



ENROLLMENT MARKETING WHITE PAPER

Enrollment Marketing in the Hot Seat: 5 Levers to Drive Immediate Revenue Impact

+49.7%

Lead to Purchase Lift

17%

Funnel conversion lift

300+

Partner Institutions

From Expansion Mindset to Revenue Activation

For years, growth in Higher Education has been synonymous with expansion: more impressions, more inquiry traffic, more leads at the top of the funnel. But in today's environment, acquisition costs are rising, prospective student attention is fragmented, and budget efficiency is under the microscope. The most effective enrollment marketers are no longer asking "How do we reach more prospective students?" but "How do we get more value from the prospects we already reach?" The answer lies in activating opportunities already embedded within your enrollment ecosystem.

This means optimizing conversion paths, recovering lost demand, deepening relationships with prospective and current students, and evolving how and where your institution shows up.

This paper explores five critical levers that can unlock value and drive enrollment revenue, compiled by industry experts with more than \$1 billion in ads served. Individually, each supports incremental gains. Together, they create a compounding growth engine.

Five levers. One compounding growth engine. Each one unlocking revenue already embedded in your existing enrollment ecosystem.

Based on Motimatic platform data, industry research, and frontline expertise from campaigns serving 300+ higher-ed institutions.

LEVER 1

Convert More Students You Already Know

The fastest path to enrollment growth is not more inquiry traffic, it's better conversions. Conversion rates for digital enrollment experiences typically hover between 1.5% and 5%, with 2%– 3% considered typical.¹ This means most potential enrollment revenue, often 95% or more, is slipping through the cracks. And yet many institutions continue to prioritize top-of-funnel expansion over fixing the downstream disconnect.

Smart enrollment marketers audit their inquiry-to-enrollment funnel to discover where qualified leads are going dark. A detailed audit often reveals drop-offs cluster at predictable points:

- Landing pages that don't align with ad messaging or program value propositions
- Application forms that introduce unnecessary friction
- Pricing, financial aid, or ROI information that isn't clearly communicated
- Enrollment flows that create hesitation or uncertainty about next steps

KEY INSIGHT

A 2026 Strada Education Foundation survey of more than 5,500 students, parents, and prospective learners found that 68% of college students reported confusion trying to calculate the real cost of attendance, and only 1 in 3 found the financial aid process straightforward. When prospective students can't clearly understand what they'll pay, trust erodes — and so does enrollment.²

Refine Student Retargeting

Most institutions waste budget chasing low-probability conversions while under-investing in the prospective students most likely to enroll. The typical approach treats all non-converters the same: one pool, one message, one timing strategy. Segmenting by behavioral intent is far more effective — retargeting becomes more efficient when messaging reflects where the prospect left off, offers are calibrated to their commitment level, and timing matches urgency around enrollment deadlines. Institutions that refine retargeting typically see higher conversion rates and lower acquisition costs without reaching more people.

Common retargeting gaps: high-intent prospects not being retargeted at all; delays between action and re-engagement; overexposure to low-intent audiences.

Use CRO as a Force Multiplier

Conversion rate optimization (CRO) can dramatically increase the efficiency of existing enrollment marketing without additional ad spend. The highest-impact improvements are often simple: aligning landing pages with ad intent, reducing form fields, adding trust signals (testimonials, accreditation badges, outcome guarantees), and simplifying the inquiry or application flow. Companies using structured CRO technologies and testing methodologies achieve an average ROI of 223%.³

223%

Average ROI for companies utilizing structured CRO technologies and testing methodologies.³

LEVER 2

Recover Lost Demand

If conversion optimization is about capturing momentum, demand recovery is about reclaiming momentum that slipped away. Not all "lost" enrollment opportunities are truly lost. Abandoned applications, stalled inquiries, dormant prospects, and lapsed students who stopped out all represent leads that have demonstrated intent — the challenge isn't generating interest but reactivating it without increasing spend.

Win-Back Campaigns Are the Smart Move

Acquiring a new student prospect is far more costly than reacquiring a former one. Churned prospects and stopped-out students already know your institution and have demonstrated willingness to engage. Effective win-back campaigns understand why a prospective student disengaged and tailor messaging accordingly — incentives or scholarship information for cost-sensitive prospects, program updates for those who lost interest, and personalized reminders tied to past behavior or stated academic interests.

Suppression List Hygiene Boosts Engagement

One of the most overlooked drivers of underperformance is poor suppression strategy. When messaging doesn't match the prospect's current state, it diminishes trust and engagement. Studies show that institutions with clean email lists see 50% higher open rates and 75% better click-through rates vs. those neglecting list maintenance.⁴

EMERGING CHALLENGE: FRAUD & BOT ACTIVITY

A growing number of institutions are contending with fraudulent and bot-generated applications that inflate inquiry volumes, distort conversion data, and drain budgets. Suppression list hygiene is a critical defense. Regularly auditing for duplicate records, disposable email domains, mismatched behavioral patterns, and implausibly fast form completions helps filter non-human activity — ensuring metrics reflect real prospective students and re-engagement efforts go where they'll have impact.

Use suppression list hygiene to: exclude enrolled students from prospecting campaigns; remove recently engaged prospects from win-back flows; segment high-intent applicants for tailored messaging; prevent overexposure across channels; and filter fraudulent or bot-generated records that skew performance data.

COMPLIANCE NOTE: FERPA & DATA PRIVACY

Of course, any use of student data for marketing must align with FERPA requirements. Institutions should ensure enrolled student records are handled with appropriate data governance protocols — restricting use of education records in marketing segmentation without proper consent. Partnering with FERPA-compliant platforms is a key safeguard as these capabilities scale.

Timing and Sequencing Matter

The goal of demand recovery is to meet prospective students at the moment they're most likely to act, with a message that reflects where they are in their enrollment journey. Coordinated timing based on behavioral signals creates communication that feels responsive rather than intrusive — following up immediately on abandoned applications while intent is high, reaching out in alignment with key enrollment decision windows, and gradually escalating from light touchpoints to stronger reactivation offers like virtual visit invitations or deadline-driven nudges.

LEVER 3

Increase Student Lifetime Value

Current and enrolled students represent one of the most efficient and under-leveraged sources of revenue. They convert faster, spend more, and cost less to reach, yet many institutions underinvest at the very moment growth becomes most scalable.

Expand Enrollment Within Your Existing Student Base

Many institutions focus almost exclusively on top-of-funnel recruitment while leaving significant tuition revenue on the table through programs, pathways, and credentials their current students never hear about. Connecting enrolled students to complementary offerings requires intentional outreach — not just catalog availability. High-impact approaches include surfacing graduate or advanced degree pathways at key academic milestones, promoting certificates or micro-credentials that complement a student's current field, and framing continuation opportunities in terms of career outcomes and earning potential rather than additional coursework.

THE ECONOMICS OF RETENTION

Recruiting a new undergraduate student costs an average of \$2,795 at private four-year institutions — and rising. Engaging a student already on campus requires no admissions staff time, no travel budget, and no yield campaigns. The most efficient enrollment growth often isn't growth at all — it's retention and continuation.⁵

Don't Ignore the Post-Enrollment Period

The moment immediately following enrollment is one of the most powerful in the student journey. The student has committed, trust is at its peak, and attention is high. But institutions often miss this opportunity by defaulting to a transactional "Welcome to the program" message. Instead, plant the seed for deeper engagement — reinforcing the value of their enrollment decision, introducing complementary programs and alumni networks, setting expectations that build confidence, and inviting deeper participation in the institutional community.

15–25%

Revenue increase seen by institutions that prioritize the post-enrollment phase vs. those focused solely on new student acquisition.⁶

Predictive, Behavior-Based Personalization

Shifting from generic outreach to predictive, behavior-based personalization allows for far more relevant communication — program completion reminders aligned to graduation windows, recommendations for advanced coursework based on academic interests, tiered scholarship offers based on engagement or GPA milestones. A Salesforce study found shoppers who click personalized recommendations are 4.5x more likely to complete a purchase.⁷ The same principle applies to enrollment decisions.

COMPLIANCE NOTE: FERPA & PERSONALIZATION

When leveraging student behavioral data for personalization, institutions must ensure compliance with FERPA. Personally identifiable information from education records should only be used in permissible ways, and third-party marketing partners should have appropriate data use agreements in place. Consent-based personalization and opt-in communication preferences are increasingly both best practice and compliance safeguard.

Loyalty Drives the Behaviors You're Looking For

When structured correctly, loyalty and engagement programs don't just retain students — they actively increase persistence and overall institutional value. Key approaches include incentivizing re-enrollment and term-to-term persistence, surfacing resources like career counseling, tutoring, and food banks before barriers arise, and creating progression milestones that reinforce momentum toward completion.

LEVER 4

Expand Your Marketing Mix

Most institutions are over-indexed on a narrow set of enrollment marketing channels. The smarter move is to expand strategically — understanding that prospective student audiences shift, platforms evolve, and costs rise. Incremental enrollment growth rarely comes from doing more of the same, but from showing up in the right places.

287%

Higher purchase rates generated by multi-channel campaigns vs. single-channel campaigns.⁸ In enrollment marketing, this means more inquiries, more applications, and more enrolled students.

Scale Without Fragmentation

More platforms can mean more creative versions, more campaign management, and more reporting overhead. A programmatic approach changes this equation — allowing enrollment marketers to coordinate and deploy campaigns across multiple platforms, use centralized data and automation for targeting and optimization, repurpose creative efficiently across formats, and consolidate measurement for holistic performance visibility. This allows enrollment teams to keep up with the ever-changing landscape of digital student engagement without adding headcount.

PROGRAMMATIC SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Programmatic activation makes it possible to scale across Instagram and Facebook for broad reach; YouTube for high-impact video storytelling; Snapchat for younger, mobile-first students; Pinterest for discovery-driven browsing; and Google for high-intent search from actively searching students.

Matching Message to Mindset

Platforms aren't interchangeable — each reflects a different user mindset. Reusing identical creative across all platforms without adaptation hurts performance. A strong channel-audience-fit strategy maps the right message to each moment: high-intent environments like search call for direct-response messaging and deadline-driven urgency; discovery platforms like Pinterest and YouTube call for inspirational, outcome-driven storytelling; social feeds call for scroll-stopping creative with emotional hooks and authentic campus content.

Test To Be Sure

Without proper measurement, new channels can appear effective while actually cannibalizing existing conversions. Incrementality testing — holdout tests, audience or creative splits, channel-specific list studies, time-based on/off experiments — provides the confidence to scale new channels aggressively or cut them quickly if they don't deliver net-new enrollment revenue.

LEVER 5

Test New Creative

The difference between a high-performing enrollment creative campaign and an underperforming one is rarely the audience. Usually it's the messaging structure, sequencing, and relevance of the creative itself. Testing new creative isn't about aesthetic iteration — it's about systematically unlocking demand. The biggest misconception is that creative is a single deliverable instead of a system: sequential messaging, value prop testing, new creative options, and a disciplined refresh cadence all working together.

Sequential Creative

Most enrollment advertising is still built as isolated moments — a single ad, a single message, a single impression. But prospective students convert on progression. Sequential creative builds narrative continuity that guides prospects through a structured journey: **Awareness** introduces the program or institution; **Consideration** positions the academic solution and its differential value; **Conversion** delivers reinforcement, social proof, and an incentive to apply or inquire. Instead of repeating the same message, sequential systems build momentum across touchpoints.

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

According to a recent Ipsos report, ads that tell stories are significantly more effective at influencing consumer behavior.⁹ In higher education, an authentic narrative about student transformation is often more persuasive than a list of rankings or features.

Value Prop Testing

Institutions often default to familiar value propositions — tuition cost, campus reputation, program rankings, alumni networks. But what resonates varies dramatically by prospective student segment, program type, and channel. Value prop testing allows you to isolate one variable at a time and build a structured understanding of what actually moves enrollment decisions. Test cost-led vs. outcome-led messaging; emotional hooks vs. functional utility; and social proof vs. program superiority.

New Program/Offer Creative

New program launches, limited-time scholarship offers, and refreshed enrollment incentives create natural spikes in attention and urgency that become short-term demand catalysts. But many institutions underutilize them or fail to amplify them with distinctive creative. High-performing teams treat new program announcements and offers as events, not just updates.

Creative Refresh Cadence

Ad fatigue is a silent enrollment revenue killer that quietly erodes performance over time. Even strong creative will eventually decline in effectiveness when prospective students are overexposed, attention drops, and engagement weakens. Key signals of creative fatigue include declining click-through rates, increasing CPMs without improved conversion, and flat or declining engagement.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Motimatic Activates Every Marketing Lever For You

Motimatic is a fully managed, human-led marketing platform grounded in motivational and behavioral science that helps institutions drive progress and results across the entire student lifecycle. With 300+ higher-ed partners, Motimatic has the infrastructure to make all five levers executable — so your enrollment team can get on with other important business.

17%

Overall lift in conversion across the funnel

+49.7%

Lead-to-enroll increase in holdout testing

300+

Higher-ed partners on the platform

Whether you want to:

- Maximize awareness among prospective students
- Increase yield from your inquiry pool
- Improve retention and persistence
- Drive more applications and motivate program upsell
- Recover churned students
- All of the above

The Motimatic team can design the workflows, behavioral triggers, creative systems, and optimization rules that drive prospective students to act — with full adherence to FERPA and data privacy standards.

Say goodbye to set-and-forget marketing.
motimatic.com



References

1. SQ Magazine, *Conversion Rate Optimization Statistics 2026: Benchmarks, Trends & Insights* (September 24, 2025)
2. Inside Higher Ed, *Confusing College Pricing Sows Mistrust in Higher Ed* (2026)
3. Monetizely, *Conversion Rate Optimization: The Key to Maximizing Your Digital ROI* (July 16, 2025)
4. Emercury, *Email List Cleaning Best Practices: Boost Deliverability* (2026).
5. Ruffalo Noel-Levitz, *3 Key Takeaways from the Cost of Recruiting an Undergraduate Student Report* (2022)
6. Emplicit, *Ultimate Guide to Post-Purchase Engagement 2025* (December 17, 2025)
7. Barilliance, *[Guide] Personalized Product Recommendations Tactics for Profits* (June 8, 2023)
8. Land Base, *35 Multi-Channel Outreach Statistics: Data-Driven Insights for Modern GTM Success* (January 3, 2026)
9. Communicate, *Ads that tell stories outperform feature-led campaigns, Ipsos study finds* (March 13, 2026), found at