



University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Keeping in Mind What Students Really Value

Founded in 1869, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Nebraska) is a top-tier research university, Big Ten Conference school, and now a leading teaching institution in the U.S. The strong academic and student life, combined with the university's commitment to an atmosphere of dignity, equity, and inclusion for all individuals, continues to attract classes of over 20,000 undergraduates each year.

While the university has a solid national reputation that attracts students to apply, the campus community goes well beyond that in order to enroll each class. Nebraska's Director of Enrollment Marketing, Andrew Swenson, explained how he has seen the focused attention given to each individual on campus over the seven years that he has worked at the university. "What I value most about the University of Nebraska is that we believe in the power of every person. I love our access mission and that we care about students as individuals. Every day, I see how we are willing to collaborate across disciplines to accomplish goals and make a difference in others' lives. Our prospective students experience this individualization when they visit campus and leave saying that they felt like they really mattered while they were here."

Caring for Each Student Amidst a Pandemic

The Nebraska enrollment team maintains these personal relationships with their prospective students beyond the

Challenge

- Pandemic limited traditional recruitment methods
- Communication to students needed at exact right time in decision-making process

Solution

- ACT® | NRCCUA® Digital Solutions
- Eduventures® Student Mindsets™

Benefits

- Website engagement **5 times higher** than with previous campaigns
- Student communications customized to what they individually value most in a college
- Thousands of new students visited website
- Highest levels of in-state student post-view and post-click interactions
- Delivering the right message at the right time in students' decision-making processes

campus visit, continuing to guide and encourage students as they navigate the enrollment process. Like all institutions across the nation in 2020, however, the team's tried and true methods of communicating with these students were incredibly disrupted with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Swenson described his initial reaction to this new challenge. "Our traditional means of connecting with students was going to be

That's when he turned to the school's ongoing partnership with ACT | NRCCUA. Teaming up with the Digital Solutions team, the university launched digital engagement and email campaigns to connect with prospective students at their specific stages of enrollment. Swenson elaborated, "We matched our communications with something specific we knew about the student—further customizing the experience with us."



The ultimate point: when we can communicate about what matters most to a student, we have a better chance at engaging them and making them feel like we care about them as a person. That's who we are. That's our whole brand and that's what our digital strategy with ACT | NRCCUA is about.



dramatically limited—perhaps even made impossible. If our usual source of applications was going to disappear, we would have to do two things really well: first, we would need to ensure our digital communications spoke to students at the exact right moments in their decision-making processes; second, we would need to find alternative ways to connect with students beyond what we had typically done."

The Nebraska enrollment team took on these two goals by adjusting which students they were messaging to and the method of communication. "In the past, we had engaged in mass market advertising with the goal of increasing inquiries—the idea was that more students at the top of the funnel means more at the bottom. But the reality is, we already have a lot of prospective students that don't convert to applicants. Instead of obsessing about dumping more students into the top of the funnel, we decided a smarter business strategy was to develop a plan that would increase the conversion rate from the students we already knew were interested," Swenson shared.

The Right Message at the Right Time

Swenson described how the heart of Nebraska's recruitment strategy was personalized communication with prospective students based on what they care most about in a future college. Having worked with ACT | NRCCUA, he knew that its Eduventures Student Mindsets was exactly the research and data that would equip him to execute his strategy. Stemming from the Eduventures Prospective Student Research, Eduventures defined six Student Mindsets to identify the dreams and desires prospective students have for their upcoming undergraduate experiences.

"Psychographic segmentation is the gold standard," Swenson relayed. "If you understand how someone makes decisions—how they think—you can understand what is individually meaningful for that person. Using Mindsets, we're able to communicate to students that we have something designed specifically for them. They help us to position

ourselves much more effectively--showing students how their experiences at Nebraska will benefit them as individuals if they enroll.”

He also described specific areas of university life that he is communicating to students using the Mindset data. “Mindsets drive the argument for why someone should engage with us in the first place. Because we know what matters to students, we have a clear starting point for our opening conversations with them. We can show them immediately that Nebraska has what they are looking for in a college,” Swenson explained. “For instance, to open the conversations with some students, we started with descriptions about our career preparation, while with others we emphasized social connections. If we know that describing certain aspects of the university first is more likely to engage a specific student, then communicating accordingly is how we’re going to be most successful. Eduventures Mindsets enables us to do that.”

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Students Respond When They Feel Known

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln team saw a lot of success through these efforts to integrate Student Mindsets into its digital advertising strategy.

“This was the first time we partnered with the Digital Solutions team on direct response advertisements. From the beginning, the results showed that our post-view and post-click interactions were consistently above



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“The core of our strategy is to deliver the right message at the right time. We don’t use Mindsets to invent messages,” Swenson clarified. “We think about positioning the university’s features to our audiences with slightly different language for each Mindset segment. Take academic clubs, for example. Clubs offer great hands-on experiences and career preparation. They also help you make friends and expand your network. To the jobs-focused student, we’re talking about a foundation for their careers when highlighting our clubs. To the social-focused student, we’re talking about friendships.

industry average. Some segments were off the charts. Thousands of students came to our website who probably otherwise wouldn’t have visited,” Swenson shared.

Swenson then explained the stages of his communication strategy with the Digital Solutions team. “The first flight of our campaign is about cost and value, since it’s the number one concern of students. The second campaign follows up with interested students by segmenting communications according to the six Mindsets. A third flight follows up with specific program information.”

While I was concerned that engagement would drop off because there is usually a limit to how long people stayed engaged, it doubled! In the first two weeks, we had double the engagement of the first four weeks.”

The Nebraska enrollment team saw their Mindset communications perform far better than they ever expected. Swenson described his reaction to the campaign results: “It is clear that the Mindsets response is the best opening argument we have ever made. What blew me away is that Mindsets outperformed our out-of-state scholarship messaging. That had been our best-performing message for seven years straight. Not anymore.

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Strategic Partnership Drives Success

According to Swenson, the true success of University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s recruitment strategy and partnership with ACT | NRCCUA is due to the trust and unity between the two teams.

He knew that he could rely on his Digital Solutions partners to strengthen his enrollment marketing strategies. “My rep figures out

anything I ask of him. I can send any big idea I have over to him and he’ll give me incredible advice and resources,” Swenson shared.

Swenson also outlined the high-level value that he knew the partnership could bring to his team at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. “The reason these campaigns are successful is that we have everything strategically aligned—from the ad creative to the landing page to the email response—everything is data-driven. Since our Digital Solutions partners were going to be doing the creative, it was really important that we were aligned on strategy.”

Swenson wrapped up his thoughts on the partnership with ACT | NRCCUA and his excitement for future years by further expressing his gratitude for professionalism, flexibility, and cooperation. “Last spring was the first time we worked with Digital Solutions and it worked really well. This year it also worked so smoothly because the ACT | NRCCUA creative team understood our creative intent and was very willing to make any little changes about our brand style without complaining. Our style change suggestions were made quickly and easily which helped since the content was on our landing pages. The team members hit the ideas out of the park because they were connected to our strategy. That’s exactly what I want in a partner.”