
- Household Income
- Residency
 - If Out of State, name state
- Do you consider yourself to be:
 - International Student
 - Veteran
 - NCAA Athlete

- Commuter Student
- Fraternity/Sorority member
- Student with special needs
- Marital Status
 - If Yes, How long
- Children?
 - If yes, number/sex/age
 - Living with you?

Education

- Class Status
- College or Department
- Program
- If UG program, do you expect to enroll for an advanced degree when you complete UG program?
- Credit Load
- GPA
- How much time per week on the following: studying, lab, other
- Parent's graduate college?

Housing

- Describe current living arrangement
 - Rent, Own, Neither
- Applicable to living arrangement
 - Live alone, with other students, with roommates that are not students, parents/guardians, spouse/partner/significant other, my children

Technology/Internet/Media

- Which of the devices do you use to connect to the Internet?
- Which of the following devices do you prefer to use to connect to the Internet
- Where do you prefer to access the Internet?
- Where are you most often when you use the Internet
- In a typical weekday, do you use the Internet most for work, school, personal reasons
- In a typical weekday, what do you most often use the Internet for?
- Which of the following social network platforms do you have an account
- How much time per day do you spend on these social network platforms?
- What type of information do you rely upon these social network platforms to provide?
- Do you receive Internet, Cable Tv and/or Phone services from the following (Xfinity, Vios, Dish)
- Do you subscribe to any of the following (newspapers, magazines)
- Do you subscribe to any of the following (Pandora, Spotify, Hulu, YouTube Red, Netflix)
- How much time, on average, do you spend per week using the following services
- Type of mobile/smartphone
- Usage of smartphone (calls, email, watching video, text, other)
- Type of tablet

- Usage of table (calls, email, watching video, text, other)

College Decision Making Process

- Motivations
- Wants
- Needs
- Expectations
- Perceptions
- Selection criteria for institution and program by stage in the decision making process
- Sources of information by stage in the decision making process
- What other institutions did you consider before selecting ours?
- What were their strengths
- What were their weaknesses
- Why did you select our institution over theirs?

Behavioral /Psychographic

- Please indicate interests and activities in which you enjoy on a regular basis
- Do you belong to a gym?
 - If yes, how often do you work out at the gym (days/hours)
- Eat in/Dine out
- Type of reader/Books read per month
- Which of the following do you plan to do within the next 6 to 12 months?
 - Get married
 - Have a baby
 - Buy a house
 - Remodel a home
 - Move to a new residence
 - Buy a personal computer
 - Buy/lease a new vehicle
 - Buy/lease a used vehicle
 - Live a life of solitude
- In today's society, one has to lie or cheat at least occasionally in order to succeed.
- People who take ethical shortcuts are more likely to succeed than those who don't.
- I am satisfied with my own ethics and character.
- I am more ethical than most people I know.
- If it was the only way to get my child into a better school I would be willing to lie about my address.
- The values and behavior of young people are about the same as when I was growing up.
- Kids today are more likely to lie, cheat or steal than 20 years ago.
- The development of ethics and character in children is exclusively the responsibility of parents; schools should not be involved.
- Schools should be more active in seeking to instill core ethical values like honesty, responsibility and respect and developing good character in children.
- PERSONAL CONDUCT. In the past 12 months, how many times have you engaged in or experienced the described conduct?

- Lied to a spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend or significant other about something significant.
- Inflated an expense claim for reimbursement.
- Inflated an insurance claim in the past 5 years.
- Was given too much change and kept the money.
- Made an unauthorized copy of software.
- Made an unauthorized copy of music or video.
- Concealed or distorted significant information in communicating to my boss.
- Lied to my boss about something significant.
- Lied to a client or customer about something significant.
- Misrepresented or omitted a material fact on a resume (in past 5 years)
- Misrepresented or omitted a material fact in a job interview (in past 5 years).
- Used the internet for more than 15 minutes for personal reasons during work time.
- Provided a child with a false excuse for missing school.
- Lied about a child's age to save money.
- Asked your child to lie for you (e.g., Tell Grandma I'm not home).
- Lied in front of your child to get out of a difficult situation.
- Misrepresented or omitted facts on a tax return (in past 5 years).
- Told the truth knowing it would be personally costly even when you could have gotten away with lying or concealing information.
- Number of times you cheated on an exam during your senior year in high school.
- Number of times you stole something from a store during your senior year in high school.
- Number of questions on this survey that you did not answer with complete honesty.
- About how long did it take to complete this survey?

STEP 2: WHAT YOUR PERSONAS SHOULD LOOK LIKE

Research Robbie

Demographics

- 25 to 34 years of age
- Married, 2 children
- Owns home
- Household Income: \$75,000 to \$100,000
- Some college, no degree

Geographic

- Lives within 100 miles of military bases located Southern States (SC., NC., GA., FL.,) and Texas (San Antonio) 900K nationally
- Within 100 miles of campus there are approximately 75K

Psychographic

- Former military and/or comes from military family
- Patriotic, conservative
- Reads about financial planning, budgeting
- Comparison shops, heavy coupon shopper
- Vacations with family in summer, typically camping
- Drives Subaru
- Shops at Kohl's
- Eats at McDonald's

Media Habits

- **Internet:** Spends 5 to 10 hours online per week. Very active on Facebook. Uses Internet to stay on top of news via sites ranging from local newspaper to Breitbart, Fox News.
- **TV:** Cable subscriber watches Fox News, Financial News Network, HGTV
- **Radio:** listens to local talk radio during morning/evening drive time Monday thru Friday
- **Print:** Subscribes to local newspaper
- **Mobile:** iPhone for calls, email, texting but no Internet access or watching video.

Education Wants & Needs

- Concerned about returning to college, ability to manage family and course work
- Concerned about writing skills, math skills at college level
- Believes that classroom will be better than trying to learn at home with family



We have included two sample personas. Please note that each persona has the following categories:

- Demographics
- Geographic
- Psychographics
- Behavioral
 - Technology
 - Media Habits
- Education Wants and Needs
 - Motivations and Selection Criteria
 - Actions by Stage



Traveling Tina

Demographics

- 30 to 39 years of age
- Single, No children
- Owns her home
- Earns \$40,000 to \$49,999
- Undergraduate Degree

Geographic

- Lives in Suburban areas in Southern California, Metro Phoenix (AZ), Florida Coastal Counties, New England (CT., MA., RI., NY., NJ.) with estimated size 1.5M
- Within 100 miles of campus, estimated 100K in this segment

Psychographic

- Travels 6 to 8 times per year for personal reasons
- Travels outside the US at least 2x per year for personal reasons
- Active: Belongs to gym and works out 5+ times weekly for 60 to 120 minutes.
- Drives Prius Hybrid
- Shops at Macy's
- Eats at Panera Bread

Media Habits

- **Internet:** Spends 10 to 15 hours online per week. Very active on Facebook, Pinterest. Active on LinkedIn, Instagram. Little to no activity on Snapchat, Twitter.
- **Internet:** Accesses local news, weather online. Also frequents NY Times, Huffington Post.
- **TV:** Watches HGTV, Travel, PBS with Hulu, Netflix subscription. Does not watch local TV or subscribe to cable.
- **Radio:** Pandora subscriber in car and at home
- **Print:** See mobile/Internet
- **Mobile:** Samsung S7 tablet and S6 phone. Email, Text, Internet, Amazon

Education Wants & Needs

- Concerned about cost
- Concerned about fitting education in current lifestyle/activity.
- Open to flexibility offered by online but needs short terms (6 to 8 weeks) for occasional breaks during summer and Winter Holidays
- Wants to use education to gain employment outside the US or with large global corporation

The information within the Geographic section ideally comes from your current students – but to get the estimated size of the segment, which is extremely valuable for goal setting, you may need to work with a data company so they can take your data, compare with their larger database, and project 'total size' or 'universe'.

As you can see in both examples, you benefit from having:

- Understanding of their educational wants and needs which helps you develop stronger, more relevant messaging and offers;
- Insight into where they spend time and how they use technology which also helps with targeting, messaging and offers;
- Knowledge of their location – down to the household level is you are working with a data provider such as Claritas PRIZM and Neustar ElementOne – which helps you set realistic goals as well as target specific geographic areas;
- Knowledge of their media habits and usage which helps you develop a much more targeted media strategy.

STEP 3: POSITIONING STATEMENTS FOR YOUR PERSONAS

Now that you have identified your personas, it's time to start focusing on how your institution, programs and services fills a particular need held by that persona in a way that others do not and, ideally, cannot. Positioning is the process of identifying that unique value so you can define and own an appropriate niche in the market.

Here's the template for writing a positioning statement:

For [insert Target Market], the [insert Brand] is the [insert Point of Differentiation] among all [insert Frame of Reference] because [insert Reason to Believe].

The point of differentiation (POD) describes how your institution's brand or product benefits prospective students in ways that set you apart from your competitors.

The frame of reference (FOR) is the segment or category in which your institution competes.

The reason to believe is just what it says. This is a statement providing compelling evidence and reasons why prospective students can have confidence in your differentiation claims.

The wording of your positioning statement doesn't have to match this template exactly, but to be effective, it must contain the five main components in brackets above. Occasionally, a positioning statement will contain a point of parity, when it is central to a product's positioning.

Above all, your point of differentiation, frame of reference, and reason to believe must be meaningful, important, and convincing to your customers, not just to your company.

EXAMPLES OF GREAT POSITIONING STATEMENTS

The following positioning statement was used by Amazon.com in 2001, when it sold books almost exclusively:

For World Wide Web users who enjoy books, Amazon.com is a retail bookseller that provides instant access to over 1.1 million books. Unlike traditional book retailers, Amazon.com provides a combination of extraordinary convenience, low prices, and comprehensive selection.

Let's try developing a positioning statement for a fictitious university that is targeting Traveling Tina for their MBA program

For Traveling Tina, ABC University's MBA program provides unique hands-on experiential learning designed by today's corporate leaders of global corporations for the purpose of developing tomorrow's corporate leaders – unlike traditional MBA programs, ABC's MBA provides unique learning experiences designed and delivered by global corporate leaders such as Tim Cook (Apple), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Jeff Immelt (GE), Wang Jianlin (Dalian Wanda Commercial Properties), Zhou Qunfei (Lens Technologies) and Lloyd Blankfein (Goldman Sachs).

STEP 4: DEVELOP YOUR MESSAGING STRATEGY

You have now have identified your personas – their unique needs, wants, perceptions and expectations – and developed your positioning statements for those personas and your institution and program(s), so now it's time to match that with your unique strengths and develop ways to communicate them to the individual in ways that show how your institution delivers unique benefits.

No more “convenient locations” – instead, focus on how the individual saves time and money because the locations are nearby which cuts down on travel, gas, wear and tear on the automobile.

No more “experienced faculty with real world experience – instead focus on the individual will be learning practical skills that easily translate to the work they do every day so they can immediately put their education to use and make strides towards the performance that leads to raises and promotions.

No more ‘graduate in as little as 12 months’ – instead focus on the individual being able to earn the credential so they can list the success sooner than students in other programs at other schools, giving them an advantage in the job market.

But more importantly, focus on what makes you unique so the individual realizes that you really have no competition – that you offer rewards that cannot be acquired anywhere else because that is what will help the individual make an informed decision easier and faster.

- What's your institution's most distinctive trait? And what is the program's most distinctive trait?
- What's the most important thing your institution and this program does for this Persona?
- What's the main reason people in this Persona enroll at your institution in this program?

Do you know the answers to these questions? Does everyone in your institution know? Do your blog posts, podcasts, videos, emails, and other communications convey the answers to these questions in one way or another day after day?

Consistency like that, believe it or not, is achievable. Maybe you think that your institution is too big, too loosely structured, or too something else. Well, don't throw up your hands, toss in the towel and call it a day. Tools exist that can help you bring your institution's messaging into alignment. One such tool favored by many content strategists – a surprisingly simple but powerful tool – is the message architecture.

Messaging is not copy; it's subtext.

So, while a message architecture consists of words, it doesn't tell content creators what words to use. It tells them what messages their words (and images, etc.) should convey and the order of importance of those messages.

While a message architecture should align with the corporate vision, mission, and brand values, it's not the same as any of those things. It has three distinguishing qualities (as noted in Margot's book, *Content Strategy at Work*):

- It conveys levels of priority.
- It's actionable (in that it directly informs content decisions).
- It's specific to communication.

For example, Traveling Tina is interested in working for a global corporation so the messaging for this Persona during the “Pre-Inquiry” phase might focus on “How to identify the institution best suited for people that want to work for global corporations”. Offers might be checklists and other tools to help those in this Persona to ask the right questions and capture the data for easy analysis.

Obviously the questions you recommend to be addresses focus on your unique strengths – for example, let’s say your programs were designed by C-level executives of global corporations based on what they believe a successful global executive must have in terms of education and experience.

Taking this a step further, once Traveling Tina in the “Inquiry to Start Application” phase, messaging might focus on testimonials from students, graduates, and employers regarding how specific elements of the program gave them an edge with global corporations and helped them gain their “dream careers”. Offers during this phase might change to incentives for starting the application by a certain date – for example, institution or program branded apparel, notebooks, pens as well as invitations to student/alumni events.

Once Traveling Tina enters the “Start Application to Submit Completed Application” phase, messaging might focus on a combination of those testimonials along with key dates, outstanding application materials and reminders about how close they are to their dream. Offers might be incentives to submit all materials and complete the application by a specific date – perhaps bookstore coupons or premium parking location on campus or tickets to on-campus events.

As you can see, the messaging in these examples is directional rather than something you cut-and-paste into whatever content is being created. Leave the creativity to the writers, focus on relevancy and unique benefits and value to the reader.

WORKSHEET: MESSAGING STRATEGY

	Persona Name
Stage 1 Name	Unique Benefit 1 Unique Benefit 2 Unique Benefit 3
Stage 2 Name	Unique Benefit 1 Unique Benefit 2 Unique Benefit 3
Stage 3 Name	Unique Benefit 1 Unique Benefit 2 Unique Benefit 3
Stage 4 Name	Unique Benefit 1 Unique Benefit 2 Unique Benefit 3

Stage 1

Description	Features	Benefits
University	<i>Engaged Learning</i>	Real Life Experience: <i>Real life case studies, internships and other opportunities to put what you learned in the classroom to work in real-world situations</i>
College/Department	<i>AACSB Accreditation</i>	Differentiation in job market: <i>The learning experience is unique, valuable and in demand by employers.</i>
Program	<i>Faculty with PhDs and 20+ years of experience leading global corporations</i>	Networking contacts and differentiation in job market: <i>You learn from those that have lead successful global corporations and they help open doors to contacts around the globe.</i>

Stage 2

Description	Features	Benefits
University		
College/Department		
Program		

Stage 3

Description	Features	Benefits
University		
College/Department		
Program		

Stage 4

Description	Features	Benefits
University		
College/Department		
Program		

Stage 5

Description	Features	Benefits
University		
College/Department		
Program		

STEP 4A: DEVELOPING YOUR OFFER STRATEGY

You want the prospective student to take some action every time you connect – and in some instances, that action is NOT ‘Apply Now!’

For example, in Stage 1 and 2, the typical prospective student is gathering and analyzing information in order to determine what options exist and what options appear to be for them. This is typically the ‘educational’ part of the process so it is appropriate and effective to offer more information.

“Learn if college is right for you!”

“How to pick the right graduate program for your life goals”

“How You Can Balance College with Work and Family!”

These are three titles of potential checklists, white papers, blog posts, podcasts, video segments...that Traveling Tina and Research Robbie might find extremely valuable – and unique – during those early stages.

Since your goal is more than just to enroll a new student – it’s to enroll a new student that’s most likely to successfully complete the program and earn their credential – you are going to want to create offers that engage, build trust and motivate the prospective student to share the information you need to determine if they are likely to succeed or will need assistance or might be better off at another institution! (For more on this, please see Adult Student Retention, our white paper.)

As you move further along the decision making process, your offers should change in order to remain relevant and of high perceived value. For example, in the “Started Application to Submitted Completed Application” stage, you want to motivate them to submit a completed application so your offers might be:

- Waive Application Fee
- Invitation to an exclusive on-campus event such as a luncheon/brunch with current/former students of their program of interest as well as faculty, staff and community leaders
- Early Bird Preferred Access Class Registration

Or when they have been accepted but have not yet enrolled in classes, you might offer them:

- VIP Parking
- Invitation to an exclusive on-campus event such as a luncheon/brunch with current/former students of their program of interest as well as faculty, staff and community leaders
- Discount on textbooks and materials at campus bookstore

The key here is to remember that you need to be relevant to the stage of the process and the wants/needs of the individual/persona.

Yes, keep “Apply Now!” in the mix but test other offers along with it so you can have something of value for those that aren’t ready to take that step at this time.

WORKSHEET: OFFER STRATEGY

Persona Name

Stage 1: *Pre-Inquiry*

Messaging/Benefits	Offers
Real Life Experience: <i>Real life case studies, internships and other opportunities to put what you learned in the classroom to work in real-world situations</i>	<i>Checklist to compare programs and make the right decision for you</i>
Differentiation in job market: <i>The learning experience is unique, valuable and in demand by employers.</i>	<i>Video Interviews with alumni and those that hire/employ students and graduates of this program to see real examples of what this means.</i>
Networking contacts and differentiation in job market: <i>You learn from those that have lead successful global corporations and they help open doors to contacts around the globe.</i>	<i>Attend Open House to meet and mingle and see the power of our network</i>

Stage 2

Messaging/Benefits	Offers

Stage 3

Messaging/Benefits	Offers

Stage 4

Messaging/Benefits	Offers

Stage 5

Messaging/Benefits	Offers

STEP 5: DEVELOPING YOUR MEDIA STRATEGY

At this point, you should have data from the institution/college/program campaigns as well as data from the students regarding media usage/reliance.

We recommend comparing these two sources by stage in the decision making process (Pre-Inquiry to Inquiry, Inquiry to Start Application, Start Application to Submit Completed Application, Submit Completed Application to Accepted/Enrolled). You will start to see overlap between their perspective of events and your own – that is the media you will want to test during each of those stages and overall.

Note: The stages may vary based on the institution's needs and processes. For example, there may be an "Inquiry to Marketing Qualified Lead" stage for institutions that wish to address "Is the individual qualified to enroll in our institution and/or their program of interest?" There may also be a "Marketing Qualified Lead to Enrollment/Advisor Qualified Lead" stage where only those qualified to enroll and within [ex] 90 to 180 days of their desired start date are assigned to an enrollment advisor.

WORKSHEET: MEDIA PLANNING

Instructions

In the Column entitled “Stage”, list the names of the stages a prospective student will move through from “start” to “finish”. You may wish to use a unique worksheet for each stage if there is a lot of media options to be addressed.

In the Column entitled “Persona’s Media” list the media they have reported to use, starting with their most preferred media through least preferred.

In the Column entitled “Our Media (Based on Results)” report on the results your efforts in that same media as the Persona’s produced in the same stage. For example, in the Pre-Inquiry Stage, the Persona’s reports that they use Facebook to identify options for advancing their career with firms outside the US and you used Facebook Ads and Facebook Page to motivate prospective students to contact your institution/college/program – put down the details here. This would include campaign goals, objectives, budgets, messaging/offers etc.

In the Column entitled “Recommendations”, this is where you lay out if this media will be used in this stage to address this persona or not. If you elect to use this media, include any key notes or comments that explain why and what you will do (stay the course, try new message/offer strategy, etc.)

Stage	Persona’s Media	Our Media (Based on Results)	Recommendations
Pre-Inquiry	<i>Facebook Google Search</i>	<i>Facebook Page Facebook Ads PPC/Google Adwords</i>	<i>Continue to use this media with focus on message/offers more appropriate for the stage. Informational offers aimed at helping them determine if college is their best option and how to select the best college/program for their needs</i>
Inquiry to Start Application			
Start Application to Submit Completed Application			
Submit Completed Application to Accept/Enroll			

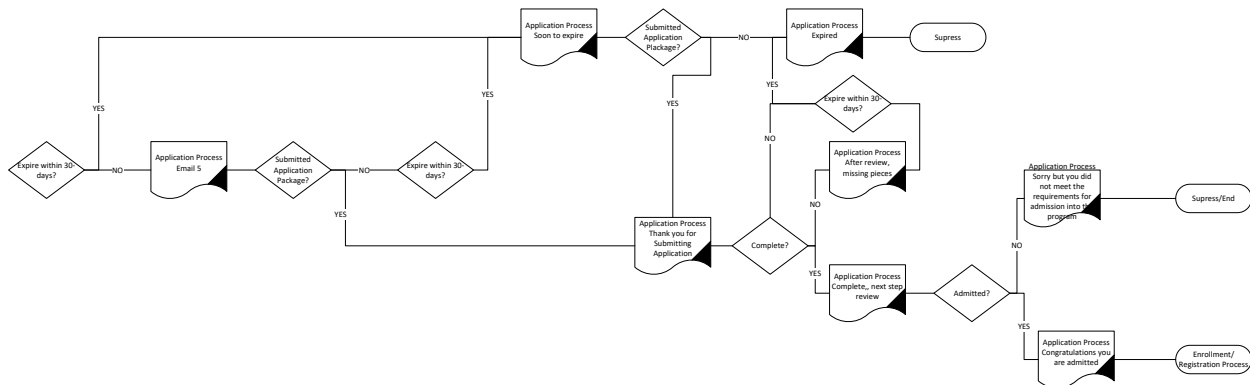
The next step is to set goals and objectives.

WORKSHEET: BUDGET AND OBJECTIVES

Please refer to the Content Marketing Communication Message Plan tool that was included with this manual. To fully benefit from this tool, be sure to watch the video that also came with this manual, entitled “How to use your Content Marketing Communication Message Planning Tool”.

If you are unable to access this video, please contact us at 651-315-7588 or marketingconnection@dwsassocites.com

STEP 5: JOURNEY MAPPING:



Please refer to the 10-minute short video, “Journey Mapping: How to” for details.

The purpose of Journey Mapping is to increase your effectiveness in terms of converting qualified inquiries into new students.

One out of five colleges and universities failed to respond to new adult student inquiries in a recent study.

Of those that did respond, more than 80% failed to mention the prospective adult student’s stated program of interest.

Now, imagine you walking into a local business and asking the staff for information on their products – only to get ignored OR have them talk about something other than products! How would you feel? Would you be referring friends and family? Would you be moving forward with them, eventually spending your money?

Journey mapping is designed to maximize the impact of your efforts by leveraging your strengths and resources, and by proactively managing the relationship. With Journey Mapping, you will have an action to take based on the action or inaction of the prospective adult student. Unlike most recruitment efforts that wait for the adult to call or start the online application, Journey Mapping helps ensure you ask the right questions, gather and analyze the right data, and then make the best possible decisions based on that data available.

If you are unable to access the short-video, “Journey Mapping: How to”, contact us at 651-315-7588 or info@dwsassociates.com

STEP 6: TESTING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

“It’s one thing for an organization to have a content delivery model. But it’s an entirely different thing to execute well in the space,” Ramona Meyer-Piagentini, Senior Consulting Manager in Digital Marketing for Adobe explains. “Intuition doesn’t play a role in marketing. If you’re going on complete assumptions, you could be missing the boat on driving real impact.”⁴

MEDIA RELATIONS

This is almost a lost art – and it’s a tremendous opportunity to get that all important 3rd party endorsement. Going beyond placing a press release on Newswire and hoping someone picks up the news, we’re highly recommending that you reach out to the key influencers and develop a relationship that leads to greater exposure for your content via their channels. Craft press releases that offer the full story and make yourself available for comments on industry news. Open up this line of promotion with professional help from PR firms or tackle it on your own.

Think outside the box – you have faculty that can be a subject matter expert for the local news on the nursing/healthcare sector or the economy. You have staff that can speak about the cost of education and how to manage the cost and limit debt. You have faculty and staff that can talk about the higher ed sector and how technology is helping adults return to college with greater success.

Just remember to set up a process for accurately tracking the performance of the activities. If part of the media coverage effort includes a free white paper for potential students, use a unique tracking URL.

CALLS-TO-ACTION

Specifically the “link/button to click”- test its size, color, shape, wording. Don’t look at it as a throw-away driven by graphic standards and never to be changed or tested.

“COUPON” CODES

There are two popular options here – the first is “enter this code to get the content” and the other is “enter this code to get your app fee waived”. One is tied to content, the other to a monetary discount. Let’s focus on the one tied to content first – for this to be an effective strategy, you are going to need something of high perceived value, otherwise the use of a “coupon” for content may be viewed as “another piece of information to remember and enter” and that can negatively impact results.

Which leads us to “always test the use of the coupon code”.

Now, if you’re offering a free or discounted entrance to a special event, or waiving the application fee – that ‘high perceived value’ is a different story than ‘free checklist to help you select the right college’.

Bottom line, coupons/codes should be used to add to the experience and should not be perceived as “another step, another hoop”.

⁴ Downloaded from <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2013/09/content-optimization-advantage-performance-testing/> on February 25, 2016.

TESTING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

BODY COPY

Working in direct marketing, I have had the honor of working with some incredibly talented people that have taught me a lot of valuable lessons. And body copy is one area where I have learned a lot and been amazed a lot.

Some people like clear and concise – so keep it short and simple. Some like to scan so use bullet points, italics and bold text. Some want long, detailed content – the longer and more detailed the better.

“Multivariate testing is a technique for testing a hypothesis in which multiple variables are modified. The goal of multivariate testing is to determine which combination of variations performs the best out of all of the possible combinations.”⁵

So you can test the headline and an image and some copy...but you also need to understand that your greatest challenge is going to be getting the visitor traffic you need to reach meaningful results and conclusions. Which is why you should project a traffic sample size prior to attempting the test – and if the traffic is projected as too low to deliver statistically valid results in a timely manner, consider restructuring the test to an A/B split.

A/B TESTING

Simple, efficient, and fast, A/B testing – also known as ‘split testing’ and ‘bucket testing’ - allows you to compare a baseline control sample with a variety of single variable experiments to improve conversion rates. A classic direct mail tactic, this method of testing is easy to execute and is a great starting point for testing copy, layouts, images, and colors.

Experiments are typically distributed equally with the original control sample.

Conversion results are measured and tracked for comparison and performance analysis. This method is different from multivariate testing, which applies statistical modeling for experimentation with multiple variables within the distribution.

Check out our post on [A/B Testing: 8 Tips to Follow](#)

EYE TRACKING

Eye tracking is the measurement of eye activity. Where do we look? What do we ignore? When do we blink? How does the pupil react to different stimuli? The concept is basic, but the process and interpretation can be quite complex but the findings can help drive improved performance.

IN-PAGE ANALYTICS FROM GOOGLE ANALYTICS

With In-Page Analytics, you can make a visual assessment of how users interact with your web pages. This helps you answer questions like:

- Is the layout optimal for what I want users to accomplish on the page?
- Are my users seeing the content I want them to see?
- Are my users finding what they're looking for on the page?
- Are my calls to action motivating or visible enough?
- What links are users clicking?

⁵ Downloaded from <https://www.optimizely.com/resources/multivariate-testing/> on February 26, 2016.

CONCLUSION

Our goal is to be more efficient. More effective. To focus on the things that really matter so we can make a greater difference.

What this manual addresses will cause some to turn and go in the other direction because it is, in all honesty, a lot of work. But it's the kind of work that, in the end, helps you be more efficient, effective and make a greater difference.

Investing more time and effort into gaining a better understanding of your target audience so that your recruitment and retention efforts generate better results is significantly better than spending more time saying the wrong things to the wrong people via the wrong channels and hoping enrollments increase.

We've implemented these initiatives for decades and double-digit improvement in performance followed – so the effort definitely pays off.

So it comes down to this. Do you want to work smarter and see improvements or do you want to worker harder and hope things improve?

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.

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