

Session Title:	The Art of Connection
Speaker(s):	
Chair:	
Reporter:	Meg Griessel, St Mary's University, Twickenham

Speaker/Institution Bio/Information:	<p>Company: SMRS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They deliver strategic marketing campaigns, especially within communications with applicants/offer holders – aiming to build relationships with them throughout their journey. • Help universities change for the better through their research and consultancy. • Last 12 months they have worked with over 80 institutions, including Universities, FE and Department of Education
Overview/Aim of session:	<p>The session looked at the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UG audience behaviors • Effective comms • Understanding who our audiences are • Understanding challenges and expectations • Reaching our prospective students on the right channels • Effective communication in HE
Workshop Content	<p>Effective Communication in HE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts across all ages: 18 and under, 19-24 and 25 and over. • Growth in self-release: +43% increase between 2019 and 2023. -10% in applicants applying after self-release in same period. • Shift in acceptance routes behavior: -7% in main scheme firm choice, +2% in clearing, +2.5% in RPA. <p>Our audiences are keeping us guessing, and we should use data within our practices to keep us informed in our approaches.</p>

Data enhanced understanding; how we can understand and communicate more effectively with our audiences.

- Unanswered questions: what is the online/offline channel mix? Why do people use the channels they do? Are there any demographic vacancies?
- This is where media consumption research comes in, but data is often incomplete.
- Slides show some recommended 3rd party measurement platforms, but these are expensive.
- **Media mapping researcher comes into play due to noticing this gap in the market**

Outputs from the research discussed in this session are best viewed on the slides once made available. Some key take aways below:

Social media and streaming occupy most time when online.

- Social media 83%
- Music streaming 57%
- Video streaming 47%

Which social channels

Tik Tok highest at 56%, lowest is reddit at 3%. Snapchat and Instagram take 2nd and 3rd place respectively.

University discovery

Different mix here: Tik Tok, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. Easier to see what the university is advertising or that it's a university on Instagram.

On what Education sites are popular for university advertising?

For raising awareness, education listing websites are the most impactful. Podcasts are great for eliciting a positive response. For nudging, radio is popular and for negative responses cinema advertising. Low quality cinema adverts due to cost has an impact.

Influencing final decisions

Website takes top, printed prospectus the lowest – on a scale of importance. There is emphasis on the importance of the University website and the credibility of the information being shown on these sites.

Applicant experience and wellbeing

- Everything you put out is building a picture for your prospective applicant.
- Applicant experience and wellbeing go hand in hand. It's rooted in feelings, a psychological contract.
- As a sector, we could be smarter about understanding the preferences of our applicant base.
- If applicants' preferences and expectations aren't being met psychologically by the university this is a huge barrier.
- 1 in 4 students in 2022 had a 'probable mental disorder'. This is up from 1 in 10 in 2017.
- Almost one-in-three applicants who started university this September have a history of missing education due to their mental health.
- 18% of applicants with a disability are not disclosing their status to universities.

A focus on conversion

Student Pulse pilot – application all the way up to enrolment. A pilot platform that many universities in the sector are buying into.

Student Recruitment teams seeing increased pressure from SLT teams in terms of higher targets. We're having to do more to convert less students.

- Demand in expectation vs reality. Demographic uplifts have not generated proportionate increased in applicants.
- Changing applicant behavior
- Unpredictable to the end – due to increase in applicant self-release. There has been growth even post-pandemic.

How to influence conversion

- Understand; Engage; Support.
- We need to create that affirmation that university is a positive pathway, especially as 18-year-olds are unpredictable. We should identify the barriers our applicants are facing.

The student journey has ups and downs; if you ask a student at the end of the cycle how they feel about their experience they won't really be able to tell. It's better to ask them at more regular intervals, as you will get a clearer and more authentic picture.

<p>Case Studies/Examples:</p>	<p>N/A</p> <p>Case studies based around their products and offering; detailed in first section. Examples of data and insights provided in above section.</p>
<p>Scenarios/Roundtable discussions:</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Questions and Answers:</p>	<p>It was discussed that teachers are very influential: Unifrog, increase in apps to higher institutions, can be attributed to Careers advisers. The thing that is unanswered now, in the speaker's opinion, is parents.</p> <p>The speakers explained how they tailor their AI automation with universities: they have about 60/70 questions that are inputted. Their research teamwork with the partnered university and make recommendations for this platform.</p>
<p>Summary Key takeaways:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Successful connections require the alignment of a multitude of factors, ● Our audiences are complex, ● Start to identify how you can enhance your data and understanding, ● Engage your audience to understand behavioral factors for personalization and optimization, ● Reach your audiences using multiple channels and & optimize your own channels