

The student marketer's guide to:

Omnichannel Marketing

Akero

In this strategy guide we'll reveal the proper meaning of omnichannel communication within the context of student marketing and recruitment for educational institutions. We will debunk the myth that multichannel is also omnichannel and show you how to use omnichannel communications to effectively capture and nurture your student leads through their decision making process.

This whitepaper will arm you with the insights you need to unify your communications across different platforms and help you create a singular experience for all your students, discover new channels, and ultimately nurture and convert more students into your institution.

We hope you find it useful and if you need any support, then please get in touch.



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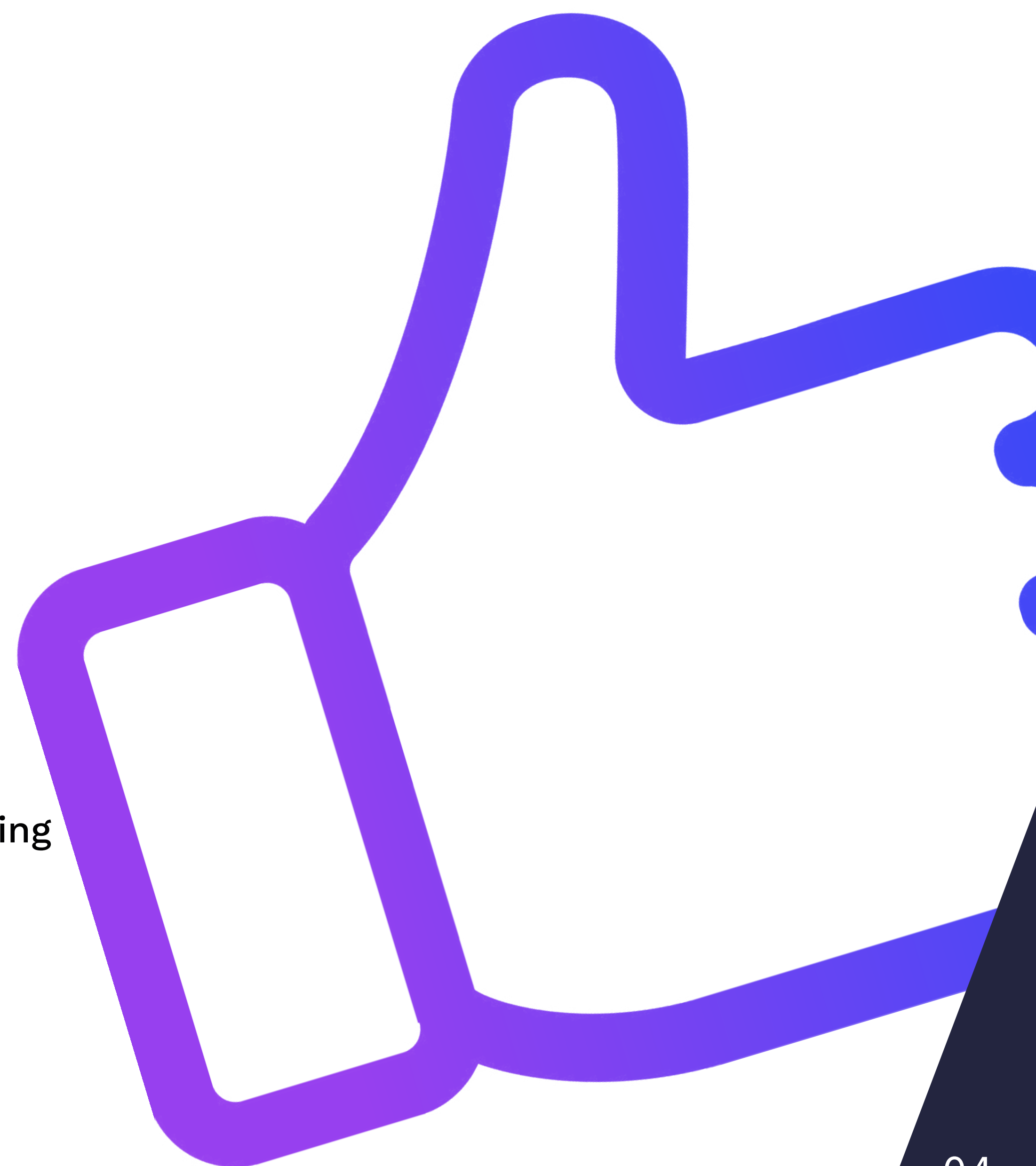
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WHAT IS OMNICHANNEL COMMUNICATION?

Omnichannel marketing is a term that has been on the landscape for several years now. But it's only recently that it's become an accepted term. Whether or not it is truly understood yet? That's another matter.

The idea is based on the origins of the word and is centred on the concept of 'Omni' – i.e., 'all', or 'every'. Omnichannel communications' true characteristics are rooted in the idea of being 'everywhere' in their ability to span data and systems, traverse channels and connect everyone, everywhere.





In the context of student marketing and this guide, omnichannel communications refer to an institution's objective to provide consistent, on-brand communications across multiple customer touchpoints regardless of where they are in the marketing funnel. These include (but certainly are not limited to):

- Social media profiles
- WhatsApp
- Landing pages
- Email marketing
- SMS
- Advertising
- Outreach and engagement
- Live chat
- Customer services

Omnichannel takes an integrated approach to marketing, admissions and enrolment. This means that, if effective, data flows freely through your departments, and that all of the online and offline systems you use are connected. Students can enter or exit your funnel across multiple channels and devices while experiencing a unified recruitment experience with your institution.

Strategic, data-driven marketers will want a view of all these systems so that they can easily identify student interactions and act on student engagements. Omnichannel marketing allows student marketers to see everything that is going on in their operating sphere – allowing them to track, understand and attribute ROI, and customise – and even personalise – each student's experience at every touchpoint.

WHEN YOU TAKE INTO ACCOUNT
THAT 98% OF GEN-Z SWITCH
DEVICES AT LEAST ONCE EVERY
DAY, TAKING AN OMNICHANNEL
APPROACH IS A NO-BRAINER.

For many institutions, not having the correct martech can make this a daunting task. But the long-term benefits are worth it.

OMNICHANNEL VS MULTICHANNEL



**Let's start by busting a common myth:
Multichannel is not the same as omnichannel.**

Multichannel means using different channels to communicate and tailor the experience of the audience (in our case students) to each medium. These channels are managed separately and data doesn't flow between them, which means a prospective student could move from one channel to the next and not enjoy the same on-brand experience that is bespoke to where they are in their journey to enrolment.

If your institution is using multiple communication channels but offering a different experience in each one, then you are running cross-communication channels.

If those experiences are targeting different audience segments, then it's multichannel. A student in an omnichannel experience should feel, no matter where, when or how they are reaching you, they'll get the same experience every time.

It's important that you start with a discovery phase and map out where you can find out more about your audience.

When an omnichannel experience is in place, it is easier for education brands to form deeper, more meaningful relationships with their students. And that will be more important than ever before in a post-Covid 19 world, where digital marketing and virtual experiences replace physical ones.

Features of multichannel marketing:

- Channels operating largely in isolation
- Customer information and engagements are stored in silos
- Your recruitment and marketing teams have a hierarchical access to data

Features of omnichannel marketing:

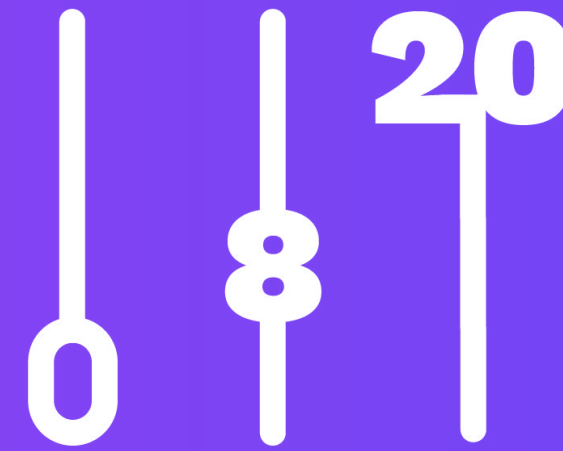
- Centralised customer data and a true view of all engagements with your brand
- Tracking of touchpoints and ability to attribute true ROI
- Personalised and automated student recruitment journeys

THINK STUDENT:

HOW AND WHEN STUDENTS WANT TO BE CONTACTED BY INSTITUTIONS AND BRANDS



1. Two thirds of students expect a response from a brand within 24 hours. Half will abandon that brand if they do not receive a swift response.



2. Personalisation has the potential to deliver 8x the ROI on marketing spend and make students 20x more likely to convert.

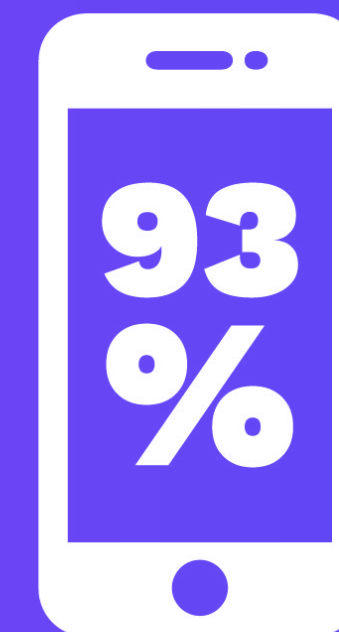


3. Two in five students would prefer to secure their place at university by email.

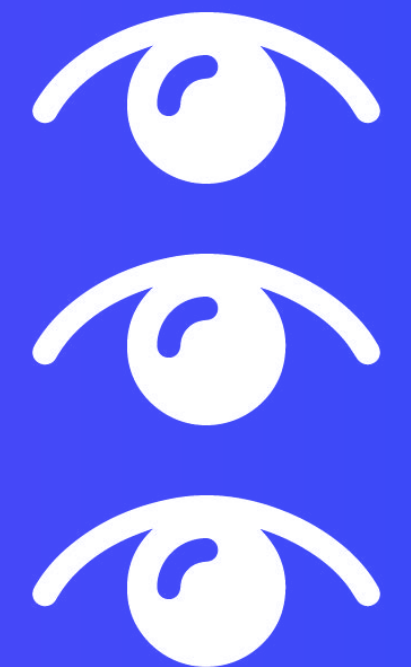
4. 70% of leads are lost due to poor follow up.



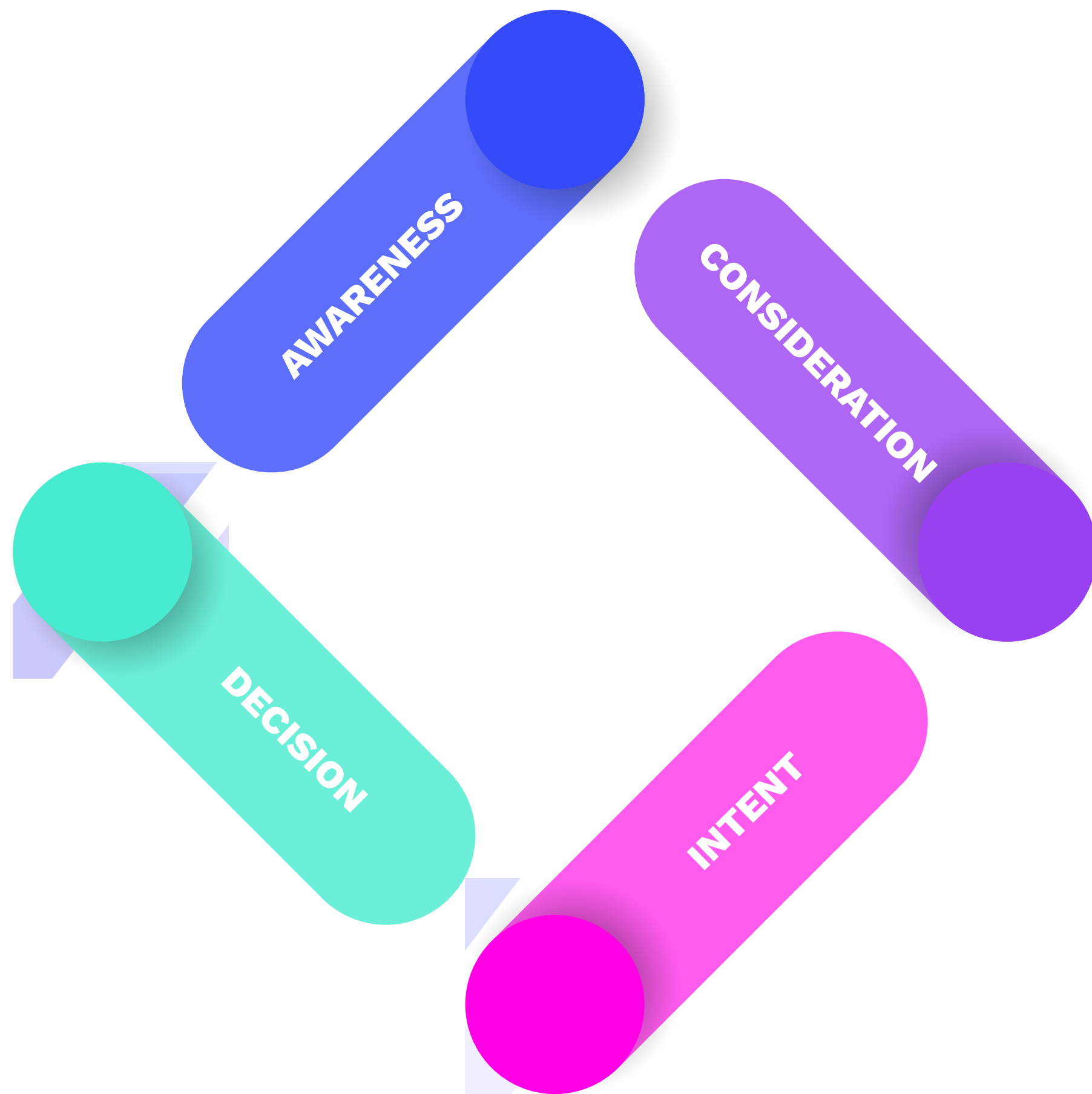
5. 93% of student Facebook use occurs on a mobile.



6. Students check their mobile phones an average of 150 times a day.



MORE REASONS TO ADOPT OMNICHANNEL



1. Crucial for when coordination is key (like Clearing)

The advertising ecosystem is complicated. A student can join or leave at any stage. And to succeed, particularly at complex times in the recruitment cycle, your advertising and conversion messaging need to be connected and delivered at key moments, aligning performance and connection with students' thoughts and motivations.

Differentiated messaging for each state of mind (Awareness, Consideration, Intent and Decision) ensures a student is targeted with the right message for where they are on their journey to making an application.

2. Turbocharge your marketing efforts and increase ROI

A well-defined, omnichannel, student-as-a-customer experience achieves a much higher year-on-year increase in lead conversions and retention rates, on average, than traditional marketing approaches. Recent research by the Aberdeen Group has found that, on average, organisations which embrace omnichannel marketing retain 89% more customers than those that don't. And we know from our data that segmentation improves advertising performance by 300% while personalisation can increase conversions by 93%.

3. Track micro-conversions more easily

If your messaging is similar across each channel, and you're tracking your micro-conversions, then an omnichannel strategy will make things easier. That's because it limits the number of external factors that could have caused a particular success.

4. It improves the brand experience

Consistency within your channels improves the brand experience and association recall for all stakeholders – including prospective students, existing students, staff and the community.

QUICK-FIRE:

WHAT NOT TO DO

01

Disregard device optimisation

You must account for multi-device behaviour; 40% of consumers who research on a mobile device go on to purchase on a laptop. So, you need to be optimised across every device.

02

Ignore the guidelines set for the use of a platform

Make sure you're giving the right message, at the right time. Remember, on Google, prospective students will be asking a question, which you want to be positioned to answer. On social media, it is you asking the question so that your student audience engages. Don't forget the rules of each platform for the best results.

03

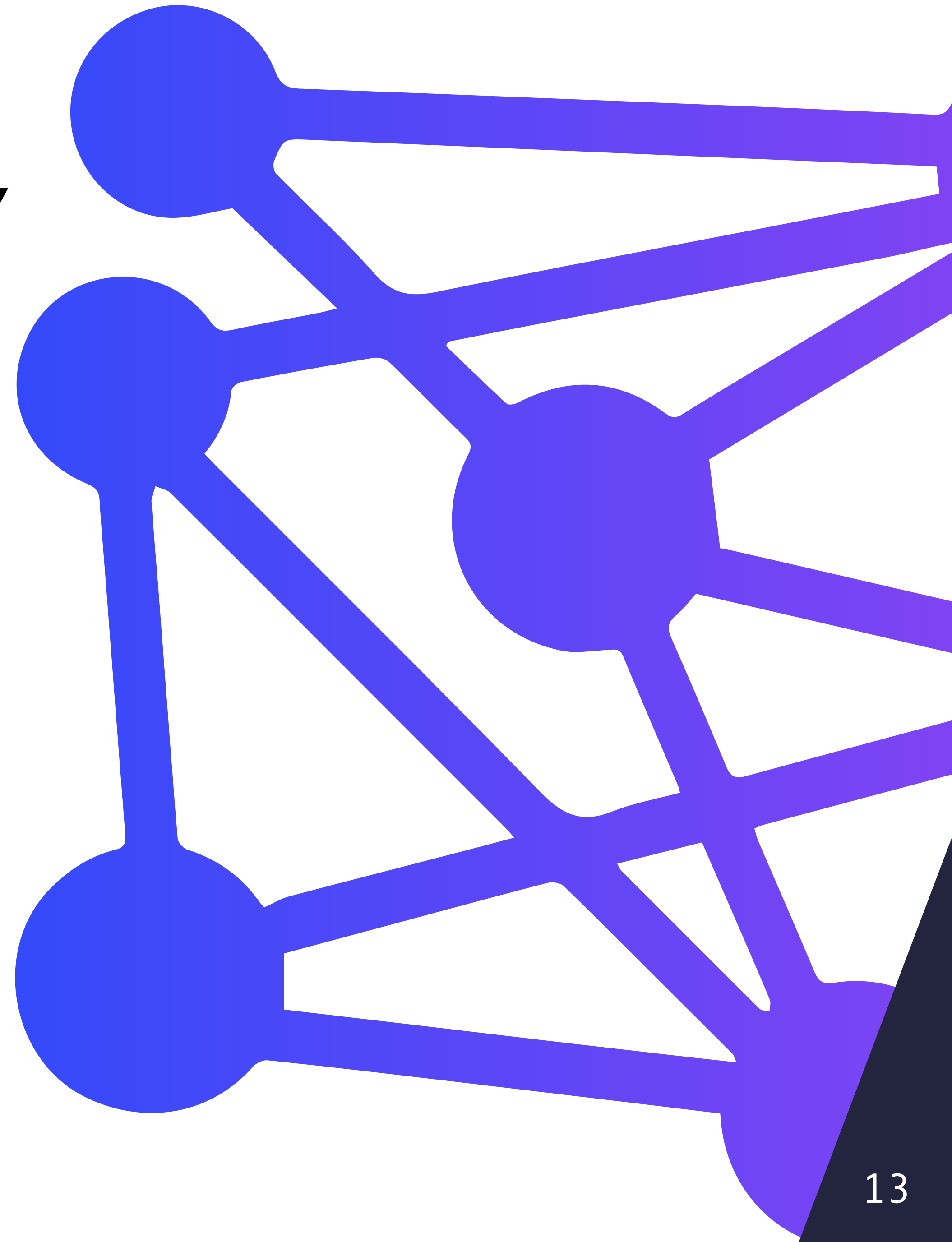
Ignore the advantage or opportunities of new platforms

Platforms like TikTok, VR, Twitch and many others should be integrated into your existing plans. They present a fantastic opportunity for you to reach your student audience.

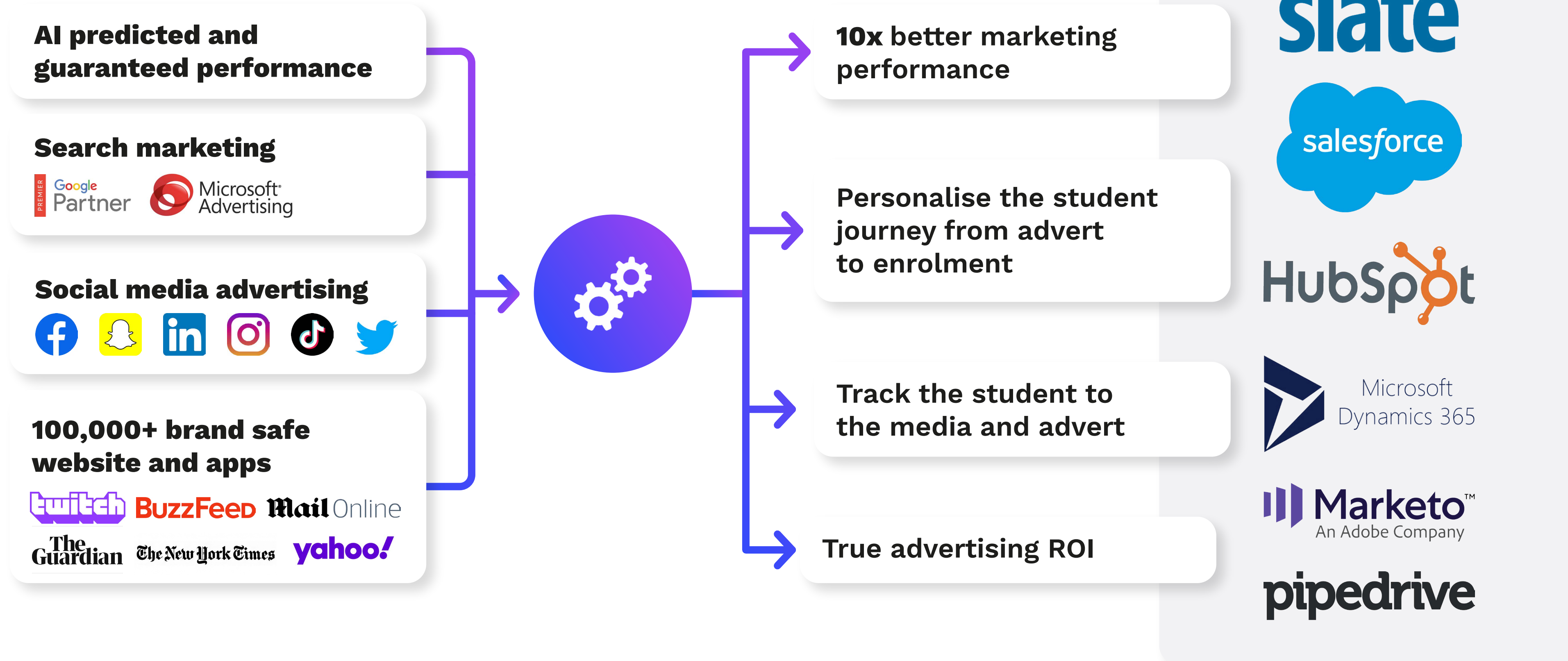
HOW TO CREATE AN OMNICHANNEL STRATEGY

STEP 1: CONNECT ALL YOUR DATA

For omnichannel marketing to work, you need to make sure all of the platforms and systems where you collect data are integrated, so you can see all of your prospective students' touchpoints together. That will mean however students interact with your institution, you'll be able to learn more about them. In turn, this will inform your comms, giving students a more consistent experience.



Akero



Integrate your systems

Integrations between your advertising, martech, CRMs and student information systems are vital for creating an omnichannel experience and the right tech infrastructure. Akero plugs into every global education CRM, including Slate, Hubspot and Salesforce, as well as 750+ popular platforms and apps.

Create a single customer view

Understanding each individual prospect and student should be baked into the DNA of every marketing and admissions department. But it can prove challenging if you don't have the right systems in place. An institution or marketing department that practices omnichannel strategy needs to house and view all of their data in one place. Akero, for example, offers a true single customer view that tracks every touchpoint from the first click on an advert through to enrolment. You can view the right data in one place, making it easy to create a personalised and highly relevant customer journey.

1. Demographics

Build interactive forms that capture the data that matter. This will help you build a total view of your prospective students and maximise conversions. You'll be using forms in many places, such as open day registrations, prospectus downloads, enquiries and more and you can use this data to build up your audience understanding and also use segmentation to turbocharge the efficiencies of your advertising. And you can easily embed these forms into your Akero landing pages.

The image displays a landing page with a form and a corresponding data completion dashboard. The landing page features a blue background with purple wavy patterns and a pink form overlay. The form fields are: First Name, Last Name, Email, and Program of Interest. The dashboard shows completion rates for various fields:

Field Name	Field Type	Completion Rate
Full Name *	Split	34 / 34 (100.00%)
Institution Name *	Text	34 / 34 (100.00%)
Work Email *	Email	34 / 34 (100.00%)
Telephone Number	Tel	14 / 34 (41.18%)
Level of Experience	Select	24 / 34 (70.59%)



**Join our newsletter for Akeru,
Marketing and Recruitment tips**

2. Preferences

Capture and understand your prospect's preferences through a preference centre. Students will want to receive communications only in things that they are interested in or are relevant to them. Otherwise, they'll switch off. You can also discover how best your contacts wish to be contacted, whether that is by email, SMS or even post. The best time to capture a student's preference for communication is when you first get a contact registration, but best practice is to offer a link to a preference centre on each communication you send out so you can constantly learn and refine.

3. Micro-conversions

Each micro-conversion you record along the way can help understand where your prospective student is on their journey to enrolment and help you tailor your marketing. We already know that the student recruitment process is non-linear and a prospect can enter (or exit) at any time, but recording a micro-conversion – such as a prospectus download, or enquiry, or event attendance – can make a huge difference in understanding the propensity to enrol and your student audience for future campaigns.

MAY

✓ Downloaded prospectus

JUNE

✓ Viewed BA (Hons) Chemistry

JULY

✓ Attended Open Day

4. Tracking activity

Tracking the activity of your prospective student helps you gauge intent and where they are sat within the whole student recruitment funnel. This data can inform you when to nudge them onto the next action that they need to take or build up a wider data set to create personalised, automated communications. Use a system that can track everything and keep pace, like Akerro, because students hop from device to device and use multiple channels during their research phase.

The image displays a CRM interface. On the left, a 'Contacts' list is shown with columns for 'Subscriber' (6, 15.38%) and 'Lead' (4, 10.26%). The list includes names like Derek Cooke, Cheryl Simmons, Colby Collier, Randall Sparks, Casey Clay, Sebastian Henry, Bruno Anthony, Theodore Lindsey, Aphrodite Benton, Sonya Terrell, Cassidy Russo, Joseph Fox, Louis Cortez, Beverly Mitchel, Tucker Hurley, Dexter Whitehead, and Zorita Stark. Each contact has a score and a date. On the right, a detailed profile for Brent Miller is shown. His profile includes a photo with a score of 80, his name, email address (brent.miller25@example.com), telephone number (+01242 790 6621), and course interest (Physics). The profile also shows the owner, Christina Hunt, and the pipeline stage: Undergraduates Applied. Below the profile, there is a social media post from the University of Kent, sponsored, showing a student in a blue hoodie working in a lab. The post has 512 likes and a caption: 'yourpagename Thinking of studying sport at university? Study at Kent with industry experts and work with elite athletes'.

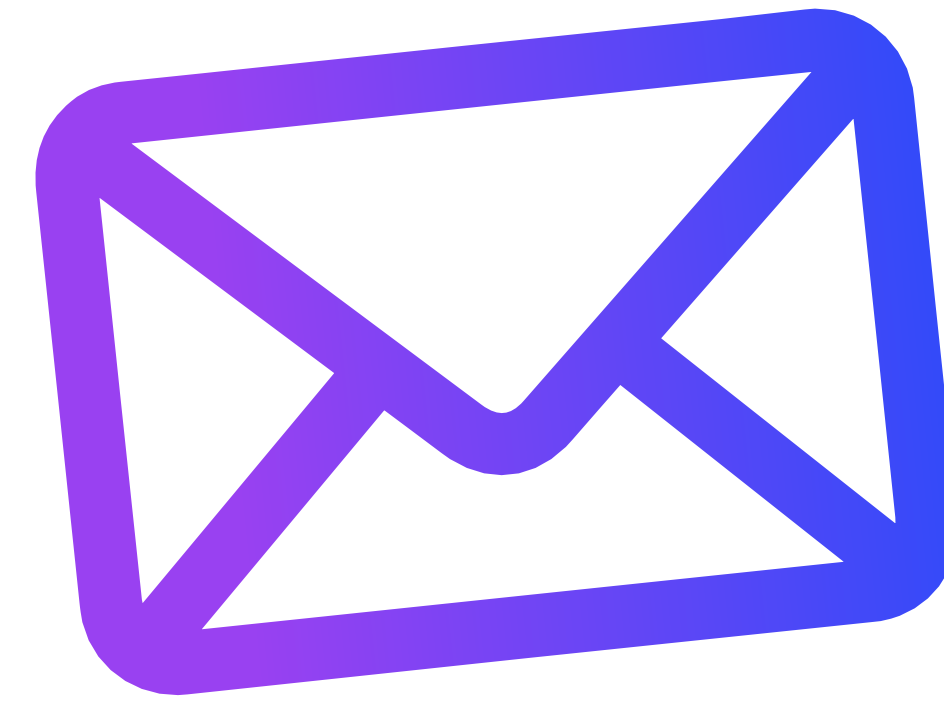
5. Lead scoring

Omnichannel marketers use lead and engagement scoring to understand intent and interest. Lead scores can be assigned based on intent-driven actions (sign up for more info, register for an Open Day). You could award more points for certain actions, for example, attendance at a key event would be worth more than a prospectus download, and you could target prospects appropriately depending on their lead score indicating that they are 'cold', 'warm' or 'hot'.

STEP 2: INTEGRATE YOUR CHANNELS

‘Omnichannel’, doesn’t mean communicating with students on different channels, but having an awareness of where they are in the recruitment journey and their mindset.

Recognising their actions and understanding your student audience will help inform which channels to use and when for that all-important follow up or nurture communication. And using a platform like Akeru, where your data is connected and not siloed, can make your comms planning and channel selection much easier.



Email marketing

Students still want to be contacted by and communicated with via email. But don’t overly rely on automation as that can come across sometimes as salesy and impersonal. Some channels may do the job better (e.g. interview reminders by SMS), or a contact may have expressed a preference when they first registered in your systems. Use the data you are collecting passively about a user's preferences. If your emails are not getting through, try a different channel.

SMS

SMS messages are a great way to connect with students, with typical read scores of 98%. Use SMS to send transactional messages, such as confirmations on open day registrations or interview dates. For those that opt-in, you can use SMS for broadcast messages as well. It's a great way to quickly update your contacts in the case of an emergency, for example, a restriction on your event or change in circumstance following a new Covid-19 restriction.

Live chat and peer-to-peer

Live chat is the direct line to your student audience via your site and can be very effective in terms of conversion. New platforms such as Unibuddy connect your prospective students with alumni and current students and can be an important part of your marketing strategy. With a system like Akerio, which integrates with every major popular student platform and CRM, you can see every conversation and touchpoint your prospects have had in your single customer view.

Smarter automation across multiple channels:
Akerio integrates seamlessly with existing email systems and CRMs. Set up personalised workflows to automate conversions from lead scoring through to email/SMS sends.

Social and retargeting ads

Your advertising should complement all your other channels and extend your brand reach with the right messaging, at the right time. As we know, the student journey and mindset is complicated and non-linear, but using the data you capture from your campaigns, forms and events mean that it is much easier to target students on the channels that they are using, at the right time.

Page Performance

All Pages 29/10/2019 - 27/11/2019

Overall	UTM	Visits	Unique Visits	Leads	Conversion
50385	42375	1732	4.1%		
Page	Visits	Unique	Leads	Conv. %	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YC - Campaign Page	74	7699	516	6.70%	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YC LLM Generic	86	8011	355	4.43%	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YC - Campaign Page - Variant 1	15	2477	171	6.90%	
<input type="checkbox"/> YC - Public Health	2250	2023	157	7.76%	
<input type="checkbox"/> YC - Neuroscience	2917	2119	140	6.61%	
<input type="checkbox"/> YC - Cyber Security Launch	1479	1344	80	5.95%	
<input type="checkbox"/> YC - Campaign Page	1117	1055	76	7.20%	
<input type="checkbox"/> YC - Campaign Page - Variant 2	63	2219	73	3.29%	
<input type="checkbox"/> YC - International	91	1582	70	4.42%	

Platform Split

- Facebook Family
- Programmatic Display
- YouTube

Eyes on Brand

The total number of Impressions that our Advertising AI predicts this Plan will receive.

1,115,062

Leads (Line Graph)

Westminster Kingsway College
This September | Study With Us
Ad www.brandname.com/display/url
Learn more about our courses ranging from... of London

Apply Now

512 likes

yourpagename An Open Distance e-Learning University reaching into places where other institutions do not.

STEP 3: STREAMLINE YOUR MESSAGING

Personalisation, segmentation and automation can help busy marketers – especially at complex times of the year like in Clearing. Curate and deliver the right message across multiple channels, at the right time.

A comprehensive nurture strategy, with the right set up for the leads that come into your systems, will deliver personalised, tailored content designed to push leads through micro-conversions (such as a prospectus download, event sign-ups, etc.) to application or enrolment. Using a platform like Akerio means that you have your student customer data accessible in one place so that you'll be able to recall the data you need to maintain a seamless experience the whole way through their journey to enrolment.

The way you segment your data will depend on your strategic objectives, and may change tactic by tactic. You could build segments based on subject area interest, or event attendance, demographics or even identified tribes, so you can build a digital community to carry into an offline experience once your students are on campus. Segmentation can also boost your advertising performance by 300% – re-marketing tactics driven by audience segmentation are a vital part of modern-day digital advertising.

You can even use segments to automate your communication plan, for example, unsubscribing applicants from subject area events if they change their preferences, or reminding them of key dates and how to access financial assistance. Segmentation is the engine that drives an effective omnichannel marketing strategy.

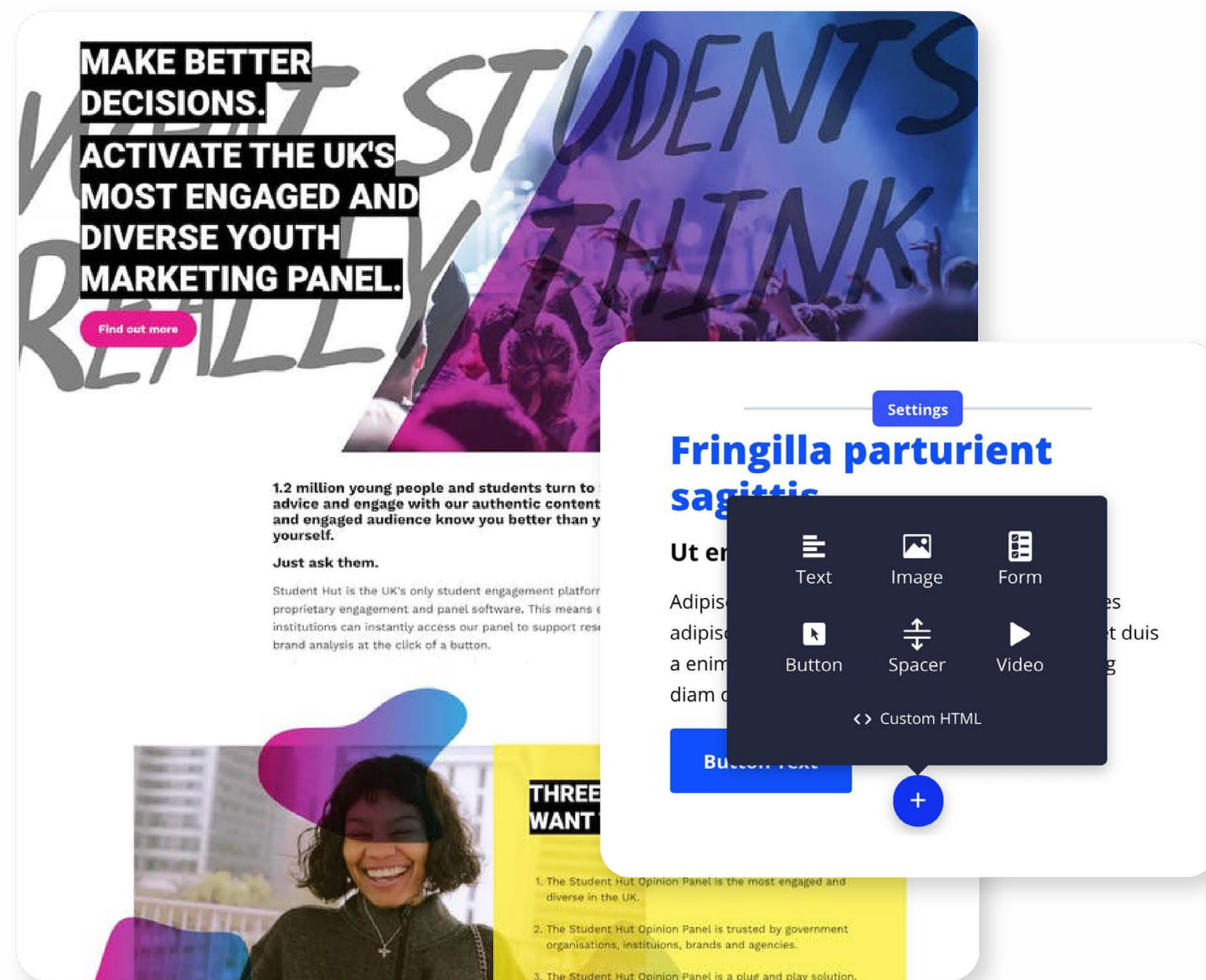
Building the right automations, as well as the segments that they pull from, varies from institution to institution. But the main thing to remember is that if you're using the correct marketing technology and have followed the first two steps, you'll have the data at your disposal to drive personalisation in your automations.

The image displays a CRM interface with three main components:

- Contact Profile:** A profile for Justin Sims, including contact details (Email: mail@example.com, Telephone: +01 242 790 6621), contact owner (jamie lovelace), pipeline (Contacts), and stage (Evangelist). It also lists personal information like Title (Mr), First Name (Justin), Last Name (Sims), Email (mail@example.com), Telephone (+01242 790 6621), Date of Birth (03/03/1994), and Age (25).
- Automation Workflow:** A diagram showing a trigger "A new Lead is created" (Whenever a Lead submits on any form) leading to a "Match 1 filter" step. This then branches into two actions: "Send notification email to All Users with default notification email" (Actioned 31 times) and "Archive Lead".
- Lead List:** A table of leads categorized by stage: Qualified Lead (3, 7.69%), Opportunity (4, 10.26%), Customer (6, 15.38%), and Evangelist (1, 2.56%). Individual lead cards show names, contact info, and dates.

HOW ELSE CAN AKERO HELP YOU?

Akero has a full range of features within its product suite to help you create and implement an omnichannel strategy. **These are:**



Self-service via landing pages

Students love helping themselves. Three quarters of students prefer to use an institution's website to answer their question or solve their problem, over any other service channel. A self-service page allows them to get help on their own terms from whichever digital device they choose, and it can raise the online profile of your institution in the process while capturing more data.

These could include:

- Virtual tours
- FAQs
- Articles and news
- Alumni engagement

Excellent SMS messaging service

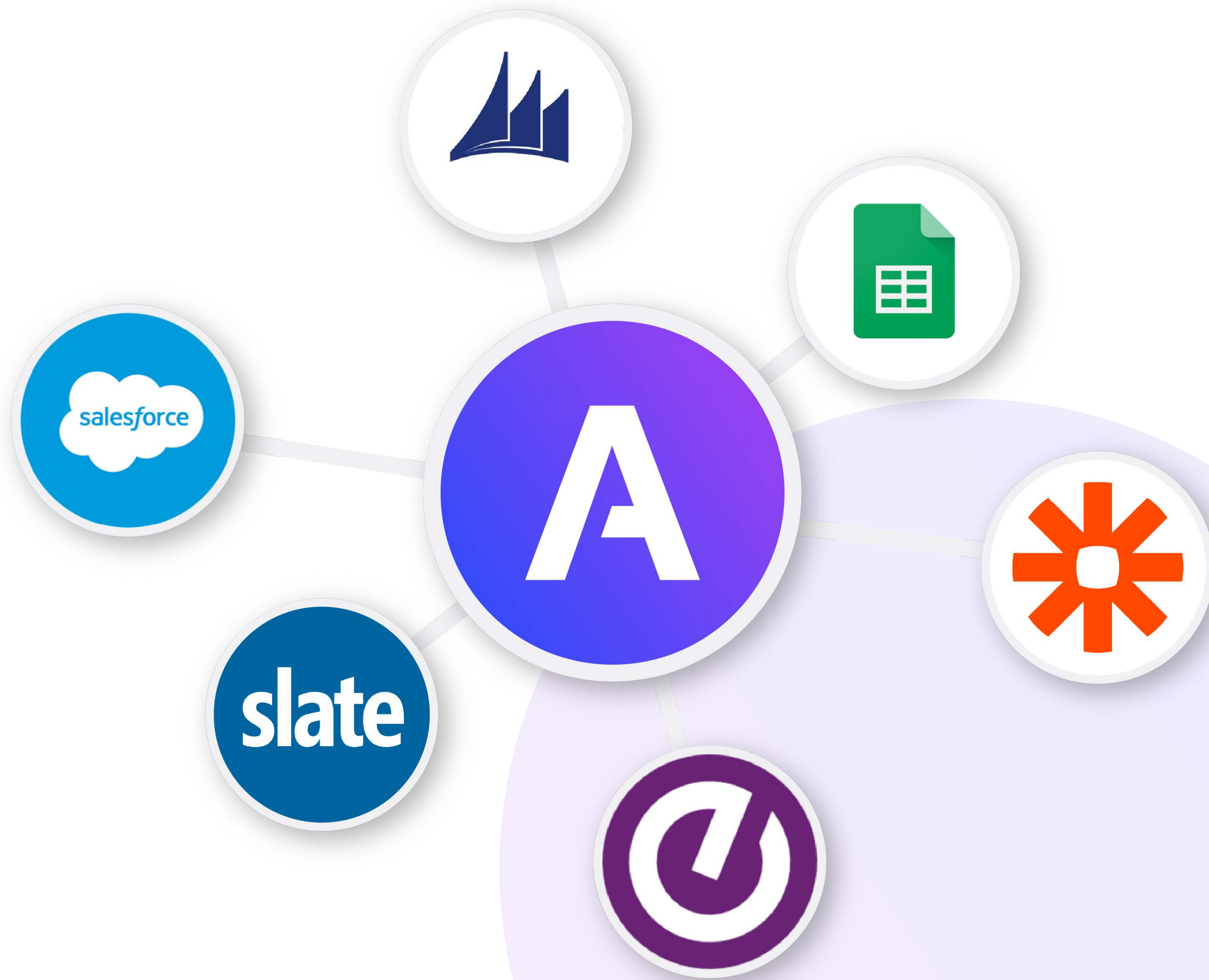
98% of text messages are read within three minutes and SMS is supported by all mobile devices. Make sure that your omnichannel communications are optimised for mobile, and that you measure and understand how consumers are interacting with your brand on mobile devices.

Akero lets you track all the visitors to your landing pages and which devices are sending you traffic. So you can continuously optimise towards the device. For example, for mobile traffic, you may wish to present the CTA as being 'call now' or access a live

chat. For desktop visitors, you may prefer to present a form. This is all possible with Akero's clever landing page builder.

We know that SMS is popular with students, so it is ideal for conversion messages, event notifications and messages that require urgent attention.

52% of students have told us that a poor mobile experience leads to a negative perception of that institution. So for an effective omnichannel strategy, you need a system like Akero that can connect best-in-class SMS with landing page builders.



Over 750 integrations with every popular and major platform and student CRM

As you've already read, you must integrate your digital touchpoints, and you can create a seamless data communication stream by integrating your existing systems with Akeru. By integrating your systems in this way, you'll see many benefits, including:

- 10x better marketing performance
- Personalise the student journey from the first advert they see, all the way through to enrolment
- Track the student from the first advert they see, through every digital touchpoint they have with your brand
- Attribute true advertising ROI

Emails within Akero

Mass or transactional emails can be a great way to communicate information to your students, and you can have full visibility of all of your messaging by doing it through Akero.

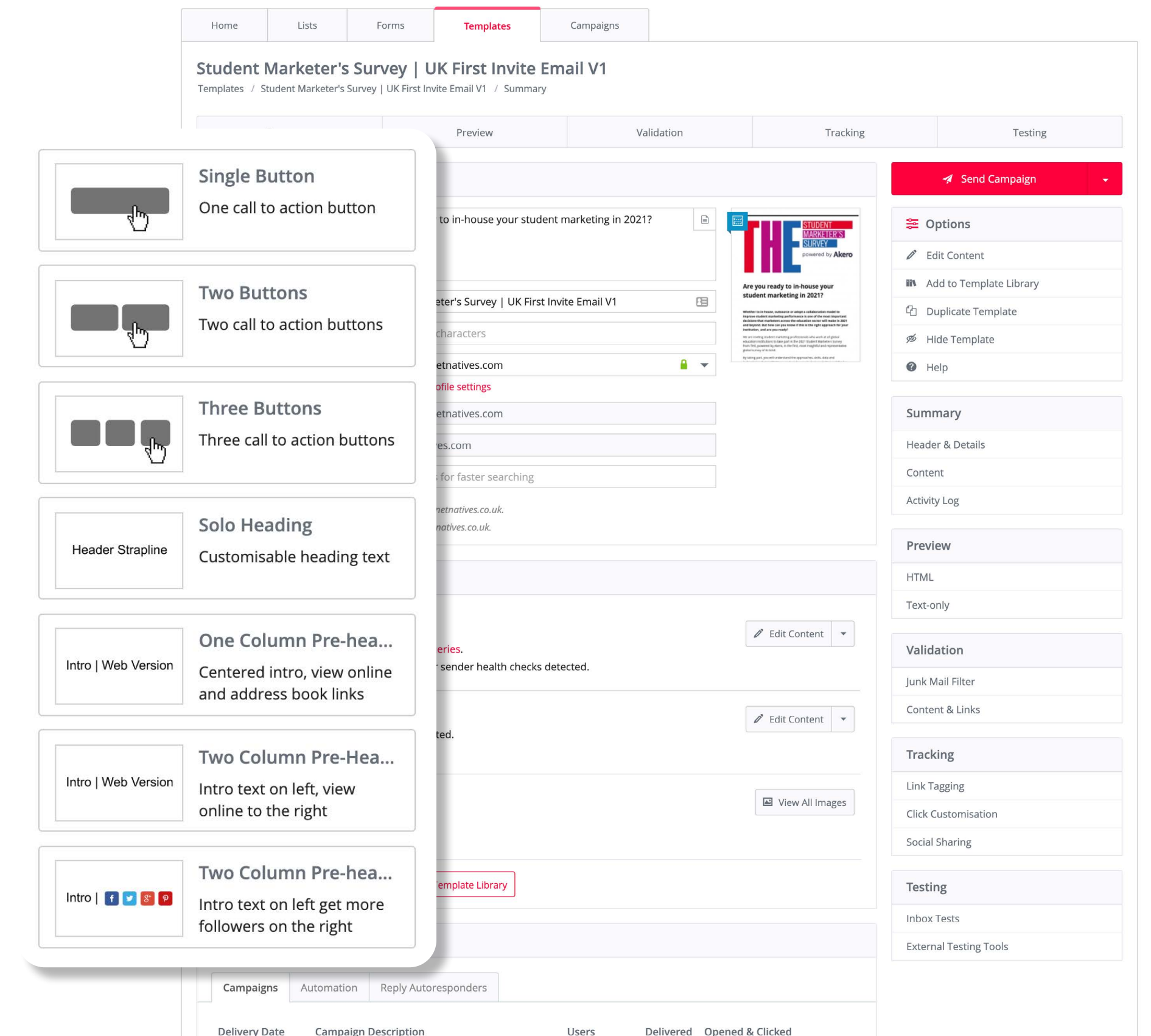
1. Akero Mail

Akero Mail lets anyone create beautiful, personalised and effective emails, effortlessly. And, complete integration with the Akero system means that you're only using one tech solution to manage emails, CRM, marketing automations and suppression lists.

It's the easiest and most cost-effective education-specific email service provider available.

2. Transactional emails

Trigger emails based on a lead's interaction with your institution.



FOUR IN 10 students would prefer to secure their place at university by email.

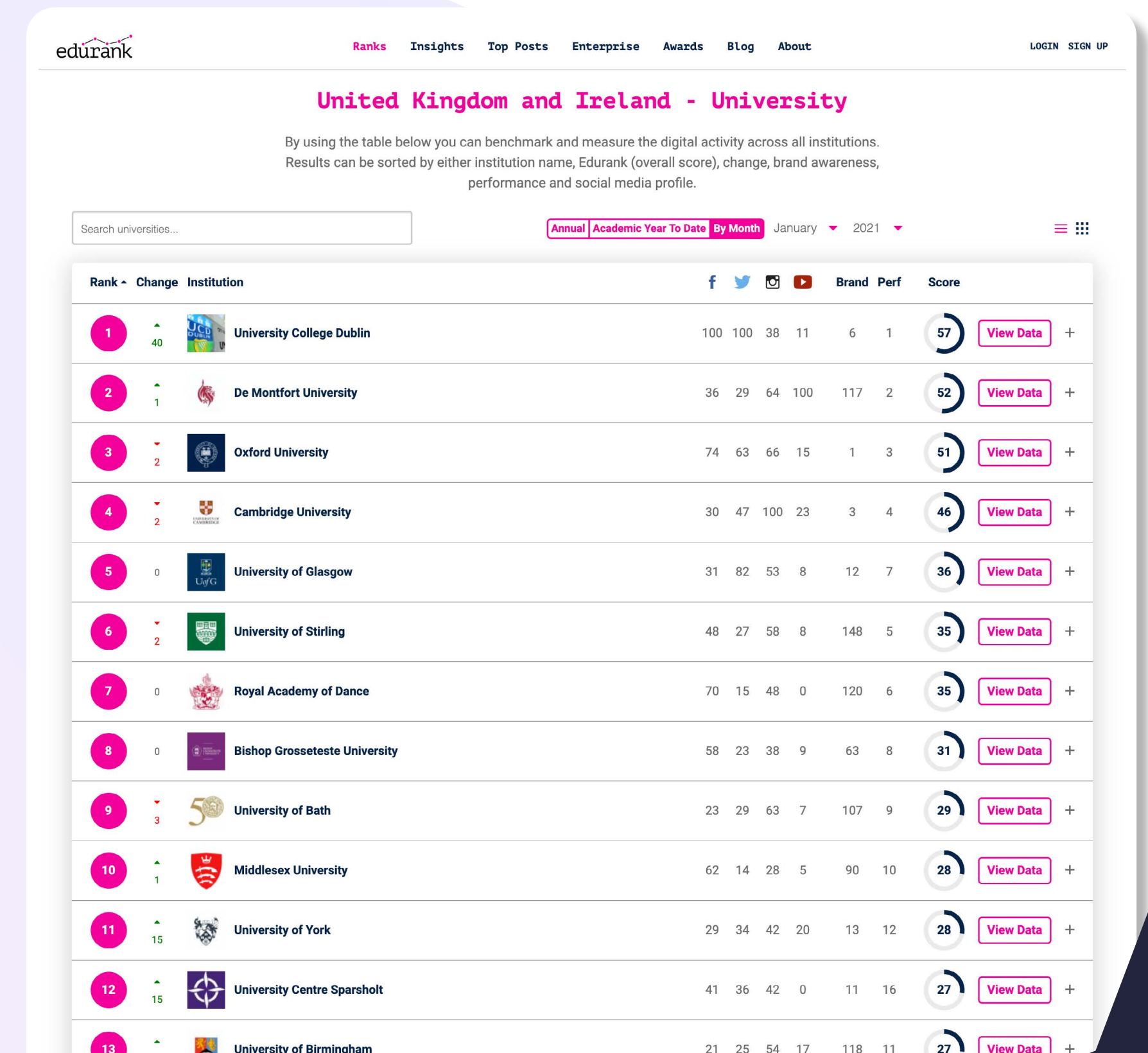
Remember, consistency is key and make sure that the information you are delivering is relevant. You do not want to waste all that hard work (and money) attracting a prospect, only to turn them disengaged with a boring, inconsistent, or irrelevant message.

On the other hand, consistency will allow you to boost the nurturing process, educate your prospects and increase your conversion rate. By utilising workflows and automations, you can increase your ROI by reducing the administrative cost of your campaigns.

Smart social media planning

Edurank, powered by Akero, is the free social benchmarking tool for the education sector. Identify the white space for when and where to post, view how your social performance benchmarks against your competitors and your previous performance, view the most popular posts by platform, region and institution type, and much more.

Edurank helps you to prioritise your comms based on data and you can use the platform to learn and refine when your student audience is most engaged.



United Kingdom and Ireland - University

By using the table below you can benchmark and measure the digital activity across all institutions. Results can be sorted by either institution name, Edurank (overall score), change, brand awareness, performance and social media profile.

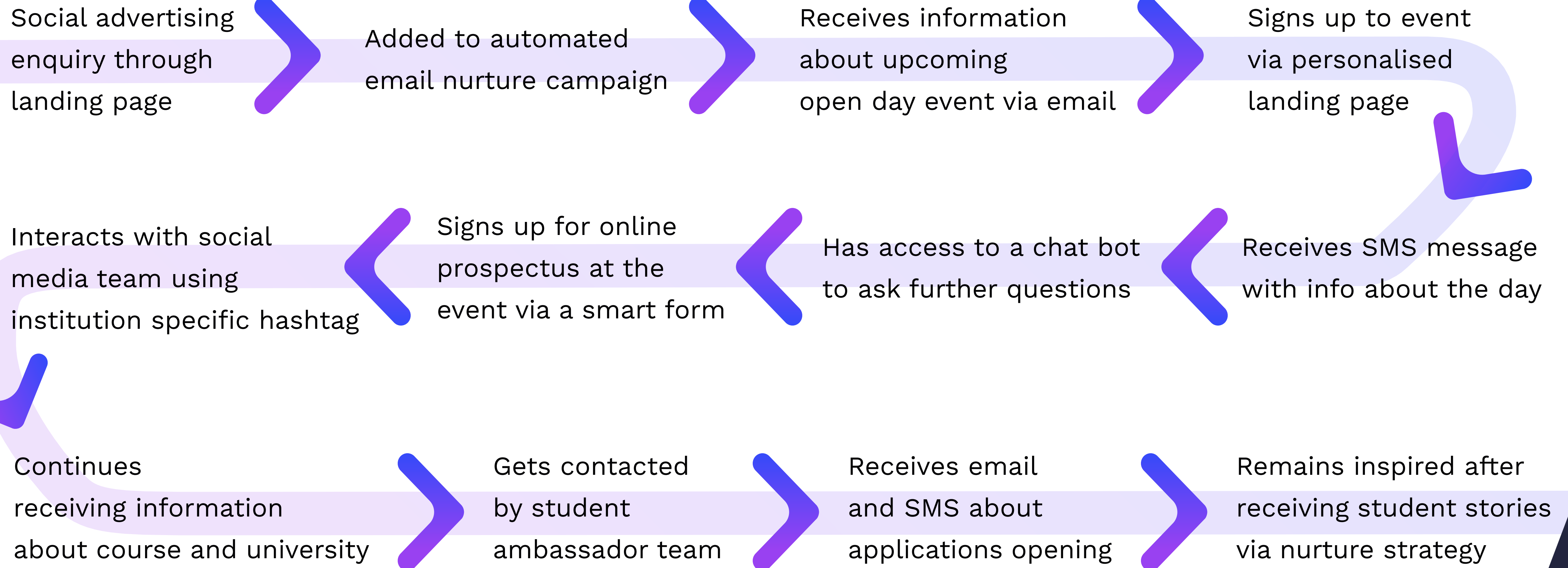
Search universities...

Annual Academic Year To Date By Month January 2021

Rank	Change	Institution	f	t	i	y	Brand	Perf	Score	
1	40	University College Dublin	100	100	38	11	6	1	57	View Data +
2	1	De Montfort University	36	29	64	100	117	2	52	View Data +
3	2	Oxford University	74	63	66	15	1	3	51	View Data +
4	2	Cambridge University	30	47	100	23	3	4	46	View Data +
5	0	University of Glasgow	31	82	53	8	12	7	36	View Data +
6	2	University of Stirling	48	27	58	8	148	5	35	View Data +
7	0	Royal Academy of Dance	70	15	48	0	120	6	35	View Data +
8	0	Bishop Grosseteste University	58	23	38	9	63	8	31	View Data +
9	3	University of Bath	23	29	63	7	107	9	29	View Data +
10	1	Middlesex University	62	14	28	5	90	10	28	View Data +
11	15	University of York	29	34	42	20	13	12	28	View Data +
12	15	University Centre Sparsholt	41	36	42	0	11	16	27	View Data +
13		University of Birmingham	21	25	54	17	118	11	27	View Data +

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

A typical UG omnichannel experience, from first advert through to enrolment...



LESS guesswork **MORE** guarantees

Plug guaranteed student advertising performance straight into your CRM and attribute true ROI.

We understand how challenging it is to recruit students and track ROI on your campaigns, especially during these unprecedented times.

That's why we are offering a free bespoke digital advertising plan, recommending to you the best possible media selection according to your brief, with guaranteed predicted performance outcomes.

Want to find out more? **Get your free advertising plan**

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