

Effective Lead Management In Higher Education Admission

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Abstract: The higher education institutions face stiff competition in student enrollment, thus make them to think like corporate marketers in lead generation and management. The challenge is on effective branding and proper systems to manage the leads for admission using specific market segments. Lead management systems are the digital tools to increase the promotion performance, reduce the drop-outs in conversion funnel, engage the candidates through monitoring multi-channels and provide relevant information with automated activities. The analytic operations track the lead quality and streamline lead generation. The critical success factor is to increase lead to enrollment. Despite the rapid technological growth, institutions are still making use of manual processes and disintegrated lead life cycle. The study focuses on effective lead management to provide positive performance and enrollment.

Index Terms: Lead Generation, Lead Nurturing, Lead Scoring, De-duplication, Predictive analysis, CRM, Content Strategy

1 INTRODUCTION

THE era of digital marketing helps the higher education institutions to expand their admission campaign, reach the applicant with maximum visibility and justified cost (Dhote et al, 2015). The digital marketing helps the institutions to improve enrollment and branding as well (Ross, 2015). Lead management encompasses the entire actions which qualify prospects from initial contact. It is evolved from the traditional, manual, batch oriented, unpredictable and point-to-point tracking to real time, intelligent, cross-functional and collaborative closed loop business processes (Hammond et al, 2003) as shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Lead Management Process

The lead management comprises efficient digital marketing outreach to continuously coordinate and exchange information with prospective applicant. The automated life cycle is distributed across multiple campaigns and multiple channels with multiple targets (Michiels, 2010). The success is based on marketing methods and content strategy which garners higher education leads to enrollment. The paper reviews the stages of lead management, recommends best practices and

provides a systematic approach of lead nurturing.

2 LEAD GENERATION

The lead management is non-linear dynamic process which is affected and influenced by different variety of approaches revamping the lead generation path. The dis-integrated lead management faces accountability and expected to be integrated along with digital marketing and admission management tools to achieve data aggregation, Customer relation management (CRM) analytics and other lead sources (Terry, 2016). The analytic tool is used to maximize the leads and feed indicators at right time.(MX Group, 2017). Some of the basic statistics in analytic tools are data validity, data centralization, lead disposition trends and measuring return on investment (ROI). The outcome of CRM results will ease lead de-duplication, lead distribution and able to access complete lead profile with in and out (Lang et al, 2014). Lead generation starts with understanding the target market. The leads are captured through multiple widgets. The lead data must be captured in consistent manner through contact forms, landing pages of marketing campaigns, direct mails, inbound calls and third party websites. The leads must be self-qualified, acknowledged and establish credibility through brand positioning. The lead generation connects the individual through engaging visitor traffic. Doing the market research provides the insight to know the current aspirations and brand awareness as shown in Fig. 2. The multiple mechanics and dimensions are used in analytic applications to track and optimize performance, lead segmentation, streamline and calculate return on investment per lead (Business Objects, 2003).



Fig. 2. Tasks in Lead Generation Market Research

3 LEAD SCORING

Lead scoring is used to rank prospect applicant and helped in assessing the interest / willingness of applicant. It is evaluated

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through implicit and explicit criteria. The list of implicit criteria includes visit of web page & views, click behavior, downloads and watching online demo / webinars. The explicit criteria are based on candidate demographic profile, qualifying score & courses in board exam, course preference and geographical distribution etc.,. The point system is assigned for each criteria. The traditional / manual lead scoring was used to gather information, however wait for a time period to update the score. The predictive lead scoring which make use the machine learning and data science tool are effectively used to discover, understand factors and assign lead score just in time. The historical information and all the standard fields attached to current leads are analysed before predicting the conversion. The personalized lead workflow is assigned based on the score as shown in Fig. 3. The difference between traditional and predictive lead scoring is listed in Table 1 (Lattice, 2013).

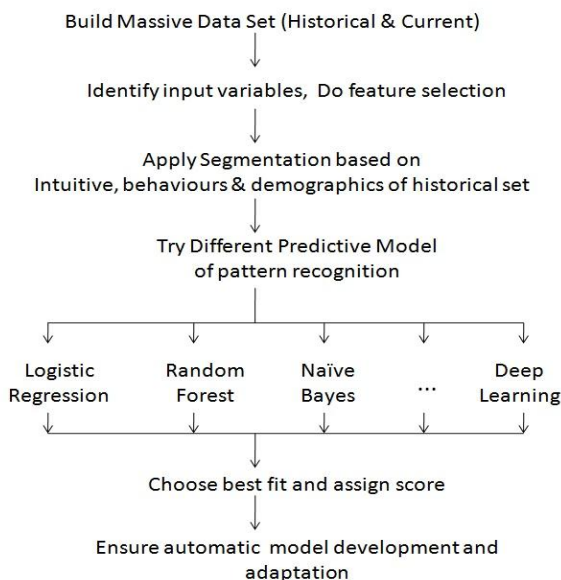


Fig. 3. Predictive lead score model

Table 1. Traditional Vs Predictive Lead Scoring

Traditional Lead Scoring	Predictive Lead Scoring
Uses predefined rules / logic	Based on historical data patterns
Implemented for small data set	Applied to massive volume of data set
Rank the prospect applicant	Identify the probability of potential enrollment
Based on pre-defined activity	Evolve on need based
Based on subjective options	Based on objective options

4 LEAD NURTURING

Lead nurturing is applied to attract applicant by showcasing unique selling position of institution and actively engage them throughout. The objective and challenges of lead nurturing is summarized in Table 2. The automation of lead nurturing helps in solving the issues such as lack of personalization, difficulty in understanding the applicant based on his profile and able to manage time and resources. The complete demographic profile data and preferences are required to share relevant content and send targeted mail. The landing page of the institution is the deciding factor and entry to lead

nurturing.

Table 2. Objectives and Challenges of Lead Nurturing

Objectives	Challenges
Increase enrollment rate	Dynamic content creation
Increase lead % in pipeline	Customize workflow, Locate decision stage
Create hot and warm leads	Target prospective applicant
Improve segmentation	Pattern identification for segment
Increase response	Content personalization
Minimize budget	Multi-channel integration

The communication through lead nurturing must meet the criteria of trustworthy, relevance, omni-channel support and impactful to build relationships. The institutions must be careful on lead nurturing campaign and avoid sharing complete statistics, institution news letter, frequent calls and promotions without considering the applicant interest (QS,2016). The content management plays an important role as the leads are nurtured via different campaigns including, messaging, email, call and social media connect. The drip marketing achieves in sharing communication to the applicant, however it tends to have similar response to all. It is part of lead nurturing sub-set, which is more personalized and adaptive.

5 CASE STUDY

The higher education institutions engage semi- / automated lead management system to identify potential applicant leads by integrating their own student information. The institutions are expected to establish trust over students rather than mere lead campaign. (Pfalum, 2014). The potential applicant collects detail information from institution website (Schimmel et al, 2010). Applicants visit the information pertaining to course offerings, eligibility, fee structure, scholarship, placement, semester abroad programme, foreign language courses, campus life and refund policies in case of withdrawal at later stage. The lead content are also created and aligned to brief about the basic course details, course differentiator including electives, specialization, teaching-learning methodology, fee & scholarship concession, international alliances, placement and internship record. The international students look into academic reputation, ranking, safety of the campus, diversity of international students, living expense, connectivity / campus location and entry requirements as additional parameters. The content must be design to meet the implicit inquiries of international and other state students. The level of lead nurturing with the created content is tracked in lead cycle as shown in Fig. 4 (Qs, 2017; Deepika, 2018). The successful higher education content strategy must focus and audit to create the relevant content to build brand, reach user and context as shown in Table 3. The higher education institutions outsource one or more activities of content marketing as follows (Demirkan et al, 2016).

- In-house : strategy, creation, distribution, measurement
- Outsource : Create, refine, promotion

Table 3. Content Strategy to maximize lead success

Focus	Audit
Brand building	Existing content
Wide reach to add new prospect	Traffic analysis in terms of hit, flow
Engage applicant	Visit of top pages

The lead content shared by third party career websites on behalf of institutions must be audited for quality benchmark over peer competitors. The leads received from third party and social media campaign also must be qualified for relevance and de-duplicated prior to engage. Such outbound marketing always require rigorous approach on lead qualification based on course interest, location demographic (Rooney, 2014). The basic lead content may be sent to those bulk leads and response time [click / open / inquiry / application submission] to be captured for further engagement. The leads from different sources can be uploaded through redirection to landing page, application interface and offline uploads using excel for bulk. The institutions are advised not to obtain leads in the form of excel / manual sheets as they are unstructured and difficult for verification.

- Misunderstanding / interpretation of candidate profile
- Lack of trained professionals
- Limited time
- Initial investment on tools & resources

The lead management services are utilized at large scale by multi-stream private institutions whose enrollment is more than 10,000 in a year. Their success rate of enrollment is 8 % from initial hit rate. The conversion of leads to application is 70 %, where the counseling turn around is 10-15 % of submitted applications. Each applicant submits 6-10 applications before taking final decision. The institutions are forced to choose lead tools available in the market to withstand the competition. The lead tools are customized to suit particular higher education to provide flexible, sustainable, secure, coherent and measurable recruitment strategy. They also do an offer follow-up of tailored communication, campaigns, lead scoring/nurturing methodologies and analytics. The institutions must have knowledge enough to choose the bundle of services based on their admission reach. The institution choice begins with selection of lead channels, content creation, advertising regions, call, message support, integration with call centre services, CRM and reports requirements. The critical success factors depend on institution vision, commitment and communication of content strategy.

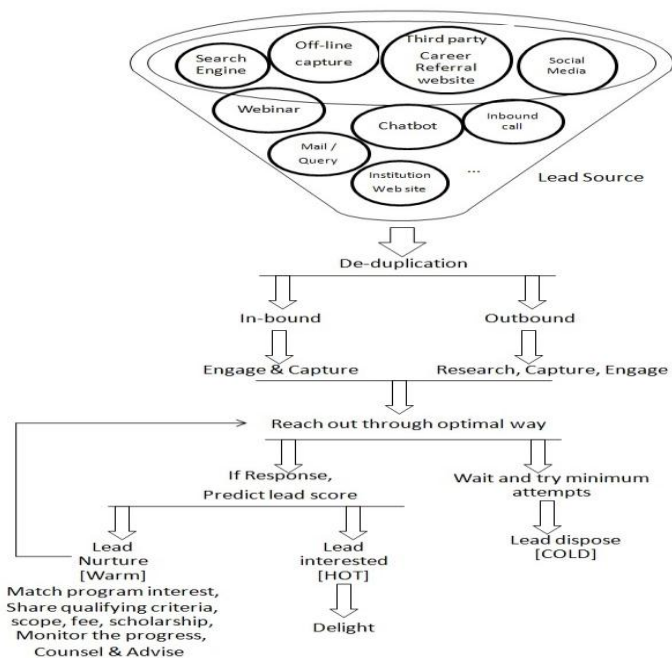


Fig. 4. Lead cycle of Higher Education Admission

The higher education search is in the number one category which creates more web traffic. The organic search links with institution landing page to capture the lead. However, the bulk leads are loaded through interfaces. The analytics are to be run on dynamic at frequent intervals instead of end of admission season. The institutions prefer to pay per enrollment over total leads / verified leads / application filling. The referral websites are analyzed on monthly traffic and average visit duration on each vertical. The high referral lead sources with success hit rate of Indian higher education institution are given in Fig. 5. The factors which affect engagement success rate are solved by automatic lead nurturing

- Lack of personalization

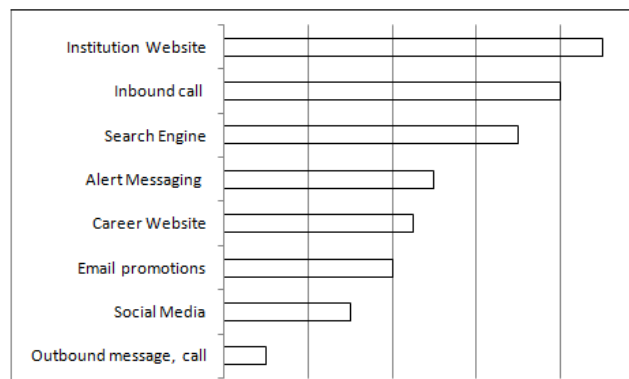


Fig. 5. Engagement success rate of lead sources

6 CONCLUSION

The educational institutions are expected to be complete digital in the coming years. The target of large audience and quick decision making is possible through marketing automation and nurturing leads. The thoughtfully designed lead management in admission ensures improved targeting, enhance collaboration across all stages and departments, increase productivity and lead conversion accountability. As the competition is high among educational institutions, many of the educational institutions expand their admission campaign through advanced lead management, chatbot and call centre follow-ups and extensively using digital marketing modes. However, attempting the drop-outs in lead cycle will create negative branding among applicants and also waste of time and cost. The institutions must apply intuitive decision on removing cold leads based on historical and current trends.

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