



THE DEFINITIVE
GUIDE
TO
FACEBOOK
ADVERTISING
FOR
HIGHER
EDUCATION



DIRECT ONLINE
MARKETING

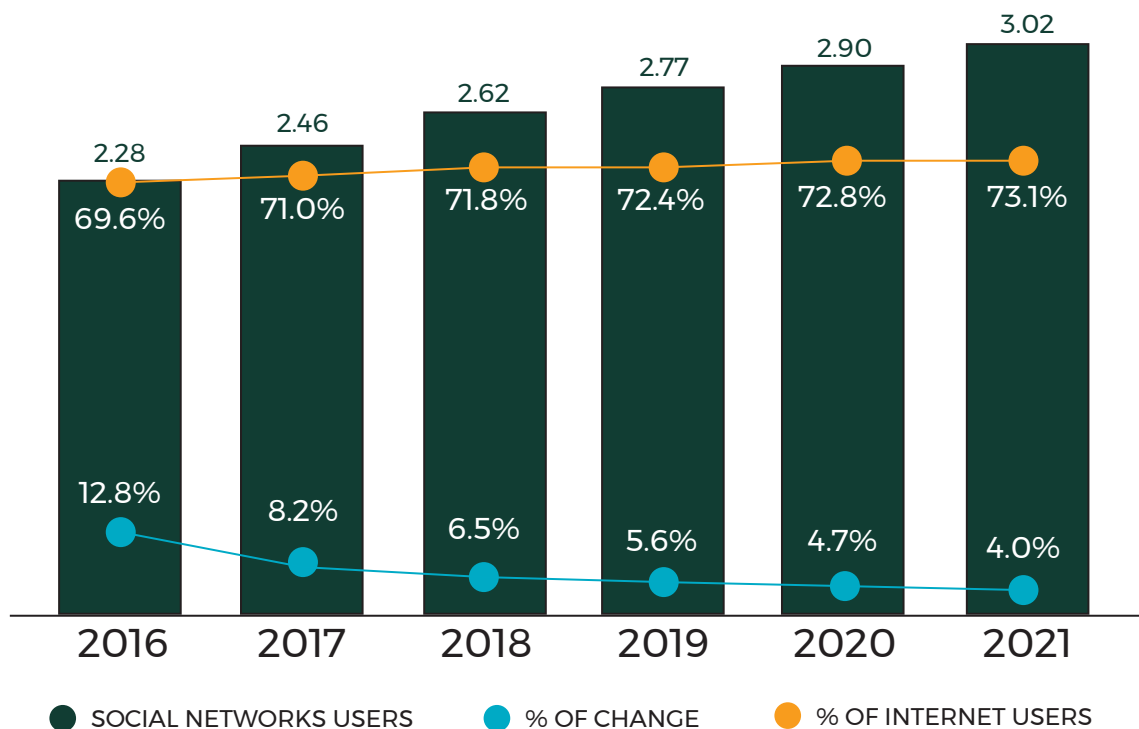
OVERVIEW

In today's always connected digital world, marketers have countless ways to reach their target audiences. For institutions of higher education looking to attract new students, social media advertising can be a remarkably useful tool when part of a broader digital marketing strategy. The power of social media lies in its ability to target users in ways that typically aren't possible through other channels. Marketers leverage several of these platforms to reach extremely specific demographics and often with lower costs than traditional media advertising.

Ever since the late 2000s, social media has become more synonymous with everyday life. Consider that in just over ten years, social media usage exploded by nearly 700%¹. In 2008, only 10% of the U.S. population was active on social media. Fast forward to 2018, and that figure has grown to a whopping 77%.

But this goes far beyond just the United States.

Looking at things from a broader perspective, there are at least **2.46 billion** people² across the globe using social media. Although social network adoption and growth has slowed in recent years, the number of social media users is estimated to grow to three billion people by 2021.



SOURCE: eMARKETER, JUNE 2017

www.eMarketer.com

Emarketer³

With dozens of social networks to choose from, it can be challenging to decide which platform is the most effective for tapping into a target audience. Each ad platform has their distinct advantages and disadvantages. Highly-specific user demographics can differ wildly between social platforms, as can features.

For universities and other higher education institutions, schools need to consider what their prospective students look like. Choosing the right advertising platform comes down to understanding what social networks these students are likely to use and how effective these platforms are for generating serious, legitimate leads.

WHY USE FACEBOOK?

Boasting the largest active user base of at least 2.17 billion monthly active users⁴, Facebook has been the leader in this space since 2012. One reason is that Facebook was one of the first major social networks. As time went on, Facebook had the recognition and a product that was constantly changing to keep users on the site for as long as possible. From simple UI improvements, to copying features from competitors, to the creation of its Newsfeed algorithm, Facebook has proven time and again their expertise of adapting to the ever-changing digital landscape.

Just remember that whenever Facebook introduces a change to their platform, they have one goal — to keep users scrolling for as long as possible.

In addition to being extremely agile as a company, Facebook has been a big proponent of creating an optimized experience for mobile users. Part of that includes acquiring other platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram, two of the largest mobile-first platforms in the world. Coupled with their investments in Messenger and Facebook Live, Facebook offers a robust platform for marketing purposes.

It is worth noting that while Facebook is the biggest social network in the world, Facebook isn't available in one of the most populous countries on the planet — China. Thanks to the "Great Firewall," Chinese citizens are restricted from accessing Facebook and many other social media platforms. To reach those potential students, you would need to target platforms such as WeChat or Weibo.

The final thing to consider when using Facebook ads for student recruitment is that their ad platform has arguably the most substantial offering in comparison to other social networks. With comprehensive targeting, variety in ad formats, and insightful reporting metrics, Facebook is an effective and versatile choice for colleges and universities of any size.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT FACEBOOK ADVERTISING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Over the course of this helpful resource, higher education marketers will get an inside look on the techniques and best practices for leveraging Facebook as a powerful marketing tool. As the best choice for social advertising, anyone can learn how to master Facebook's targeting options and the differences between Facebook's ad formats. In no time at all, this guide will help anyone implement and optimize successful Facebook advertising campaigns.

SECTION 1: TARGETING & BUILDING AUDIENCES

Facebook provides thousands of targeting options to reach its more than one billion daily active users to help higher education marketers hone in on the perfect audience. These targeting options get extremely powerful when layering targeting parameters over one another, providing the option to segment audiences with the utmost granularity.

Before diving into some of the targeting options available to higher education institutions, we would be remiss if we didn't discuss Facebook's removal of Partner Categories in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal⁵. Partner Categories were additional ad targeting parameters pushed into Facebook via third-party data providers such as Acxiom.

While the loss of this targeting provides new challenges for many Facebook marketers, the good news is that institutions looking to attract recent high school graduates may be one of the industries most isolated from these changes. Many third-party data categories were not applicable to users under the age of 18.

A plethora of targeting options still exists for colleges and universities to leverage. Here are several options that we've used to drive the best results for our higher education clients.

LOCATION

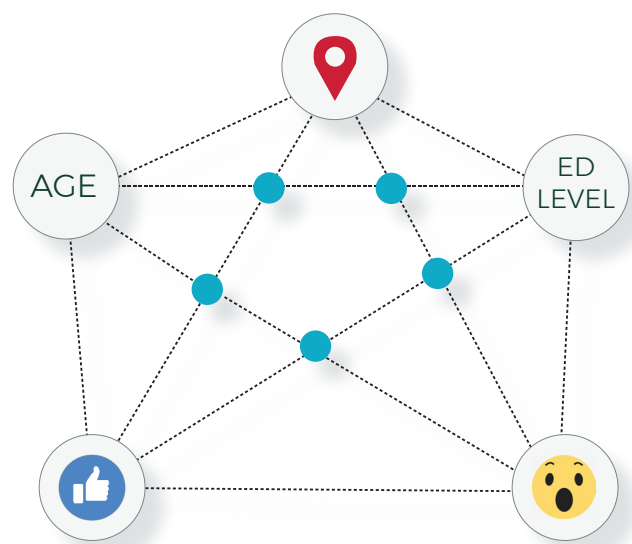
Many institutions run national campaigns and overlook the value of segmenting their geographic targeting to tailor their messaging to different regions. For example, institutions may want to highlight on-campus housing options for students who live more than 50 miles away from their campus while stressing the tuition savings for possible commuter students who live within driving distance. Another example would be promoting online programs for students who live outside of the region.

AGE AND EDUCATION LEVEL

While these targeting options seem obvious, it may be surprising to learn that many higher education campaigns fail to implement these targeting options in their audiences correctly. For example, when targeting traditional students for undergraduate programs, we recommend to always use "High-School Grad", "In High School", & "Some High School" in campaigns targeting student prospects (as opposed to their parents). Also, by layering on age targeting, higher-ed institutions can further refine their audience by removing unqualified older high school graduates, or high school students who are not yet considering college options.

DEMOGRAPHIC, BEHAVIORAL, & INTEREST

Facebook offers literally thousands of behavioral and interest targeting options. In the image on the next page is an expansive list of high-level categories from which to choose. Remember that more targeting options don't necessarily equate to better targeting. What is important is how these targeting options are used. Form buckets to create an ideal target audience by logically pairing different target options.



EXAMPLE:

Let's say a school offers a video game design program. They want to target a current high school student or recent high school graduate who not only has an interest in video games, but also has a background in technology. This is the time to model a buyer persona that embodies a person interested in becoming a game designer.

Meet 17-year-old Miles from San Diego, California. He's a high school senior and spends most of his free time playing the latest online multiplayer games like Fortnite and League of Legends. He's been tech-savvy since a young age and is taking several elective classes that teach the basics of programming languages such as Java and Python.

To target prospective students like Miles, use the following targeting details:

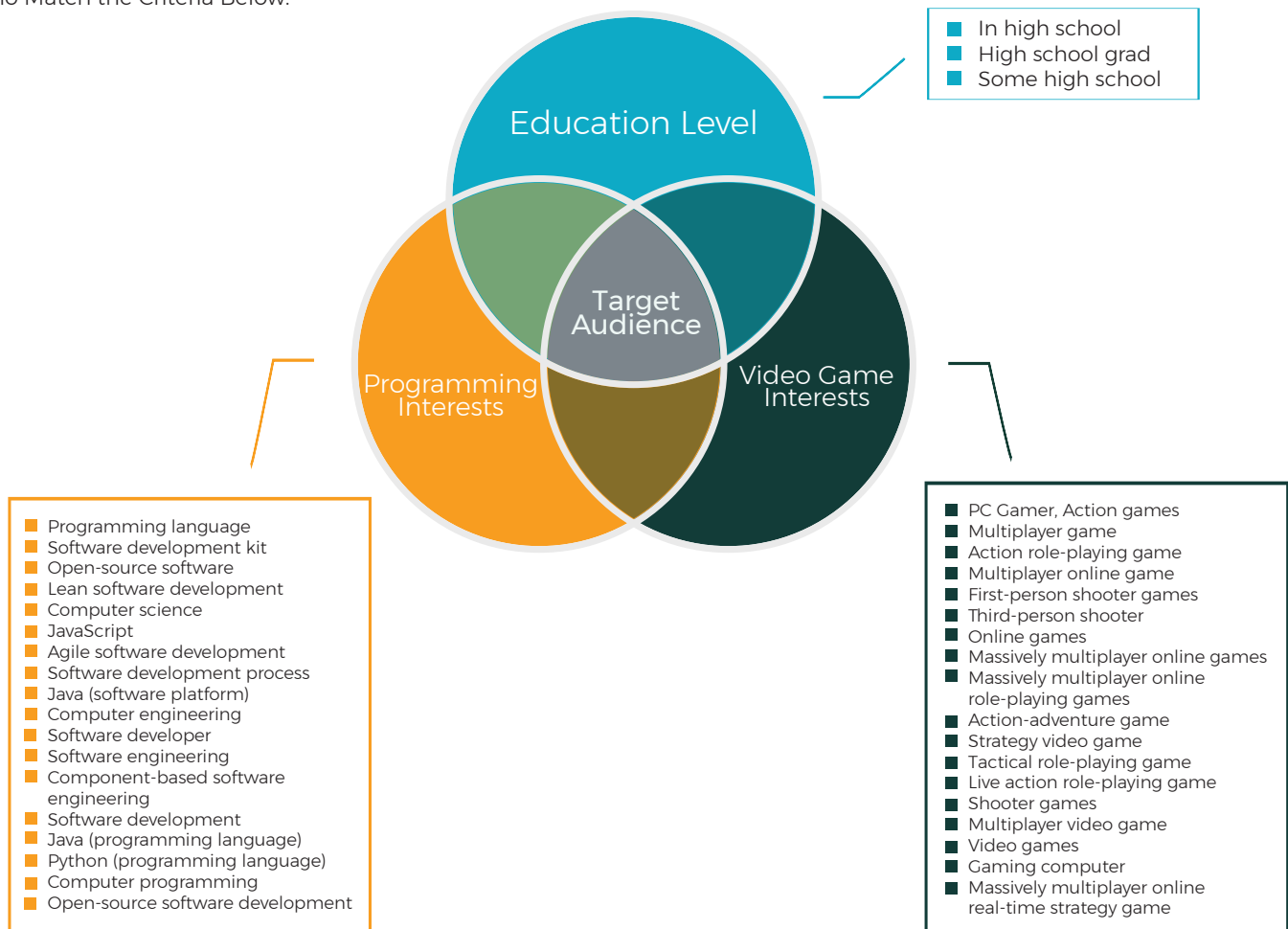
AUDIENCE NAME: GAME DESIGN 2

LOCATION - LIVING IN: United States: California, New York, Texas

LANGUAGE: English (UK) or English (US)

AGE: 16 - 19

Who Match the Criteria Below:

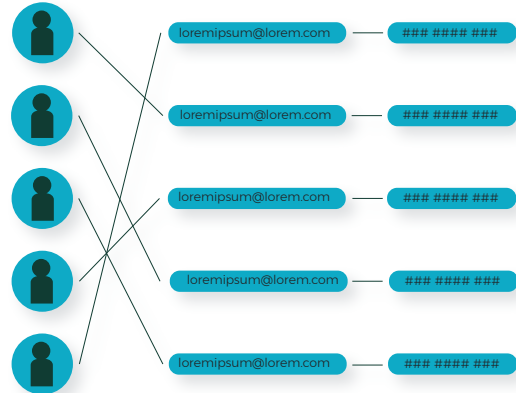


- Bucket similar options (either/or) where people must match one of the traits. For example, “High School Grad” Or “In High School” Or “Some High School”.
- Layer on another bucket to further narrow an audience.
- To further refine, exclude particular interests, too.
- Optional: Choose to narrow an audience using up to 3 buckets.

AUDIENCE OPTIONS

CUSTOM AUDIENCE EMAIL LISTS:

Despite the efforts to build a large email list of prospective students, the question remains — how many 18-year-olds regularly check their email? Email campaigns are not as effective for reaching younger audiences, but here is where Custom Audiences can be helpful. After uploading an email list as a CSV file, Facebook will match emails and/or phone numbers to the respective Facebook accounts.



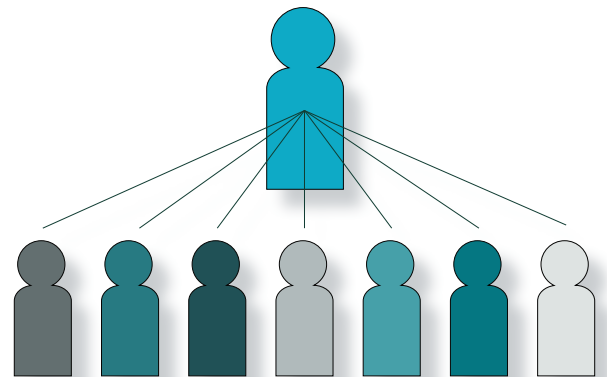
WEBSITE CUSTOM AUDIENCES:

For website custom audiences, marketers can create retargeting audiences of prospects who have visited their website in specific ways, such as viewing certain pages and time spent per visit. Keep in mind to avoid targeting unqualified website visitors, such as faculty and staff. To achieve this, layer location, demographic, education level, interests, and behavioral targeting over website custom audiences. It is also possible to exclude certain audiences, such as those who log in to an intranet or online portal.



LOOKALIKE AUDIENCES:

With Lookalike audiences, Facebook has the ability to find prospective students with similar attributes to those on a given email list. Lookalike audiences only work if at least 100 of the contacts in an email list can be matched to emails tied to a Facebook account. Also, Facebook can leverage these audiences to find students with similar attributes as those who have visited certain landing pages, or have submitted forms. Marketers may choose to layer on additional targeting to further refine these audiences.



SECTION 2: AD TYPES

Audiences respond differently to various types of ads and content based on which platform (Facebook or Instagram) and device they use.

To create and implement a holistic social media marketing strategy, institutions must account for their goals, the message they want to convey, and available assets. Most of all, they must account for their target audience, and understand that they must serve them the right content, conveying the right message, at the right time.

Each of the following ad formats have their unique strengths. For example, Carousel Ads are perfect for highlighting different courses of study and degrees and allow users to click-through to program-specific landing pages. In contrast, Canvas Ads provide an excellent branding opportunity to differentiate a school's message from its competitors'.

When properly utilized, every format referenced here can be successful in driving student enrollment, but no ad format will be the “magic bullet” appropriate for every situation. Here's what is important to know about each:

SINGLE IMAGE

Single image ads are Facebook's most common type of ad. That's because they're simple to use and still provide great results with the correct application. Start by leveraging a compelling image while highlighting aspects of an institution's campus or a specific program, with a link to a designated landing page to maximize inquiries. These clicks can also be segmented into audiences to use for separate retargeting campaigns.

SINGLE IMAGE SPECIFICATIONS – FACEBOOK

- File type: .jpg or .png
- Recommended Image Size: 1,200 x 628 pixels
- Recommended Image Ratio: 1.91:1

CHARACTER LIMITS:

- Body: 125 characters
- Headline: 25 characters
- Link Description: 30 characters



Facebook Desktop Example

SINGLE IMAGE SPECIFICATIONS – INSTAGRAM

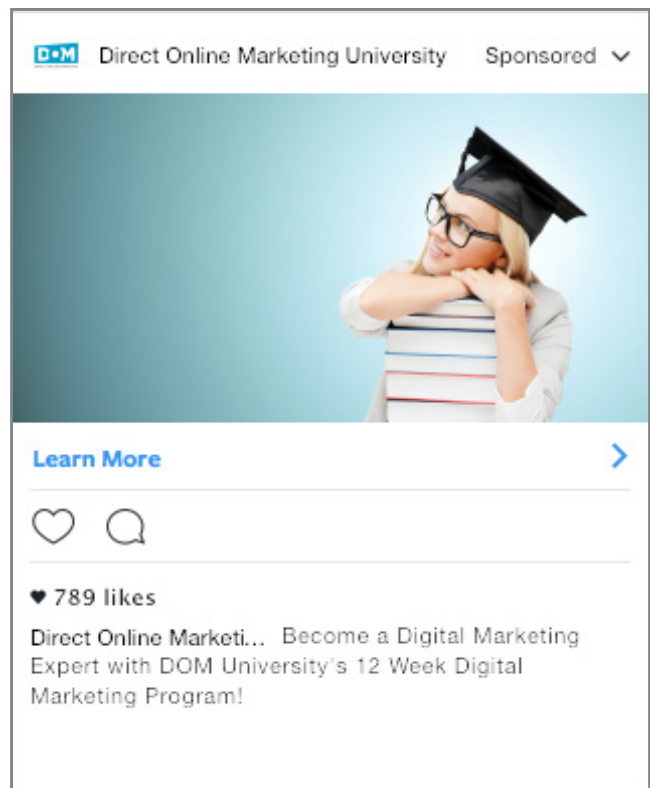
- Recommended Image Size: 1,200 x 1,200 pixels
- Recommended Image Aspect Ratio: 1:1

CHARACTER LIMITS:

- Maximum Text Length: 2200 characters
- Two rows of text (Est. 90 characters)



Image ads containing too much text may be rejected or have reduced delivery on Facebook or Instagram. Keep text to less than 20% of the overall image.



Instagram Example

SINGLE VIDEO

Video has the power to engage users at a deeper level than a single image when using a video that appeals to a target audience. For example, to target non-traditional students for an online Bachelor's, consider featuring success stories of former students with similar backgrounds.

Generally, standard video ads will garner better engagement than static image ads on Facebook and Instagram. For campaigns with both direct response and awareness goals, consider combining Newsfeed and in-stream ad placements for lower cost-per-view and higher ad recall.

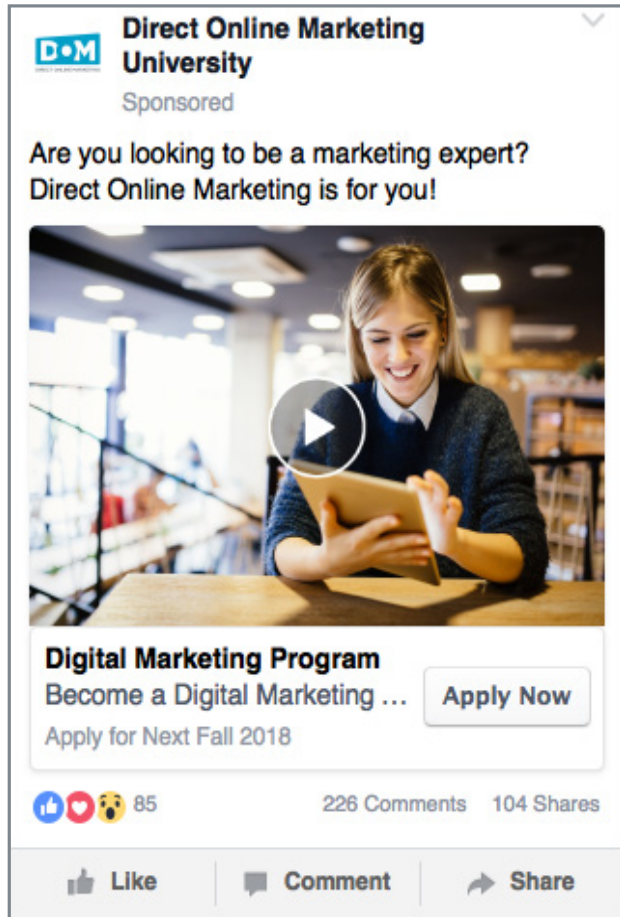
In-stream ad placements appear as ad breaks within long-form Facebook video content and can be up to 15 seconds long. Also, in-stream ads are non-skippable and won't appear until at least 60 seconds of video has been watched. This ensures that viewers are actively engaged when the ads are served.

Newsfeed ad placements will look and feel like typical Facebook posts users see from friends and pages they follow, but with small, visible text indicating the post is "Sponsored" beneath the name of the Facebook advertiser. They almost always contain a call-to-action button in the bottom right hand corner of the post, just above the comments section.

Unless otherwise indicated by a user's personal settings, video ads will automatically play when on screen.

SINGLE VIDEO SPECIFICATIONS – FACEBOOK

- Video Ratio: 9:16
- Recommended Video Length: 15 seconds
- Maximum Length (in-stream): 15 seconds



Facebook Mobile Example

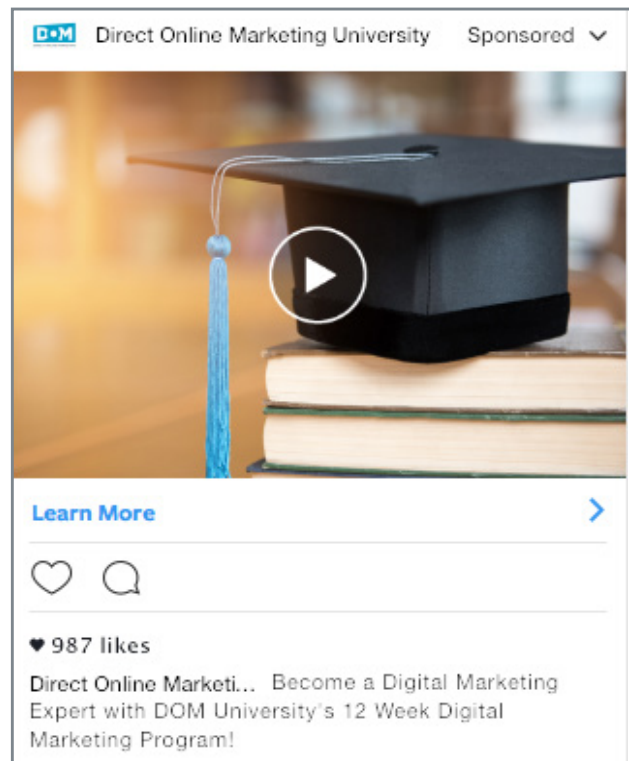
SINGLE VIDEO SPECIFICATIONS – INSTAGRAM

- Video Ratio: 1:1
- Recommended Image Ratio: 1.91:1
- Video Length: 1 to 60 seconds

CHARACTER LIMITS:

Maximum Text Length:

- 2200 characters
- Two rows of text (approx. 90 characters) will display without the viewer needing to click to read more



Instagram Example

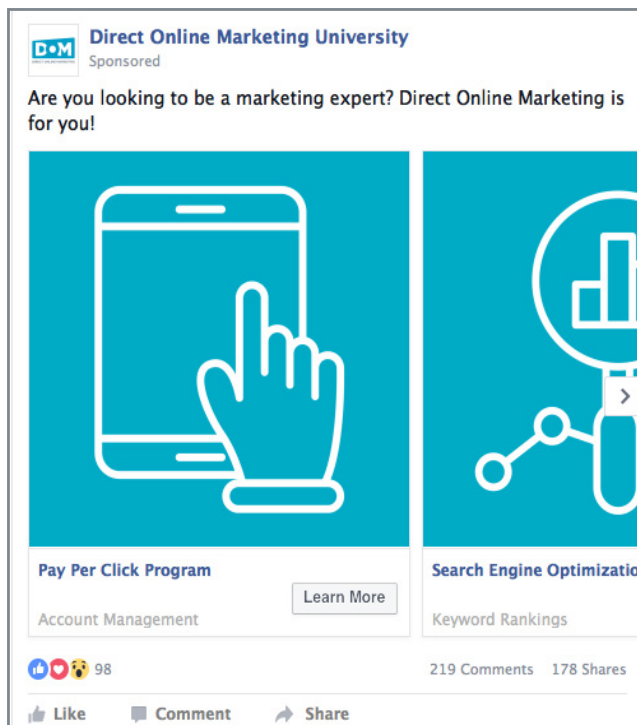


Similar to image ads, thumbnail images containing too much text may be rejected or not get delivered widely on Facebook or Instagram. Keep text to less than 20% of the overall image.

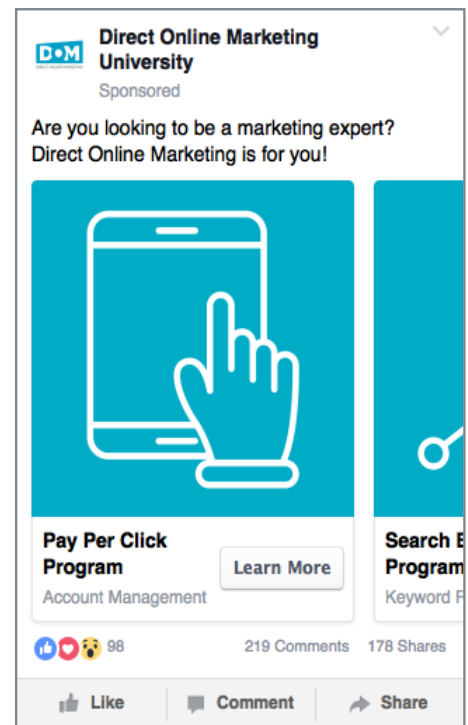
CAROUSEL

Carousel formats allow advertisers to show up to 10 “cards,” which are square-oriented images or videos. One of the most successful initial prospecting strategies for higher education institutions is using each card to showcase a different major or program. Not only is this a great way to introduce prospective students to the programs that an institution offers, but it also allows these institutions to collect data and segment their audiences by specific programs of interest. Since each carousel card can have a unique URL, advertisers can send each user to a program-specific landing page. Even if users don’t convert on said landing page, the advertiser now knows which program they are interested in and can retarget them with ads that are personalized towards that program.

Another successful strategy to experiment with is using carousel cards to illustrate the different value propositions an institution has to offer. Using carousel cards in this way allows more room to highlight all of an institution’s offerings and provides an opportunity for institutions to differentiate themselves from competitors. Additionally, there is an option to have the carousel cards reorder themselves based which card performs best. Doing so is a great way to test which features appeal most to a target audience. It also allows marketers to optimize their messaging moving forward.



Facebook Desktop Example



Facebook Mobile Example



LEAD ADS

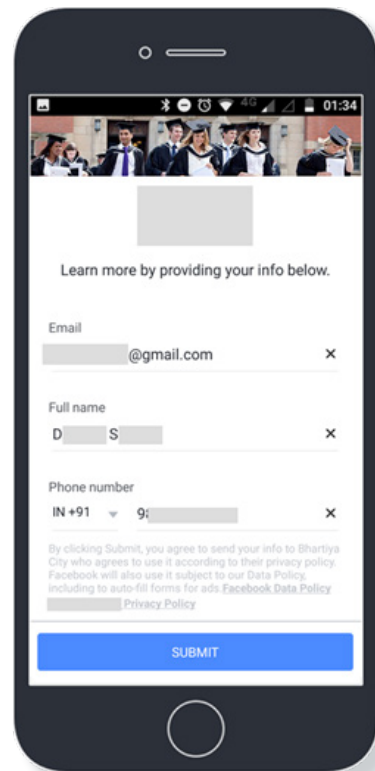
Lead ads are available exclusively on mobile devices and can help advertisers capitalize on the disproportionate increase in mobile usage among high-school-age social media users. While mobile is the best place to attract young Facebook users, even the best mobile-optimized landing pages can add friction to users filling out forms, killing conversion rates.

Lead ads remove this barrier and avoid pulling engaged users off of the platform. When a user clicks a Lead Ads on either Facebook or Instagram, a form pops up, pre-populated with the contact information from their Facebook profile. Besides basic contact information, Facebook has the option to create custom questions to ensure that admissions have the most useful information at their disposal.

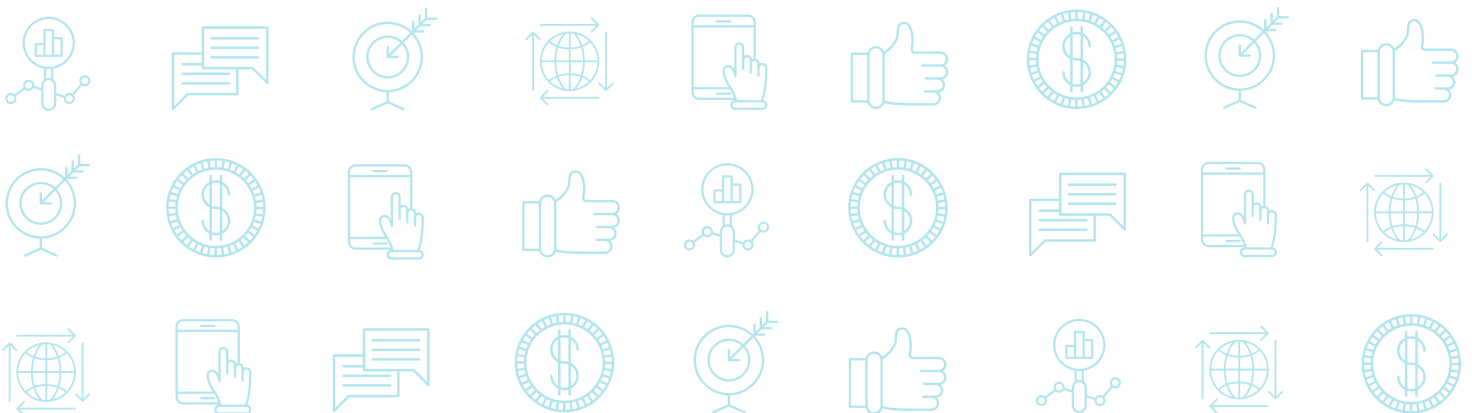
Types of form fields include:

- Short Answer: a one-line open answer field
- Multiple choice: a drop-down menu
- Conditional: multiple-choice fields with answers that change based on a previous answer
- Appointment Scheduling: a pop-out calendar to self-select date and time choices

Lead ads easily integrate with most CRMs, allowing admissions to reach out to new prospects as soon as possible. For teams that don't utilize a CRM currently, downloading the leads directly from Facebook is always an option.



Facebook Mobile Example



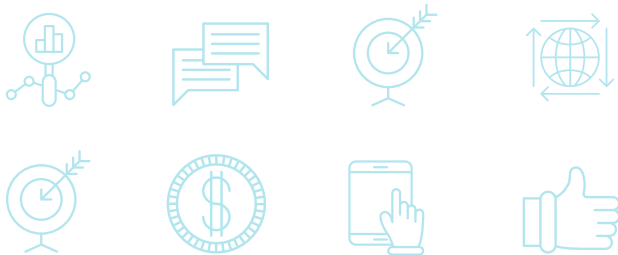
CANVAS ADS

Canvas ads are an innovative mobile-only option for campaigns with both brand awareness and direct response aspects. When a user sees a Canvas ad within the mobile interface, it appears very similar to a standard image or video ad. The only major difference being a small arrow at the bottom of the thumbnail prompting the user to “Tap to Open.” Once the ad is clicked, it opens up into a fully interactive and mobile-optimized experience. The user can tilt, swipe, and scroll through a Canvas. Think of it as a mini landing page that exists on the Facebook platform.

A Canvas ad is made up of the following customizable content blocks from which to choose:

- Headers
- Text Blocks
- Photos
- Videos
- Carousels
- Buttons

The combination of all of these options allows higher education institutions to create a unique, immersive, and engaging experience. In turn, a remarkable Canvas ad can provide a considerable bit of differentiation versus competitors.





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Proper SEO involves both art and science. Finding the perfect balance between the two is critical for increasing organic traffic to your site. We take a team approach to each account, with our dedicated SEO professionals committed to meeting your specific goals.



The search engine experience for e-commerce advertisers is radically different than it was just a few years ago. Today, Google and Bing offer shopping results prominently on searches with clear buying intent.



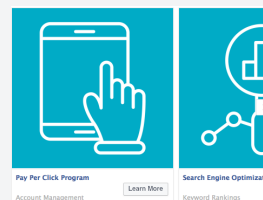
We've helped clients export their products and services (yes, services) to more than 150 countries around the world and can help you, too. We understand the differences between domestic and foreign sales and can help you reach exactly the right audience.

[I WANT TO APPLY TODAY](#)

Here are a few ideas to get started using Canvas Ads:

1

Use carousel cards to highlight different programs. Like standard carousel ads, each card can send users to a unique landing page. But unlike standard carousel ads, the 20% text rule does not apply, allowing the option to utilize sizeable, attention-grabbing text in images.



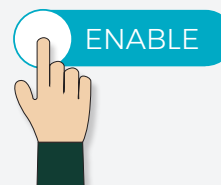
2



Use a video as the ad thumbnail, which is the element that will appear in the Newsfeed. By using the same video as the first content block, the video will continue playing when the Canvas ad is opened. Leveraging a video in this way ensures a seamless transition from the user's Newsfeed to the Canvas ad.

3

Be sure to enable the "Swipe to open final link" in the Canvas settings. Users who swipe down at the bottom of the canvas will be redirected to a designated landing page.



4



Combine image and text blocks to create testimonials from alumni.

5

Structure a narrative to flow through the features, advantages, and benefits of the school or program.

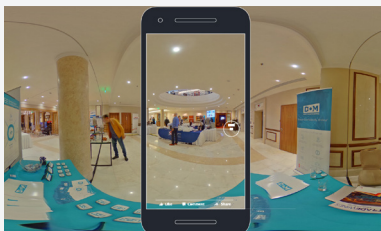


Proper SEO involves both art and science. Finding the perfect balance between the two is critical for increasing organic traffic to your site. We take a team approach to each account, with our dedicated SEO professionals committed to meeting your specific goals.



The search engine experience for e-commerce advertisers is radically different than it was just a few years ago. Today, Google and Bing offer shopping results prominently on searches with clear buying intent.

6



Use a tilt-to-pan image block to display a panoramic view of the campus.

READY TO GET OUT THERE?

It can be somewhat daunting when trying to dig into everything Facebook has to offer to higher education institutions. Facebook's most significant advantage for higher-ed schools is its vastly superior reach. Nearly every corner of the world is on Facebook, and its ownership of Instagram only adds to its influence.

By leveraging the ad platform's capabilities on both Facebook and Instagram, higher education institutions are more likely to attain a high level of visibility amongst prospective students with Facebook advertising. Facebook can help colleges, universities, and other schools of higher learning achieve better results when recruiting new students through its expansive reach and superior advertising product. Between the highly complex targeting options and a plethora of creative ad types to choose from, getting started is half the battle.

Here are three useful concepts for marketers looking to reduce their costs and propel student enrollment numbers through Facebook advertising.

1) FACEBOOK'S TARGETING IS INCREDIBLY GOOD. USE IT.

The level of granular targeting available through Facebook's ad platform is beyond useful for marketers. When leaning on buyer personas and highly detailed audiences, be as specific as possible when targeting prospective students.

2) CONVEY CONSISTENT MESSAGING AT ALL TOUCHPOINTS.

No matter what type of Facebook ad a prospective student is engaging with, it should be abundantly clear why a school or program is the best choice for them. Conveying value is the ultimate goal, and consistent messaging at all levels of the funnel is the tool by which institutions can achieve this.

3) ALWAYS EXPERIMENT WITH NEW CREATIVE AND AD FORMATS.

Experimenting with new creative assets — such as augmented reality — could provide great opportunities before competitors can get in on the action. As digital ad technology becomes more advanced, Facebook will eventually offer new ad formats. With a willingness to try these new formats, advertisers can innovate unique and immersive experiences for their target audience.



SOURCES

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ABOUT DIRECT ONLINE MARKETING

Direct Online Marketing is a leading digital marketing agency dedicated to delivering its clients and partners with more sales and better leads. Since 2006, DOM has helped businesses from every populated continent export to over 150 countries around the world.

DOM is a top 200 Premier Google Partner and Bing Ads Partner, offering pay-per-click advertising, search engine optimization, social media advertising, and retargeting.

DOM drives prospective students from around the world to universities and colleges. To learn how we can help you increase enrollment and acquire more leads through Facebook and Instagram, talk to us today to schedule a free social media marketing consultation.

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