Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions

Marketing Strategy
2013 - 2015

November 2013
The Marketing Strategy is created cooperatively by the Department’s marketing managers and exists to advance the University’s goals and purposes by supporting the Corporate Strategy, the Business Plans of the Deans of Faculty and the aspirations of applicants and partner organisations. The plan has been devised to increase awareness of the university, to increase understanding of the university and to increase engagement with the university by meeting the following main objectives:

Reputation Management

We will:

- strive to ensure that the University is recognised fully for the quality of its delivery and services in local, national and European markets
- enhance the University’s reputation by managing its visual identity, key marketing messages and brand recognition consistently across all platforms to all potential stakeholders
- continue to strengthen recruitment by promoting the University’s portfolio and encouraging applications to all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes
- act as advocates for the University’s widening participation agenda, underpinning the University’s access agreement through activities and campaigns that encourage applications from key groups
- offer a full schools and colleges liaison services to target schools and colleges of further education
- serve as an exemplar for promotional activity across the institution, setting standards, and supporting with advice, guidelines and co-operation

Market Research

We will:

- make evidence-based decisions underpinned by comprehensive qualitative and quantitative market research
- manage change by being responsive to changes in markets and market conditions, and underpin all marketing plans and activities with a strong evidence base
- ensure that we are market-informed, rather than simply market-led
- systematically evaluate all marketing activity through reviews, feedback, scoping activities, data analysis, management information, surveys, web analytics and other diagnostic tools
- be proactive in providing internal colleagues with a wide range of market intelligence and market support
- offer advice and background research and evidence to reinforce portfolio management
- keep the University community informed of sector trends, current marketing thinking and promotional and customer relationship campaigns

Relationship Building

We will:

- develop and undertake sustained relationship management campaigns (both traditional and digital) with applicants, potential applicants and partner institutions that encourage applications and convert applicants into students
- build on our relationship with our alumni to ensure that they remain strong advocates for the University as well as encouraging progression onto postgraduate and CPD programmes
- provide a website, marketing materials, promotional campaigns and events that encourage target audiences to engage with the University and the University’s brand identity and values
Action Plan

Strategic Approach

Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions undertake the marketing and communications effort using both traditional and new marketing practices, employing creative thinking, with a commitment to long term implementation, and providing a seamless client experience as well as a systemic link to the University's planning efforts.

We employ a tone that is welcoming, confident, co-operative, engaging and inclusive. In keeping with the ethos of the University, we also have an approach that supports and guides our prospects and applicants through the application cycle. We do not employ a sales-driven approach since this would not be appropriate to the nature of our business.

The output of all MRA recruitment and outreach work focuses on developing and adhering to a set of core messages that address the issues pertinent to prospective students while, at the same time, differentiating the University of Chester from other universities.

The core messages that we integrate across our entire communications mix are as follows:

- the **benefits of a university experience**
- demonstration of the **aspects of our product that adds value** to the student experience
- an emphasis on the **benefits that augment our courses and support services** that enable our students to enhance their employability prospects
- presentation of the **unique aspects of the University's delivery** (differentiation)
- **value for money**, with an advice driven approach as to the affordability of a University education
- **employability**
- **risk reduction**, highlighting why Chester is a sensible option

With these core messages in mind, there is also an emphasis on demonstrating what the University experience is really like. In order to aid conversion and retention, it is important that we provide a means to make this whole experience more tangible and present a true and accurate representation of this experience.

Our core messages also emphasise personalisation, and focus on how the University of Chester gives our students the freedom and support to develop as individuals, enabling them to shape themselves into truly unique graduates that stand out in a fierce graduate job market.

An integrated marketing approach has been adopted in order to provide consistency across all marketing and recruitment channels, allowing the flexibility needed to keep up with the changing HE marketing landscape, and using the following integrated mix:

- web-based collateral
- print-based collateral
- events
- annual campaigns
- photo library
- social networking
- digital marketing
- video
- media advertising (e.g. pay per click)
- newsletters
- Our personal interactions with stakeholders (customer service)
CRM

Our CRM strategy serves as the mainstay of the plan and articulates the nature and timing of market touch points, articulating our primary target audiences and when and how we engage with them. These include prospective students, parents, schools, colleges of further education, alumni, faculty and the wider University community. The CRM timetable identifies the order and manner in which stakeholders are contacted as well as the information/messages that underpin the contact points, and is made available as a detailed document. It includes:

- The identification and appropriate employment of integrated communication tools
- The creation and management of the web-based undergraduate Applicant Space and associated digital marketing campaign
- The creation and dissemination of the annual pre-applicant campaign
- Pay per click campaigns
- UCAS Fairs and events
- Open Days
- The production of the University’s annual Undergraduate and Postgraduate Prospectuses as primary sources of information
- Undergraduate and Postgraduate Applicant Days
- Interview and audition days
- Newsletters
- Social Media, using the most relevant social media tools, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to open up communication avenues with a broad range of audiences
- Digital contacts and pay per click campaigns
- Management of the University’s WP and Schools and College Liaison activity
- Web content management, web guidelines, web and content management support

Market Research Underpinning

All marketing and recruitment plans and activities are market-research driven, which means that strategies are grounded in continuous renewal and improvement. Understanding and “taking the pulse” of individual target audiences allows us to present the University of Chester brand in an authentic, consistent and distinct way and allows us to make evidence-based CRM decisions. Market research activity includes:

- MRA input into outline planning proposals to support portfolio management
- Google analytics
- Applicant activity surveys: Open Days, Applicant Days, Schools Liaison and WP activities
- Decliners surveys
- Analysis of UCAS management information: application numbers, gender, region of provenance, postal code analysis, qualifications, ethnicity and disability
- Applicant tracking
- Applicant feedback
- Application trends
- Competitor data
- Tracking digital activity and response rates
- Individual course market information
- Postgraduate Review and WP Review: two major pieces of research looking at strategic and delivery issues

Benchmarking, Monitoring and Review

Tracking success is routinely undertaken throughout the market research process. The Department’s marketing section meets weekly to monitor and determine the effectiveness of the strategy and to review the delivery of University of Chester communications messages and assess on going plans and activities.
Plans are benchmarked and monitored through the use of:

- Identity Guidelines
- Web and other templates
- Web champion training
- Prospectus templates
- A written CRM plan
- Photo library
- Statistical analyses
- The provision of advice, help, guidance and support for all University of Chester colleagues on promotional opportunities, markets, events and activities
- The provision of advice, help, guidance, support and monitoring for University of Chester partners
- Key Performance Indicators and targets

The Department's Risk Register and table of Key Performance Indicators are updated each year in consultation with Departmental staff and have traditionally formed part of the Department's annual business plan.