A **White Paper** by Percussion Software, Inc.

Driving Education Enrollment Through Agile Content Management

Solve Your Top 3 WCM Pains

Contents

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Executive Summary

Your website's goal above all others is to attract students and get them to apply, visit, or request more information. Because most college research now happens on the web, losing ground online means losing prospects and tuition revenue.

To attract prospective students, colleges must create a content ecosystem that encourages dialogue and repeat visits. As students become increasingly cost-conscious and outcomes-oriented in their online college search, more colleges will use original content to demonstrate the value of their education, differentiate themselves from the competition, and retain the attention of savvy and determined searchers.

A good web content management platform should support the creation, publishing, and reuse of your content, and remove technological obstacles between contributors and going live. With insights straight from our many education customers, we've put together a list of how a CMS can alleviate your biggest pain points in creating content that drives enrollment.

The Top 3 Challenges in Creating Great Content

- Not Having Enough Data to Demonstrate ROI
- Not Knowing How to Improve SEO
- Not Knowing How to Keep Websites From Becoming Outdated

On the following pages, we diagnose the top problems in more detail and offer some strategic CMS-based solutions and preventative measures to keep your web strategy healthy and effective.

Google Search and Education 2013 Q2 Report

Google's most recent quarterly report on education search showed 4% overall growth, and a 49% increase in mobile search, while ad clicks and searches for creative careers declined.

Google's findings underscore the need for better findability among growing competition and responsive websites that deliver value-driven content on any platform.

View the report analysis.

A good web content management platform should support the creation, publishing, and reuse of your content and remove technological obstacles between contributors and going live.

Top Pain #1: Not Enough Data

Demonstrating ROI is a challenge in higher education if there are no defined metrics for success or appropriate tools for capturing data. With the technological landscape constantly changing, it's difficult to anticipate which investments will be most fruitful and collect enough historical data to convince skeptical CFOs.

Why It Hurts

Budget constraints and lack of data often inhibit the adoption of new tools and strategies in higher education, even when the need is truly dire. Being slow to adapt means missing recruitment opportunities with prospective students whose technological expectations and informational needs are met elsewhere.

Pain Management

Take advantage of the wealth of research being done by thought leaders regarding web trends and ROI and invest in tools with built-in ways to measure your success. Your content management system should integrate smoothly with Google Analytics and provide its own tools for measuring the effectiveness of your content. Most importantly, know what your desired outcomes are.

Recommended Reading
How Google's Education Search Report Will Impact Your Content Management Strategy

Top Pain #2: Understanding SEO

When we talk about search engine optimization, SEO is often shorthand for "ranking well with Google." Due to its dominance in search, institutions find themselves at Google's mercy when it makes major changes. Most recently, Google introduced its hummingbird algorithm, which is geared towards natural language queries and has begun concealing keyword referral data from marketers. Building SEO strategies around information that might become irrelevant within months is daunting.

Why It Hurts

You want to get found, and you want to get found for the right reasons. Not showing up on the first page of results in a relevant search is as bad as having a query take prospects to party photos with underage drinkers, or otherwise innocuous content that has nothing to do with your college. Losing keyword referral data makes it more difficult to understand which content is most effective and relevant. In any case, you're either losing leads or losing face, and no matter what, that's costing you prospects.

Pain Management

Colleges without a dedicated budget for SEO can still improve their rankings and clean up results pages with straightforward SEO tactics such as updating the meta titles and descriptions with relevant text, ensuring page titles and copy are relevant to specific keyword searches, and using alt tags with images to make sure image searches are dominated by sanctioned results. Most importantly, it's even more crucial now to create

About Hummingbird

Google's updated search algorithm was named for its speed and precision.

Google is forcing a shift away from keyword-loading content by increasingly masking keyword referral data, and gearing its tools to better understand context and natural speech.

Producing content that is original, relevant, and above all helpful is now more important than ever.

content that is helpful, original, and valuable to the reader. A good CMS will enable you to do each of these on the fly and without having to look at code, so you can teach all users these basic best practices when they create and edit content to serve their audience.

Recommended Reading

Embracing Hummingbird for Conversational Search in Higher Education

Top Pain #3: Future-Proofing Your Website

It doesn't take a long time for a website to feel outdated, and it seems every few years they have to undergo a major redesign. You may have built a dynamic, Flash-heavy site a few years ago, only to find it's not supported on iOS devices or SEO friendly. Possibly, you invested in a robust WCM platform that was customized to your institution's specific needs, only to find two years later those needs have changed and you essentially have to start from scratch.

Why It Hurts

Web projects are costly, complicated, and time-consuming. Redesigns, launches, and custom development can eat into IT and marketing budgets, straining already limited resources, and still yielding websites with a limited life span.

Pain Management

Having a content management system is the first step towards future-proofing your website. Having CMS that gives you full control of your design while providing a framework for a more responsive site will allow you to make design and navigation changes on the fly. Minimizing custom development saves on initial cost and allows for seamless, ongoing updates, and testing new options without committing to a new design project every two years. Even a comprehensive design refresh becomes a strictly front-end project that many colleges can plan and execute in-house.

Recommended Reading

Can't Afford Content Migration? Rethink Your Strategy

> Minimizing custom development saves on initial cost and allows for seamless, ongoing updates, and testing new options without committing to a new design project every two years.

Pain Relief: Three Things to Do Now

1. Measure What You Want to Manage

Define the parameters for success, no matter how small, to start measuring for impact. Did a blog post get more traffic from Facebook or Twitter? Did students click on your online application after visiting one page over another? Articulate what actions you want prospects to take, produce content designed to trigger these actions, and set up systems to measure what works.

Percussion CMS Users

Integrate your Google Analytics account with the analytics gadget on your Percussion CMS dashboard, and pair with our What's Working and Traffic gadgets to quickly gauge website activity.

2. Start With SEO Basics

Make sure your most important pages have meta titles and descriptions that include keywords and underscore the relevance of your content, and work your way towards ensuring every page on your site uses this information. Google reported that branded searches still lead overall search growth. If your college doesn't have broad name-brand recognition yet, focus on SEO in highly desirable areas such as career-focused majors, bachelor's degrees, and certificate programs. For on-page titles, subheadings, and copy use words that are descriptive, relevant, and used by your intended audience. Avoid internal jargon.

Percussion CMS Users

Use the Actions menu to update your meta data with SEO titles and descriptions, and make sure on-page titles are styled as h1 headings using the Title widget.

3. Plan for Growth

Design trends, technological literacy, software and hardware capabilities, user experience best practices–it's all going to change. Readiness to adapt is critical because teens are consistently the early adopters of new technologies, platforms, and forms of communication. Develop a content and technology plan that is flexible enough to adapt to a changing recruitment landscape, and create strong frameworks for content creation and governance that will support any process. Most importantly, invest in a CMS that will allow for expandability without requiring additional spending with your vendor.

Percussion CMS Users

Build dedicated workflows for various campus groups to decentralize content production and governance while creating a way to review and approve section content at a glance and enjoy new feature rollouts every eight weeks.

Develop a content and technology plan that is flexible enough to adapt as you go, and create strong frameworks for content creation and governance that will support any process.

Our Clients

Meet some of our many education customers.

Additional Resources

Here's a list of useful resources and links to help you manage your web content strategy and production.

Downloadable Resources

- Content Management System RFP Template
- Content Marketing ROI
- Four Models to Make a Winning Business Case for CMS

Helpful Blog Posts

- Back to School: Tips for an Effective Higher Education Website
- You Want to Implement Responsive Design. Do You Know Why?
- Need a Budget for CMS? Questions Your CFO Will Ask You

Higher Education Case Studies

- Lancaster Bible College
- Georgia Southwestern State University
- Graceland University

About Percussion Software

Percussion Software make it easy and affordable to create and maintain engaging and modern websites to increase traffic, drive revenue, promote thought leadership, and create compelling online customer experiences. Delivered as a highly usable and affordable product, leading companies, education institutions, and government agencies are using Percussion to be nimble and drive change quickly to the web, allowing them to increase leads and conversion rates at a very low cost. Leading customers include Sunoco, the U.S. Social Security Administration, Norfolk State University, Ceridian, Axceler, and Cornell University.

To learn more, visit **percussion.com.**

Corporate Headquarters

Percussion Software, Inc.
600 Unicorn Park
Woburn, MA 01801
Main Phone: 781 438 9900
Website: percussion.com
Email Us: sales@percussion.com

Twitter

twitter.com/percussion

LinkedIn

linkedin.com/company/percussion-software

Facebook

facebook.com/PercussionSoftware