



HIGHER ED  
BENCHMARKS

# 2018 Marketing and Student Recruitment Report of Effective Practices



Effective practices for undergraduate recruitment at four-year colleges  
and universities, as rated by campus officials

**RUFFALO**<sup>SM</sup>  
NOEL LEVITZ

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## WHAT'S WORKING IN HIGHER ED MARKETING AND STUDENT RECRUITMENT?

### What is the competition doing? How is technology changing things? And where are the gaps in today's outreach?

To explore these questions, undergraduate officials from a broad cross-section of colleges and universities participated in a spring 2018 poll to produce the *2018 Marketing and Student Recruitment Report of Effective Practices* from Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

#### Highlights from the study:

- Digital advertising was popular in 2018 for both first contact with prospective students and for follow-up contact with non-responders.
- Approximately one in five private respondents to the poll and four out of 10 public respondents were not using text messaging. These institutions should give students the opportunity to provide cell numbers and opt in.
- Campus visit events for high school counselors were rated effective by 100 percent of public respondents and by 94 percent of private respondents, yet only 69 percent of privates and 81 percent of publics reported using them.
- Recruiting opportunity: Many public institution respondents were not offering academic-division-hosted programs, which were rated highly effective.
- Another recruiting opportunity: Seven of every 10 respondents, public and private, did not have specific strategies for recruiting Hispanic students.

Notable differences are included from parallel RNL reports released in 2016-17.

## HOW DO YOU TURN BENCHMARKS INTO STRATEGY? ASK OUR ENROLLMENT EXPERTS.



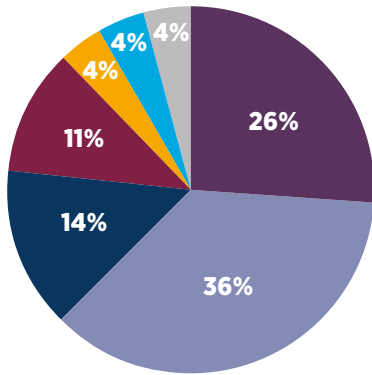
The enrollment strategists at Ruffalo Noel Levitz have helped four-year public and private institutions use their resources more effectively to meet their enrollment goals—growing enrollment, shaping enrollment, recruiting for specific majors, breaking into new markets, to name just a few. As you look at these benchmarks and wonder how to translate them into strategic action, ask for a consultation.

- **Visit [RuffaloNL.com/Consultation](https://www.ruffalonoellevitz.com/consultation)**
- **Call 800.876.1117 and ask to speak with our enrollment strategists**

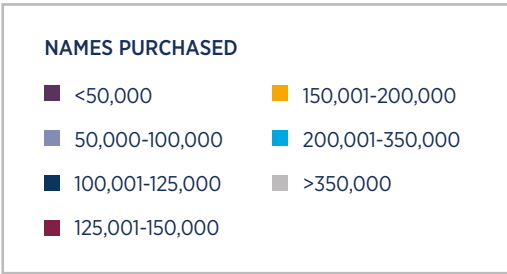
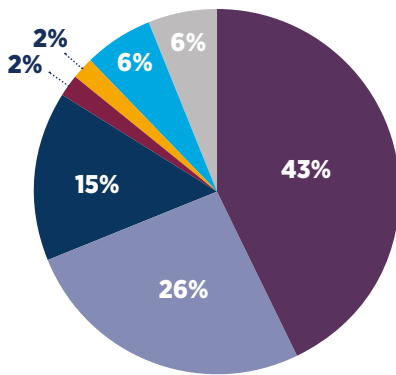
## STUDENT SEARCH PRACTICES

Approximate number of high school student names purchased for marketing campaigns to generate inquiries and applicants

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

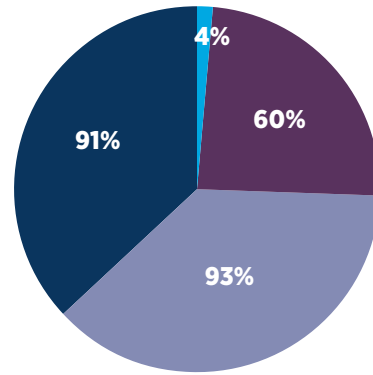


### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

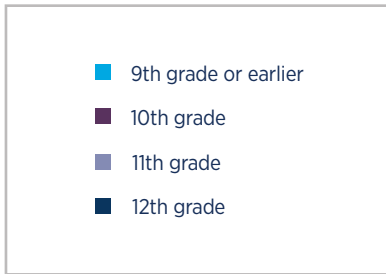
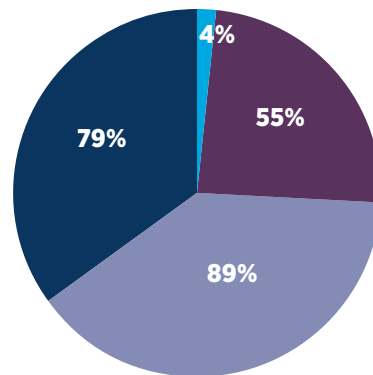


Purchased high school names by high school grade level

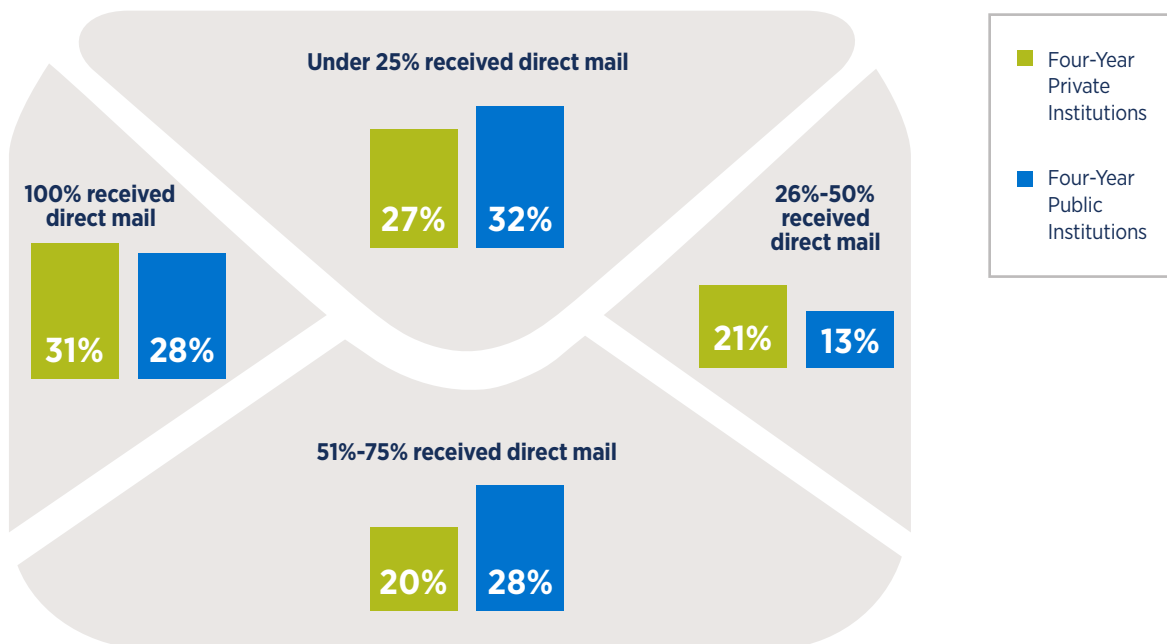
### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS



### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



## How many purchased names receive direct mail?



### START EARLY ON BUILDING DEMAND

Many campuses are losing out on an opportunity to start building relationships with sophomores and even freshmen. The availability of student records for purchase may diminish in earlier high school years, but the opportunities to reach students when they are receiving less marketing traffic can provide more attention for your brand. Think about ways to get students to identify early and learn more about your campus, such as:

- Location-based digital advertising
- Paid interactive marketing that promotes your academic offerings
- Special advertising that specifically targets sophomores or freshmen

### TAKEAWAY

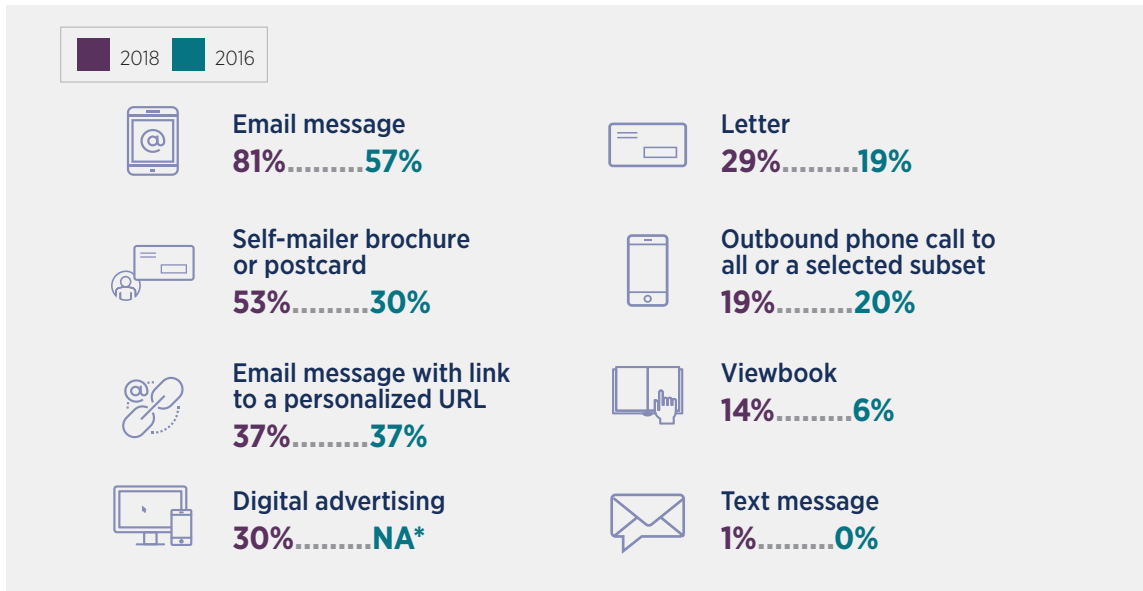
- These results reinforce that each institution has unique needs and goals when deciding how many names to purchase. The key is that name purchases should always be informed by analytics and modeling so your campus identifies key opportunities and optimizes your purchases.
- Direct mail remains a popular choice, yet more students have preferred email for their first contact for the past eight years.<sup>1</sup>
- Many campuses (40–45 percent) did not target sophomores, a potentially wasted opportunity to begin engaging prospective students earlier.

<sup>1</sup>Data from RNL's Perceptions report series from 2011-2017.

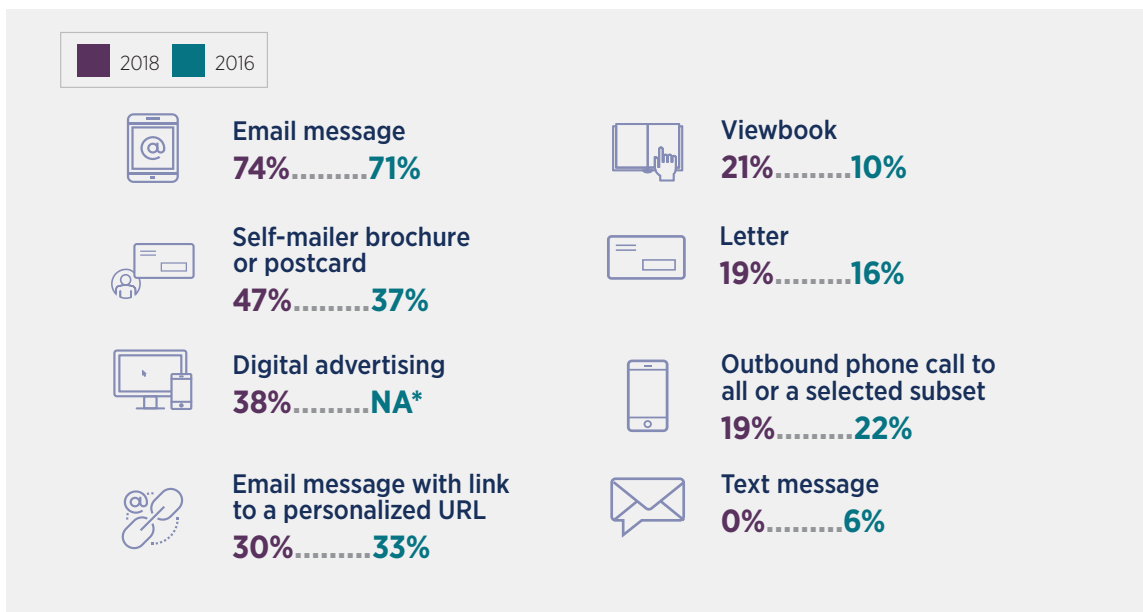
### Preferred methods for making *first contact* with high school purchased names

Respondents were instructed to “check all that apply” regarding the contact methods listed below. The results from the 2018 survey are also compared to the 2016 study.

#### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS



#### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

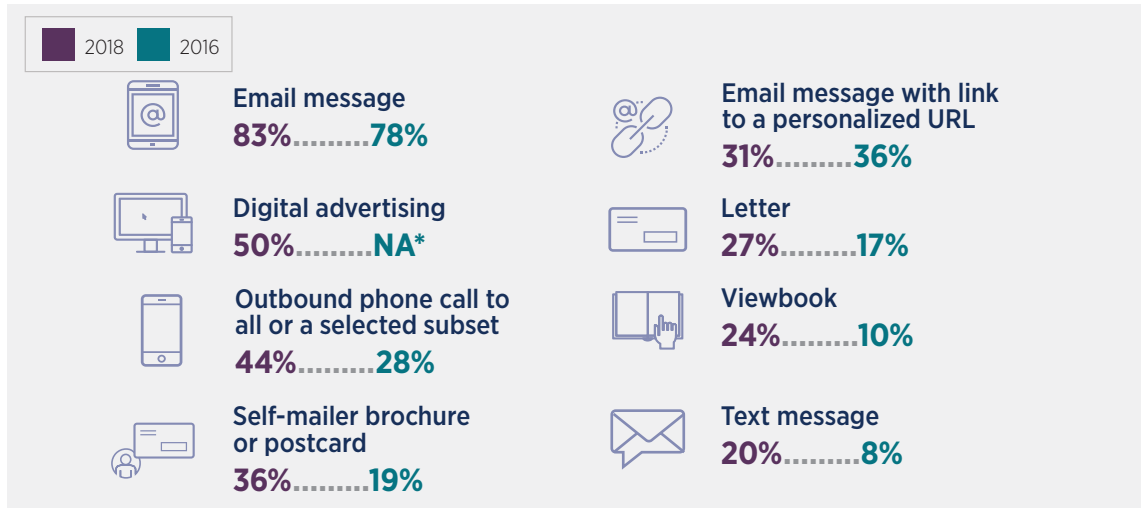


\* In 2016, digital advertising was not listed as an option for first and subsequent contacts with high school purchased names.

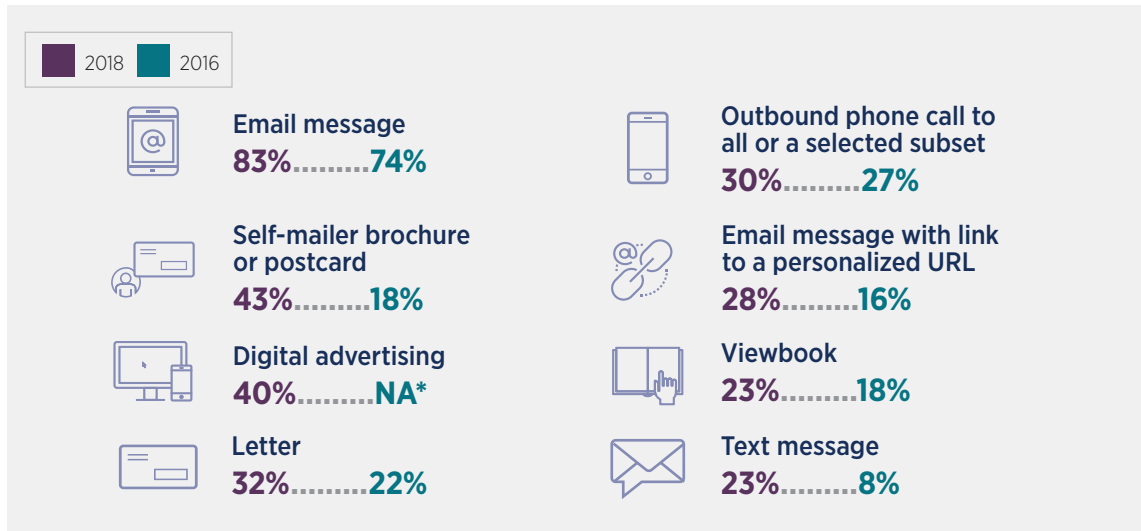
**Preferred methods for making *subsequent contact* with non-responding high school purchased names**

(Respondents were instructed to “check all that apply”)

**FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS**



**FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**



**TAKEAWAY**



**Digital advertising was popular in 2018** for both first contact and for follow-up contact with non-responders. Institutions should consider expanding its use as a way to reach students through web pages, social media, paid interactive marketing, and other digital assets they use every day.



**Self-mailers have now overtaken letters** for print outreach to non-responders and have gained ground as a method for first contact. Consider testing the self-mailer format—but also keep in mind that only 30-34 percent of high school students have actually preferred direct mail for the first contact for the past eight years.<sup>2</sup> (For context, 48 to 50 percent of high school students have preferred email for the first contact and most of the rest have preferred a phone call.)

<sup>2</sup> Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2016). *2016 marketing and student recruitment practices benchmark report for four-year colleges and universities*. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

\* In 2016, digital advertising was not listed as an option for first and subsequent contacts with high school purchased names.

## FIRST CONTACT SOURCE

### First contacts: actual sources of inquiries and enrollees vs. budget

Respondents were asked to provide their approximate percentage of sources for their inquiries and enrolled students from a list of 10 sources.

In addition, we have compared these responses to results from another RNL report that asked enrollment managers how they allocated their budget to specific marketing and recruitment activities.<sup>3</sup>

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS				FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS			
	INQUIRIES	ENROLLED	BUDGET		INQUIRIES	ENROLLED	BUDGET
Purchased names	32%	18%	16%	Application as first contact	12%	19%	NA*
Travel to high schools and college fairs	17%	18%	16%	Campus visit	9%	17%	15%
Application as first contact	8%	14%	NA*	Travel to high schools and college fairs	19%	16%	18%
Campus visit	7%	14%	12%	Purchased name	26%	14%	14%
Website/web form	9%	9%	4%	Test score	10%	10%	NA*
Student self-initiated inquiry (call, email, snail mail, etc.)	7%	9%	NA*	Website/web form	7%	7%	3%
Test score	5%	4%	NA*	Student self-initiated inquiry (call, email, snail mail, etc.)	5%	4%	NA*
Referral	3%	4%	NA*	Paid online ad	3%	3%	10%
Traditional advertising	4%	1%	25%	Referral	3%	2%	NA*
Paid online ad	2%	1%	16%	Traditional advertising	1%	1%	24%
Other source	8%	8%	12%	Other source	5%	6%	16%

#### DEFINITIONS

<b>Referral</b>	Any source coded as a referral from a group or person such as an athletic referral, guidance counselor referral, alumni referral, etc.
<b>Website/web form</b>	Any source coming via web including emails, info request forms, visit request forms, social media sites, web-lead-generating activities, etc.
<b>Self-Initiated</b>	Phone call, email, or snail mail request
<b>Campus visit</b>	Individual visit, group visit, open house, or tour
<b>Traditional advertising</b>	Billboards, newspapers, TV, radio, magazines, or other “traditional advertising”
<b>Other</b>	Anything else

### TAKEAWAY

Public and private institutions spend approximately one-quarter of their budgets on traditional advertising, but only attribute a very small number of first contacts to that source. While that advertising can drive branding and awareness, this highlights the need for institutions to closely examine their budgets and be sure they are optimizing their spending on areas that will have the greatest impact on enrollment results.

Be aware that paid online ads and traditional advertising may be driving awareness even when they are not attributable as a first-contact source.

<sup>3</sup>Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2018). *2018 cost of recruiting an undergraduate student report*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Ruffalo Noel Levitz, p.9.

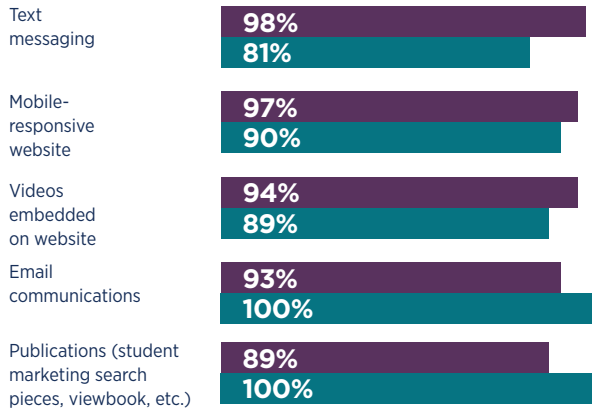
\* The budget for these areas was not polled in the cost of recruiting study.



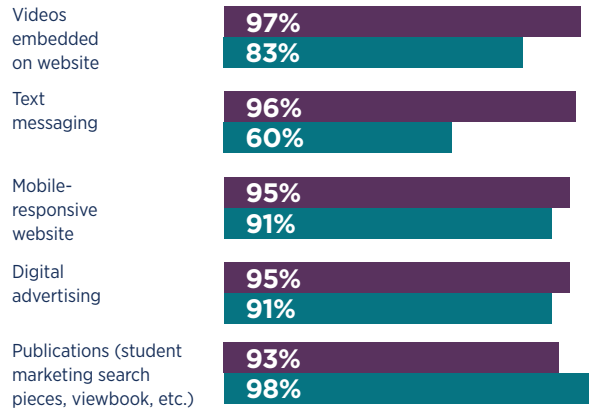
## TOP FIVE MOST EFFECTIVE OUTREACH STRATEGIES AND TACTICS FOR RECRUITMENT/MARKETING

Of 15 items measured, the top five most effective outreach practices are listed below along with the percentage of institutions using these practices.\* (For complete findings, see page 21 of the Appendix.)

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS



### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



WHAT DO STUDENTS SAY ARE THE MOST INFLUENTIAL RESOURCES?	RESOURCE	SENIORS	JUNIORS
<p>Our 2018 E-Expectations® research on college-bound students asked which resources most influenced their decision to enroll (scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most influential). Here were their top answers.</p>	The website for a school	4.02	4.16
	Calculator results	4.05	3.9
	Email from a school	3.73	3.73
	Printed brochures about the school	3.27	3.49
	Phone calls from admissions counselors	3.14	3.49
	College planning website entries for specific schools	2.99	3.46
	Texts from admissions counselors	3.03	3.37
	Videos	3.31	3.33

### TAKEAWAY

**Many institutions missing an opportunity with text messaging.** Despite text messaging receiving very high ratings for effectiveness from enrollment managers, one out of five private institutions and 40 percent of public campuses did not use text messaging. Institutions should consider incorporating a communications technique that is both rated highly by their peers and used universally by students.

\*Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who rated the item either “somewhat effective” or “very effective” as opposed to “somewhat ineffective,” “not effective at all,” or “practice not used.”

## HISPANIC STUDENT RECRUITMENT

With Hispanic enrollment on the rise, how many campuses have specific strategies for recruiting these students?

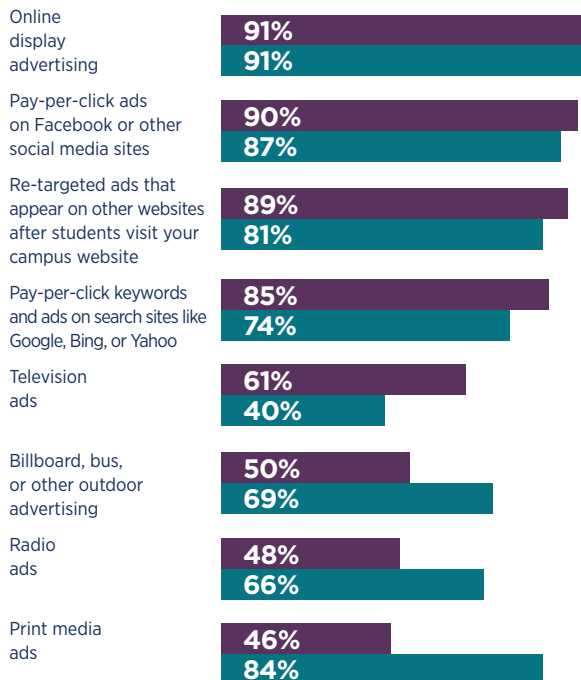


**Hispanic recruiting opportunity: Seven of every 10 respondents did not have specific strategies for recruiting Hispanic students.** Given the increases expected in Hispanic students, especially among first-generation students, it increasingly makes sense to deploy strategies to not just engage Hispanic students but also their parents who may not have gone to college and who may not be native English speakers.

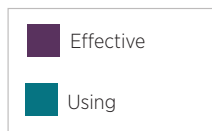
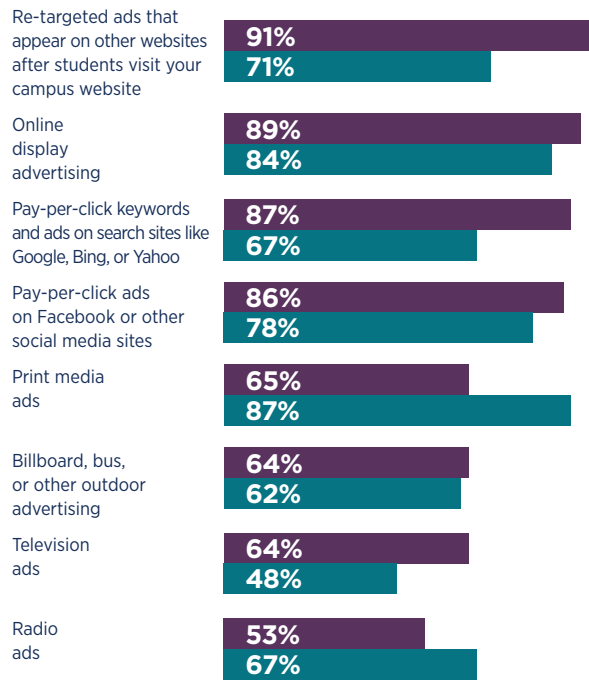
## EIGHT ADVERTISING STRATEGIES: EFFECTIVENESS, USAGE, AND COMPARISON WITH USAGE IN 2016

Respondents rated the effectiveness and usage of eight advertising strategies in 2018.

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS



### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

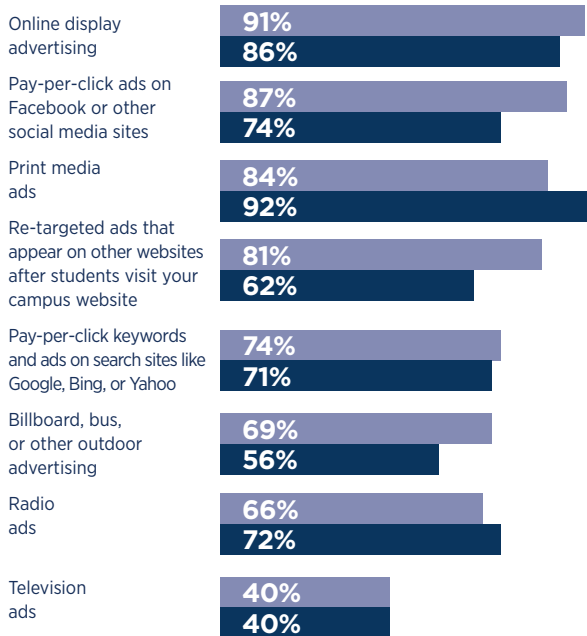


### TAKEAWAY

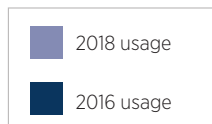
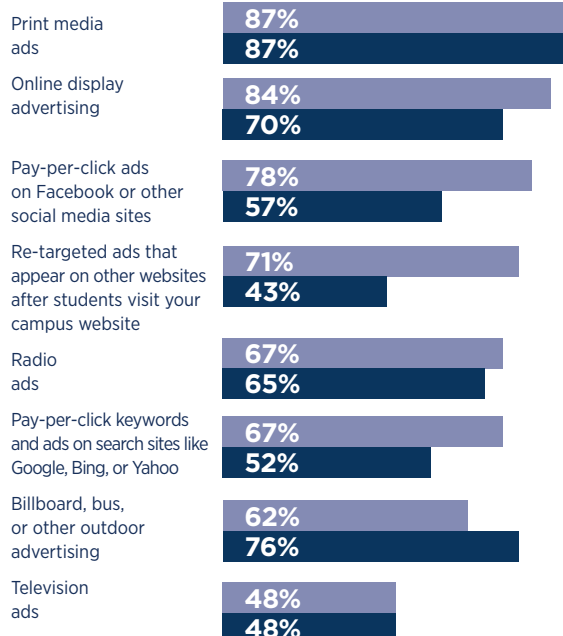
**Spend advertising dollars where they will be most effective and accountable.** Outdoor advertising, radio, and print media ads all had higher usage than effectiveness, according to respondents. Clearly enrollment managers and campus marketers are questioning the effectiveness and ROI of these efforts, but have not proportionally shifted their use of these often expensive advertising activities.

How has usage changed in recent years? Here are the 2018 results compared to those from RNL's 2016 study.

**FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS:  
2018 USAGE VS. 2016 USAGE**



**FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS:  
2018 USAGE VS. 2016 USAGE**



**TAKEAWAY**

**Invest in mediums with measurable ROI.** Digital advertising such as online display ads, pay-per-click, and re-targeting ads have all increased significantly since 2016. These are sound mediums to invest in as they provide precise metrics and allow campuses to accurately assess ROI.

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Institutions also said which social media accounts they use for marketing and recruitment. (Comparison to 2016 results included.)

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE		2018 USAGE	2016 USAGE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		2018 USAGE	2016 USAGE
Instagram	94%	86%	Facebook	94%	97%		
Facebook	93%	99%	Twitter	87%	95%		
Twitter	89%	90%	Instagram	79%	78%		
YouTube	83%	77%	YouTube	72%	77%		
Snapchat	54%	39%	Snapchat	49%	39%		
LinkedIn	41%	37%	LinkedIn	26%	37%		
Pinterest	17%	14%	Vimeo	13%	8%		
Vimeo	16%	11%	Pinterest	6%	20%		
Google+	14%	9%	Google+	4%	7%		
Periscope	7%	NA	Periscope	4%	NA		

**TAKEAWAY**

**Prioritize Instagram over Snapchat.**

According to our latest E-Expectations survey of college-bound high school students, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular social media channels. However, those students found Instagram much more useful for researching colleges.

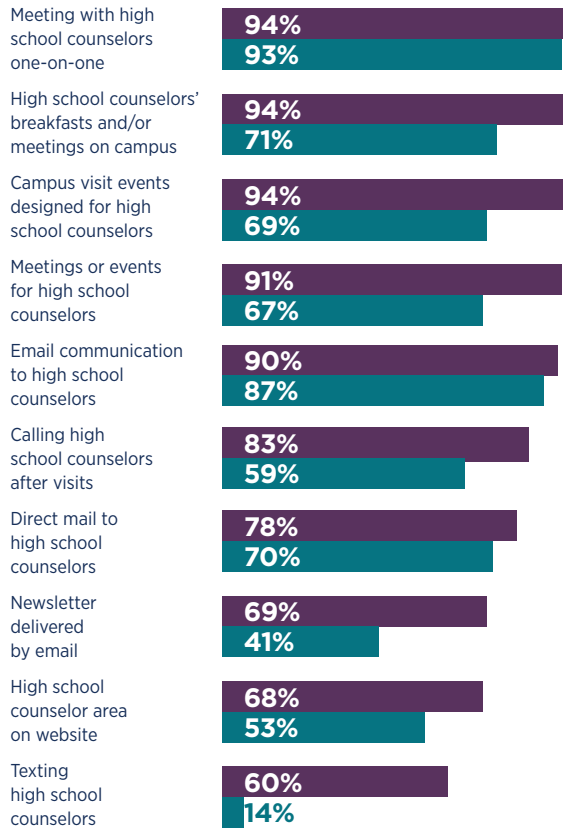
**Keep an eye on Facebook trends.**

The same E-Expectations survey showed a decline in Facebook use, which could be tied to the company's recent troubles in the news. It remains one of the best social media channels for recruitment, but keep in mind this may be a shifting trend.

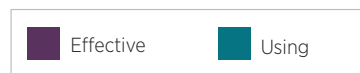
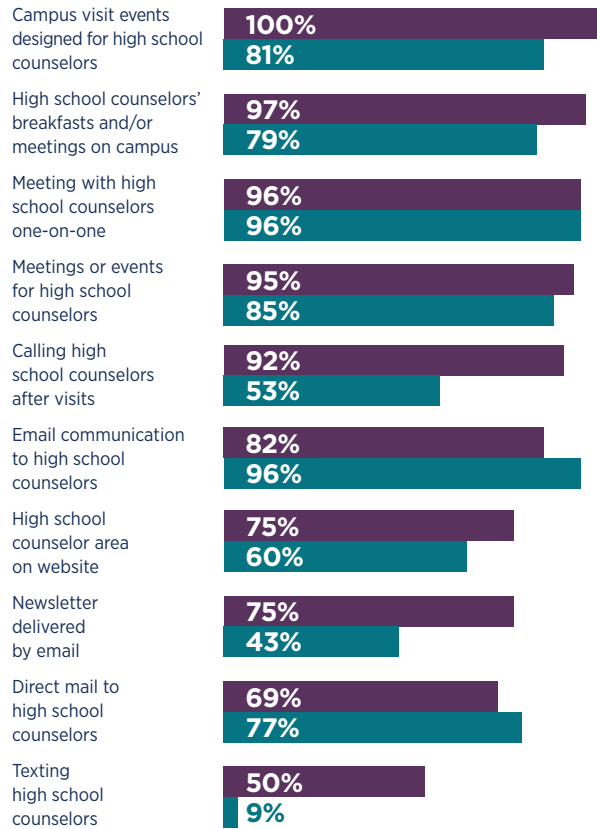
**DISCOVER THE STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE IN THE 2018 E-EXPECTATIONS REPORT**  
Download it at [RuffaloNL.com/Expectations](http://RuffaloNL.com/Expectations)

## 10 OUTREACH STRATEGIES FOR HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS: EFFECTIVENESS AND USAGE

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS



### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



### Counselors' top-preferred sources of information

In a separate RNL study, counselors were asked to indicate their "four most useful and practical sources of information...to stay up to date when helping students search for the right college."<sup>4</sup>

### RATED USEFUL BY COUNSELORS

College/university websites	87%
College and university representatives who visit our school	75%
College planning websites	50%
My own visits to a college or university	43%
Contacting the college or university by phone with specific questions	36%
Google and other search engines	34%
Printed college guides	16%
Direct mail colleges and universities send	15%
College viewbooks	8%
Catalogues sent by the colleges or universities	7%
Social networking sites	6%

<sup>4</sup>Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2017). *6 facts about growing enrollment referrals from high school counselors*. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

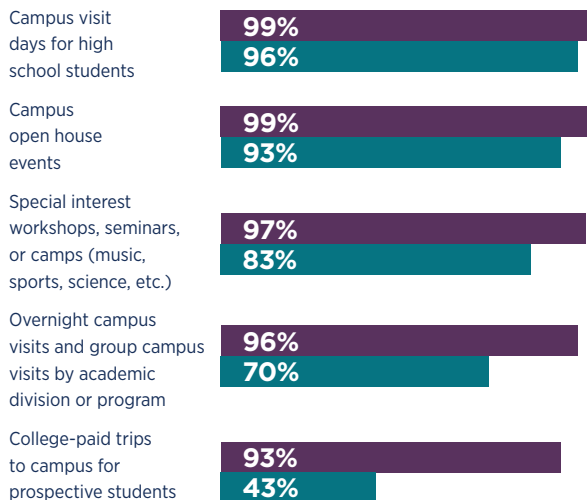
**TAKEAWAY**

**Align high school counselor outreach with activities counselors value.** In comparing the responses from enrollment managers with the data about what high school counselors value, there are some clear disconnects. Only 50-60 percent of institutions said that they had a section of the website for high school counselors, yet high school counselors overwhelmingly rated college websites as the most useful resource. Similarly, 69 percent of public institutions and 78 percent of private institutions rated direct mail sent to counselors as effective, but direct mail was only rated useful by 15 percent of counselors.

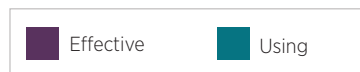
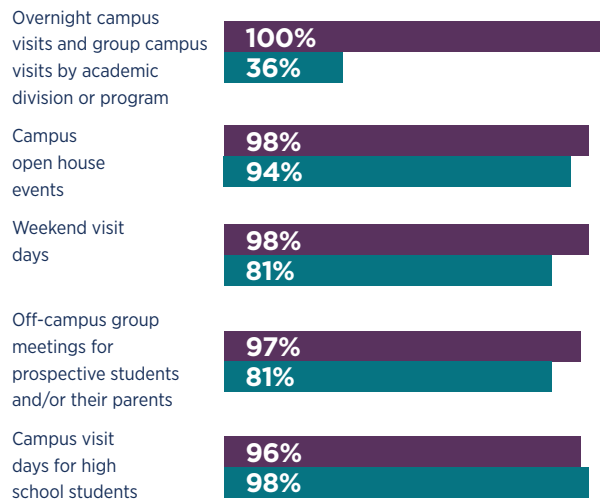
**TOP FIVE ADMISSIONS EVENTS: EFFECTIVENESS AND USAGE**

Of 12 items measured, the following are the top five most effective admissions events and their frequency of use (“2018 usage”). (For complete findings, see page 23 of the Appendix)

**FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS**



**FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**



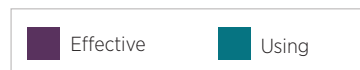
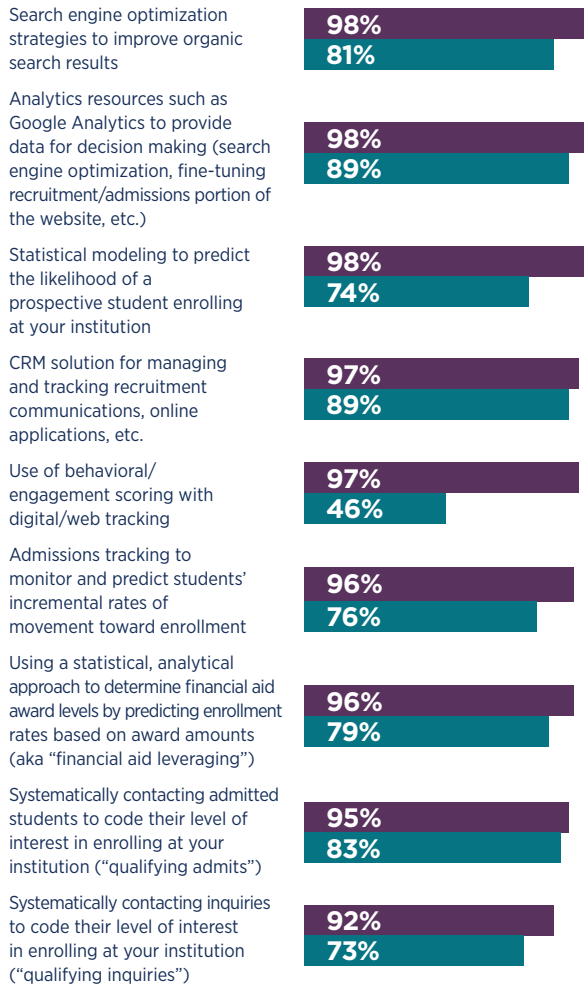
**TAKEAWAY**

**College-paid trips to campus are underutilized, as are overnight campus visits.** These special events are likely targeted to select groups of applicants, admits, or other priority targets such as out-of-state students or students of low socioeconomic means. Many public institution respondents also reported not offering academic-division-hosted programs, which were also highly effective. (RNL data show that academic program is the top factor in a student’s decision to attend an institution.)

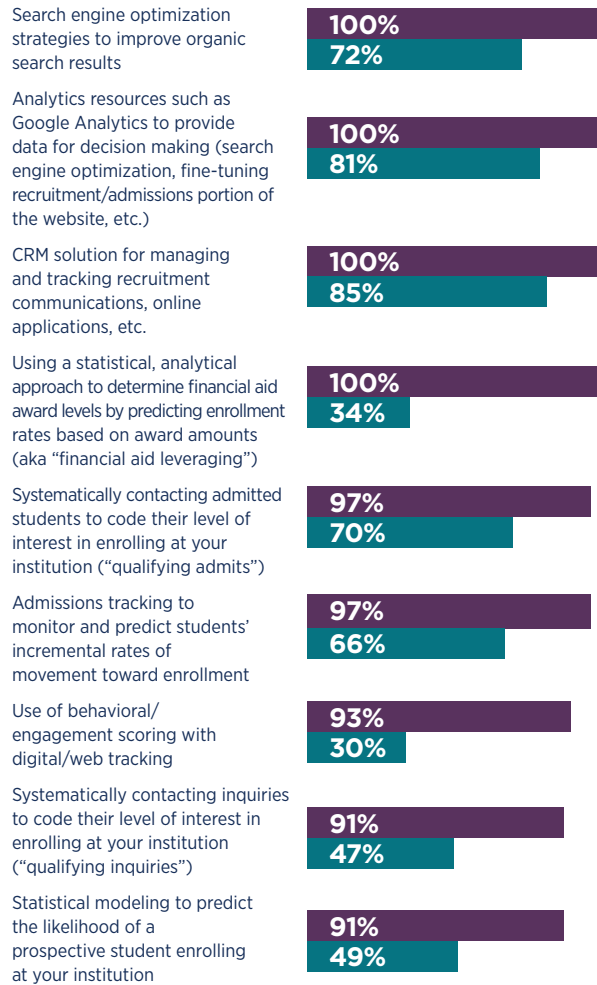
## MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Respondents evaluated the following nine operations, systems, and strategies that help them with their recruitment and marketing programs.

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS



### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



## TAKEAWAY

**Investigate behavior/engagement scoring with digital tracking.** This practice is one of the most underutilized opportunities from this study. Today's students do not respond in traditional ways, and many immediately go to an institution's website to research on their own. This scoring and web tracking provides campuses with incredibly valuable behavioral insight for these students that otherwise would be lost.

**Focus engagement efforts with statistical modeling.** Private institutions and especially public institutions can use statistical modeling to see which students will best respond to their efforts to influence enrollment. As the competition for students grows, this enrollment likelihood can save valuable time and resources by prioritizing the students campuses should target as well as reveal promising prospects who may have been otherwise overlooked.

## BUDGET INVESTMENT AREAS

Respondents ranked 10 areas for future investment. Here are their top four areas:

### FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE



#### WEBSITE CONTENT

**89%** ranked it in the top four

**71%** ranked it in the top two



#### WEBSITE DESIGN/FUNCTIONALITY

**84%** ranked it in the top four

**73%** ranked it in the top two



#### EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

**53%** ranked it in the top four



#### SOCIAL MEDIA

**51%** ranked it in the top four

### FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC



#### WEBSITE CONTENT

**94%** ranked it in the top four

**81%** ranked it in the top two



#### WEBSITE DESIGN/FUNCTIONALITY

**94%** ranked it in the top four

**68%** ranked it in the top two



#### EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

**68%** ranked it in the top four



#### SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

**40%** ranked it in the top four

For context, the other five areas that did not make the top four included text messaging, virtual tours, online chat, virtual reality video tours, and paid interactive advertising (online advertising).

## TAKEAWAY

**Web content and design should be prioritized.** Campuses are properly placing website content and development at the top of their budgets. Websites are the bedrock of student search now, and your site needs to have the best user experience and content you can possibly provide.

**Don't overlook SEO.** Related, more and more students are coming to campus sites via search, and often may be landing on academic program pages or other areas of your site. Be sure you are optimizing your pages to boost your search results and appealing to students when they arrive.

## APPENDIX | 2018 COMPLETE FINDINGS

### STUDENT SEARCH PRACTICES

Approximate number of high school student names purchased for use in marketing campaigns to generate inquiries and applicants

Names purchased	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
<50,000	26%	43%
50,000-100,000	36%	26%
100,001-125,000	14%	15%
125,001-150,000	11%	2%
150,001-200,000	4%	2%
200,001-350,000	4%	6%
>350,000	4%	6%

Percentage of the purchased high school student names that received direct mail (“snail mail”)

Percentage of purchased names receiving mail	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
<25%	27%	32%
26%-50%	21%	13%
51%-75%	20%	28%
All of them	31%	28%

Purchased high school names by high school grade level

Grade	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
9th or earlier	4%	4%
10th	60%	55%
11th	93%	89%
12th	91%	79%



### Preferred methods for making *first contact* with high school purchased names

(Respondents were instructed to “check all that apply.”)

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	
Email message	81%	Email message	74%
Email message with link to a personalized URL	37%	Email message with link to a personalized URL	30%
Self-mailer brochure or postcard	53%	Digital advertising	38%
Digital advertising	30%	Self-mailer brochure or postcard	47%
Letter	29%	Letter	19%
Outbound phone call to all or a selected subset	19%	Viewbook	21%
Viewbook	14%	Outbound phone call to all or a selected subset	19%
Text message	1%	Text message	0%

### Preferred methods for making *subsequent contact* with non-responding high school purchased names

(Respondents were instructed to “check all that apply.”)

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	
Email message	83%	Email message	83%
Email message with link to a personalized URL	50%	Email message with link to a personalized URL	43%
Self-mailer brochure or postcard	44%	Digital advertising	40%
Digital advertising	36%	Self-mailer brochure or postcard	32%
Letter	31%	Letter	30%
Outbound phone call to all or a selected subset	27%	Viewbook	28%
Viewbook	24%	Outbound phone call to all or a selected subset	23%
Text message	20%	Text message	23%

**After the first contact, the number of additional contacts typically made with non-responders from each of the following four channels before dropping the non-responders from communications**

Number of contacts	EMAIL	DIRECT MAIL	PHONE CALL	DIGITAL ADVERTISING
<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS</b>				
1-5	13%	82%	84%	34%
6-10	43%	11%	9%	34%
11-15	29%	6%	4%	16%
16+	15%	2%	2%	16%
<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>				
1-5	36%	91%	96%	59%
6-10	45%	7%	4%	19%
11-15	9%	2%	0%	19%
16+	11%	0%	0%	4%

**First contacts: actual sources of inquiries and enrollees**

(approximate percentages of respondents' inquiries and enrolled students that came from each of the 10 sources listed)

<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE</b>		
Source of first contact	INQUIRIES	ENROLLEES
Purchased names	32%	18%
Travel to high schools and college fair	17%	18%
Application as first contact	8%	14%
Campus visit	7%	14%
Website/web form	9%	9%
Student self-initiated inquiry (call, email, etc.)	7%	9%
Test score	5%	4%
Referral	3%	4%
Traditional advertising	4%	1%
Paid online ad	2%	1%
Other source	8%	8%

<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC</b>		
Source of first contact	INQUIRIES	ENROLLEES
Application as first contact	12%	19%
Campus visit	9%	17%
Travel to high schools and college fair	19%	16%
Purchased name	26%	14%
Test score	10%	10%
Website/web form	7%	7%
Student self-initiated inquiry (call, email, snail mail, etc.)	5%	4%
Paid online ad	3%	3%
Referral	3%	2%
Traditional advertising	1%	1%
Other source	5%	6%

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Number of written communications a typical prospective student receives from marketing and recruitment offices by stages

	PURCHASED NAMES/ PROSPECTS	INQUIRY STAGE	APPLICANT STAGE	ADMIT STAGE	DEPOSIT/ CONFIRMED STAGE
<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS</b>					
25th percentile	6.0	10.0	6.0	10.0	6.0
<b>Median</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>
75th percentile	12.0	19.0	18.0	21.5	18.0
<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>					
25th percentile	5.0	6.0	5.5	6.5	5.5
<b>Median</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>
75th percentile	12.5	18.0	14.5	22.0	14.0

## HISPANIC STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Do you have specific strategies for recruiting Hispanic students at the moment?

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
Yes, our office currently has specific strategies for recruiting Hispanic students.	30%	30%
No, we don't have specific strategies for recruiting Hispanic students, but we are currently studying strategies to recruit Hispanic students.	26%	38%
No, we don't have specific strategies for recruiting Hispanic students, and we are not currently considering specific strategies for this market.	44%	32%

**What recruitment materials or communications do you currently have available specifically for Hispanic prospective students and their families? (Check all that apply.)**

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
Search emails	9%	15%
Direct mail search pieces	7%	11%
A viewbook for Spanish-speaking families	7%	11%
Campus visits and programs for Hispanic students	21%	32%
Admissions website	16%	17%

**What recruitment materials or communications do you currently have available in Spanish? (Check all that apply.)**

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
Search emails	3%	0%
Direct mail search pieces	9%	11%
Phone calls in Spanish	24%	17%
A viewbook for Spanish-speaking families	0%	0%
Campus visits in Spanish	13%	9%
Website in Spanish	29%	26%

## 15 OUTREACH STRATEGIES AND TACTICS FOR RECRUITMENT/MARKETING: EFFECTIVENESS AND USAGE

	EFFECTIVE*	USING
<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS</b>		
In-person meetings (on and off campus)	100%	99%
Text messaging	98%	81%
Mobile-responsive website	97%	90%
Videos embedded on website	94%	89%
Email communications	93%	100%
Publications (student marketing search pieces, viewbook, etc.)	89%	100%
Social media	88%	99%
Digital advertising	86%	94%
Calling cell phones	82%	94%
Virtual tours	77%	63%
College planning/application-specific apps	72%	56%
Video calls using Skype or similar services	72%	41%
Online chat	67%	26%
Aid/scholarship calculator	61%	96%
Calling land lines	52%	83%
<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>		
In-person meetings (on and off campus)	100%	98%
Videos embedded on website	97%	83%
Text messaging	96%	60%
Mobile-responsive website	95%	91%
Digital advertising	95%	91%
Publications (student marketing search pieces, viewbook, etc.)	94%	98%
Email communications	94%	98%
Social media	87%	98%
College planning/application-specific apps	85%	59%
Video calls using Skype or similar services	83%	26%
Calling cell phones	76%	89%
Virtual tours	75%	60%
Online chat	75%	51%
Aid/scholarship calculator	73%	85%
Calling land lines	50%	81%

\*Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who rated the item either “somewhat effective” or “very effective” as opposed to “somewhat ineffective,” “not effective at all,” or “practice not used.”

## 10 OUTREACH STRATEGIES FOR HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS: EFFECTIVENESS AND USAGE

	EFFECTIVE	USING
<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Meeting with high school counselors one-on-one	94%	93%
High school counselors' breakfasts and/or meetings on campus	94%	71%
Campus visit events designed for high school counselors	94%	69%
Meetings or events for high school counselors	91%	67%
Email communication to high school counselors	90%	87%
Calling high school counselors after visits	83%	59%
Direct mail to high school counselors	78%	70%
Newsletter delivered by email	69%	41%
High school counselor area on website	68%	53%
Texting high school counselors	60%	14%
<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Campus visit events designed for high school counselors	100%	81%
High school counselors' breakfasts and/or meetings on campus	97%	79%
Meeting with high school counselors one-on-one	96%	96%
Meetings or events for high school counselors	95%	85%
Calling high school counselors after visits	92%	53%
Email communication to high school counselors	82%	96%
High school counselor area on website	75%	60%
Newsletter delivered by email	75%	43%
Direct mail to high school counselors	69%	77%
Texting high school counselors	50%	9%

## TYPES OF ADMISSIONS EVENTS: EFFECTIVENESS AND USAGE

	EFFECTIVE	USING
<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Campus open house events	99%	93%
Campus visit days for high school students	99%	96%
Special interest workshops, seminars, or camps (music, sports, science, etc.)	97%	83%
Overnight campus visits and group campus visits by academic division or program	96%	70%
Off-campus group meetings for prospective students and/or their parents	93%	80%
College-paid trips to campus for prospective students	93%	43%
Weekend visit days	90%	86%
National or regional college fairs	73%	99%
Podcasts and webinars	42%	34%
Online college fairs	18%	40%
<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Overnight campus visits and group campus visits by academic division or program	100%	36%
Campus open house events	98%	94%
Weekend visit days	98%	81%
Off-campus group meetings for prospective students and/or their parents	97%	81%
Campus visit days for high school students	96%	98%
Special interest workshops, seminars, or camps (music, sports, science, etc.)	95%	85%
College-paid trips to campus for prospective students	94%	36%
National or regional college fairs	79%	91%
Podcasts and webinars	71%	30%
Online college fairs	23%	55%

## 8 ADVERTISING STRATEGIES: EFFECTIVENESS AND USAGE

	EFFECTIVE	USING
<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Online display advertising	91%	91%
Pay-per-click ads on Facebook or other social media sites	90%	87%
Re-targeted ads that appear on other websites after students visit your campus website	89%	81%
Pay-per-click keywords and ads on search sites like Google, Bing, or Yahoo	85%	74%
Television ads	61%	40%
Billboard, bus, or other outdoor advertising	50%	69%
Radio ads	48%	66%
Print media ads	46%	84%
<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Re-targeted ads that appear on other websites after students visit your campus website	91%	71%
Online display advertising	89%	84%
Pay-per-click keywords and ads on search sites like Google, Bing, or Yahoo	87%	67%
Pay-per-click ads on Facebook or other social media sites	86%	78%
Print media ads	65%	87%
Billboard, bus, or other outdoor advertising	64%	62%
Television ads	64%	48%
Radio ads	53%	67%



## 10 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
PLATFORM	USING
Instagram	94%
Facebook	93%
Twitter	89%
YouTube	83%
Snapchat	54%
LinkedIn	41%
Pinterest	17%
Vimeo	16%
Google+	14%
Periscope	7%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	
PLATFORM	USING
Facebook	94%
Twitter	87%
Instagram	79%
YouTube	72%
Snapchat	49%
LinkedIn	26%
Vimeo	13%
Pinterest	6%
Google+	4%
Periscope	4%

## 14 MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR RUNNING RECRUITMENT AND MARKETING PROGRAMS

	EFFECTIVE	USING
<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Search engine optimization strategies to improve organic search results	98%	81%
Analytics resources such as Google Analytics to provide data for decision making (search engine optimization, fine-tuning recruitment/admissions portion of the website, etc.)	98%	89%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of a prospective student enrolling at your institution	98%	74%
CRM solution for managing and tracking recruitment communications, online applications, etc.	97%	89%
Use of behavioral/engagement scoring with digital/web tracking	97%	46%
Admissions tracking to monitor and predict students' incremental rates of movement toward enrollment	96%	76%
Using a statistical, analytical approach to determine financial aid award levels by predicting enrollment rates based on award amounts (aka "financial aid leveraging")	96%	79%
Systematically contacting admitted students to code their level of interest in enrolling at your institution ("qualifying admits")	95%	83%

	EFFECTIVE	USING
<b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Systematically contacting inquiries to code their level of interest in enrolling at your institution (“qualifying inquiries”)	92%	73%
Outsourcing market research (lost applicant analysis, brand perceptions, pricing analysis, SEO, etc.)	85%	49%
Outsourcing print or electronic campaigns for student search	80%	63%
Outsourcing print or electronic campaigns to generate applications from the search or inquiry pool	73%	63%
Outsourcing international recruitment	63%	27%
Outsourcing telephone qualification to rate the interest levels of prospective students by phone	39%	37%
<b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Search engine optimization strategies to improve organic search results	100%	72%
Analytics resources such as Google Analytics to provide data for decision making (search engine optimization, fine-tuning recruitment/admissions portion of the website, etc.)	100%	81%
CRM solution for managing and tracking recruitment communications, online applications, etc.	100%	85%
Using a statistical, analytical approach to determine financial aid award levels by predicting enrollment rates based on award amounts (aka “financial aid leveraging”)	100%	34%
Systematically contacting admitted students to code their level of interest in enrolling at your institution (“qualifying admits”)	97%	70%
Admissions tracking to monitor and predict students’ incremental rates of movement toward enrollment	97%	66%
Outsourcing print or electronic campaigns to generate applications from the search or inquiry pool	96%	51%
Use of behavioral/engagement scoring with digital/web tracking	93%	30%
Outsourcing print or electronic campaigns for student search	92%	53%
Systematically contacting inquiries to code their level of interest in enrolling at your institution (“qualifying inquiries”)	91%	47%
Statistical modeling to predict the likelihood of a prospective student enrolling at your institution	91%	49%
Outsourcing market research (lost applicant analysis, brand perceptions, pricing analysis, SEO, etc.)	89%	38%
Outsourcing telephone qualification to rate the interest levels of prospective students by phone	60%	11%
Outsourcing international recruitment	89%	19%

## USE OF CELL/MOBILE NUMBERS, EMAIL, AND NET PRICE CALCULATORS

### How mobile/cell numbers are used (Check all that apply.)

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
Notifications of impending deadlines, events, acceptance, etc.	76%	75%
Calls simply to build a relationship between the caller and the student	81%	64%
Calls from telecounseling call centers	40%	36%
Mass text messages	59%	49%
Individual text messages	79%	38%
We do not collect cell/mobile numbers	0%	2%

### How mass emails are delivered to prospective students

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
We use a campus-based system such as Outlook to send mass emails	19%	17%
We use a campus-based CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system to send mass emails	69%	83%
We use a third-party vendor to send mass emails	46%	23%
We use another approach to deliver mass emails to prospective students	3%	2%

### Does admissions office collect contact information for parents at the inquiry stage?

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
Yes, email address	63%	55%
Yes, mobile phone numbers	49%	32%
Yes, mailing address	53%	36%
No, we do not collect any contact information for parents at the inquiry stage	34%	45%





















### Who provided the institution's net price calculator?

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
The federal government	13%	26%
The institution	24%	30%
Outside vendor	61%	43%

### Percentage of students who complete the institution's net price calculator after starting it

	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
25th percentile	12.8	20.0
<b>Median</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>33.0</b>
75th percentile	50.3	50.0

## 10 AREAS FOR FUTURE BUDGET INVESTMENT

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC
 <p><b>WEBSITE CONTENT</b>  <b>89%</b> ranked it in the top four  <b>71%</b> ranked it in the top two</p>	 <p><b>WEBSITE CONTENT</b>  <b>94%</b> ranked it in the top four  <b>81%</b> ranked it in the top two</p>
 <p><b>WEBSITE DESIGN/FUNCTIONALITY</b>  <b>84%</b> ranked it in the top four  <b>73%</b> ranked it in the top two</p>	 <p><b>WEBSITE DESIGN/FUNCTIONALITY</b>  <b>94%</b> ranked it in the top four  <b>68%</b> ranked it in the top two</p>
 <p><b>EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS</b>  <b>53%</b> ranked it in the top four</p>	 <p><b>EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS</b>  <b>68%</b> ranked it in the top four</p>
 <p><b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b>  <b>51%</b> ranked it in the top four</p>	 <p><b>SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION</b>  <b>40%</b> ranked it in the top four</p>
 <p><b>SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION</b>  <b>46%</b> ranked it in top four</p>	 <p><b>TEXT MESSAGING</b>  <b>34%</b> ranked it in the top four</p>
 <p><b>TEXT MESSAGING</b>  <b>33%</b> ranked it in top four</p>	 <p><b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b>  <b>28%</b> ranked it in top four</p>
 <p><b>PAID INTERACTIVE ADVERTISING (ONLINE ADVERTISING)</b>  <b>20%</b> ranked it in top four</p>	 <p><b>VIRTUAL TOURS</b>  <b>19%</b> ranked it in the top four</p>
 <p><b>VIRTUAL REALITY VIDEOS TOURS</b>  <b>6%</b> ranked it in top four</p>	 <p><b>PAID INTERACTIVE ADVERTISING (ONLINE ADVERTISING)</b>  <b>17%</b> ranked it in top four</p>
 <p><b>ONLINE CHAT</b>  <b>4%</b> ranked it in top four</p>	 <p><b>VIRTUAL REALITY VIDEOS TOURS</b>  <b>6%</b> ranked it in the top four</p>
 <p><b>VIRTUAL TOURS</b>  <b>3%</b> ranked it in top four</p>	 <p><b>ONLINE CHAT</b>  <b>0%</b> ranked it in the top four</p>

## HOW DO YOU TURN BENCHMARKS INTO STRATEGY? ASK OUR ENROLLMENT EXPERTS.



The enrollment strategists at Ruffalo Noel Levitz have helped four-year public and private institutions use their resources more effectively to meet these enrollment goals—growing enrollment, shaping enrollment, recruiting for specific majors, breaking into new markets, to name just a few. As you look at these benchmarks and wonder how to translate them into strategic action, ask for a consultation.

- **Visit [RuffaloNL.com/Consultation](https://RuffaloNL.com/Consultation)**
- **Call 800.876.1117 and ask to speak with our enrollment strategists**

## ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS AND METHODOLOGY

Data in this report reflect responses from 115 nonprofit four-year colleges and universities. Respondents participated in the Ruffalo Noel Levitz national electronic poll of undergraduate practices for marketing and student recruitment in the spring of 2018. The poll was emailed to enrollment and admissions officers at accredited, degree-granting institutions across the United States. Respondents to the poll included 70 four-year private institutions and 45 four-year public institutions.

**THANK YOU**  
to those who  
participated

Standard descriptive statistics (such as sample means) were used to analyze the results of the poll for central tendency and variation. Due to the relatively small sample size, the results should be read as indicators.

To report the findings as accurately as possible, the rankings of effectiveness were based only on the relative effectiveness options that were given to respondents: **“effective” (responses of “very effective” or “somewhat effective”), “somewhat ineffective,” and “not effective at all.”** This approach of excluding “practice not used,” allowed promising, less-frequently-used practices to be included.

**FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS**

Augusta University  
 Austin College  
 Bradley University  
 Carthage College  
 Centenary University  
 Christian Brothers University  
 Colby-Sawyer College  
 College of Menominee Nation  
 College of Saint Scholastica, The  
 Converse College  
 Dallas Baptist University  
 DePauw University  
 Dordt College  
 Elmhurst College  
 Finlandia University  
 Freed-Hardeman University  
 Fresno Pacific University  
 Friends University  
 Goshen College  
 Grace College and  
 Theological Seminary  
 Guilford College  
 Houghton College  
 Houston Baptist University  
 John Brown University  
 John Carroll University  
 Kettering College  
 Keystone College  
 Lakeland University  
 Lincoln College  
 Lipscomb University  
 Manchester University  
 Marist College  
 Marymount Manhattan College  
 Miles College  
 Milwaukee School of Engineering  
 Mount Aloysius College  
 Mount Ida College  
 Mount Vernon Nazarene University  
 Muhlenberg College  
 Newbury College  
 North Carolina Wesleyan College  
 North Central University

Northwest University  
 Occidental College  
 Oklahoma Baptist University  
 Oral Roberts University  
 Otterbein University  
 Pace University-New York  
 Piedmont College  
 Resurrection University  
 Robert Morris University  
 Rocky Mountain College  
 Rosalind Franklin University of  
 Medicine and Science  
 Saint Joseph's College  
 Seattle University  
 Southern Adventist University  
 Springfield College  
 St. Louis College of Pharmacy  
 St. Mary's University  
 Thiel College  
 Trinity Christian College  
 Tusculum College  
 University of Evansville  
 University of Richmond  
 Ursuline College  
 Utica College  
 Washington & Jefferson College  
 Wisconsin Lutheran College  
 York College Pennsylvania

**FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**

Adams State University  
 Bellingham Technical College  
 Boise State University  
 Buffalo State College  
 Clarion University of Pennsylvania  
 Colorado State University-  
 Fort Collins  
 Colorado State University-Pueblo  
 East Stroudsburg University  
 of Pennsylvania  
 Florida International University  
 James Madison University  
 Maine Maritime Academy  
 Miami University-Oxford  
 Michigan Technological University

Minnesota State University  
 Moorhead  
 Missouri State University-  
 Springfield  
 Montana Tech of the University  
 of Montana  
 New Jersey Institute of Technology  
 North Dakota State University-  
 Main Campus  
 Ohio University-Main Campus  
 Oklahoma Baptist University  
 Pennsylvania State University-  
 Penn State Lehigh Valley  
 Peru State College  
 Sam Houston State University  
 San Diego State University  
 Shawnee State University  
 University at Buffalo  
 University of Alaska Fairbanks  
 University of Cincinnati  
 University of Guam  
 University of Illinois at Springfield  
 University of Michigan-Dearborn  
 University of Minnesota-Crookston  
 University of Missouri-St. Louis  
 University of New Hampshire-  
 Main Campus  
 University of North Carolina  
 Wilmington  
 University of Northern Colorado  
 University of Pittsburg  
 University of Southern Maine  
 University of Texas at San Antonio  
 University of Vermont  
 University of Wyoming  
 Western Connecticut  
 State University  
 Western Kentucky University  
 Western Oregon University  
 Western State Colorado University

## ABOUT RUFFALO NOEL LEVITZ

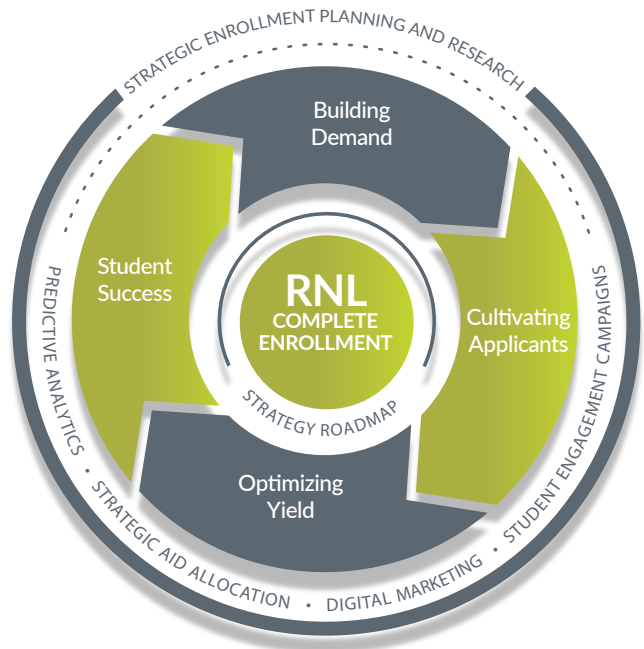
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#### How to cite this report:

Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2018). *2018 marketing and student recruitment report of effective practices*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

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