

# **Strategies: Improving Your Win Rate**

**Written by Jim Black  
Associate Provost for Enrollment Services  
At The University of North Carolina at Greensboro**

Enrollment management organizations are driven to the brink of excellence or extinction in the relentless pursuit for strategies to improve competitive position, recruit a larger or higher profile class, retain a greater percentage of students, or enhance student satisfaction. Some are scientific, data-supported strategies while others are derived from past experiences. Still other strategies are mandated from the top, emanate from “gut instincts,” or linger because “it is the way it has always been done.” Regardless of the source, some strategies work and others do not. Knowing the difference and acting accordingly often determines the enrollment management organization’s win rate.

Successful enrollment management strategies in the decade ahead will focus on speed of delivery, customization, personalization, and convenience. Automated e-mail responses, e-brochures, dynamically created Web portals, electronic confirmations, real time degree audits, and instantaneous early intervention contacts are examples of speed that are in use on many campuses today. These speed strategies resonate well with students who have grown-up digital. Their culture is one of immediacy.

In the digital world, students are inundated with spam and are increasingly irritated by communications that are unsolicited and seemingly irrelevant. So, the first rule of effective communication in the electronic age is to incorporate permission marketing. Seek the recipient’s permission to send communications along with an option to be removed from the distribution list. The second rule is to customize the communication, so that it is relevant for the individual.

Segmented e-mail and Web-mail, vertical portals, digital publications, targeted phone contacts, and interactive Web chats represent a few mediums for delivering content that is specific to an individual's interests and decision-making stage. By using data mining tools, such as Customer Relationship Management software, a profile of each prospective and current student can be developed and used to tailor communications as well as special offers.

For this level of customization to work, you must have the technology infrastructure and the staff expertise. You also must personalize the communication. Using the student's name in Web pages, e-mails, phone calls, publications, and letters adds power to the message and increases the likelihood that it will be read. The content becomes "my message" rather than something sent to thousands of people. Having "my" admissions counselor, academic advisor, peer mentor, online personal assistant, or student services advocate adds a degree of personalization to the student's experience. Particularly at large universities, this approach humanizes the experience by providing a face to an otherwise anonymous institution.

Knowing who to go to with issues is both reassuring and convenient for students. Today's students live extremely busy lives, so the more business transactions, information, and decision-making tools they can access anytime, anywhere, the more satisfied they will be. For example, students should never have to walk into an office to pick-up a form. They should not have to understand your organizational structure or know how to find information buried on your Web site. They should never experience "runaround" or receive inaccurate information. Simply put, matriculating into and through an institution should be intuitive, seamless, and hassle free. They enroll to receive an education, not to master your bureaucracy.

Strategies do matter, but execution matters more. Quality execution depends on systems and people. Reengineer all major processes to produce a quality deliverable, to prevent problems

from occurring, to identify and eliminate “bottlenecks,” and infuse quality control measures. Build a culture that values quality work. That means having clearly defined expectations, incentives for innovation and excellence, accountability, adequate resources and infrastructure, an action plan, and skill development opportunities.

Regarding the latter, invest in people. The staff in your organization represent your only sustainable competitive advantage, not strategies. Provide learning opportunities specific to their functional area but also that introduce them to enrollment management concepts, your enrollment management strategies, the institution’s vision, and higher education in general. When staff understand how their functional role fits with the bigger picture, they think “outside the box” and take calculated risks. They contribute to the enrollment management organization in ways that you never imagined. And most importantly, if you recognize their contributions, they will feel like valued members of the team.

Search for as many win-wins as possible, strategies that produce results while improving efficiencies, the work environment, or the skills of the staff. When people believe a strategy will somehow make their work life better, they are more passionate about the cause. Passion yields commitment and when necessary, personal sacrifice.

And lastly, improve your win rate by focusing on the strategies that offer the best return on investment. Know how much money and time are invested in each strategy and compare that investment against the return. Did you meet or exceed the desired objective for a particular strategy? Are there other promising strategies that could yield a higher return on investment? By constantly assessing everything you do and using information gathered to eliminate or refine an existing strategy or perhaps, invest in a new initiative, you will create a high performing organization.