The student marketer's guide to:

Maximising conversions through the funnel

Akero

CONVERSIONS THROUGH THE FUNNEL, AT EVERY LEVEL OF MANAGEMENT.

Increasing conversion rates is one of the biggest challenges for any institution. In fact, it was named as one of the top three issues at every level in HE marketing teams, from Directors to Marketing Executives (Net Natives and Times Higher Education student marketers' survey 2021).

But moving students through the funnel from interest to engagement to application and enrolment is never straightforward. How do you overcome the key challenges? How do you identify the metrics that matter? And, most importantly, how do you know you're getting a good return on investment from your marketing activity?

In this whitepaper, we'll take you through what marketers at every level can do to boost their conversion rates. From the decision-makers, who need to engage with and get buy-in from key stakeholders to set the strategic direction, to the heads of and managers who direct the teams and set the plan of action, to those on the ground putting the tactics in place to get the most out of your campaigns, we'll cover everything you need to know to maximise conversions through the funnel at every stage of the process.

CONTENTS

WHAT MATTERS TO MARKETERS?

DIRECTOR
1. Increasing conversion rates
2. Increasing brand awareness
3. Increasing domestic enrolments

HEAD
1. Increasing student enquiries
2. Ability to see marketing performance
3. Increasing conversion rates

MANAGER
1. Increasing conversion rates
2. Increasing brand awareness
3. Ability to see marketing performance

SENIOR EXEC/TEAM LEAD
1. Increasing domestic enrolments
2. Increasing Open Day numbers
3. Ability to see marketing performance

EXEC
1. Ability to see marketing performance
2. Increasing conversion rates
3. Increasing brand awareness

ASSISTANT
1. Increasing brand awareness
2. Increasing international enrolments
3. Increasing website visits

THE DECISION MAKERS

Creating a strategy to maximise conversion

As a decision-maker, you're thinking strategy and KPIs. Enrolment numbers and how your department stacks up against the overarching objectives and goals of your institution. The most effective way to achieve this? Through full-funnel visibility of your advertising and marketing. And in order to hit your targets with your marketing and advertising activity, you'll know the importance of including stakeholders in the strategy, and how critical it is to get their buy-in and investment and speak their language. While simultaneously conveying your value proposition that lands with senior members, the market and most importantly your students. There's a lot to do. We get it. Here are the key strategic takeaways for student marketing decision-makers.

1. Be disruptive and demand attention

One of the main causes of drop-off is a lack of interest. You need to convey your value proposition in a creative way that excites your students to engage. Break boundaries and be innovative in your approach; students want to see you as an institution that isn't afraid to be different. And don't get left behind. When your students move to a new platform, make sure you're there too. From [Snapchat](#) to [TikTok](#), and whatever the latest social space may be [(Clubhouse, anyone?)](#), get your students' attention through dynamic adverts on the platforms they're actually using, making full use of their features, and accounting for audio-only engagement. 64% of Snapchat Ads are viewed with noise on, so make sure your ads suit your students in any situation.

More than **one in three** students are using TikTok daily.

NATIONAL CLEARING SURVEY 2020/21

TikTok

2. **Focus on micro conversions**

Once you've got your students engaged, you'll want to audit how quickly they're moving through the funnel, and build up a picture through the data of how, when and why they're making key decisions. But, it's easy to lose sight of the steps they're taking towards achieving those bigger conversion KPIs. So, don't forget to measure micro conversions. They reflect the performance of your conversion activity, and let you know what is working and how, in-year and in real time. Audit these steps so that your student journey is as streamlined as possible to your overall recruitment strategy.

3. **Don't do things in silos**

Avoid fragmenting the ownership of the student journey. Not only do the admissions, marketing and advertising teams need to be included in your recruitment strategy, but you'll need to bring all key stakeholders across the institution, from the top down, on board. Don't wait until the end of the recruitment cycle to bring stakeholders into the picture - make sure they're informed and integrated into the plan from day one, so you can get their buy-in and take advantage of their input and expertise. Read more about what our friends at Net Natives have to say about [how to engage your key stakeholders here.](#)

4. **Align your technology**

In addition to aligning your teams, you need to make sure your tech is ready to deliver your campaigns, and everything is aligned, too. Once you get your technology talking, your teams will be able to automatically pass data through the stages, helping to streamline the funnel. By investing in a tech stack like Akero, you can ensure that your advertising, campaigns and touchpoints are all mapped, aligned and linked, so you can calculate your true ROI for every campaign and boost conversions.

Ensuring your teams have the right tech stack allows you to bring all your data into one place, and enables you to get a true overview of all your marketing activity. You will be able to better understand the student journey, identify pinch-points (and work to address them and optimise the experience), calculate an accurate CPA and, ultimately, convert more students.

5. **Squeeze your first party data**

Data regulations are constantly changing and the eventual elimination of cookie tracking is an update you should prepare for. So, what does it mean for you?

Cookies have powered modern advertising structure, enabling remarketing and cross-channel marketing. The update means that your students will have to opt in and cross-device tracking will become more difficult. Although the value of third-party data will decrease as cookies disappear, the value of first party data will increase, making it more useful than ever.

OUR MAIN TAKEAWAY

Aligning and integrating your technology is key, in addition to including all your stakeholders in the student journey. And don't forget about the basics: staying ahead of the curve and ensuring your CTAs are clear to drive qualified actions and move your students through the funnel.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNERS: INCREASING CONVERSIONS AT EVERY STAGE OF THE FUNNEL

What needs to be on the radar of the strategic planners among us? We're looking at you, Heads of Marketing and Marketing Managers. Common challenges range from segmentation, targeting and positioning to what advertising (and tracking) at each stage of the funnel looks like and identifying the common chokepoints.

What do you need to know to increase conversions at every stage of the funnel as a strategic manager?

1. **Don't overlook the power of research**

Without accurate and up-to-date research, you'll find it almost impossible to segment your students into categories that you can target. Basing your strategy on last year's data will result in outdated methods of attracting your students and this will be reflected in low conversion rates.

2. **Don't limit your lens**

Segmenting your students based on demographics and psychographics is key to hyper-relevant adverts that can be tracked using specialist software such as Akero. Akero harnesses personality profiling to help inform targeting, platform selection and messaging to improve performance within its AI platform, ensuring that the most relevant and captivating adverts are put in front of the right kind of people. To discover more about how Akero uses the OCEAN model to factor in those important psychographics, you can head over to this article here.

OPEN-MINDEDNESS

NEUROTICISM

AGREEABLENESS

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

EXTRAVERSION

OCEAN
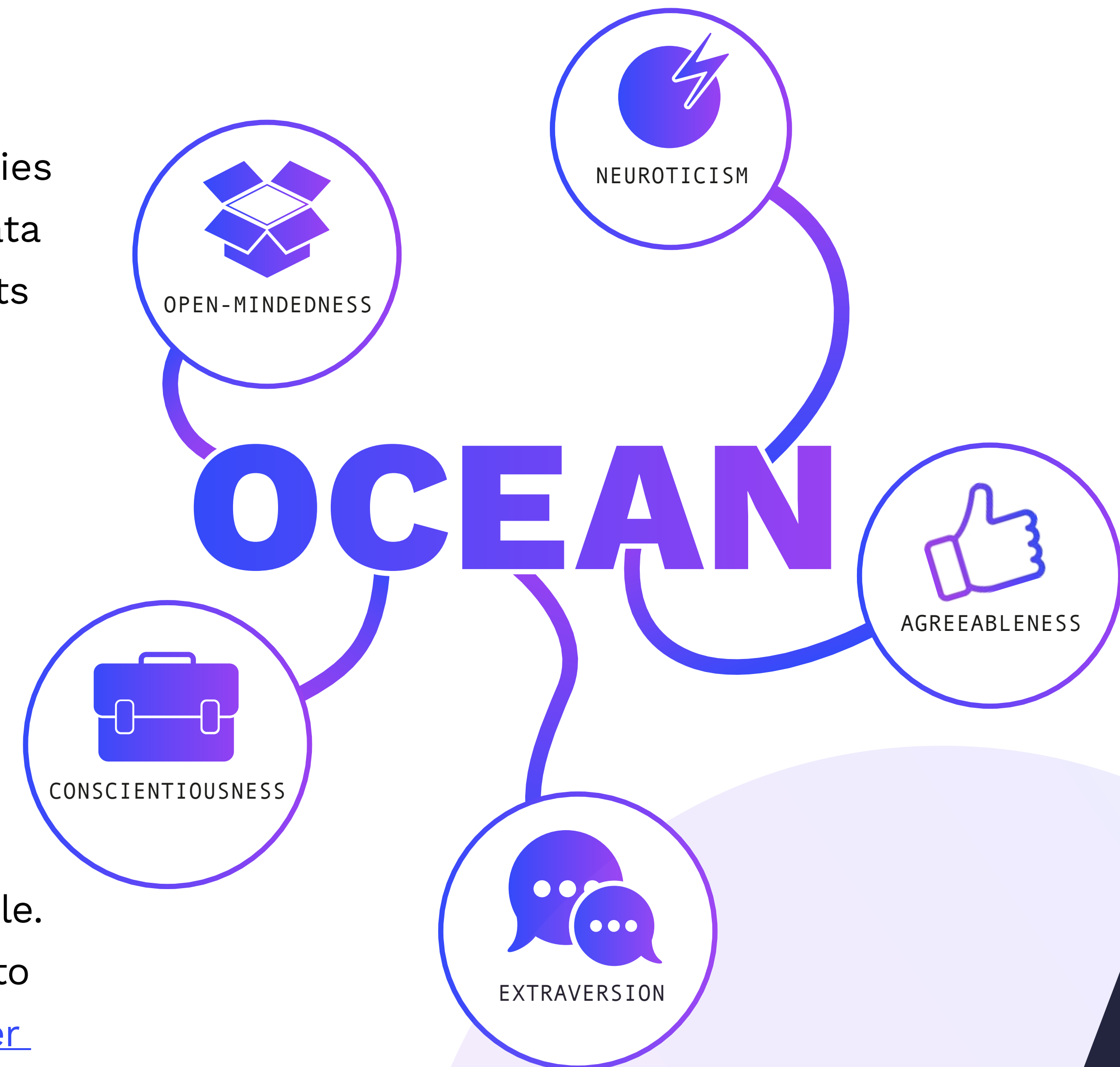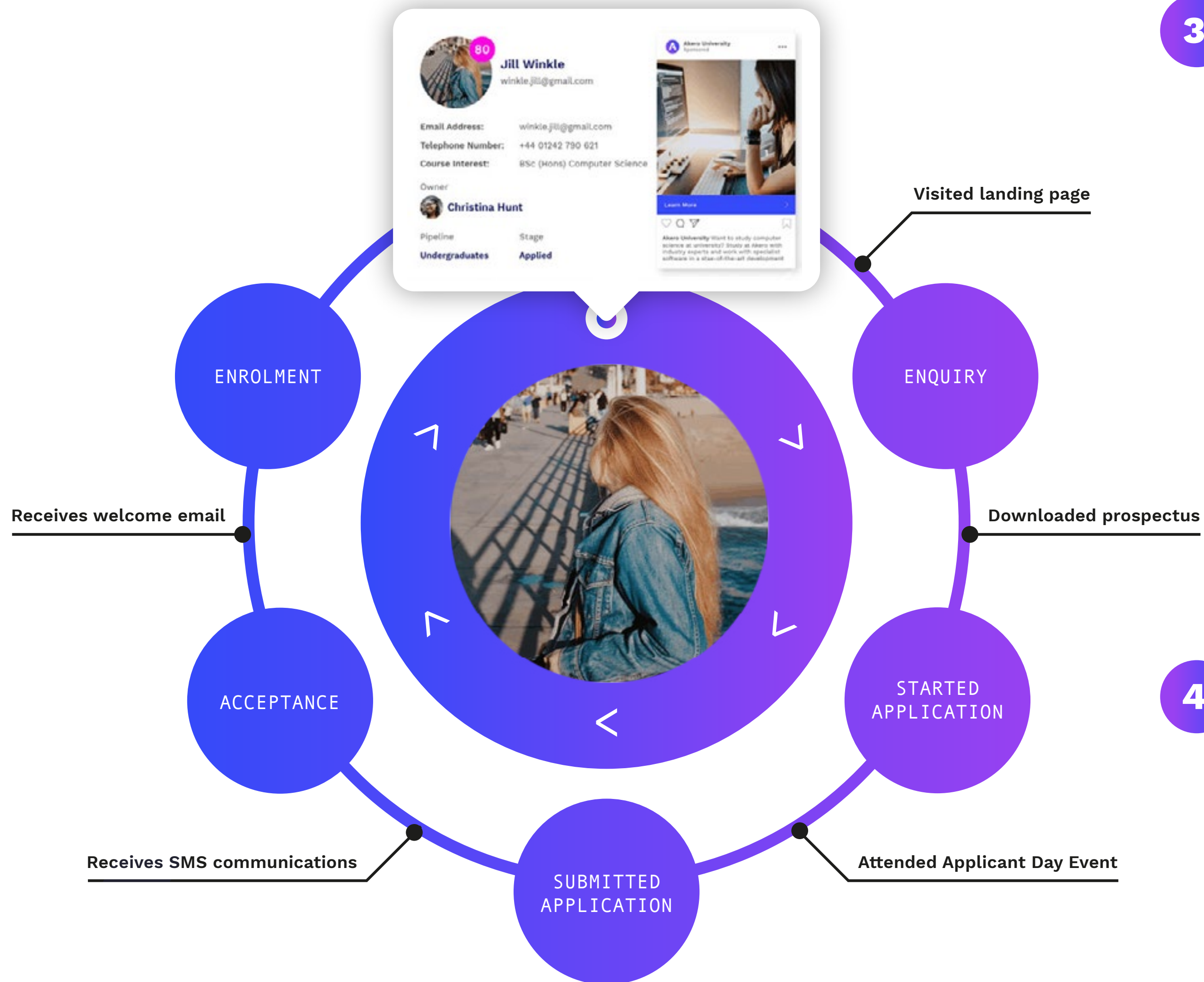
3. Stay connected

Don't lose connection - keep a record of each student throughout their entire journey towards enrolment (using tools like Akero's Enrolment Attribution). Pull your students closer to your brand through omnichannel strategies, which will not only allow you to align your branding and advertising to boost brand awareness, but also join up your enquiry management system and admissions and enrolment systems to seamlessly track your students and pinpoint where drop off is occurring.

4. Get smart with your data

Focus on platforms and media that allow for retargeting (social, search and programmatic) then use the remarketing audiences that you've built up during the previous stages of enquiry and application. Next, engage your creative and copy team to tailor specific messages to encourage that final action: enrolment.

5. Diagnose and audit your brand

To build your brand, you need to audit the micro conversions that your students experience along the funnel. Monitor the key stages in their journey and plan direct response campaigns to hit recruitment targets and application deadlines. To break this down further - for HEIs, we recommend using a 70/30 model; 70% of activity is driven by sales activation/short-termism and 30% for long-term brand building.

Conversion is about getting your students from application to enrolment in the simplest, smartest way possible. Akero's AI and performance guarantees will help you to boost enrolments, but it's important to monitor and audit your campaigns with metrics to calculate your true ROI. To avoid your touchpoints dropping off, zoom in on the micro conversions and optimise your strategy to nurture them through to an enrolment.

OUR MAIN TAKEAWAY

Segmenting your audience and monitoring your campaign data and results will give you the insight you need to optimise your campaigns and measure true ROI. And use demographics to make sure you target your prospects with the right message, on the right platforms, at the right times.

THE TACTICAL MARKETERS: TOP TIPS FOR BOOSTING CONVERSIONS

And finally, what can you do right down to the tactics to boost your conversions? Last year's Clearing revealed some new and emerging trends in student behaviour around application and enrolment. But, what do the trends tell us, and how can institutions plan for these developments this recruitment period?

Institutions received an increase in inbound enquiries. They started early on in the cycle and involved a multitude of questions around health and safety, their course and what living on campus would look like. Students didn't want to find out the answers by navigating websites or landing pages - they wanted a human response and they wanted it quick. Delayed responses led to students opting for other (more efficient) institutions. Live chat was particularly popular and WhatsApp stood out as the winner with international students. So, how can institutions meet students' expectations while staying on-budget? Here's how to utilise your CRM to the max.

1. CONSIDER YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

Talk to the students. What do they want to be reassured about and when do they need that reassurance in the funnel? Most students want to know that the quality of their course won't be compromised by the impact of a hybrid delivery. Incorporate student success stories in your advertising. Use location and course-specific ads to draw your students in. Then, monitor your analytics and optimise your ads and social posts accordingly. Find out when your students are looking at the platforms you advertise on and use scheduling tools to manage and automate the process. For smarter advertising, stay up-to-date with your students' media habits with the Student Pulse.

2. YOUR CONTENT TIMING, TOO

Students are looking to higher education for a variety of reasons. If your content doesn't reflect their motivations then you'll fail to engage your students. Determine where your applicants are in their student journey and consider how this influences their decisions. We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused fears over isolation and a strong desire to socialise for most students, but not all students are the same. Research their barriers to entry and find out how to target these in your content strategy.

Knowing when to attract each student group is essential to building personalised and effective campaigns. Our friends over at Net Natives have created a guide to the Direct Applicant segments that have emerged in the last year to inform your approach.

3. MAKE EVERY INTERACTION A TOUCHPOINT

Students want to connect quickly. They don't want to repeat their conversations with every admissions officer they talk to, so log their data in your CRM to build lasting connections. Align your teams and technology so that all their information, from their fears to their motivations, is passed on to the next contact that the student talks to. Logging all the information in one place makes it easy for your team to dip in and out of notes and gain a clear view of the data.

4. BE FLEXIBLE

Is your team able to pivot? If Covid-19 has taught us anything, it's that innovation and flexibility are imperative. In recent years, we've seen a shift in the tools that students are using to contact institutions as enrolment draws closer: traditional forms of communication are out and on-the-go methods, such as SMS and live chat, are in. Get savvy with your resource allocation so you're available to your students 24/7. Remember, students don't want to be waiting in live chat queues, so you need to be able to pivot and plan for an influx of live chat requests close to application.

5. PERSONALISE THE EXPERIENCE

Be quick, efficient and friendly when talking to your students. Simply by communicating effectively, you will experience an uplift in engagement and enrolment. Of course, you can't forget the importance of segmenting and targeting your communications so your students feel listened to and their pain points addressed. Include course titles, names and location dynamic tags in your comms and advertising to speak directly to your students. And, of course, don't forget to follow up with post-comms so your leads don't go cold.

Recruitment this year will be different. Students want to connect with you 24/7 and on the platforms they're already using. But, with the right tools and strategy in place to pivot your approach and automate your processes, you can keep your touchpoints sticky and boost conversions.

OUR MAIN TAKEAWAY

Timing is everything. Make sure your messaging is hitting the mark at the right times to really resonate with your prospective students. And don't forget to set up your CRM to capture that all-important data and ensure your students feel listened to and engaged by personalising your comms to just what they want and need to hear at every stage of the student journey.

GET STARTED
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Whether you're a decision maker, manager or executive, we hope this whitepaper has given you the insight you need to help you maximise conversions at every stage of the funnel and achieve your recruitment and enrolment goals.

From stakeholder engagement and the overarching direction, to the strategic planning, to the tactics at ground level for day-to-day success, we've given you the tools you need to plan your strategy, optimise your campaigns and put your plans into place.

We've talked you through segmentation, targeting and positioning, what advertising (and tracking) at each stage of the funnel looks like, the importance of brand, common chokepoints and so much more.

Conversion is about getting your students from application to enrolment in the simplest, smartest way possible. Akero's AI and performance guarantees will help you to boost enrolments, and through aligning your technology and automating your campaigns can help take your marketing and recruitment efforts to the next level.

Get in touch with our experts today to get started and find out how Akero can help you maximise conversions at every stage of the funnel.

Do you need help with aligning your technology and automating with Akero?

Get in contact for guaranteed results. →

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