

Effective Marketing of Online Degrees

An Overview of Seven Best Practices

By C.J. DeSantis

2004 Sloan-C Conference

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Speaker Background

- C.J. DeSantis, President, eLearners.com
 - After online master's degree - saw need to help colleges market their online programs
 - Founded eLearners.com Inc. in 1999
 - Served over 75 college clients in past 5 years
 - Have used and analyzed over 100 advertising sources to find interested online students for clients
- Contact Info
 - cdesantis@elearners.com
 - 866-eLearners (353-2763)

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Presentation Goals

- Provide you with best practices in marketing your online programs
- Advise you on the benefits & potential pitfalls of marketing your programs online
- Share the lessons learned from 5 years of marketing education online

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Best Practices

1. Set appropriate goals and expectations
2. Coordinate marketing & admissions
3. Utilize tracking & metrics
4. Build effective web sites
5. Benefit from eMarketing advantages
6. Test & refine your eMarketing
7. Understand pricing models

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Audience Survey #1 Your Goals

- What is your primary marketing goal?
- How many of you need to increase enrollment as the top goal?
- How many of you need to build your brand name, as a higher goal than increasing enrollment?

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1. Set Appropriate Goals and Expectations

- What is your main marketing goal?
 - To generate highly qualified, convertible inquiries/leads?
 - To create awareness of your programs and your institution?
 - To increase your enrollment with the highest return on investment?

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Expectation Considerations

- Enrollment needs
- Amount & types of programs
- Budget & business model
- Staff size & skills
- Prior marketing experiences

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What About Branding Expectations?

- What type of marketing do you need?
- Fill your programs >> Direct Response
- Reputation/recognition >> Branding
- “Zero-Cost Branding” is available online
- We’ll presume it’s direct response

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Audience Survey #2 Coordination

- What level of coordination do you have between marketing and admissions?
 - Great
 - Fair
 - Poor
- Which of the two tasks is a bigger challenge for your college?

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2. Coordinating Marketing & Admissions Efforts

- Critical questions to ask yourself...
 - Are your marketing and admissions departments set up to cooperate?
 - How many admissions personnel do you have to handle the inquiries/leads you generate?
 - How many leads can each of those admission personnel handle each day or month?
 - Is the admission staff trained to “sell”?

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Lead Lifecycle Coordination

Marketing

1. Research
2. Place Ads
3. Ad Viewed
4. Ad Clicked / Action
5. Web Site Viewed

Admissions

6. Lead Submitted
7. Lead Assigned
8. Lead Contacted
9. Follow-up
10. Conversion / Enrollment

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The Admissions Opportunity

- Competitors may all share the same lead/inquiry
- Not all leads are of equal quality
- Consider spending less resources generating leads and focus on conversions
- Admissions can be your competitive advantage

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Conversion Tips

These tips require complete cooperation between marketing and admissions:

- Quick initial follow-up
- Personalized contact (phone, email)
- Make multiple contacts
- Get your leads to take action
- Prioritize your leads & follow-up
- Track the process

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Enrollment Mgmt. Systems

- Central tracking of both marketing and admissions progress
- What can a system do for you?
 - Manage print mailings
 - Manage phone follow-up
 - Manage applications
 - Track inquiries, applicants & enrollments
 - Manage the process
- The right system can help improve efficiency

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Audience Survey #3 Tracking & Metrics

- Can your college track marketing efforts from ad to enrollment?
- Does your marketing department make spending decisions based on metrics like cost per enrollment or ROI?
- Are decisions on what ads to place often made based on politics?

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3. Utilize Tracking & Metrics

- In the old world of marketing, tracking was very challenging & often overlooked
- Today your metrics can show exactly what works
- Each enrollment must be tagged to an ad campaign and an individual ad
- Need coordination between marketing & admissions and a tracking system

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The Best Metrics

- Metrics help you analyze the efficiency of your marketing spending
- Use the best metric you can:
 - Good: Cost Per Lead
 - Better: Cost Per Enrollment
 - Best: ROI (Return On Investment)
- ROI determines which ads *really* work

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The Importance of Tracking

- Without tracking you won't be able to calculate any metrics
- What must be tracked?
 - tag each ad, click, lead, applicant, enrollee
- Try to plan for tracking and metrics at each step in the marketing process
- Third party software can help

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Calculating Marketing ROI

- If you have the data, ROI provides the most accurate metric of which ads work
- $ROI = (\text{revenue} - \text{cost}) / \text{cost}$
- Note: total ROI would account for all costs, but you can use marketing costs to find your "marketing ROI"

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Decision Making With Metrics

- Which is the best deal for \$2,500?:
 - 1 directory listing for a year
 - 1,000,000 banner ad impressions
 - 1,000 clicks on paid search listings
 - 100 leads from an online directory
- What else do you need to know?
- Which metrics would be most helpful?

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Audience Survey #4 Web Sites

- Does your marketing department have enough control over your web site?
- Have you done any testing to calculate and improve conversion from visitor to inquiry?
- Have you optimized your site for search engines?

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4. Build an Effective Web Site

- Most online ad types require an effective direct response web site to convert visitors
 - Note: No site is needed for performance-based directory listings that deliver leads
- Different ad types require different "landing pages" for max efficiency
- Building an effective site requires testing and more testing

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Conflicting Site Purposes

- Efficiently convert high priced ad traffic
- Resource for students, faculty & alumni
- Generating free traffic via search engines
- Potential Solutions:
 - Consider a separate site for paid ads
 - Build the ideal "landing page" for each ad
 - Use site data to justify changes

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Good Site Characteristics

- Consistent navigation & design
- Call to action (a lead form)
- Limit your text
- Design for search engines (SEO)
- Understand your audience
- Compare changes using A-B testing

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Audience Survey #5 Online vs. Offline

- Have you compared effectiveness of online vs. offline media?
- Which is more effective at generating the lowest cost per enrollment?
- What percent of your budget is spent online?

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5. Understand Online vs. Traditional

- Your balance of online and offline ads will depend on many factors
- There is no “magic” blend that works
- Don't just copy other colleges
- Understand online & offline and use the advantages of each

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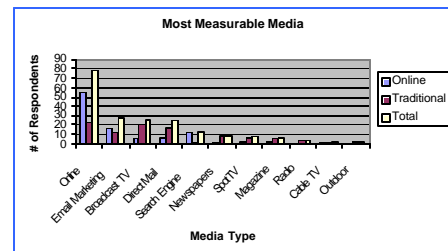
Traditional vs. Online Ads

- You may want/need both
- How many resources to invest in each?
- Which do you think is:
 - Easiest to measure effectiveness
 - Easiest to setup and use
 - Most targeted media
 - Highest ROI

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Online is Most Measurable

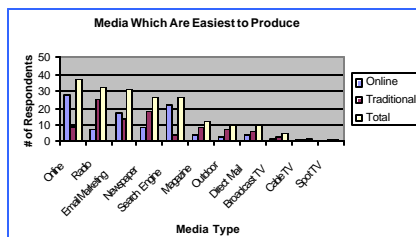


Source: MediaPost Sept. 2003 survey of online and traditional media planners/buyers

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Online is Easiest

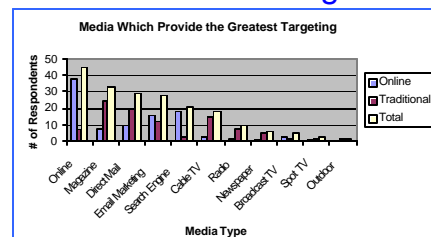


Source: MediaPost Sept. 2003 survey of online and traditional media planners/buyers

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Online is Most Targeted

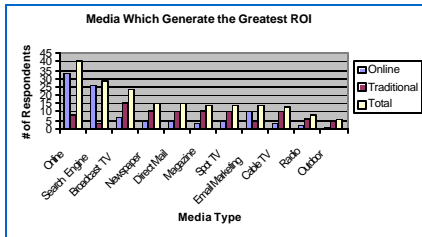


Source: MediaPost Sept. 2003 survey of online and traditional media planners/buyers

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Online Has Highest ROI



Source: MediaPost Sept. 2003 survey of online and traditional media planners/buyers

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Online Programs Are Different

- On-campus programs typically have geographical & physical limitations
- Traditional marketing matches well with on-campus programs
- Online programs have NO geographic limitations
- Different marketing needed for online programs
- Online programs need online students who can be found...ONLINE!

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Audience Survey #6 Online Ads

- Have you tracked and compared various types of online advertising?
- Which ad types have been most effective for you?

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6. Test & Refine Your eMarketing

- There are many types of online ads
- Online eMarketing evolves rapidly
- What is the ideal eMarketing mix?
- There is no "magic" formula
- Test and refine each ad you run

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eMarketing Examples

- Directory listings
- Banners / Graphical
- Email
- Popups / Adware
- Search engine marketing
- Other (affiliate, promotions, etc)

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Which Ad Type is Best?

- All ad types can be effective
- Considerations:
 - Enrollment goals
 - Size & strengths of marketing staff
 - Cost models & complexities of type
 - Marketing budget
 - Pressure from your administrators

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Directory Listings

- Flat Fee / Traditional
 - One annual fee
 - Easy to budget
 - Limited guarantees
- Performance-Based
 - Pay per lead (CPA / CPL)
 - Fewer unknowns

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Banners & Graphical

- Banners typically refer to ads where size = 468x60 pixels
- Many standard size ads:
www.iab.org
- Users began ignoring banners
- Rich Media = ads that use flash or other interactive technology to gain clicks
(ie. Orbitz ads on ESPN.com)

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Email

- Lists
 - Email marketing companies
 - Opt in vs. opt out
 - Concerns about SPAM laws
- Newsletters
 - Ads in daily / weekly newsletters
 - Targeted audiences

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Popups & Adware

- Contextually targeted ads
- User behavior tracked by “legal” software on user machine
- Some companies also sell popups on their site or network of sites
- Disliked by many users, but high click rates

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Search Engine Marketing

- Broad & complex topic!
- Free/Organic/Natural Listings
 - Left side of Google results
- Paid Placement/PPC Ads
 - Right side of Google results
- Paid Inclusion/Feeds
 - Listed among free listings
 - Guaranteed inclusion

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Other Alternatives

- Affiliate Marketing
 - Pay other sites to send targeted visitors to your site
 - Pay by visitor or lead
- Promotions
 - Good at generating quantity of leads
 - Questionable quality
- Many other alternatives...

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Audience Survey #7 Pricing Models

- Can you describe the differences between CPM, CPC and CPA?
- Which of the pricing models allows you to do the least work in the marketing part of your process (creating leads)?

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7. Ad Pricing Models

- Flat-fee / Cost Per Ad (traditional)
 - Most unknowns & highest risks
- CPM / Cost Per 1000 Impressions
 - Many unknowns & risks
- CPC / Cost Per Click
 - Shared risks (advertiser & publisher)
- CPA / Cost Per Action (lead or inquiry)
 - Fewest risks (highest for publisher)

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Unknowns = Risks = Work

- More unknowns mean more risks
- More risks mean more complexities
- More complexities mean more work to ensure good performance
- All price models can convert for you, but some typically require more work

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Flat Fee

- Most unknowns for advertiser
 - No guaranteed impressions, visitors or conversions
- Lowest risk for publisher
- The “Publisher” or “Mall” model
- Some directory listings (Petersons,...)
- Sponsorships (MSN/AOL,...)

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Flat Fee Example



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CPM

- Cost per 1,000 Impressions
- Many unknowns for advertiser
 - What counts as an impression?
 - No guaranteed visitors, or quality of visitors
- Low risk for publisher
 - (# of monthly visitors) x (Pages viewed) x (ads/page)
- The “Advertising” model
- Banner ads (About.com,...) & email newsletters

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CPM Example



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CPC/PPC

- Cost Per Click / Pay Per Click
- Shared risk for advertiser & publisher
 - Publisher only gets paid when visitor clicks
 - Advertiser risks the quality of clicks (# of conversions)
- The “Search Engine” model
- PPC & paid inclusion (Yahoo,...)
- Also banners, text links, “pop-ups”, email

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CPC/PPC Examples



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CPA/CPL

- CPA = Cost Per Action/Acquisition
- CPL = Cost Per Lead (or PPL)
- Fewest unknowns for advertiser
 - Publisher does not get paid unless a visitor is interested in being contacted by you
- Highest risk for publishers
- Numerous online lead vendors
- Not all leads are equal!

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CPA/CPL Example



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Steps to Enrollment

- | Marketing | Admissions |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Research | 6. Lead Submitted |
| 2. Place Ads | 7. Lead Assigned |
| 3. Ad Viewed | 8. Lead Contacted |
| 4. Ad Clicked / Action | 9. Follow-up |
| 5. Web Site Viewed | 10. Conversion / Enrollment |

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Optimizing Your Resources

Ad Pricing	Unknowns, Risks & Complexities
Flat Fee	# impressions, # clicks, # leads, # enrollments
CPM	# clicks, # leads, # enrollments
CPC/PPC	# leads, # enrollments
CPA/CPL	# enrollments

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Remember Best Practices

1. Set appropriate goals and expectations
2. Coordinate marketing & admissions
3. Track ads & use metrics
4. Build effective direct response web sites
5. Utilize advantages of online ads
6. Test & refine your eMarketing
7. Take advantage of ad pricing models

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Final Audience Survey

Which best practice was most helpful?

1. Effective Goals
2. Coordination
3. Tracking & Metrics
4. Effective Web Sites
5. Advantages of Online
6. Test Your eMarketing
7. Pricing Models

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