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| Session Title: | Adapting to change: What we learnt from 5 years of undergraduate conversion campaigns |
| Speaker(s): | Jackie Thompson and Sarah Colegrove |
| Chair: | Alastair Harman |
| Reporter: | Niamh Gallagher |

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| Speaker/Institution Bio/Information: | <p>The University of Edinburgh</p> <p>Marketing managers for school of arts humanities and social sciences</p> |
| Overview/Aim of session: | <p>What we have learnt from 5 years:</p> <p>About us Conversion in HE A new approach Learning and growing Top tips The futures</p> |
| Workshop Content | <p>1. Jackie talked through information on the slide- didn't go into the applicant experience and conversion officer as Colin wasn't in attendance. Explored the context of the ug applicant journey Conversion is basically the comms sent to applicants</p> <p>2. Same as what it means in marketing 'sell the university and sell the city' Selecting rather than recruiting university so need to focus on the sale of the university – are we a good fit for them? Do they want to do a 4 year degree? All about experience and starting off on a good start Even if students don't join, keeping up rep for siblings, friends etc.</p> <p>3. Forces which shape recruitment and conversion 2012-2016: UoE impacted from outside and in-Planet of UoE in center and asteroids hitting it surrounding (see slide) Low NSS affected reputation Survey for accepters and decliners about journey quotes on slide Compared to other universities and harshly impacted – 'felt they didn't receive comms'</p> |

1st steps: created a team to react to the impacts (team they're now a part of)
The schools are where stuff happens
Enabled schools to do the comms themselves by providing templates etc. but schools weren't resourced enough to carry it out
Not relevant & not timed well
Off brand and no student voice
Jackie's team ended up doing it after all
Later surveys continued to show negative comments
CTO % still extremely low

Inspiration: whole team went to Brussels, Belgium – chance to listen to great talks (e.g., gen z and other universities doing same roles)
Time to think outside the box

A new approach:
Make campaign timely effective and authentic
Delivered centrally
Properly researched into audience and employ students for the authentic student voice
Two elements student life and academic experience
Lives hosted 3x a day and 30 blogs posted on students' blog site
Everything personalized and segmented to applicants' interests
Inc. info on joint degrees too

Survey: improvements across the board (CTO% up to 23)
Added student voice to social media and it also upped traffic compared to original posts of just the city

Everyone was happy with improvements and have continued to carry it on as years went on

Jackie details how they used PESTEL to measure external impact examples
Internal impacts were a new strategy from a new principle & 2 WP strategies

Jackie handed it over to Sarah to share examples (see slides)

Adaption and iteration (email)
*Largest element of the campaign
Some things come and go and its constantly evolving
Key learning: using metrics – key to know each year what they want to measure
A B testing (5-10% split in half get a different email to test what works then best result goes wide)
Also experiment timings e.g., about the city email sent

early/late in timeline
Entrance and decliners surveys carried out each year
1st year: missed out an email on accommodation
Learnt from mistakes each year
Increased single focus emails – school level started as newsletter-ish style
Keeping it short has led to the offer holder hub – dedicated university wide offer holder space (working with all the schools)
Big learning impact run in parallel to print
Realised they needed to include applicants in the campaign at an earlier point (rather than waiting quite late in the cycle)
Successes: much more fluid approach with higher rates of opening and valuable content
Jackie does a lot of desk research to support

Adaption and iteration (print and direct mail)

'Print is not dead' 'print can play a really important role alongside email'

Map of Edinburgh folded out with 23 reasons to join the class of 2023

Map focuses on things that aren't that common e.g., Edinburgh's on the coastline, got a zoo, a volcano
Authentic content is important, so they asked the students for the places as a comp

Only sent to UK based applicants

Received a very positive response

Stood out (audience not the usual audience to receive post)

Parents seen it too and they're biggest influencers

Also did a wp pilot of direct mail

If at first, you don't succeed keep trying (they were told no initially)

Originally only did brochures for in-person events (but wasn't consistent across schools)

Held an audit and desk research on what applicants would want

Created a template and schools used it and all were sending out the same info (really supported joint honors)

Brochures were sent out as direct mail during covid to UK offer holders

*Impact of sustainability

Returned to in person... 'do we bring back the brochures?'

Decided against brochures – offer holder website had all the info

Knew still needed to give something out though
Changed it to an a5 postcard with school and subject info with QR code to offer holders (650 actioned)
Printed on flower paper so could plant it (more recyclable)
Surveyed students later: 52% remembered, 64% felt it made a positive impression

Congrats letters also included QR codes too and were printed on recyclable paper

Adaption and iteration (content and working with students)

Took too much on first year

Too much content and too many students

Decided less was more – work with small number of good students is much better

Videos – permissions did cause some issues (copyrighted music, live performances etc.)

Students are now more thoroughly briefed on email and 1:1 in person plus with training to help

It's really important to work with experts and always take into considerations about accessibility (think about resources needed)

Changing channels – Instagram (grid, stories, reels), Tik Tok, BeReal– constantly changing

Content needed to fit across every channel for fluidity (Create Once Publish Everywhere – COPE)

Covid pushed them to be adapting (students blogs pushed for activity which couldn't be carried out in COVID)

They then created COVID (life in lockdown) material

Successes:

Huge traffic across channels with likes and views

Adaption and iteration(events) – Colin

Large events ran by already busy people

What helped them was having one dedicated resource – Colin

They really emphasised that they needed to work together to carry out events so everything was clear, and presented externally as an integrated and positive front
Going forward with hybrid approach (to support with those

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| | <p>who can't travel to Edinburgh</p> <p>Jackie took it back over</p> |
| <p>Case Studies/Examples:</p> | |
| <p>Scenarios/Roundtable discussions:</p> | <p>Shared experiences that each university has done (Written on post its that will be shared with slides)</p> |
| <p>Questions and Answers:</p> | <p>1: content for social media – with your content did you get a say or was it passed through social media team? A: they weren't initially handed the power. They have a closer relationship with the marketing team and the team are small so wouldn't have had the time They were reserved using channels initially but gave free rein (let them be the first to start using stories) Did let a student have access last year (relationships factored into it a lot)</p> <p>2: Generating content: was there any worry about bombarding with too much content (crossing barrier of helping and annoying) A: Come across that a little 'When we look back, we become aware of how much we sent' (constantly thinking everything needed to be shared Last year relied more on self-serving with Offer Holder Website Still haven't got it right</p> <p>3: Did you find email fatigue? A: Surprisingly not – stayed high dependent on content. Subject good, wellbeing bad</p> <p>Restricted with social media but want to do more</p> <p>4: Do you have specific emails for parents/teachers/P&Gs? Do they differ in tone etc?</p> |

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| | <p>A: UoE don't do it, just students only</p> <p>'If we did it would be slightly different tone and content' Ran focus group with parents – asked what they'd want to see in direct mail (wanted something different to the kids)</p> <p>5: Do you find parents sign up as students?</p> <p>Yes</p> |
| <p>Summary Key takeaways:</p> | <p>In summary top tips:</p> <p>Get inspired: great way to 'steal' ideas but also think outside the box in a different way</p> <p>Pay attention: PASTEL and good desk research</p> <p>Plans and goal: Think outcomes not output (what do you want out of it) and don't expect perfection</p> <p>Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate Do it throughout</p> <p>Change and innovate: There will always be changes from covid to channels</p> <p>Get buy in from stakeholders (keep the right people informed and on board)</p> <p>Don't be afraid to ask People will want to support if you just ask</p> <p>Work with students Tricky but worth it – offer holders find it more relatable</p> <p>Repurpose, re-use and recycle: Communication channels (COPE) Create content for where the audience is</p> |