

“Digital Marketing Tools for Institutes – An Agency Perspective”

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Abstract:

India has an ever increasing 60 million tablet, 450 million mobile phones and around 500 million internet users in 2018. Indian Higher Education system has more than half a lakh higher educational institute infrastructure with ever rising and wide faculty of choice (MHRD, GOI). Attracting good, diverse students is a challenge for any educational Institution. In 2015-16, 50% of seats alone were vacant (9,07,736) in under and post graduate technical programs in the country (*India today*, 2017). The efforts of educational institutions in attracting students if not best students is always a challenge. The return on investment on traditional methods like newspaper advertisement, radio, television promotions were inefficient and ineffective. On the other hand the parents, students were with in-adequate information, knowledge and choices on educational programs. There is a link-gap between demand and supply. The digital age has started finding solutions to connect good, diverse and right student population across the country with right educational institutions. What education institutions could not do in reaching out to students and parents is fulfilled by these Digital start-ups and agencies. An attempt is made to understand various options, strategies of these Indian Digital agencies in this space. This paper establishes a conceptual foundation describing the various tools and techniques available and used by internet startups, digital agencies, Business schools on marketing the educational programs.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the “Internet Report of India 2017” (IAMAI and Kantar IMRB) the number of Internet users stood at 481 million in December 2017, an increase of 11.34% over December 2016. The report also found out that an estimated 281 Million daily Internet users, out of which 182.9 million or 62% access internet daily in urban area and 98 million users or 53%, in rural India (Economic Times Feb 20, 2018). The higher education sector was facing a challenge in terms of enrollment. In the academic year 2014-2015, the number of seats to be filled was 19,04,922 in 3,455 engineering colleges across the country, of which only 9,81,436 seats were filled, leaving 9,23,486 seats vacant. The next academic year, 2015-16, too showed dismal figures with only 9,15,196 seats filled from 18,22,932 seats available, which meant 9,07,736 seats remained vacant (Mirror-Bangalore, Feb 24, 2017). There were 66(2015-16), 76(2016-17) and 101(2017-18) Business Schools

that have applied to AICTE for closure and one among the reasons being few or no takers (College dekho, April 25, 2018). The internet, the web and digital media have transformed marketing and business since the first website (www.info.cern.in) went live in 1991. The use of the internet and other digital media technology to support “Modern Marketing” has given rise to a bewildering range of labels and jargon created by both academic and professional. It has been called digital Marketing, Internet Marketing, E-Marketing and Web Marketing (Dave Chaffey, Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). According to Catherine, Dunrie & Burkle (2012), for both B2C and B2B companies, the internet is an increasingly important Marketing, Sales Tool. Purchasers love it because it’s an information rich medium where they can conduct research and easily make comparison. Marketers love it because online efforts are trackable and measurable in real time.

The efforts of educational institutions in attracting students if not best students was always a challenge. The return on investment on traditional methods like newspaper advertisement, radio, television promotions were inefficient & ineffective. Several articles have been published questioning if web advertising really works and how it can be better (Sundar, Narayan, Obregon, and Uppal, 1998). The Millennials in a survey said that they favour the digital format (Dayton, 2016). The parents and students were with in-adequate information, knowledge & choices on educational programs.

Digital Marketing tools & activities

i. Home Page

The home page provides information about what Institutes are and what they provide. The home page has a title/main heading that attracts students when they search towards the site. It was found that main heading of institution websites attract searching students by more than 9% (Puneet, 2017).

ii. SMS:

SMS (Short Message Service) is a text messaging service component of most telephone, World Wide Web, and mobile device systems. It uses standardized telecommunication protocols to enable mobile devices and computers to send short text messages (Wikipedia). The SMS carries information about the website link, updated information on application deadlines and any other matter than the institute/college would like to convey to the prospective candidate. The exam & interview date, venue, interview call and admit information/alert can also be passed through SMS. There are two kinds of SMS - Promotional and Transactional.

iii. Emailer:

Emails are not only electronic way of sending and receiving messages (thefreedictionary.com). It goes beyond for digital agencies. Digital agencies use emailer to send newsletter, alert students about deadlines, update about events happening in the institute/college and provide various information related to the institute to the subscribed students in their portal. These Electronic Direct Emailers (EDM) nearly reaches 1 lakh prospective students email inbox. According to MBA Universe a digital agency these mails have 35% open rate. The call for action

brings traffic to the Institute portal which can be measured using google short URLs.

iv. Branding:

The Digital agency involves in creating a unique name and image for a course/institute in the stakeholder (students & Parents) mind through advertisement campaigns with a consistent theme. The campaign uses banners highlighting the unique and differentiating advantage and brings high amount of visibility about the branding institution to the targeted aspirant audience. Branding banners in the homepage and other key sections is a good way to reach the candidates.

v. Content Marketing:

A type of marketing that involves the creation and sharing of online material that does not explicitly promote an institute but is intended to stimulate interest in its training or courses (Oxforddictionary.com). The websites, native advertising, videos, blogs, and social media posts which does not explicitly promote a brand but is intended to stimulate interest on a course or institution.

vi. Lead Generation:

A lead is differentiating from a visitor or a prospect primarily in its intent, as it is more "Qualified", thus having a higher chances of conversion of the candidate to take part in the application process. Lead generation by definition is generating or triggering a stakeholder attention or enquiry into course, program or institute.

vii. Search Engine Marketing (SEM):

Search engine marketing (SEM) involves the promotion of websites by increasing their visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs) primarily through paid advertising. They can also divert to specific pages of the website which the institute wants the prospective student to navigate and that becomes landing pages of the search advertisement.

viii. Social Media Marketing (SMM):

Social media marketing (SMM) is a form of Internet marketing that utilizes social networking websites and digital portals as a marketing tool. Also known as community-based marketing relates to concept like word of mouth, influence building among

students, networking, virality & personal communication etc. The goal of SMM is to produce content that users will share with their social network to help an institute increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach (whatis.techtarget.com).

ix. Banner:

A web banner or banner ad is a form of advertising on the World Wide Web delivered by a digital agency in the portal. This form of online advertising entails embedding an advertisement into a web page. It is intended to attract traffic to a website by linking to the website of the advertising institute(en.wikipedia.org).

x. Trending Institutes:

Trending institute is the term used by education portal to pull traffic for the institution who have sponsored for this inventory on their website. The portal will send alerts to their registered users that these are trending institution on some Category.

xi. Advertorial:

A newspaper portal, e-magazine giving information about a course/institute in the style of an editorial or objective journalistic article(en.oxforddictionaries.com).

xii. Editorial:

An editorial is an article written by the senior editorial staff or publisher of the digital agency often unsigned on a topic/subject which indirectly refers to the Institute/course(en.wikipedia.org).

xiii. Page Associate Sponsor:

An education institute that sponsors a particular page on a website in the form of banner for commercials is called Page Associate Sponsor.

xiv. Newsletter:

Digital newsletters are scheduled, recurring messages from companies to a list of subscribers that usually has a web page counterpart or archive which represents a specific type of content(www.toprankblog.com). These newsletters carry various information related to colleges, institutes/B-schools.

xv. Facebook Sponsorship page:

Boosting posts is an effective and inexpensive way to get more exposure for educational content. It's a simple and easy process – posts are boosted directly from the Facebook Page – and it can boost a post for as much or as little as they want(en-gb.facebook.com). It's a great way to get more people to see the posts, to promote special events, programs and courses, and to reach new audiences through targeting.

xvi. Admission Buddy:

Admission buddy is a tool used by few education portals. Through this page students would get counselling from digital agencies which will help them to take good decision. The admission buddy helps in understanding the criteria of Institute that they want to join and also predicts the possibility of getting admission.

i. WhatsApp Session:

The Digital Marketing agencies use this tool to get expert opinion from existing students and clarify doubts, share experiences in live format. The WhatsApp session helps in generating prospective leads for follow-up. The WhatsApp web client uses the phone to connect and send messages – in a sense, everything is mirrored(economictimes.indiatimes.com).

ii. Preference Building:

Marketers use this digital tool to understand the behaviors and preferences of students in order to provide them with the best possible experiences while simultaneously influencing their college enrolment plans(www.adweek.com).

iii. Institution Comparison:

Comparison tool used by the user of the website to compare one institute with one or more similar institution on various set parameters by the website in order to arrive at a college selection decision.

Digital Marketing Type, Tools & activities

Sl. No.	Digital Marketing Type	Digital Marketing Tools & activities
1	Intent Based Marketing	Search Engine Marketing(SEM), Search Engine Optimisation(SEO), Admission Alert, Recommended search result,
2	Brand Marketing	Branding, Banners, Call Predictor, Sentiment Analysis, Display/Digital Advertising
3	Content Marketing	Home page, Content, Trending Institutes, Advertorials, Page Associate Sponsor, Admission buddy, Micro site, Institution Comparison, Job portals, Native Advertising
4	Community based Marketing	Social Media Marketing(SMM), City Page, Whats app session,
5	Partner Marketing	College Admission forum, Affiliate Marketing, Sponsorships & PR
6	Communication Channel Marketing	SMS, Emailer, Leads Generation, Newsletter – dedicated, Q & A session,
7	Platform Based Marketing	Facebook Sponsorship page, Preference Building, You Tube channel,

iv. YouTube Channel:

The You Tube plays the role of Community & Platform based marketing. The You tube plays the role of influencing a student or providing an aspirant about life at the campus with the multimedia content. Certain agencies use the institute you tube channel to telecast events discussion, branded talks, guest lectures and debates etc(money.howstuffworks.com).

v. Call Predictor:

Call predictor is a tool that helps students apply to the right college. The tool will help students to know their likely chance of admission in some of their preferred colleges based on the previous year cut off marks.

vi. Question & Answer Session:

Through this medium users will post their queries on a website in order to get clarification for their doubts from an expert of the respective domain.

vii. Job Portal:

A job portal, also known as a career portal, is a modern name for an online job board that helps applicants find jobs and aids employers in their quest to locate ideal candidates. Career websites, such as naukri.com, Monster, etc have job portals that offer a broad range of jobs in a vast number of fields(<https://careertrend.com>). Digital agencies use the applicants data from these job portals to cross-sell educational institutes courses etc. These courses

range from Full-Time, Part-Time to Distance Learning Programs.

viii. City Page:

A page that represents a city and it contains information about all educational institutes & streams available in the particular city.

ix. Microsite:

A microsite is an individual web page or a small cluster of pages which are meant to function as a discrete entity within an existing digital marketing portal or to complement an offline activity. The microsite's main landing page can have its own domain name or subdomain

x. Sentiment Analysis:

Sentiment analysis is contextual mining of text which identifies and extracts subjective information in source material, and helping an Institute to understand the social sentiment of their brand, product or service while monitoring online conversations. Sentiment analysis is used as a tool by a few digital marketing agencies to develop a competition mapping among educational institutes by understanding student perceptions. This analysis will help institutes to understand their strong and weak areas and improve on this.

Conclusion:

Even though there was large number of literature on Digital Marketing types, tools and activities in respect to other sectors, there was not much in

higher education sector. This paper has attempted to bring out the various tool, activities of digital promotion of Higher educational courses, tabulated under the different types. Though this list is limited, considering the start-ups in this space it is considered to be ever emerging, shaping up to the expectations of the customers namely students, parents and challenges that emerge in this sector.

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