



The Higher Ed Marketer's Guide to Reaching


Generation Z

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These days,

a new Generation seems to come along at about the same pace as a new version of Spotify (so every 15 minutes.) Generation Z is looking for colleges, and it's prime time to reach them with your school's authentic story.

A diverse group of young adults, including students of various ethnicities and ages, are shown from the chest up. They are all smiling and looking towards the right side of the frame. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall mood is positive and inclusive.

So who is Generation Z? Who are their parents? What's it like for them to apply to college? What do they care about, and what obstacles will you face in attracting them? And how can you get ahead of the curve?

We're glad you asked. Let's start with the "who."

Who is Generation Z?

Let's do the numbers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 21 million 15-19 year-olds in the USA in 2014. Generation Z is thinking hard about college.

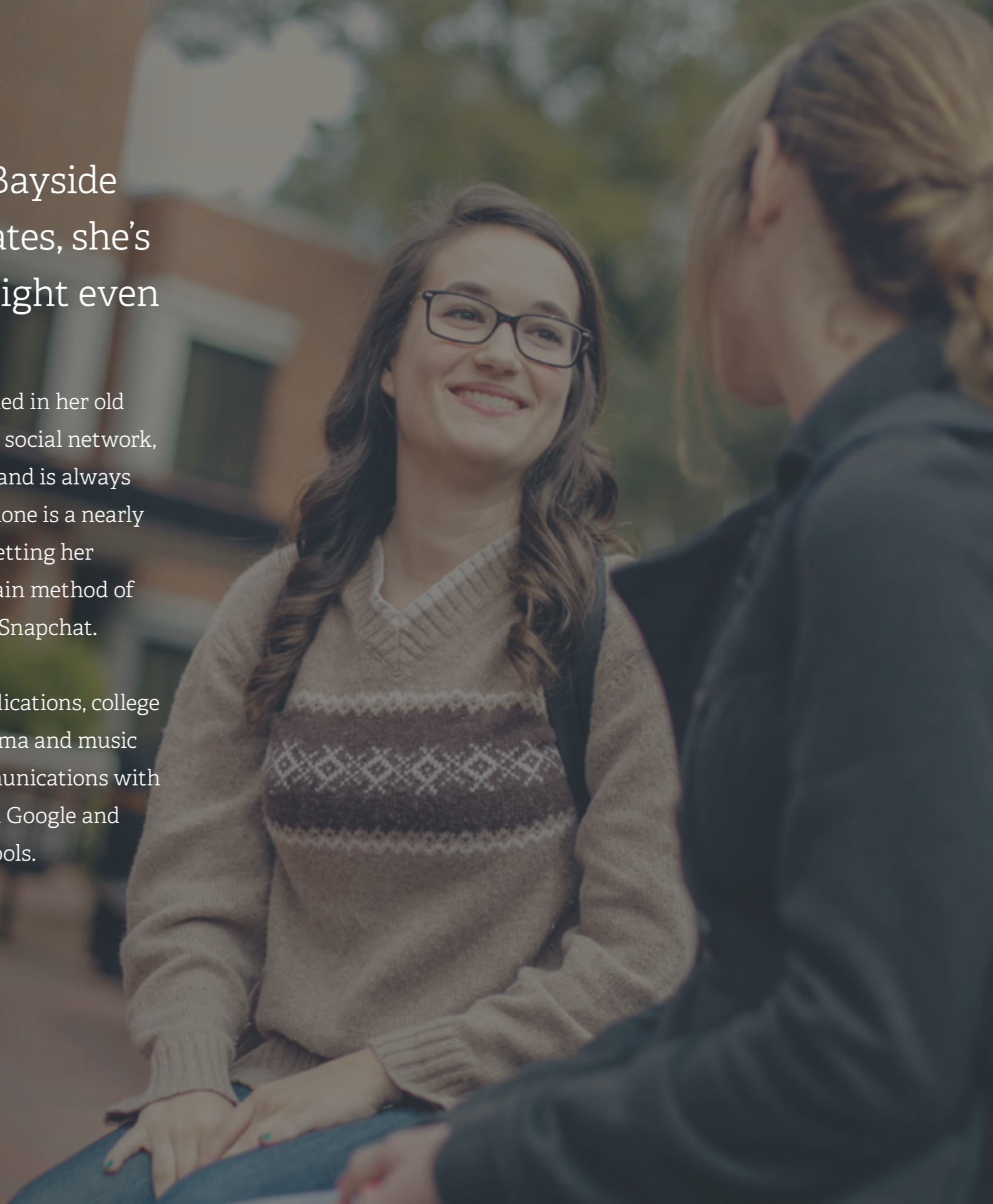
So what makes them tick? Let's spend some time with a typical teen.

Meet Kelly.

Kelly is a 16-year old junior at Bayside High. Like most of her classmates, she's thoroughly "connected" and might even say she's online "all the time."

She practically lives on her iPhone, and she just traded in her old model for the latest edition. Facebook is her favorite social network, and Instagram is a close second. She loves YouTube and is always on the lookout for the next big star to follow. Her phone is a nearly constant stream of texts, from gathering gossip to letting her parents know when she'll be home. Texts are her main method of communication, but she's tried Kik, WhatsApp, and Snapchat.

Now that her senior friends are putting in their applications, college is on her mind more and more. She's involved in drama and music at Bayside, and she's thinking about studying communications with a theater minor. Her college search will begin with a Google and YouTube search, and she'll probably apply to 4-8 schools.



Meet the parents.

The parents of Generation Z are a mix of Gen-Xers and Boomers, and they may soon be transitioning to an “empty nest.”

The Gen X-ers of this group make up a quarter of all adults, and 77% of them are on social media. The Boomers are plugged in too, though they're more tuned into advertising and email marketing. Facebook is the network of choice for the Gen X-ers. Boomers are wary of Twitter and blogs (but they recognize the power of technology since they had a front-row seat to the tech revolution.)



What does applying for college look like for Generation Z?

Today's teens have the world at their fingertips, and they'll use it heavily in their search. Higher education marketers have a golden opportunity to share their stories, because Generation Z is tuned in and will have multiple schools vying for their attention. More students than ever are applying to multiple schools.



39%

of students will
apply to 4-6
schools

20%

of students will
apply to 7-10
schools

A photograph of a college courtyard with a brick fountain in the foreground. Several students are walking or standing in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark layer containing text.

80%

of students will watch a video from a college during their search

44%

will watch a video from current students at that college

91%

said they'd love to receive tailored content from an institution



Facebook



YouTube



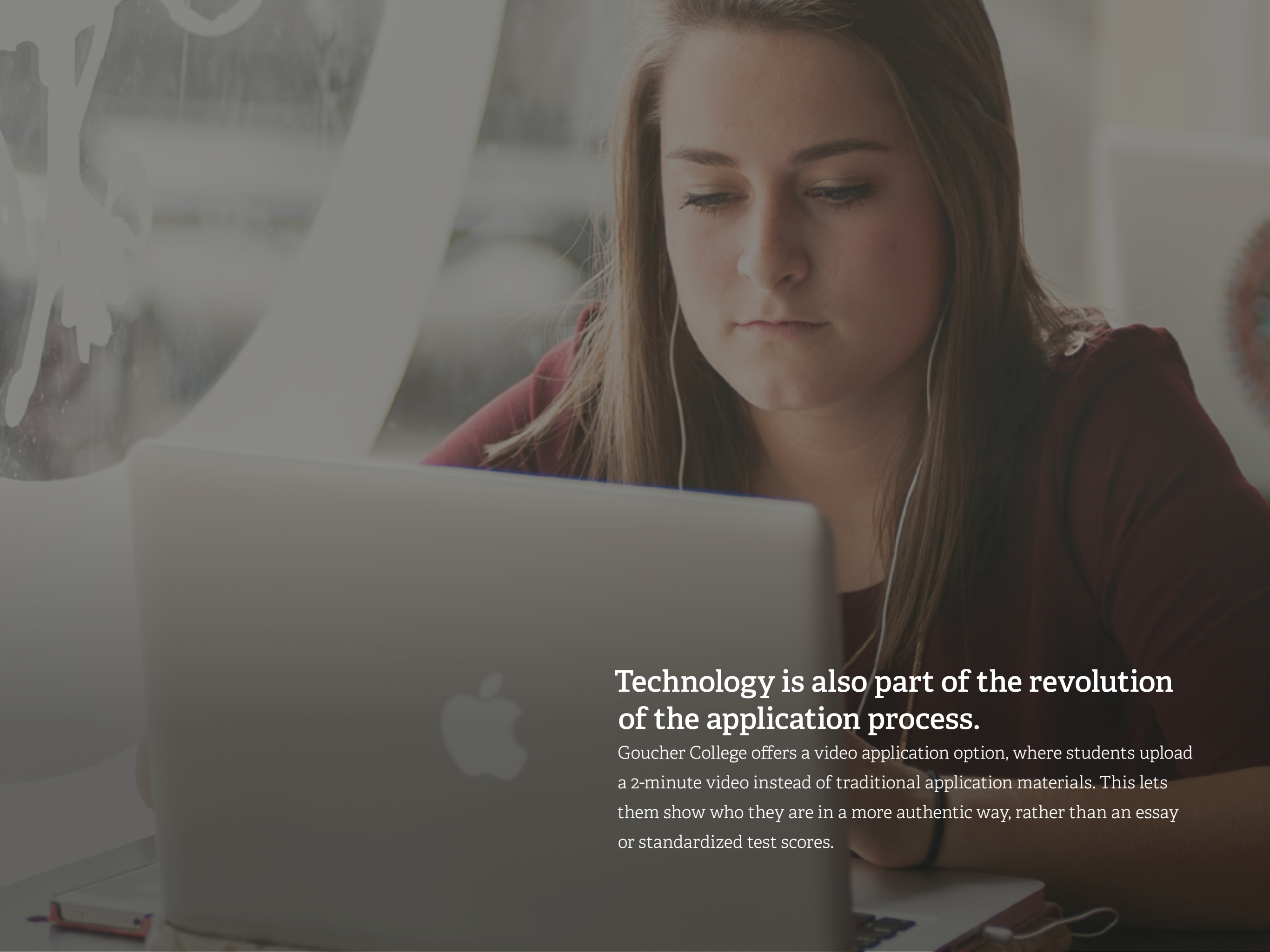
Instagram

Top 3 networks teens use to research schools



81%

will look at your
website on their
mobile devices



Technology is also part of the revolution of the application process.

Goucher College offers a video application option, where students upload a 2-minute video instead of traditional application materials. This lets them show who they are in a more authentic way, rather than an essay or standardized test scores.

What's on their mind?

Generation Z has a massive amount of information to process as they choose what to do next. As higher ed changes and the workplace rapidly evolves, what's most important to them as they choose where they'll spend the next 4+ years of their life?

Higher education has changed greatly in the last few years,

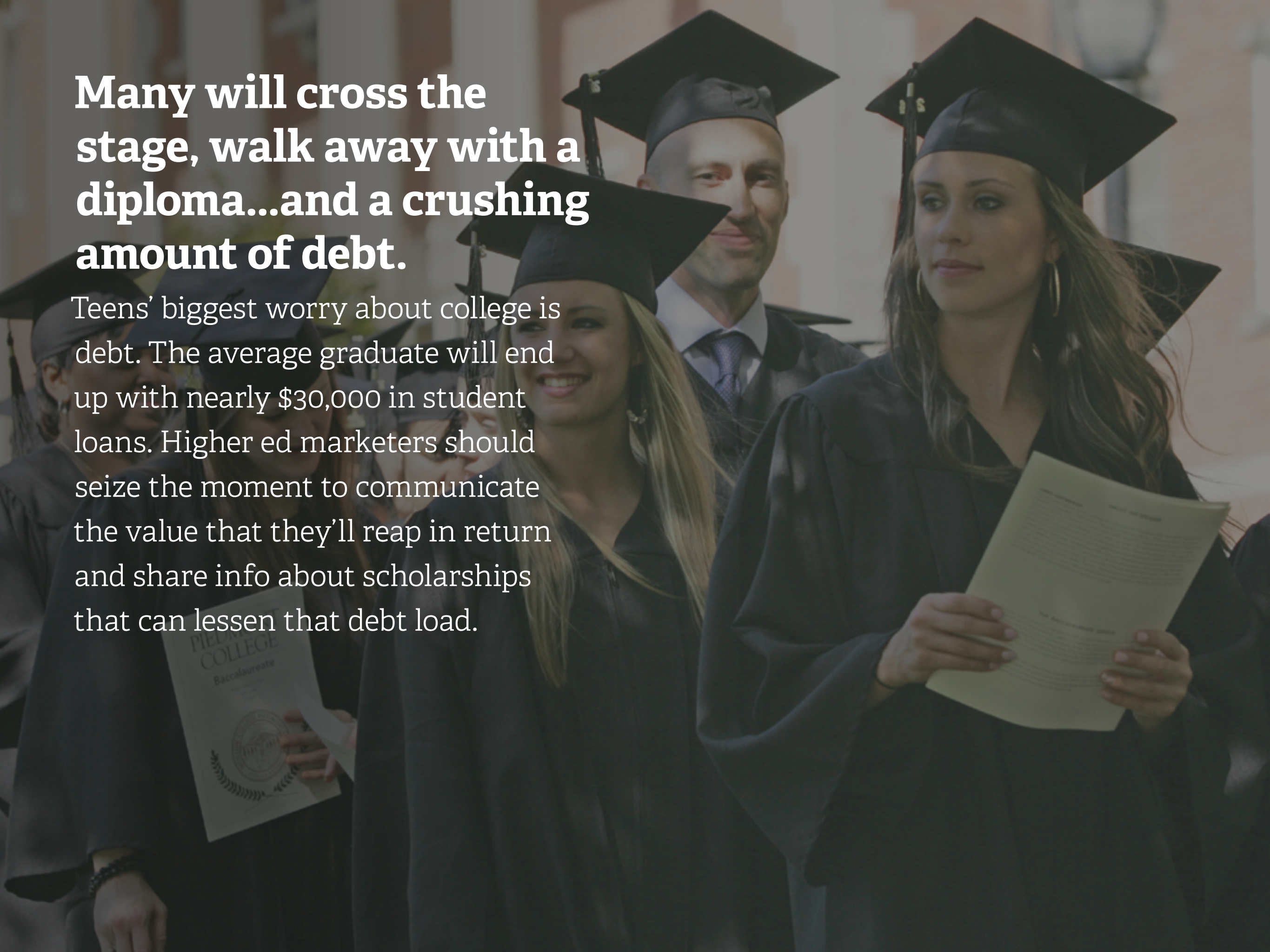
and it's just beginning. In the next 10-15 years, the face of higher ed may be unrecognizable, and marketers need to adapt to the rapid pace of change. From fear of debt to the gap between what employers want and what colleges offer, nontraditional alternatives pose a growing threat to the traditional 4-year degree.



Generation Z wants the best possible education for their investment.

With the growth of MOOCs (massive online open courses), nano-degrees, completely online degrees, and other alternatives, the 4-year degree is becoming less common. It also doesn't wield the earning power it once had. When they graduate, they'll step into a fiercely competitive workplace, so they need the greatest bang for their buck.





Many will cross the stage, walk away with a diploma...and a crushing amount of debt.

Teens' biggest worry about college is debt. The average graduate will end up with nearly \$30,000 in student loans. Higher ed marketers should seize the moment to communicate the value that they'll reap in return and share info about scholarships that can lessen that debt load.

A young man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a red and blue plaid shirt, is sitting at a desk in a classroom. He is looking to the left with a thoughtful expression, holding a pen in his mouth. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and classroom furniture.

The cost of attending college has increased by 10 times since 1965,

and in today's hyper-competitive workforce, a college degree doesn't hold the clout it once did. One 17-year-old said: "I feel like a college degree is worth a lot less than it was. There's a lot more people competing for the same jobs." 51% of students said the biggest benefit they were hoping to get from college is a better, higher-paying job.

So what does this mean for higher ed marketers?

With so much noise competing for their attention, your mission (should you choose to accept it) is to show upcoming classes why your school will provide them the highest value for their investment, whether you offer a purely traditional or hybrid approach. You can help them see the unique value that your school provides and the intangibles that make a college education worth it.



How can you get ahead of the curve?

Try these tips tomorrow to start reaching Generation Z.

Moving Pictures

69%

of consumer traffic will be owed to video by 2017

Video is becoming the de facto king of the Internet. According to Cisco, 69% of consumer web traffic will be owed to video by 2017. YouTube stars garner millions of views, and brands are using the power of video to promote themselves in many new ways. Higher ed should do the same. Generation Z will be tuned into video content, so ROI is high. Quality video can offer an “inside look” to your prospective students. Don’t forget the power of student-curated and created content as well. Crowdsourcing is your friend. Facebook’s recent test of a video-only channel amped up their rivalry with YouTube, and it could provide a fresh new platform on a network that teens and their parents are plugged into.

Try this tomorrow:

Recruit a small group of highly involved students, give them a GoPro, and have them record a “Day in the Life” video. Give them a few simple parameters, but let them have fun with it! A few minimal edits here and there and you’ll have an engaging piece of content for YouTube (or piece it out for a series of Instagram videos.) Prospective students want to see what life’s like on your campus.

Be Prepared for the Conversation on Social Media

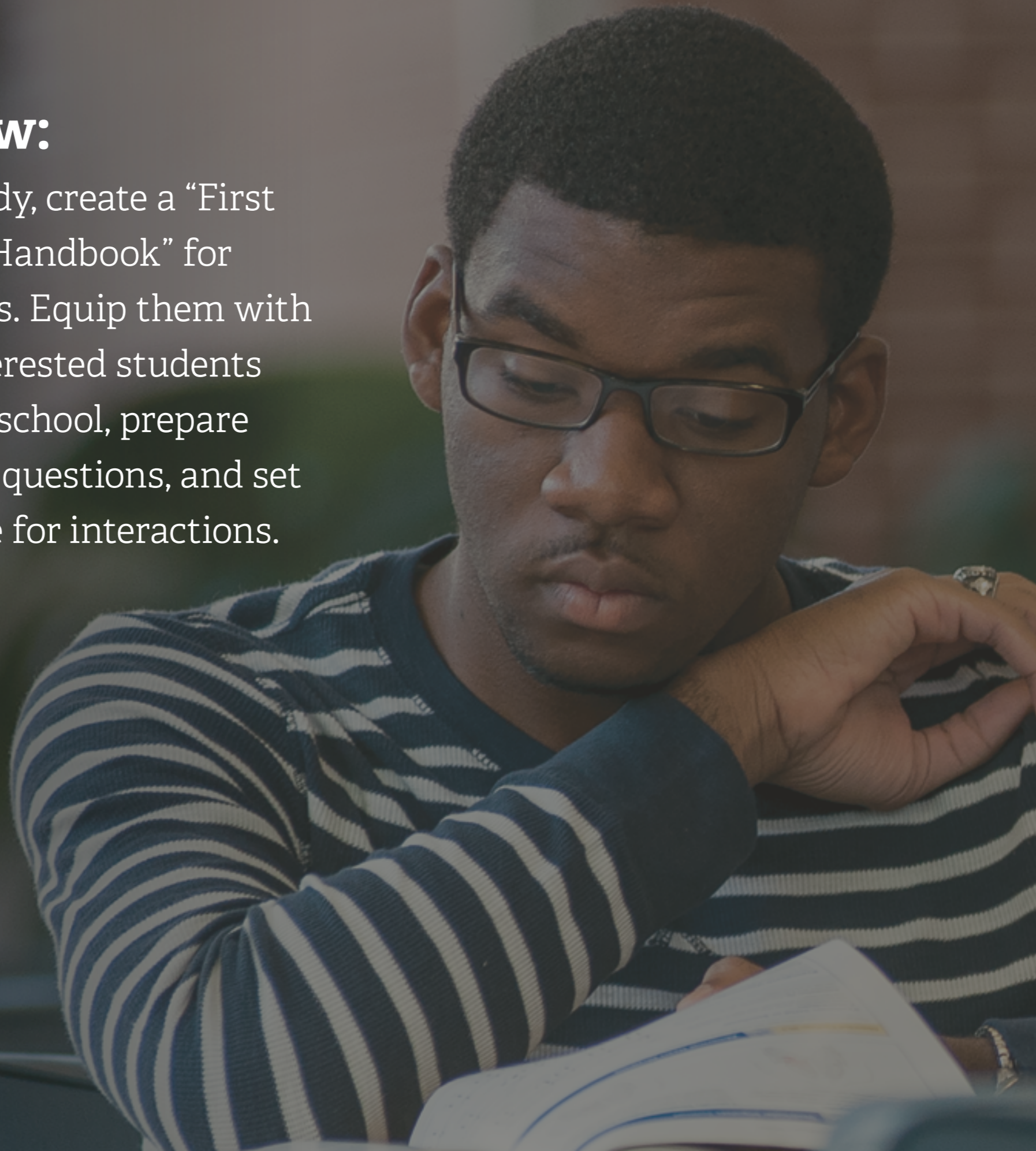
66%

of students say that social
media conversations
impacted their choice

You're probably already geared up to manage your social channels with efficiency and consistency, but if you don't feel prepared, it's not too late. These conversations have real impact: Uversity reported that 66% of students say that social media conversations impacted their college choice, and they said conversations with admissions counselors and other students already admitted to the college meant the most.

Try this tomorrow:

If you don't have one already, create a "First Impressions Social Media Handbook" for your admissions counselors. Equip them with "talking points" to help interested students learn the most about your school, prepare them for potential "pitfall" questions, and set a consistent tone and voice for interactions.



It's In Their Hands

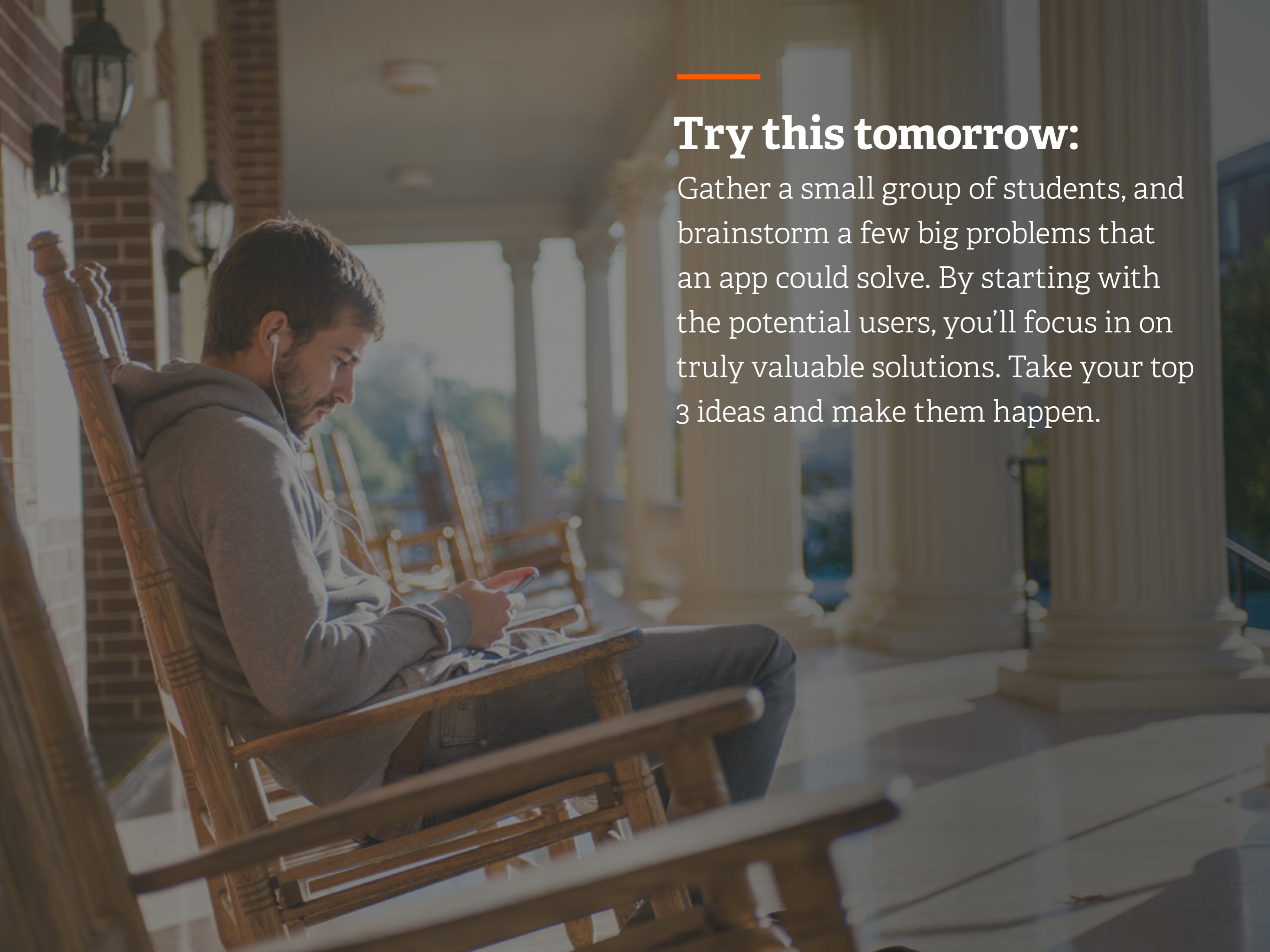
57%

said they downloaded
a college app to learn
specific info about
their target schools

You may be a step ahead here, but just in case—when you think through channel allocation, remember mobile and apps. In addition to visiting the school's mobile site, Uversity reported that the other top 4 uses of mobile were scheduling campus visits, submitting applications, virtual tours, and downloading apps. 57% said they downloaded a college app to learn specific info about their target schools, so your audience is coming to you. Seize the day and spread your content to these channels.

Try this tomorrow:

Gather a small group of students, and brainstorm a few big problems that an app could solve. By starting with the potential users, you'll focus in on truly valuable solutions. Take your top 3 ideas and make them happen.



Don't Lose Them on The Application

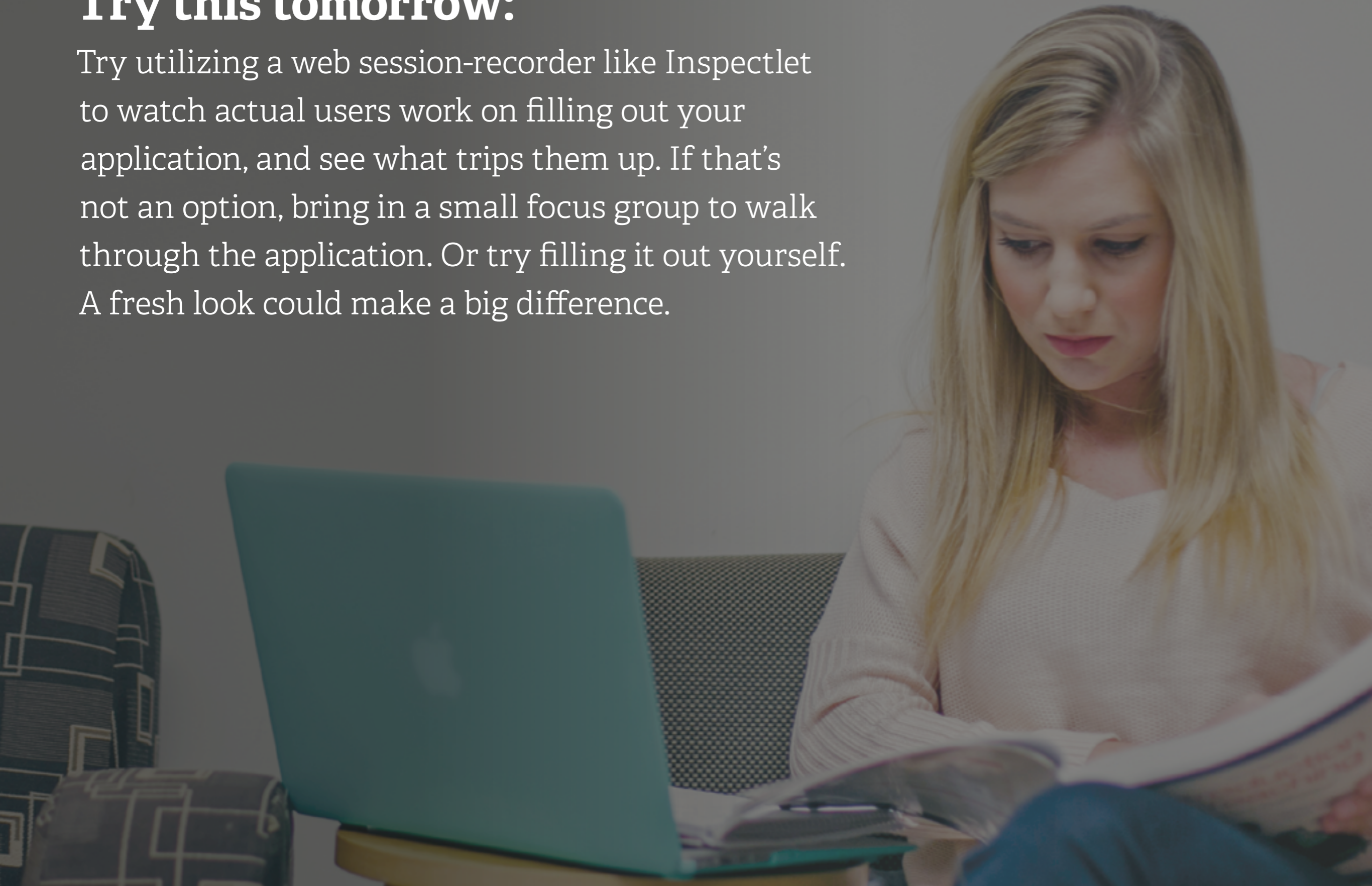
31%

of students
abandon online
college apps after
getting started

With students applying to so many schools, don't let your school's application be the one they leave behind. More schools are using the Common App, but remember to streamline your own app to prevent losing students.

Try this tomorrow:

Try utilizing a web session-recorder like Inspectlet to watch actual users work on filling out your application, and see what trips them up. If that's not an option, bring in a small focus group to walk through the application. Or try filling it out yourself. A fresh look could make a big difference.



The Homepage Still Matters

1st

your homepage is
often the first stop for
prospective students

It's easy to let your homepage turn into a newsfeed for faculty and staff, but remember to get your core brand messages and differentiators front and center.



Try this tomorrow:

Put a list of your core messages and differentiators in front of you. Now open your homepage. Are they easy to find? Are they presented clearly? Don't hide them under a carousel of scrolling news—make them obvious. By putting key messages “above the fold,” you'll make sure Generation Z knows why you are different.

You Get What You Pay For



when used well, paid
media can help you
find the right students

Paid media is getting a bad rap with the recent buzz over ad-blocking, but when used well, its targeting power can be very useful. Narrow it down to the networks your audience lives on and to the messages you want to reach them with. Remember, this generation doesn't like to be marketed to. Especially when you're paying for it, don't sell something, tell them a story.



Try this tomorrow:

Some may say Facebook is becoming your dad's social network, but stats say otherwise—it's still the most popular network for teens. Experiment with paid Facebook ads. Since they can be hyper-targeted, it's less risk, more reward. Facebook has also stepped up its video game recently, with "live" video, 360 video, "suggested" videos, and their upcoming video-only channel. It could be a gold mine for reaching your prospects, since it combines 2 things they love: video and Facebook. Instagram is also coming on strong with expanded ad types, like Carousel, which offers multi-image ads and direct web links on swipe.

You got this!

The higher ed landscape is shifting, and the workplace Generation Z is heading for is very competitive. The door is open for higher ed marketers to use the latest digital tools to show them why your school is the one for them.

About Up&Up

Up&Up is an agency in Greenville, SC that's committed to impacting the world through the good our clients do. We've been lucky enough to work with a great group of higher ed institutions over the last 15 years. To us, higher education marketing is more than just getting new freshmen through the doors on move-in day, or getting more alumni to join a Facebook page. Connecting the right student to the right school not only provides someone the perfect college experience, but it also makes them fans for life.

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The Team Behind the Book



Adam Landrum

President & CEO

—
Before Adam attended college, he had already started several business ventures. He graduated Cum Laude from Clemson and was recruited by Arthur Andersen. But Adam's entrepreneurial spirit kicked in and he set out to create a digital agency with an incredible culture and business model. In 2002, he founded Up&Up. Today, Adam oversees the agency's strategic direction, leads Up&Up's leadership team and finds amazing ways to help our clients impact the world.

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Matt McFadden

Digital Strategist

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Matt is the only digital strategist we know that lives on a 17-acre horse farm. He's been developing digital strategies for nearly nine years and has led large scale website projects for some of higher education's biggest brands. His work now revolves around brand strategy, content strategy and development, and digital media research.

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Beth Blume

Director of Client Services

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Starting her career off at L'Oreal in New York managing brands like Kiehls, Maybelline, and L'Oreal Professional, Beth has over 11 years of agency account management experience. A Chicago native, she found her way back home and spent five years as the Account Director for Havas Chicago, managing integrated campaigns for major brands.

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Jeremiah Barba

Digital Marketing Manager

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Jeremiah likes to think of himself as "trilingual": English, Shakespeare, and a smidge of Mandarin. His path into marketing began with his love of writing and the arts, and it's taken him to Hawaii, Pennsylvania, and back to his Carolina roots. His continuing mission is to tell the story of Up&Up on the interwebs and beyond.

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Ryan Davidson

Designer

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Ryan always knew he wanted to pursue a career that let him push his creative skills and ideas every day, but he didn't want to be a starving artist. And unlike most art school kids, he had a passion for marketing. Designer by trade and creative problem solver by nature, he joined the ranks at Up&Up to inspire and influence others through design.

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