How To Make Student Communications Stick
#LetsDoThis

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Today’s Agenda

+ The Problem—Noise, Competition
+ The Rule of 7
+ Communication Channels
+ Top 3 Channels to Optimize
+ Group Exercise!
Problem:
Communicating effectively with students is exceedingly difficult.
Student Attention—Who’s Vying For It?
A Lot Happens In One Second

- 2,619,856 emails sent (a lot are spam)
- 7,740 Tweets
- 70,603 YouTube Video views
- 1,281 Tumblr posts
- 43,642 GB of internet traffic
- 880 Instagram photos uploaded
- 62,263 Google searches
Students Are Overwhelmed

- Relationships
- Family
- Bills
- Grades
- Living Expenses
- Military Deployment
- Health
- Employment
- Peer Pressure
How Do You Break Through?

- Persistence
- Multiple Channels
- Consistent Messaging
The Rule of 7: Students Need to See Your Message *At Least* 7 Times To Take Action
Relevant Channels for Student Financial Services

Your Message

- Television
- Social Media
- Direct Mail
- Online Chat
- Out of Home
- Radio
- Phone Calls
- Ground Events
- Office Counselling
- Student portal
- Text / SMS
- Email
- FinAid Website (External Facing)
Optimize Mobile & Online Channels

- There are **more active mobile devices** than there are **people** on earth.
- **85%** of 18–29 year-olds in the U.S. **own smartphones**—the highest rate of all age groups.
- **60%** of Americans’ digital media time is spent on smartphones & tablets.
- The **average college student** brings **7** Internet-connected devices to campus.
- **More than half** of smartphone users used their devices to look up **health information** or do **online banking** within the last year.
3 Important Channels To Optimize

1. Email
2. Text / SMS
3. Social Media

(Your school website (.edu) and student portal (SIS) are important channels, too— but you may not have much influence over them. We’ve got some tips there, too.)
1. Email

Email Trends

- **Pros**
  - Unlimited word count, can explain in-depth
  - School branding adds credibility and familiarity can lead to higher open rates
  - Can be customized and automated
  - Analytics available on open/click rates
  - Can test effectiveness of headlines, time for send, and more

- **Cons**
  - So. Much. Spam.
  - Unlimited word count leads to long emails no one reads
  - Inboxes are crowded
  - Students have multiple email accounts

- **40%** of all email are spam
- **14.5 million spam messages/day**
Email At Rivier University (NH)

- Use emails sparingly—so students know it’s important information
- Use compelling subject lines
- Keep your messages short and sweet
- AwardLetter is a BIG WIN for Rivier. It’s the email that gets opened, read, and acted on the most
2. Text / SMS

**Student Text Trends**
- 80% report sleeping with their phone
- 4,000 texts a month

**Pros**
- Instantly & directly delivered to students
- Students can communicate with you, anytime, anywhere
- People tend to read all their texts; they don’t read all their emails
- 2/3rds of students say it’s ok for schools to contact them via text

**Cons**
- Must keep message short
- Some students may be wary of receiving unsolicited text messages—get buy in
- Regulations exist around communicating in this format—be informed
Texting At Mineral Area College (MO)

- Texts pushed fast adoption of new financial services processes
- Text alerts saved all but 8 of the 250 students at risk of getting dropped
- MAC experienced so much success, it’s looking into using this channel for other school initiatives
- **Warning:** Students expect your immediate response; they don’t care about office hours

MAC saved 242/250 students at risk for dropping due to non-payment
# 3. Social Media

## Student Social Habits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Pros
- Students already use these channels
- 75% of students use social the during college search
- Students will engage w/ schools on social, but they want to initiate
- Many channels are free and easy to set up
- In-channel analytics refine strategy

## Cons
- Many platforms to consider
- Highly public, channels, must be monitored
- Students expect immediate answers on social media
- Responding & monitoring takes staff time
Social Media at D’Youville (NY)

+ Works with the social media team on strategies and goals for social channels
+ Posts consistent communications across social channels, all timed together
+ Uses strong visuals to create eye-catching posts
+ Best practice: Plan out by month, or quarter, for at least one post per week
Putting It All Together:
Missing Paperwork Exercise
Missing Paperwork

Social

Text

Email

Website

Portal
Don’t get dropped from class! Is all your paperwork in? #FinAid
Scarier than zombies? Verification paperwork. We can help. Learn more >
Psssst, we need paperwork from you. Check your email / login for more info. Your FinAid Dept. [link]
Subject Line:[First Name] Missing paperwork may keep you from class
Callout Box on FinAid page: Owe Us Paperwork? Next Steps Here >
Please file your missing paperwork immediately! More info >
Optimize Around How Students Are Communicating & You’ll Win
Questions?
APPENDIX – TIPS!
Social Media Tips

**Facebook**
- Tell a story, show faces, people, outcomes.
- Be conversational
- Focus on providing info, not on generating likes or shares
- Link back to relevant FinAid resources
- Provide your social media team with talking points and guidelines on who to direct questions to

**Twitter**
- Say something worth listening to in 140 characters
- Visuals help you stand out
- GIFs are eye-catching and give your feed variety
- Use for immediate information dissemination: systems down, office closures, deadlines approaching
- Include relevant hashtags #FinancialAid #FinLitMonth #FinAidFail
Texting Tips

• Keep things short and sweet

• Identify yourself and your reason for texting clearly

• Include a CTA (call to action), a reason for the text

• Provide an opt-out process

• Text during hours your students will consider ‘normal’ but know they’ll likely respond at all hours

• If you need to use shorthand, start with most obvious words
Email Tips

- **Content Counts**
  - Keep things short and sweet
  - Use subheads to guide readers
  - Avoid embedding forms-link to them instead
  - Don’t overdo it on fonts, styles, colors

- **Optimize your email for mobile devices**

- **Use Analytics**
  - A/B test where possible (subject line, time of day)
  - Monitor analytics and refine

- **Avoid spam filters**
  - Use recognizable sender name
  - Keep email send list clean
  - Stay up to date with ISP practices and anti-spam laws

- **Subject Lines Matter**
  - Try to stay around 30-45 characters max
  - Questions get higher open rates
  - Avoid all caps, exclamation marks in headlines
School Website (.edu) Tips

- In the USA, **94% of people with smartphones search for local information on their phones.**

- Make sure your site is mobile optimized here: [https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly](https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly)

- Use other channels to drive traffic to your website: email, social

- Website visitors will usually stick around for 59 seconds max—but the first 10 seconds matter most. Make info easy to find, scan, navigate.

- Meet ADA Standards for Accessibility design
Student Portal (SIS) Tips

- Target messaging by student ID, driving engagement

- Request high-visibility portal spaces to pass along timely information: landing pages, right rails, banner ads


- Request analytics on student usage: high traffic times, most visited pages, most clicked links

- Pay attention to least-visited pages, links that are not clicked on, high bounce pages, and rethink their use / strategy

- Many portals include community building initiatives, monitor FinAid streams and groups and provide information