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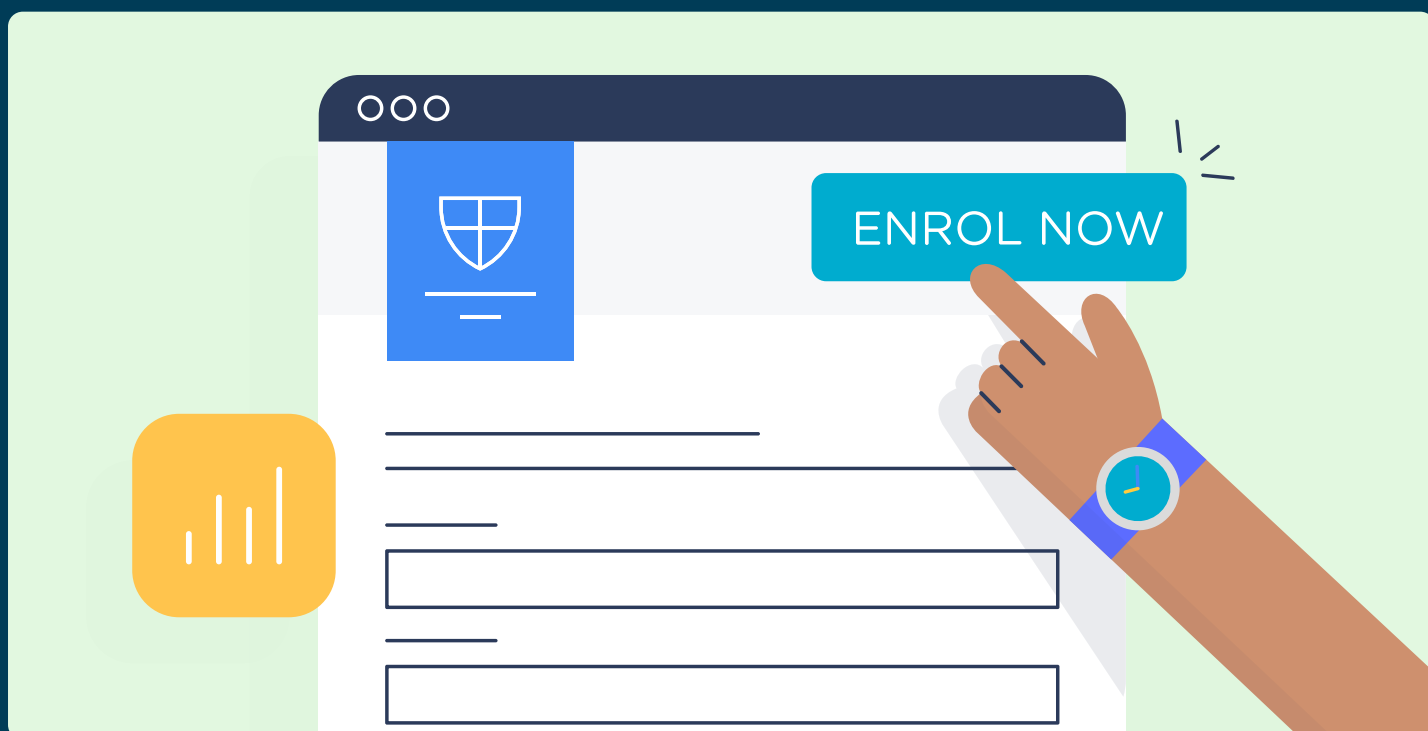
insights

A guide for increasing K-12 school enrolments

↳ Learn how to maximise enrolment opportunities for your school.

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Contents

Let's get started!

Are you looking for ways to maximise enrolment opportunities at your school? In this guide, you'll learn everything from attracting prospective parents to closing the deal. There's no question that the past few decades have been marked by incredible progress.

As much of our lives have moved online, consumer behaviour has shifted, and businesses, including schools, have had to adapt their approach in order to meet the needs of their prospective customers. These changes are particularly evident when it comes to school enrolments.

01

How the enrolment process has <u>evolved</u>

Today's parents expect all the information they need to be readily available at the click of a button. So how can schools manage their messaging and nurture prospective families successfully through the enrolment process?

Competition and innovation

With all this change, getting your message out has never been easier or cheaper. Schools are making the switch from expensive traditional advertising to cost-effective online options like email marketing, social media and pay-per-click advertising.

The downside to increased visibility is increased competition. **Schools are now fighting for every last enrolment**. In order to keep up, schools have been forced to innovate to ensure their message cuts through and resonates with prospective parents.

Focus shifted from school to family

A major innovation in the way schools are driving prospective parents to their school is by adjusting the focus to the family rather than the school. The population of prospective parents is shifting <u>from Gen X-ers to Millennials</u> and this younger generation does not just weigh up straightforward criteria like school proximity or academic records. Instead, they're looking for a school that will provide the best opportunities for their family's specific needs.

To meet these needs, schools need to offer **personalised communication** rather than standard school messaging. We'll talk more about how to better understand your prospective families to provide the best quality connection for them on their enrolment journey.

The move to online enrolment

The other major change in school enrolments is that the entire process can now be conducted online. Time-poor parents won't tolerate clunky, multi-step processes involving printers, scanners and trips to the school; they expect to be able to do everything required for an enrolment application online from their mobile device.

On the school's side, there are enormous benefits to switching to digital enrolments, along with meeting parents' expectations. You can reduce manual data entry, seamlessly transfer student data directly into your student information system, and easily take payments online. With all these benefits, online solutions are quickly becoming the norm when it comes to the school enrolment process.

02

Understanding prospective parents

The key to driving enrolments in this new era is for schools to provide the best possible enrolment experience for parents. Receiving **personalised** and **engaging** communication from one school, compared to generic and sparse communication from another can greatly influence prospective parents' choices.

So, how can schools do this? First, they need a <u>deep understanding of their database</u>. Knowing the needs and wants of prospective parents and their children allows schools to better nurture the family through each stage of their journey through to enrolment.

What is a lead?

The term 'lead' is commonly associated with traditional sales processes; it refers to an individual who has expressed an interest in purchasing a product or service. Companies try to track their interactions with a lead to find out which actions are the best at engaging leads, and <u>which leads are more likely to purchase</u>.

While the enrolment process is different from traditional sales, tracking prospective parent's interactions with your school is crucial to growing enrolments. It's useful to understand prospective families as 'leads' in order to map out the best methods to nurture them.

Personas

Understanding the needs and wants of every prospective parent is a daunting undertaking and you probably don't have the resources to write personalised emails to every single family in your database! So how do you keep your communications meaningful? Enter, personas.

Personas are a <u>fictional character profile</u> that represents a specific type of person. Personas help you to group your leads into segments and then communicate with them on a more individual level. You can get started with personas by reviewing your school customer relationship manager (CRM) and looking for commonalities between the people who are applying for enrolment.

The customer journey

Once you know who is considering enrolment at your school, it's time to <u>map out the journey that they will take</u>; from awareness through to consideration and finally to decision. Having a thorough knowledge of their customer journey and the potential roadblocks helps you to create strategic activities that will nurture them through each stage.

Understanding this journey also helps you to improve the process based on customer experiences. Reducing the number of steps a prospective parent has to take will result in fewer abandonments.

Customer relationship management

All of these steps — tracking interactions with your school, creating personas, mapping out the customer journey and improving the customer experience — fall under the broad umbrella of customer relationship management. The goal here is to develop meaningful relationships with prospective families that result in increased enrolments at your school.

To carry out effective customer relationship management, schools need to have a wealth of information about prospective families in a database. The database needs to be easy to update and shareable so that various members of your school team can access the information. For this reason, many schools are switching from using spreadsheets to track enrolments to specific customer relationship management software, also known as a school CRM.

03
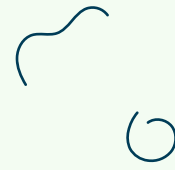
Attracting prospective parents

It's no secret that the first step in the enrolments process is to attract prospective parents to your school. In the previous decades, schools relied on word of mouth and reputation to collect high-quality leads and continue moving families through their enrolments funnel. But due to increased competition, schools now have to **proactively market their message** to the community in order to keep drawing in families.

In a world of 24/7 advertising vying for parents' attention, schools need to be able to summarise the number one reason that parents should choose them over the competition — and do it succinctly. This is known as a <u>unique selling proposition (or USP)</u> and it's at the heart of all successful school marketing efforts. Once you've defined your USP, it's time to get the word out to prospective families in the best possible ways.

Website

In the online era, a non-negotiable marketing tool is <u>your school website</u>. It's the digital equivalent of a billboard — showcasing your brand, your USP and your facilities — but with a much bigger impact.

Having a well-designed website gives you the opportunity to make a quick emotional connection with prospective parents through the images and content that you use on your homepage or landing page, and then draw them in further by

communicating your values and giving them the additional information they need to consider your school. For this reason, it's important that any advertising or marketing activities you undertake all lead back to your school website.

Blogging

Maintaining a school blog is one of the best ways to provide more detail and increase awareness about your school's USP, programs and facilities. As a pillar of the inbound marketing methodology (where you attract customers through free company-created resources), many schools are implementing a blogging strategy to drive enrolments.

Sharing content

Publishing content on your blog is a great way to build up your search engine optimisation (SEO) and domain authority — however, the downside is, this takes time. If you want to get your message out to a broader network, it's a good idea to consider sharing your blog content on third-party sites, including social media, forums and other blogs. This helps schools to generate new leads from audiences that may not have heard of your school.

Advertising

While inbound marketing is arguably the best long-term strategy for your school, paid advertising can help you get your message in front of prospective parents much faster. There are so many marketing channels available; from traditional methods like print media to digital avenues like paid social media or Google Ads. As it can be difficult to get a handle on all the options, many schools enlist a marketing agency.

Social media

Social media is one of the best ways to increase awareness and drive school enrolments. It provides a platform to promote the goings-on around your school,

including student and alumni achievements, events, updates and more. It can also help foster two-way communication between your school and your community.

Most schools choose several social media platforms, according to their marketing goals. Regardless of which platforms you choose, it's important to keep your information up to date and invest in posting quality content that suits each platform. Read our guide to social networks to get an idea of which channels might be right for your school.

Reputation management

Regardless of which marketing channels you choose, having a solid reputation management strategy in place is crucial for all schools. Your school's reputation is a deciding factor for prospective parents considering enrolment. This is why it's so important to seek out social proof; testimony or reviews from others determine how we think about a particular business (including your school!). You can proactively gather social proof by reaching out to existing parents and asking them to write a review for your school that you can use on your website, social media, print marketing and more.

On-site and Virtual Open days

The final way to attract prospective families is by throwing open your school doors and letting them see inside for themselves. The success of open days has been up for debate, as some parents tend to favour smaller, more personalised tours of school grounds, however, there's no denying that open days can be a great way for schools to cast a wide net by allowing anyone to come and engage. They also allow prospective parents to engage with other parents and current students.

The emergence of virtual open days has allowed parents to gain an immersive experience of a school, without having to step on campus. This has been a game changer during the Covid19 Pandemic, but is also a fantastic option for schools looking to engage students based out of state, or overseas.

04

Lead nurturing activities

Once a parent has become a lead (by expressing interest in your school), it's important that you remain top-of-mind while they consider all of their options for enrolment. Lead nurturing activities are designed to nudge parents through each stage of the enrolment journey, while also establishing a relationship with the prospective family through two-way communication.

Regular follow-ups

Have you ever had a company provide you with a quote for a service (say, electrical work at your house) and then just disappear? When this happens, it's likely you forgot about them and delayed the service or chose another company. How different would your experience be if they had reached out every few weeks to keep the conversation going?

Of course, we've all experienced the other side of this coin, when companies follow up so aggressively it actually becomes a deterrent. To avoid annoying your prospective families, make it your aim to keep your interactions educational and helpful. Brainstorm a list of common questions that parents might have about your school, and set up an automated email sequence to share the answers with them. You can also schedule phone calls to check in with families and see if you can provide them with any further information.

Contact across multiple channels

An effective omni-channel marketing strategy does one thing: it communicates the same message in different ways to provide a seamless and consistent experience. Prospective parents use multiple channels as they're progressing through the enrolment process, including search engines, forums, social media, and more. The important thing is that no matter where they are looking, they are hearing the same thing.

Reminder emails

Emails play a crucial role in nurturing parents through the enrolment funnel by reminding them about upcoming deadlines and providing them with additional opportunities to engage with your school. You can also segment your email list based on their enrolment pipeline stage to move them along to the next stage. For example, if the parents have registered for a tour or open day, you can set up reminder emails to ensure they attend and follow up emails with a school prospectus.

Events

Inviting prospective parents to events is a great way to get them to engage with your school community and nudge them further along the road to enrolment. Your events might be specifically designed for prospective families, such as tours or open days, or they might be general school events that are open to the wider community. Both can be incredibly effective.

Remarketing

Remarketing is an automated, digital method for showing advertisements to people who have interacted with a specific page on your website (for example, your enrolments page). You can retarget people who are browsing on third-party websites through the Google Display Network or on social media by installing a tracking pixel on your website.

05

Final steps toward enrolment

After you've nurtured parents all the way through to the point where they have applied for enrolment, it might be tempting to sit back and relax. Unfortunately, an enrolment team's work isn't done until you've sealed the deal and they've accepted your offer of enrolment.

On average, most **parents will apply for 2.5 schools**, meaning they will receive at least two letters of offer. Because of this, it's important that your school is <u>regularly reviewing your letter of offer</u> to ensure it is as compelling as possible to sway parents to your school.

Understanding why families didn't enrol

Hopefully, the majority of students who receive your letter of offer happily accept and are quickly integrated into your school community. But what about the ones who don't accept? Some schools will move on quickly to extend another offer to replace the student, but smart schools follow up to see if there was a <u>roadblock that stopped parents</u> from completing the process. By understanding the reasons they didn't enrol, schools have the opportunity to potentially 'save' the enrolment by providing alternative solutions, or collect data to improve their process or communication for future enrolments.

Waitlist management

Sometimes your school might receive more enrolment applications for places in a particular grade level than you actually have available. When this happens, it's essential to have a clear <u>waitlist management process</u> in place so that your team can easily filter through applications and assign them a position within the queue.

Leveraging a customer relationship manager (CRM) such as <u>Digistorm Funnel</u> can help to **streamline waitlist management** through lead scoring and data segmentation. It's likely that your school has an ideal applicant in mind when looking through enrolments. Factors that make a student a great fit for your school can include; whether the student already has a sibling enrolled, the proximity of their home, or whether they're the child of an alumnus.

You'll want to be able to identify these quality applications quickly – this is where lead scoring comes in! Lead scoring is a tool within the Digistorm CRM that enables you to assign 'points' to a lead based on various attributes that determine their value. In doing so, your enrolments team will be able to view priority waitlisted applications at a glance.

06

Streamlining internal processes

One of the driving forces behind implementing a school CRM is the number of new enrolments that can slip through the cracks due to clunky internal processes. We know just how competitive the education landscape currently is, so it's essential that your enrolments process runs like a well-oiled machine in order to maximise your school's enrolment opportunities.

Pipeline

Every school is different, and so are the steps that prospective families take to reach enrolment. This is why it's important to have a system that's set up to account for custom enrolment stages that are specific to your school's process. Getting this set up correctly means you'll gain a clear view of where every single lead is within your enrolment pipeline. From here, your enrolment team will be able to nurture each lead to the next stage more successfully and be able to more accurately predict expected enrolment numbers.

Using a school CRM

When it comes to managing your schools' enrolment process, the reality is, spreadsheets no longer cut it. If you're relying on spreadsheets to manage enrolments, you're likely spending too long drowning in admin and data entry, instead of connecting with prospective families.

Sound familiar? Then it's time to make the switch to a school CRM. CRMs allow you to quickly sort your database however you choose by using filters and segments. This functionality provides you with quick and simple methods to organise and understand prospective enrolments.

Online forms

Imagine if all of your prospective student data could be collected in one place and then effortlessly transferred into a central database. Sounds like a dream right? Well, a CRM can turn this dream into a reality. Schools can add integrated forms to their website that collect data and then automatically input parent and student information directly into the CRM database.

Upon completing a form — for example, an expression of interest, or a tour registration — that student is automatically entered as a lead, indicating to the school that they are a potential enrolment. This process effectively removes manual data entry for your school and speeds up the initiation process of a new potential enrolment.

Fee processing

We know that chasing up application fees can be a pain point for many schools. A school CRM can also help to alleviate this by integrating your online enrolment form with your school's bank account or payment gateway. For example, Digistorm Funnel enables you to set up your form to collect payment when parents lodge their application or set up an automatic email in your enrolment workflow to send a friendly reminder to parents who are yet to make payment.

Are you thinking about taking the next step? <u>Learn more</u> about what a dedicated CRM can do for your school.

insights

Resources and inspiration to **help schools grow**, curated by Digistorm