

Mention Ebook

Definitive Guide to Social Media Management for Higher Education Institutions

Date

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Table of contents

P.04

Introduction

Chapter I - P.06

How to Improve Your School's Brand Awareness

Chapter II - P.34

How to Leverage Social Media For Student Recruitment

Chapter III - P.58

How to Manage Online Crises

P.68

Conclusion



Introduction.

Whether it is to communicate, sell, share news, hire new talents, or entertain - social media has radically changed the way we live our lives.

As individuals, it has allowed us to chat with friends and family, stay up to date with the brands we like, as well as find and share information as it happens. As marketing and communication professionals, social media has revolutionized the way we talk to our target audience - making it easier than ever to share relevant information when needed. It seems like a perfect medium for marketing, but of course, **there's a caveat**. What we gained in reach, **we lost in control**.

In other words, we no longer fully control our brand's image. We can only contribute to shaping it and trying to improve it over time. Today, all organizations can be walking on thin ice as it takes time to build a solid online reputation, but only seconds to ruin it. **This couldn't be more true for higher education institutions.**

Schools have it even harder than the average business as **they mostly deal with digital natives**. According to a recent study from the [Pew Research Center](#)*, 90% of them are active on social media platforms, where information travels incredibly fast.

Fast is great if the information is positive. But misinformation can travel even faster: one rumoured tweet can quickly get your school's name trending – and not in a good way.

For this reason, schools have to build a strong social media strategy.

What's more, prospective university students rely more and more on social media to learn about the schools they're considering to apply to.

This contributes significantly to increase the competition within the higher education industry. Those that want to keep attracting students every year need to step up their social media game if they want to survive.

A 2016 [report](#)* found that 1 in 2 students use it for this exact purpose and that 80% of these students also pay attention to how the schools interact with enrolled students on social media to forge their opinion.

As we work with many clients in higher-ed, we're aware of the many challenges you face as a professional in the industry. For this reason, we created a dedicated resource to help you map out and build what could be the perfect social media strategy for your institution.

In this ebook, we'll be sharing best practices for social media management in order to help you apply them to your strategy.

This includes:

- **How to improve your school's brand awareness**
- **How to leverage social media to recruit students**
- **How to deal with inevitable online crises**

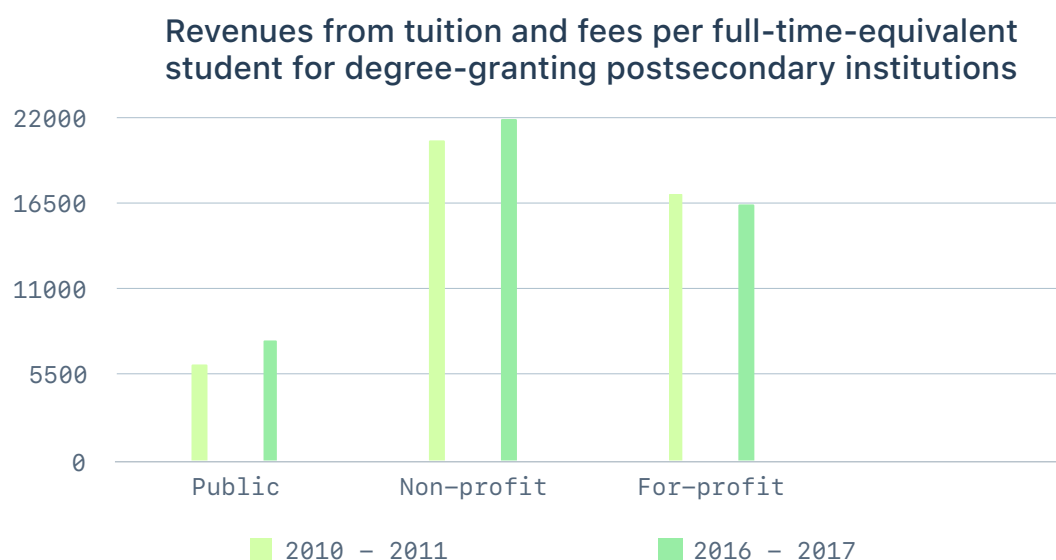
Chapter I.

How to Improve Your School's Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to how a brand (or in this case, a school) is known and perceived within its industry.

A school is a brand – just like any other business is. The more students they attract, the more revenue they generate.

According to the [National Center for Educational Statistics](#)*, a full-time university student brings in between \$7,700 and \$21,900 a year of tuition fees for a higher education institution.



Long story short, you need to grow your school's brand awareness to attract students.

Your task, as a marketing and/or communication professional working for a higher-ed institute, is to make sure that your prospective students, businesses, and investors are familiar with what your school represents and what it can do for them.

In this chapter, we're presenting **8 ways to improve your school's brand awareness, followed by examples from 4 schools doing this the right way on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube**, based on our customers' and experts' feedback.



8 ways to improve your school's brand awareness

The best way to start is to leverage social listening in order to **monitor all relevant conversations about your school and campus online.**

First, let's make sure we're all on the same page here. In a nutshell, social listening shows what's being said about you on social media, without having to go looking. Social listening helps brands and organizations:

- **Identify relevant conversations** about them in real-time both on social and traditional online media
- **Monitor their competitors** and benchmark performance
- **Discover trends** before they become mainstream
- **Analyze** and gather insights about their audience

“When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new”

- DALAI LAMA

Now, let's look at how schools and higher education institutions can benefit from it. There may be thousands of daily conversations about your school on social media, and you may have no idea. **Social listening allows you to put an ear to these discussions to learn what your audience cares about – providing you with actionable insights.**

This includes things like their questions, concerns, and feedback for improvement. But with so many conversations, where do you start listening? **We recommend starting by looking at who is talking about your and where the conversations are taking place.**

Listen to your campus' everyday life

Social listening can provide you with several key insights. This includes the following:

The volume and origin of mentions

Simply put, this is how many times your school is mentioned on social media and where the mentions are coming from.

For example, *Chester University*, located in the UK, seems to have a strategy focused on English-speaking countries. However, a quick analysis shows they are also being mentioned in South America, Spain, and Russia – which could be markets they should explore in terms of recruitment.

“We track particular issues that are relevant to the University, particular individuals, accommodation issues, businesses that are of interest to the University.”

– SHAI VURE, DIGITAL MARKETING MANAGER, CHESTER UNIVERSITY

Current trends you’re associated with

Are there any negative trending topics that could be related to your school? Social listening helps you track these before it starts to circulate.

“We use Mention to monitor activity about our district on the internet. Our parameters include searching for school names, our Superintendent’s name, and much more. We also use Mention to help monitor any news about our district on the internet, such as a recent news story, police report, student fight, etc.”

– KATE HOPE, MULTIMEDIA COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST OF KLEIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Criteria for choosing a university

Parents may be concerned with tuition fees and prospective students could have questions around housing - these are things you should be tracking. Using a social listening tool, **you can respond to these key questions as they happen**. More on this in [Chapter 2: How to leverage social media to recruit more students](#).

The overall sentiment around your school's brand

It's crucial to understand how your school is being perceived online - this will help you adjust and shape your communication strategy. A monitoring tool can show you a clear view of the tone of conversations mentioning you. Running a [sentiment analysis](#)* can also tell you about how programs and events you run are perceived across the board.

All in all, listening lets you see the big picture of your school on social media. Not to mention, it's also helpful to identify the influential voices of your community.

"Monitoring social media is like being a good listener. Students today are more comfortable with online platforms to voice their concerns, dissatisfactions, etc."

* AI ADDYSON-ZHANG, WRITER AND FOUNDER OF CLASSROOM WITHOUT WALLS

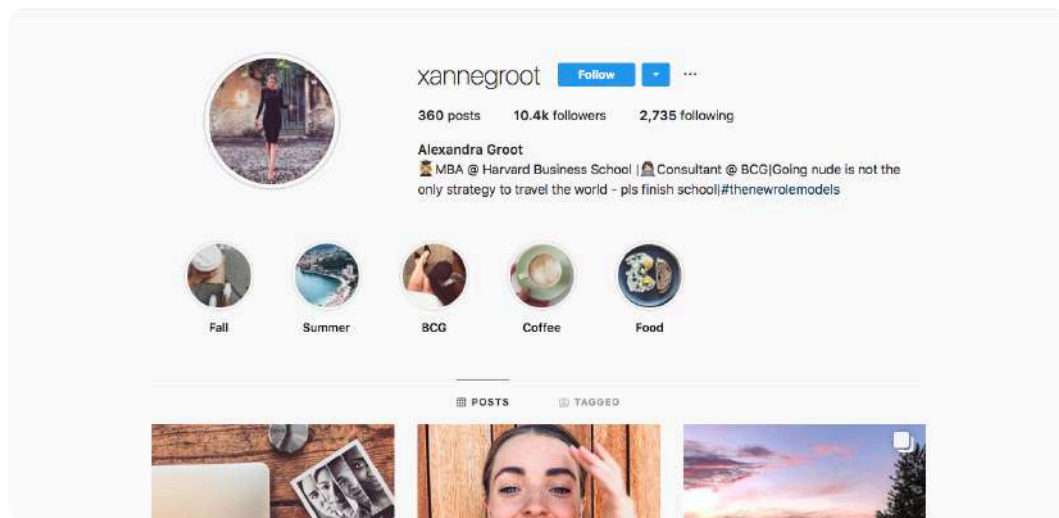
Identify and interact with influencers in your community

[Influencer marketing](#)** is essential for every brand as it helps them strengthen their online reputation - this also applies to schools.

Influencers who are active in the educational space can help boost your school's branded content in terms of visibility.

For this reason, it's a good idea to **prioritize your engagement with influencers.**

Out of curiosity, we ran a search using Mention on "Harvard Business School" to identify influencers related to them.



We found an MBA student who has quite a large following and is generating strong engagement when creating school-related content:



This is a premium piece of UGC* (User-Generated Content) for Harvard.

If their social media team play their cards right, they would reach out to her and start forming a relationship. Once established, they could even ask to use her content in future recruitment campaigns.

What's more, having influential voices on your school's side can be extremely helpful [when facing a PR crisis](#)* - more on this in [Chapter 3: How to deal with online crises](#). They can be the first to help you share information and content to defuse a negative situation. The bottom line is, **you want them on your side.**

In addition to influencers, there's another group that your school needs to engage with to strengthen your brand awareness: **your alumni.**

Maintain alumni relations

You likely have more alumni than you have students. They too, are active on social media and can help you improve your school's reputation online. But let's be honest for a second. Do you remember the last time you logged in to your alumni platform? Now, if your school was to interact with you on social media, you'd likely be more responsive to them and perhaps even attend networking events or share advice with students more regularly. This is one of many reasons to use social listening to **identify influential alumni students and reach out to them.** A strong alumni community can be highly positive for a few reasons:

- **They have a professional network on social media:** if they're loyal, they could be spreading your name across their own network.
- **Alumni give credit to your school:** an active alumni network is a premium selling point for students. Leverage their expertise to advise and share practical support to students and help them build their network.

Once you have identified relevant alumni, re-initiate a conversation with them on social media: share their content, leave thorough comments, and show them you value their opinion. **Some of them will likely return the favor.**

Benchmark partners and competing schools

Most universities and colleges have partners around the globe. And just as any business would, schools can monitor their partners to:

- **Get inspiration** from them and run innovative campaigns.
- **Find opportunities to collaborate.** If your partner school is also planning to host a networking event, why not host it together to get more attendants?
- **Find new partners.** *"The friends of your friends are your friends."*

Social listening can also teach you a lot about **competing schools**. After all, to be the best, **you need to know how the competition is doing.**

Here are a few things to pay attention to:

- **Which networks** are they active on?
- How do students **perceive them**?
- How they **promote programs** similar to yours?
- What's their **recruitment strategy**?
- **How many followers** do they have?
- **What type of engagement** do they get?
- How much **brand awareness** does your school get **compared to them**?

These key insights will help you keep a pulse on your partners and competing schools.

Appeal to your college community

While you want to reach new students, don't forget about the community you already have – **your current students**. You want them to stay at your school, learn, enjoy, and come back to visit once they've graduated.

On the one hand, you can organize galas, concerts, social events, sports games, etc. **And you can also use social media** to share content that's appealing to your community. This includes:

- Students' stories about their favorite memories
- Behind-the-scenes looks at sports and cultural events
- Questions and polls that matter to your students
- Content about what campus life is like

A tip from the pros: Save time by scheduling your posts in advance. Once you plan your content calendar, schedule them directly via a social media management tool.

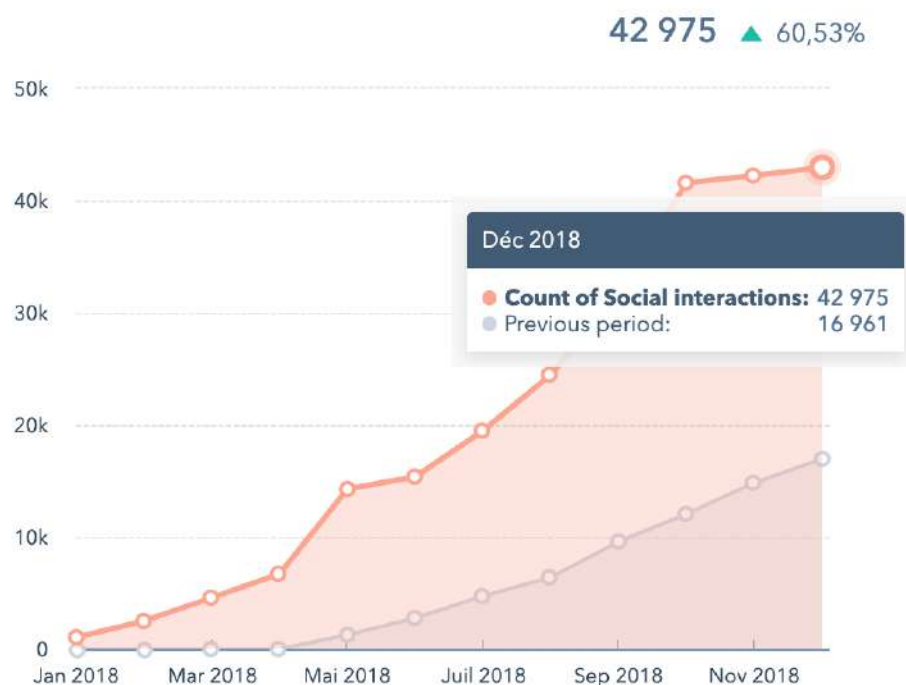
If you're lacking inspiration about what to post - start by listening to what your community is talking about online. With the right tool, both of these can be done effortlessly. Using an all-in-one tool to schedule your social media posts from one place, and in advance, has two irrefutable benefits:

1. **You don't have to jump from one platform to another**, copying, pasting, adapting the style and, therefore, wasting time.
2. If you take a couple of minutes each week/month to schedule your posts, you can then **spend the rest of your time focusing on more critical issues**, such as jumping into key conversations as they happen.

This is something that we have been doing using HubSpot for a while — until recently. But with our new publishing feature, we can now schedule posts in advance on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram using Mention.

Scheduling is something we've been doing for quite some time now and it works very well. In fact, in 2018, we even reached 42K+ clicks on the social media posts we had scheduled, compared to the year before.

Clicks ⓘ



And this is great. This type of engagement is something your school needs to stay ahead.

"I create hashtags for events, campaigns and classes that I taught. I do this to monitor the sentiment towards my course and gauge interest and learning. It's important for higher education schools to be good listeners, and embrace social media as having an ear open to students."

- AI ADDYSON-ZHANG, WRITER AND FOUNDER OF CLASSROOM WITHOUT WALLS

Find and share interesting local content

The sense of "community" we mentioned earlier can extend beyond the university itself and into the actual physical community. Especially in small college towns where the town and the university go *hand-in-hand*. In these cases, sharing news and images from the area can make the town look like a wonderful place to spend your college years, serving as a great recruiting tool. Once again, a listening tool can be of great help here. **Let's see how the University of Hull could do it, using Mention.**

The screenshot shows the Mention alert configuration page. At the top, there is a text input field containing "University of Hull" and a dropdown menu with a green dot icon. Below this is a "Description" section with a text area containing "Monitoring Aston Martin brand plus the word 'Cars'". The "Optional Keywords" section includes a note: "Your alert will collect mentions that contain at least one of these keywords, plus all required keywords." Below this note are five blue buttons: "University", "Education", "Innovation", "Business", and "Investment". A text input field below these buttons contains the text "Press 'enter' to add". The "Required Keywords" section includes a note: "Your alert will collect mentions that contain all of these keywords." Below this note is a blue button labeled "Hull". A text input field below this button contains the text "Press 'enter' to add". The "Excluded Keywords" section includes a note: "Your alert will not bring in mentions with any of the following keywords." Below this note is a grey button labeled "football". A text input field below this button contains the text "Press 'enter' to add".

Creating this alert, you would be notified when the city of Hull is associated with either *"University"*, *"Education"*, *"Innovation"*, *"Business"* or *"Investment"*.

Now, to eliminate a bit of noise about the local football team, we could remove mentions including the term *"Football"*

Once the alert is created, you can watch for interesting stories related to these associations of keywords and share them with your audience.

Finding fresh content online will give you plenty of social media fodder. And the more you share, the happier your followers will be.

Only share powerful visuals

Focus on the things that make your school unique.

These might include:

- Beautiful scenery and architecture
- Capture events like concerts, graduation, and fairs
- Moments spent with special guests (political figures, celebrities, known business women, etc.)
- Unique characters around campus

Look at what Harvard University is doing with their YouTube channel. This should give you a ton of ideas. All you need is a good camera, a decent microphone, and a montage app on your computer.

Just like UCLA, ask students to take photos of what the school means to them. Their favorite aspects of campus life may be very different from yours.

Newsjacking done right

There are two golden rules to follow when it comes to jumping on trends (or [newsjacking](#)*).

- **This timing needs to be right.** Once something goes viral, your contribution will probably be lost in the noise.
- **It will only work if it's relevant to your brand and if you're able to tell a good story about it.**

We have selected one example that will resonate with all higher-education institutions: **the #IceBucketChallenge**.

Not only was the Ice Bucket Challenge fun, but it promoted awareness around ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, or Motor Neuron Disease). It went viral on social media during the summer of 2014. If a friend challenged you, you had to film yourself pouring a bucket of iced water over your head *and/or* donate money to an association fighting the disease.

We particularly liked how MIT dealt with it.



The MIT President, Rafael Reif was challenged by Harvard's President. Not only did he take the challenge, but he also nominated other school Presidents.

You can find the [video here](#).

“Universities need to use those [social media] channels to contact their target group. But usage needs to be differentiated. Posting on Facebook may be inefficient if the target group perceives Facebook as outdated. Posting on Snapchat may be perceived as inappropriate. Without a differentiated strategy, it is likely that higher education institutions will do more harm than good.”

— MICHAEL HAENLEIN - PROFESSOR OF MARKETING - ESCP EUROPE

Now that your head is buzzing with ideas, take a look at how **Indiana University, UCLA, University of Cambridge and Harvard University** respectively deal with communication on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.





Four schools leveraging social media the right way to generate brand awareness

Now that your head is buzzing with ideas, take a look at how Indiana University, UCLA, University of Cambridge and Harvard University respectively deal with communication on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

Depending on how you use it, Twitter can be both incredibly useful or extremely frustrating. We dived into what the Indiana University does the right way on Twitter.

How Indiana University communicates with their audience on Twitter

There may be thousands of daily conversations about your school on social media, and you may have no idea. **Social listening allows you to put an ear to these discussions to learn what your audience cares about – providing you with actionable insights.** Indiana University is a great example of a higher ed institution that's using social media the

right way. They [tweet/retweet](#) about 10 times a day, share campus news, fun facts, invite their followers to follow them on other platforms, and also share their community's posts when relevant.

Here are a couple of examples that we liked:

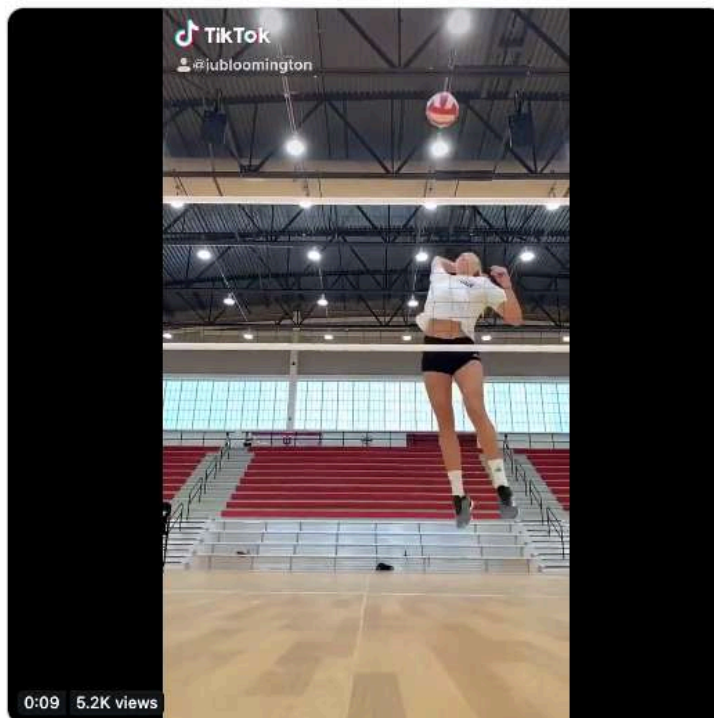
Fancying a cup of coffee?



Why we like this [type of post](#):

It may seem *silly*, but it contributes to reinforcing your school's *culture* and campus *life*. You want your students to feel like they belong to your school. To get there, you need this type of connection.

Hey! We're not only on Twitter!



Why we like this [type of post](#):

Your followers are using more than one social media channel. Now, this doesn't mean that they are following you on all those platforms. Actually, maybe they're not aware that you're on other platforms!

This is why it's essential that you **remind them about it**.

What's more, Indiana University is showing that they follow trends and can adapt to a new social media channel that a large part of their audience probably uses. In fact, [TikTok](#)* was downloaded more than 660M times in 2018 alone and 66% of users are 29 years old or less.

Thanks for mentioning us!



Why we like this [type of post](#):

Interacting with your community is key if you want to develop your school's awareness. Sharing this type of post shows that you care about what people say and your followers will always appreciate having an account with a high following sharing their posts!

How Indiana University communicates with their audience on Twitter

UCLA is doing a great job on [Instagram](#). They share between 1 to 3 posts a week — and always have a great story to share, whether it is informational or inspirational.

Here are a couple of examples that we liked:

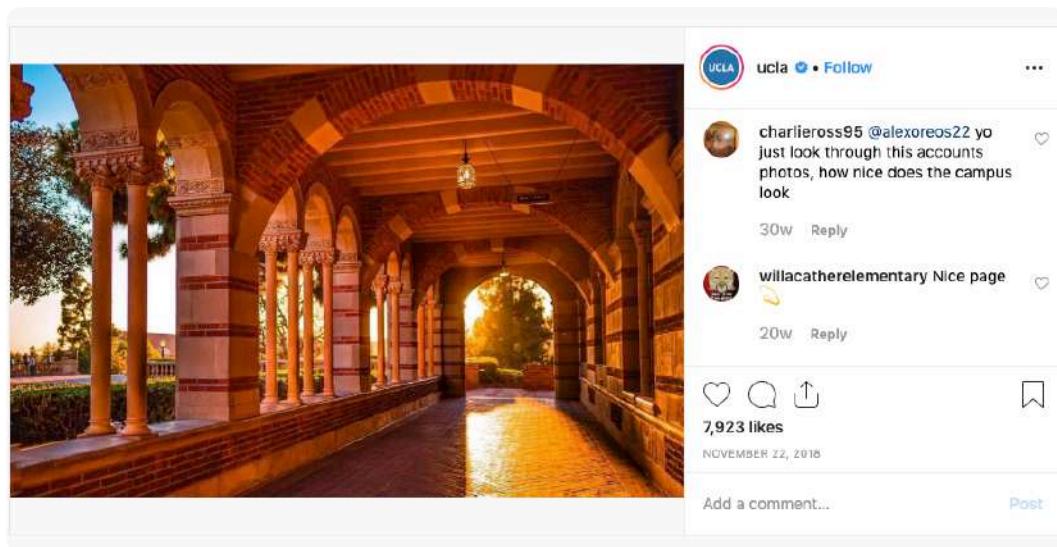
We're old, let's celebrate!



Why we like this [type of post](#):

As mentioned earlier, **schools are brands**. Brands that make it through the ages are trustworthy. Sharing key milestones and successes on social contributes to reminding how great your school is.

#WeHaveAHashtag!



Why we like this [type of post](#):

Sharing content on social media is one thing. Driving the conversation is another. By creating a *#Hashtag* of your own, you'll reinforce your school's community feeling on the one hand, and you'll create a pool of user-generated content on the other hand.



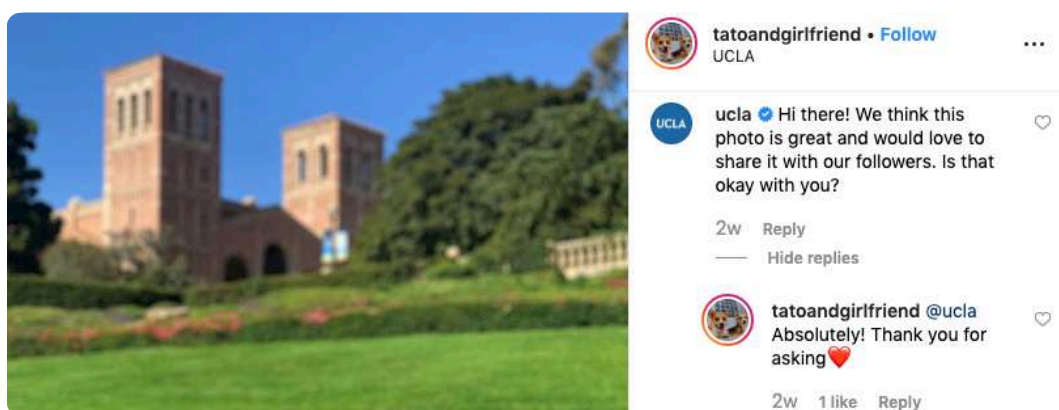
This is a 'like' magnet!



Why we like this [type of post](#):

What is there not to like in this post? UCLA is sharing one picture shared by one of their students and is inviting others to do the same, using their hashtag.

Interesting fact - The school was not quoted in the original post. They found it and asked for permission to use it.



Social media is about visual appeal. That's even more true for the college-aged population. All the more reason to get inspired by great accounts such as UCLA's.

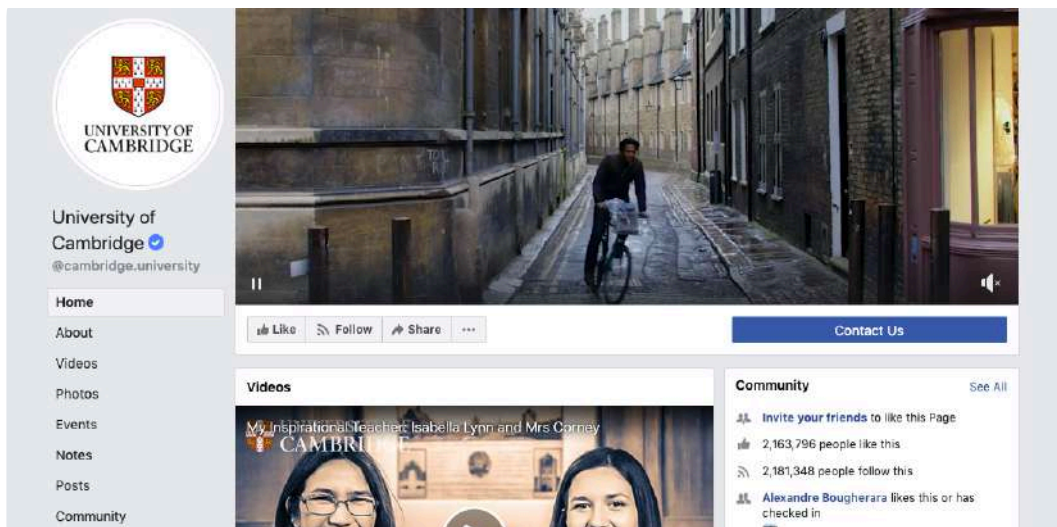
How the University of Cambridge uses Facebook to share its History

More than a social media platform, Facebook is actually a media outlet which the University of Cambridge uses to share industry and campus news, information about its school, and its history. Their community manager shares 1 to 2 posts a day on Facebook and manages to generate hundreds of likes, shares, and comments using this strategy.

Here are a couple of examples that we liked:

Hey, check out our campus!

Why we like this [type of content](#):



Given the quality of internet networks and the equipment we all have, the video format is probably the best way to share information these days. We liked that their *Facebook Page Cover* is, in fact, a short video showing life on campus and in Cambridge.

This is who we are

University of Cambridge
@cambridge.university

Home
About
Videos
Photos
Events
Notes
Posts
Community

Like Follow Share ...

About [Suggest Edits](#)

BUSINESS INFO

Founded in 1209

CONTACT INFO

Call +44 1223 337733
<http://www.cam.ac.uk/undergrad-study>
@cambridge_uni
cambridgeuniversity
cambridgeuniversity

MORE INFO

About
Official Facebook page for the University of Cambridge
Study at Cambridge: www.study.cam.ac.uk
Information about scholarships: www.cambridgetrust.org/scholarships

General Information
HOUSE RULES
We welcome your contributions to our Facebook Page – do discuss us, our research, events and breaking news....
[See More](#)

Founding Date
1209

College & University · School

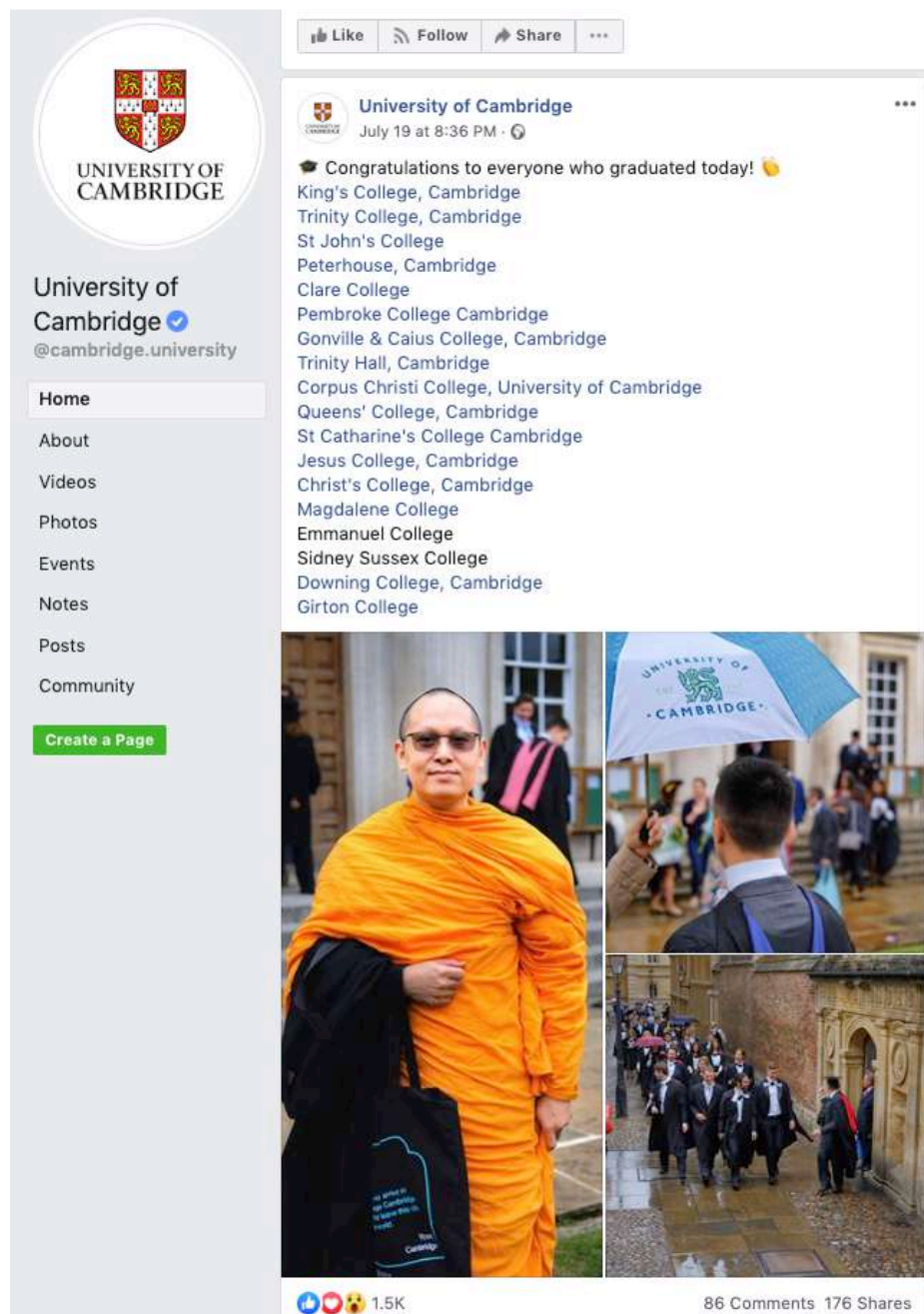
Milestones

- 2017 • Professor Stephen Toope becomes 346th Vice-Chancellor of the University
- 2010 • Homerton College gains its Royal Charter, becoming a full Cambridge College
• Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz becomes Vice-Chancellor
- 2003 • Professor Alison Richard becomes Vice-Chancellor
- 2001 • Launch of the new Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH)
- 2000 • Gates Scholarships go live.
- 1999 • Cambridge Scientists identify gene causing diabetes and high blood pressure
- 1998 • Senate-House marks the 50th Anniversary of women gaining full membership of the University
- 1997 • Mrs Molly Maxwell becomes Cambridge's oldest graduate at the age of 105
• Professor Michael Pepper and his team discover a new standard for electric current
- 1996 • Professor James Mirrlees is awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics
• H.M. The Queen visits Cambridge to open the new Law Faculty and Judge Institute of Management Studies buildings
• The Institute of Biotechnology is awarded the Queen's Award for Technology for its work on protein purification
- 1995 • Professor Sir Martin Rees becomes the Astronomer Royal
- 1993 • The Royal Commonwealth Society Library moves to Cambridge
• The Granta Backbone Network is completed, providing the University with on line computer links across Cambridge
- 1990 • The Institute of Management Studies is

Why we like this [type of content](#):

If filled properly, the about section on Facebook can be extremely informative for whoever is looking for extensive information on your school. Cambridge's About Page contains information about the school, its Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube social accounts and a very long list of key milestones that go back as far as 1284.

Congratulations are in order!



Why we like this [type of post](#):

Schools need to share a promise of excellence, as well as a strong community sense. Sharing this type of feel-good story shows that the school excels and that it's giving many students a fair chance to reach the elite, together, regardless of their backgrounds.

How Harvard University shares inspiring stories using YouTube

Often considered to be the [best University on the planet](#)*, Harvard also excels at reminding us how good they are. A great example of this is their YouTube page, where you could easily spend hours watching inspirational and well-made videos...

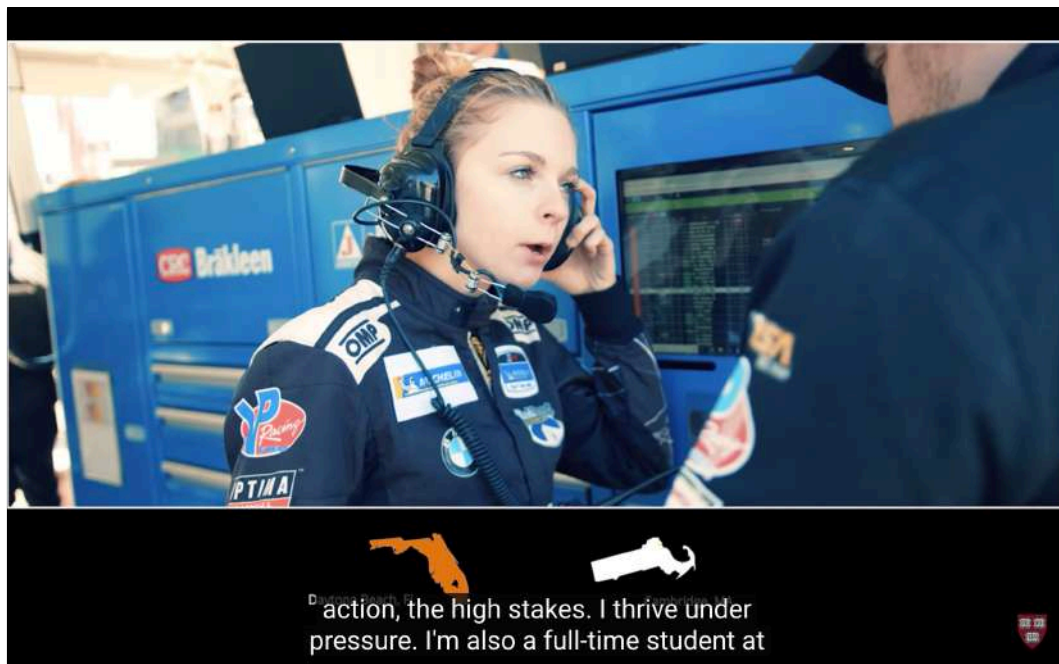
Featuring an inspirational video on the front page



Why we like this [type of post](#):

Harvard is not a typical school. They can afford to invite world-renowned personalities such as Al Gore and Angela Merkel to share their thoughts on Graduation Day. Something that you probably cannot do. However, you can invite former successful students to give a speech, film it, and produce the same kind of content.

"Harvard student Aurora Straus has drive"



Why we like this [type of post](#):

Unusual is interesting. **Unusual and inspiring is addictive.** YouTube is the perfect media to share snacking video content. Harvard University does this well and shares high-quality videos to promote how exceptional their students can be, no matter who they are, and what their dreams are.

Now that we've tackled how you can work on your school's brand awareness to make your institution known around the globe, let's see how you could make better use of social media to turn more prospective students into full-time students.



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Chapter II.

How to Leverage Social Media For Student Recruitment

The more students you enroll, the more revenue you generate. You then need to invest in new infrastructures, services, and competent teachers to welcome a growing amount of students in the best conditions.

“Just as it costs money to learn, it costs money to pay teachers. Higher education is a labor-intensive industry, and productivity gains come slowly”

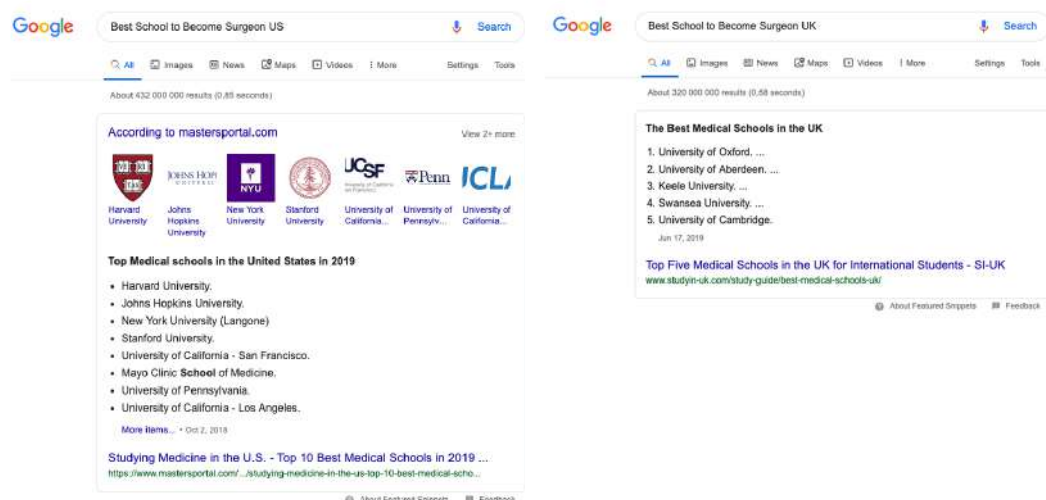
- TERRY HARTLE, A SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

And the more you invest, the more you need students to continuously generate higher revenue in order to deliver high quality education.

What's more, the number of enrolled students each year sends a clear message about the success of your school. **The more you recruit, the more appealing your school is.**

The bottom line is that increasing enrolment year after year is a necessity.

But things have changed a lot in the last few decades. Before social media, word-of-mouth, brochures, and events where usually how prospectives students would hear about your school. Nowadays, students can find and learn everything about your school, as well as competing schools - in a couple of clicks.



Now, what matters is that they pick your school. For this to happen, you need to understand your prospective students' motivations.

- Why are they pursuing their studies?
- What are their criteria to chose one university over another?

It turns out that [QS Enrolment Solutions](#)* surveyed 62,366 students in 2017 to learn more about their motivations.

Note: the information from the next two pages is based on the results of this study.

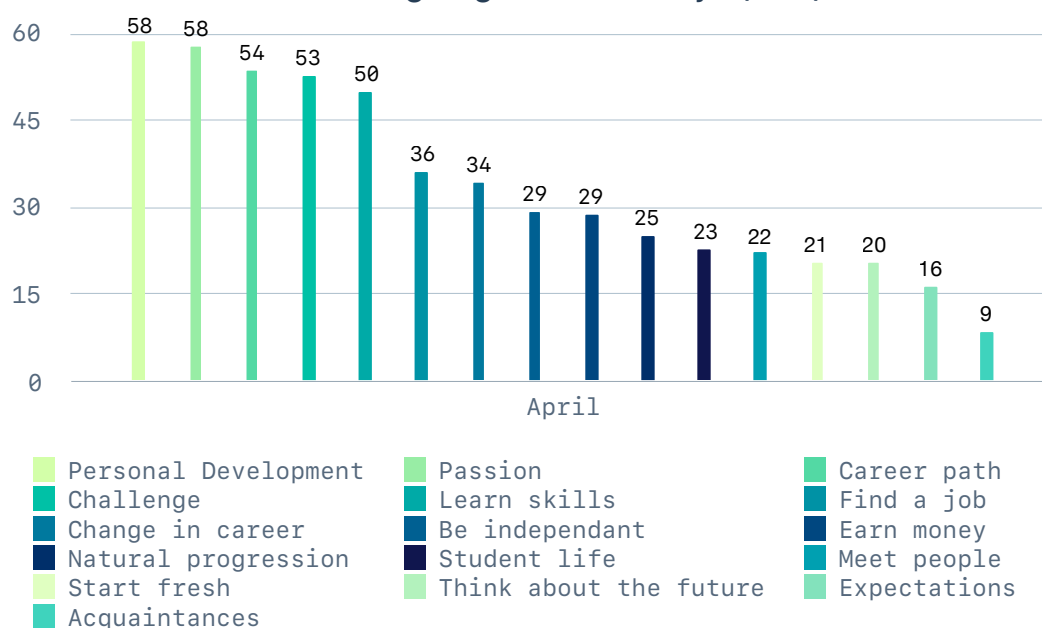




Learning and personal development are main motivations to go to university

The main motivation for students to go to university is to continue their learning and development. It turns out that most students are prioritizing much higher these two reasons than others like preparation to find a job and securing their future.

Graph. 1 — What are/were your most important reasons for wanting to go to university? (in %)

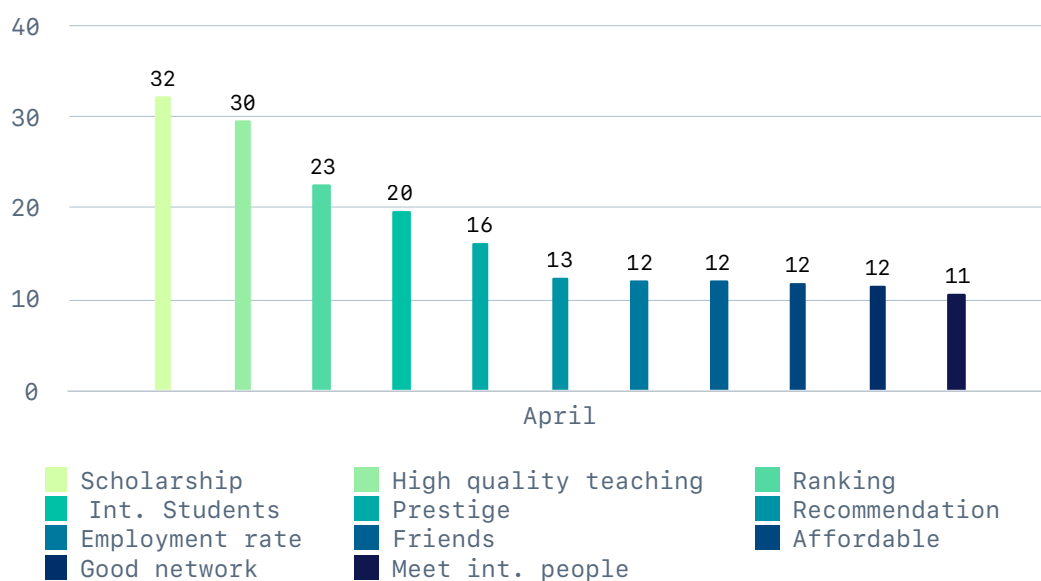




Scholarships and quality of teaching make a big difference

Now, QS Enrollment Solution's study also reveals what makes students chose a university over another. Once again, it appears clearly that **academic factors** (scholarship, high-quality teaching) are truly decisive as they appear as the #1 priority for 30% of the surveyed students.

Graph. 2 — What is the most important to you when choosing a university?



For this reason, it's a good idea to highlight on social media your school's teaching staff, the special initiatives they develop, and the unique approaches they take towards education.

With that said, the quality of life once at school appears to be critical as well. Interestingly enough, the rank of a school does not particularly stand out. This means that about 80% of the time, a student will choose a school because they liked it, and not because it's well ranked in the specialized press.

The beauty of social media is that you can communicate on all the aspects that seem to matter the most for young adults looking to study at university. **While other forms of recruitment are still necessary today, using social media can be very interesting if you play your cards right.**

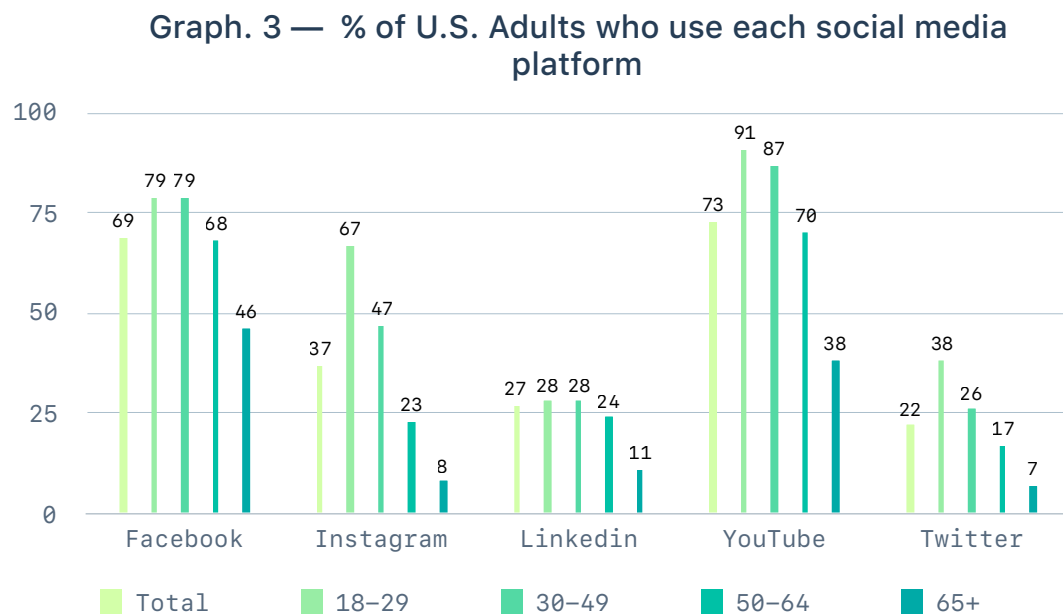
There are three main reasons as to why you should invest resources in this.

- **Students live online:** as mentioned earlier, 90% of the U.S. population aged 18-29 is on social media.
- **You can reach a much bigger audience** than when using traditional communication channels (school fairs, hard mail, word-of-mouth, paid ads, etc.).
- **It's cost-effective:** if you can pay to boost the reach of your communications on social media, you can also count on the potential virality of your owned media to reach hundreds, if not thousands of prospective students around the world, free of charge.

1. Today's students live online

Students are connected 24/7, spending a lot of their time on social media.

This is at least what we can learn from a survey conducted by the [Pew Research Center](#)*.



School brochures don't cut it anymore. When it comes to finding their dream school, students do their homework online. And their research goes beyond your website - they learn about your culture and programs from search results and social media.

“Social media plays an increasingly important role in student recruitment for many reasons - Firstly because students are making more informed decisions about where they go for their higher education, and social media is the 'loudest' voice. It keeps the name of the educational establishment current and present in their daily lives.”

— KATHY CAMPBELL, HEAD MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT, BBSN

2. You can reach a much bigger audience

Fairs and on-campus tours sure are fun and effective. After all, walking around campus and talking to enrolled students and teachers is the most convincing experience you can offer.

But how many students can you and your staff meet face-to-face? For starters, you and your colleagues don't have the time to meet and greet everyone. On the other hand, all students considering your school may not live close enough to attend such events.

Using the internet, you can expand your reach exponentially and even reach students living abroad. You can also target your marketing messages, tailoring specific campaigns and initiatives to specific demographics.

3. It's cost effective

While organizing an event on campus requires a lot of resources (staff, beverages, brochures, tours, etc.) - using social media to communicate your school's programs, policies, sports equipment, etc., will be a lot more cost-effective in terms of your time and money.

To give you a better idea, here's a comparison of advertising cost per 1000 impressions/readers on social media and in a printed newspaper.

[Social media ad costs*](#)

Platform	Monthly Active users	Cost per 1000 impressions
Facebook	2.23 billion	\$7.19 per 1000 impressions
Instagram	1 billion	\$7.91 per 1000 impressions
YouTube	1.9 billion	\$9.68 per 1000 impressions
Linkedin	294 million	\$6.59 per 1000 impressions
Twitter	335 million	\$6.46 per 1000 impressions
Pinterest	250 million	\$30 per 1000 impressions

[Newspaper ad costs**](#)

Newspaper	Circulation	Cost per 1000 readers
Washington Post	551,360	\$296,40
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	153,207	\$154,61
Bozeman Daily Chronicle	14,069	\$197,02

At this point, you should be convinced that social media is a versatile tool to consider to recruit more students. Now, let's see what tactics you could adopt to get there, based on what other schools already do (successfully).



Share relevant content to meet student's expectations

We did our homework and identified a few types of key content to improve the way you can leverage social media to attract and recruit more students online.

The key is to follow these guidelines all year long, and not only when students are starting to send their applications - at that point, it might be too late.

Tell stories around your programs and majors

According to QS Enrollment Solutions' study, high-quality teaching and personal development are playing a major part when it comes to sending an application to a higher education institution. To recruit more students, you should then make sure that the information about the majors you offer are easily accessible on your website. To add to this, don't be afraid to share short stories about the academic opportunities you offer on social media

Here's an atypical example from the University of Kentucky, sharing the story of Eric, who followed the UK's online program from Nevada



University of Kentucky ✓
@universityofky



"I attended class from my home in Kentucky, an aircraft hangar in Maryland and even in the middle of the desert in Nevada."

Learn why Eric Rannenberg says, enrolling in an online program at UK was one of the best decisions he ever made. 👉



From Marine Pilot to Horse Industry Data Scientist, Online Degree Grad in High ...
Life is a balancing act, and no one understands that more than Eric Rannenberg.
As a man with many titles — devoted husband, dedicated father and former ...
uknow.uky.edu

3:19 PM · Jul 16, 2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)

[Find the post here.](#)

This kind of post matters as it depicts the diversity of the programs your school offers. Now, social media communications work best when personified. You can talk all day long about your programs, your prospective audience won't care so much if they cannot see themselves in the story.

The key is to highlight extraordinary students and stories to find a pretext to mention your programs. Just like the University of Kentucky did with Eric.

Share teachers' academic successes

While the reputation of a school relies on the success of its students, a lot comes from the accomplishment of its teachers and researchers as well.

This is something that the most successful universities on social media tend to do a lot. It has two positive effects on your audience:

- It's **entertaining and engaging** for prospective and current students
- It shows that **your institution cares for research and innovation**. This sends a positive message to prospective students, teachers and potential investors who could fund future research.

Here's an example from the University of Bath, sharing a study on how *"cigarette smoke can make MRSA bacterial strains more resistant to antibiotics"*



University of Bath ✓
@UniofBath

Cigarette smoke can make MRSA bacterial strains more resistant to antibiotics, new research from the University of Bath has shown.

bath.ac.uk/announcements/...



12:25 PM · Jul 30, 2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)

15 Retweets 45 Likes

[Find the post here.](#)

Share your school's rankings

While it appears that this is not the most critical factor when choosing a school, rankings matter as they show what experts think about your institution.

Now, there's a ton of different rankings. What matters is that you share the ones that are legitimate and put your institution or even a single program that you offer, under the spotlight.

Here's how Bath University does it.



[Link to the page.](#)

Once you land on their page, the ranking is one of the first information you'll find.

HEC Paris is another school that excels in many ways. And when one of their key programs is featured by The Economist, they don't hesitate to share the news with their audience.



[Find the post here.](#)

Don't expect these posts to generate thousands of reactions. What matters is that you circulate the information and make sure that it lands in front of prospective students.

The same goes with your school's successes and milestones, whatever they may be: winning a football championship, qualifying to the cross-words state final, inaugurating a brand new running track or a new science lab - share the news! At the end of the day, these can make a difference when it comes to applying to a school.

Share current students' testimonials

Did you know that 84% of consumers [trust online reviews](#)* as much as a personal recommendation?

This may sound odd as distrust and alternative facts are growing on the internet, but it's the effect of what we call Social Proof.

It's a sociological law that says that we - humans - are more likely to do something if we know many others recommend doing it. Say you're browsing Amazon, looking for an iPhone XR. You find the same phone sold by two different shops:



Apple iPhone XR, Fully Unlocked, 64 GB - Black (Renewed)


★★★★★ ~ 191

Black

\$637⁹⁷ ~~\$749.99~~

Eligible for Shipping to France
In stock on August 7, 2019.

Price may vary by color





Apple iPhone X, GSM Unlocked, 64GB - Space Gray (Renewed)

★★★★★ ~ 27

Wireless Phone Accessory

More Buying Choices
\$619.99 (4 new offers)

- **Shop A** sells the phone at \$638, with almost 200 positive reviews.
- **Shop B** sells the phone at \$620, with a lot less positive reviews.

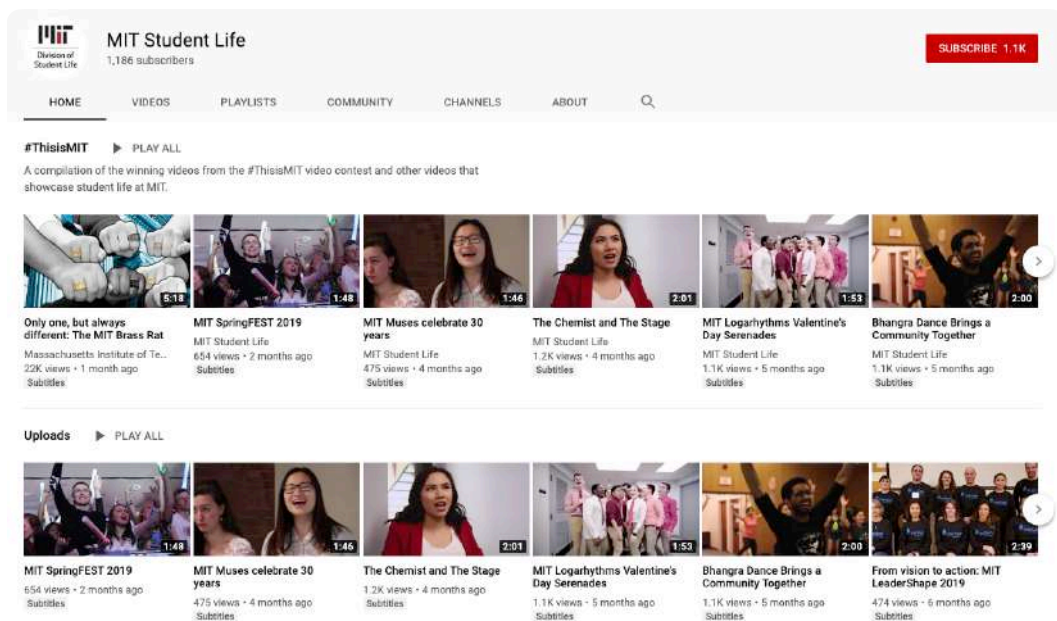
Although it's more expensive, studies say you'll purchase from **Shop A** because it has more reviews. After all, if so many customers are satisfied with this shop, there's no reason not to trust them.

It's no different for schools.

You need to leverage your current students' experiences on campus to convince younger students to apply to your school.

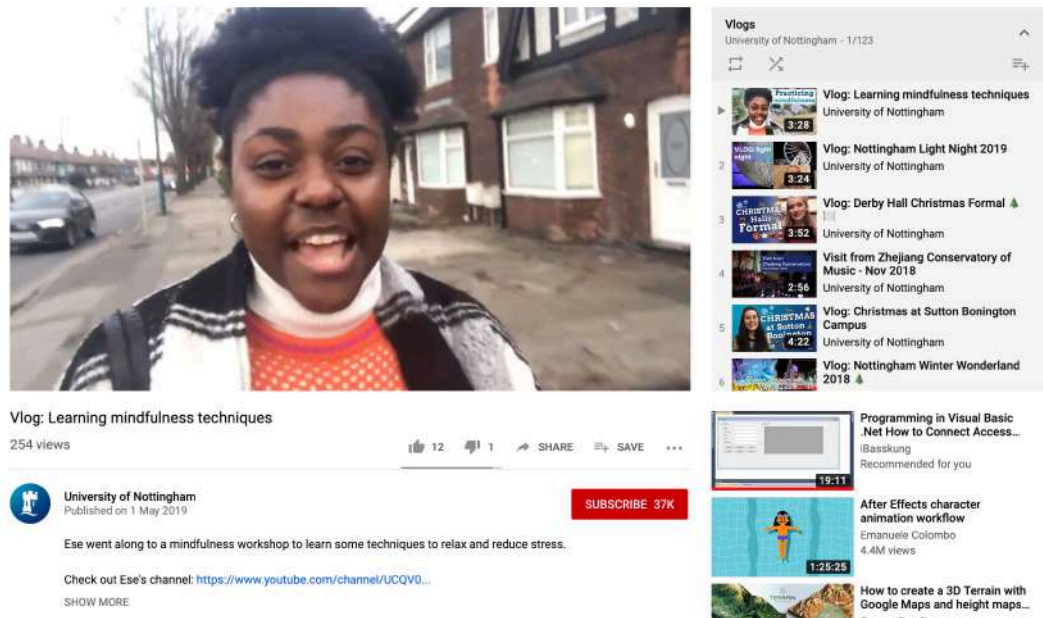
Here's an example from MIT that you should try to implement if you're not already doing it.

They understand how much student-generated content plays a part in convincing prospective applicants. Not only do they [feature student blogs on their admissions page](#)*, but they also have a YouTube channel with videos featuring students talking about college life.



[Find the page here.](#)

The University of Nottingham also has a [whole series of vlogs](#) by students covering all types of topics like first-year experiences, accommodation and dining options, the best coffee shops around campus, or even techniques to fight pre-exam stress.



[Find them here.](#)

All of this user/student-generated content offers prospective students a different perspective on your school. Sure, course offerings and admissions requirements are important, but students also care for their well being on campus.

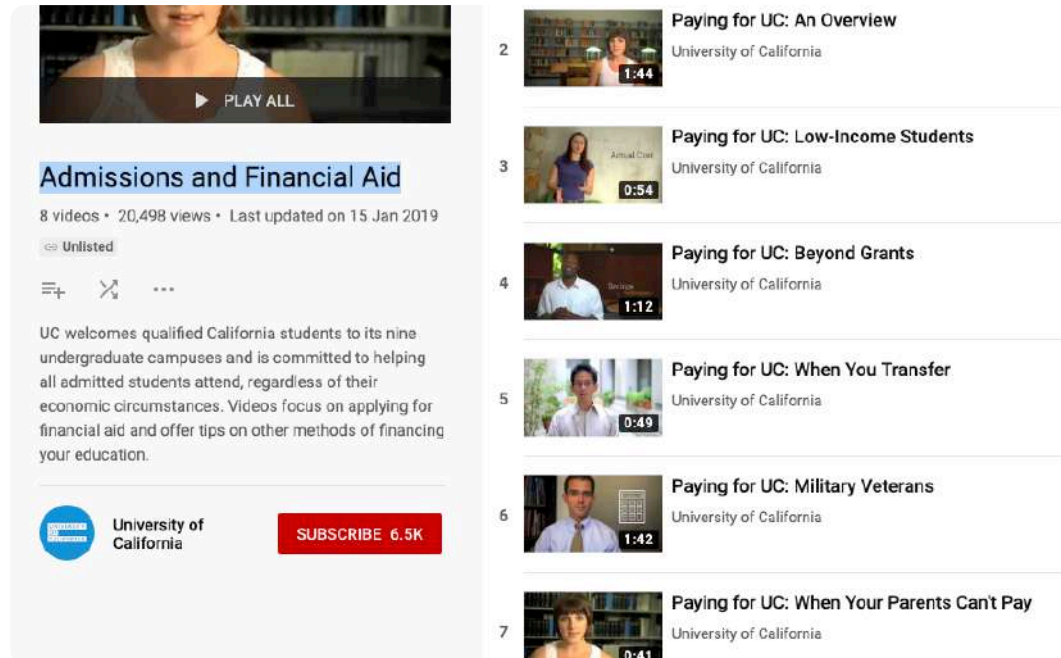
And these videos, produced by their peers, answer just that. They give applicants a better understanding of the real college experience they can have, and reasons to choose your school over another.

So pick a topic, like sports or accommodation on campus, and invite students to share their opinions and experiences. This can be done in whatever format, videos, photos, even tweets – as long as they are created by your current students.

A strategy that you should apply to your alumni community to show prospective students the opportunities that your school creates.

Be transparent about the costs involved and offer solutions

When you add up the cost of tuition fees, books, and living expenses (especially in the US and Canada), **higher-education represents a high cost** for the students and their families. So much that it can even discourage some students to apply to your school if they're not aware of the financial support they can get. Besides, as mentioned earlier, **scholarships are the factor students look the most at when applying to a school**. This is something that the University of California tackles with a series of videos on YouTube called [Admissions and Financial Aid](#).



Admissions and Financial Aid
8 videos • 20,498 views • Last updated on 15 Jan 2019

Unlisted

UC welcomes qualified California students to its nine undergraduate campuses and is committed to helping all admitted students attend, regardless of their economic circumstances. Videos focus on applying for financial aid and offer tips on other methods of financing your education.

University of California **SUBSCRIBE 6.5K**

- 2 **Paying for UC: An Overview**
University of California 1:44
- 3 **Paying for UC: Low-Income Students**
University of California 0:54
- 4 **Paying for UC: Beyond Grants**
University of California 1:12
- 5 **Paying for UC: When You Transfer**
University of California 0:49
- 6 **Paying for UC: Military Veterans**
University of California 1:42
- 7 **Paying for UC: When Your Parents Can't Pay**
University of California 0:41

Now, communication is not a *one-way* road. If you're the only one talking, you'll bore your audience.



Chat with your prospective students

“Educators and schools need to use social media. It allows students to gain a sense of trust with you, and have a personal connection. My students are able to get to know me, my values and the materials I teach before they enroll in my classes.”

— AI ADDYSON-ZHANG, WRITER AND FOUNDER OF CLASSROOM WITHOUT WALLS

As students research their dream schools and majors, they'll have a lot of questions that need answers. Questions could be more specific such as “how to choose a major”, “living on campus”, or about “scholarship” and “loan offers”.

On the other hand, they can be more broad such as: “which university should I choose.”

Whatever the questions might be, you'll want to be there to answer them.

Here's one from a student planning to apply to UCLA. She says she's *extremely* nervous. This would typically be a great opportunity for UCLA to reach out to her to give her more information about *how to apply* and how to make sure she sends a strong application.



[Link to the post.](#)

Now, UCLA never answered the tweet as they were not directly @mentioned. With the right monitoring tool, they would have been notified of the mention and could have answered to Carla.

Long story short, **UCLA missed an opportunity to show that they care.**

How to identify all relevant conversations?

You probably have an FAQ section on your website. Based on this, your best shot is to use a monitoring tool to track FAQ on social media (as well as on specialized blogs, and forums).

Here's an example using Mention:

The screenshot shows the Mention alert configuration interface. It is divided into three main sections:

- Any of these keywords:** A section for creating an alert that triggers if any of the keywords are present. It includes a text input area with the instruction "Your alert will collect mentions that contain any of these keywords, plus all required keywords." Below this are five buttons: "How", "What", "When", "Who", and "Where". A "Press 'enter' to add" prompt is at the bottom.
- All of these keywords:** A section for creating an alert that triggers only if all keywords are present. It includes a text input area with the instruction "Your alert will collect mentions that contain all of these keywords." Below this is a single button labeled "Harvard". A "Press 'enter' to add" prompt is at the bottom.
- SOURCES:** A list of sources to monitor, each with a status indicator (green checkmark for selected, grey circle for unselected). The sources are: Facebook (selected), Twitter (selected), News (unselected), Blogs (selected), Videos (selected), Forums (selected), and Images (unselected).
- LANGUAGES (10 max):** A list of languages to filter by, each with a status indicator. The languages are: French (unselected), English (selected), Spanish (unselected), German (unselected), Italian (unselected), Portuguese (unselected), and Afrikaans (unselected).

By doing so, you'd be notified each time a question would be formulated about your school on social media, blogs, and forum.

Now, that's one way to do it, **but that's not the best way.**

The best way is to use the FAQ and create an advanced alert including the "Name of your school" AND "All the potential questions you frequently receive".

Here's what it looks like on a tool like Mention:

The screenshot shows a Boolean Query in a monitoring tool. The query is entered into a text area under the "Boolean Query" tab. The query is as follows:

```
1 Harvard
2 AND
3 ("How large are classes?"
4 OR "What will my room look like?"
5 OR "How many courses does Harvard offer?"
6 OR "Must I live on campus?"
7 OR "How do I pay"
8 OR "What if english is not my first language?"
9 OR "What admissions criteria do you use?"
10 OR "Is there a wait list"
11 OR "Are loans available if I choose not to work?"
12 OR etc)
```

To give you another example, **Chester University** monitors variations of the university name to find conversations about their school for content ideas.

“We set up alerts for [University of Chester], [Chester Uni], and [Chester University]. You know, the different ways that people talk about us. I was looking for content that we could share across our networks.”

— SHAI VURE, DIGITAL MARKETING MANAGER, CHESTER UNIVERSITY

All in all, students need transparency, authenticity, and trust. If you're able to convey that your school is fueled by these values via all your communication channels, and follow some of the advice we just shared – you should in time see your recruitment results go up, significantly.

The next chapter will be less optimistic as it deals with something that's partly out of your control: online crises.



Chapter III.

How to Manage Online Crises

Another reason to do social listening for your school is to manage potential PR crises.

Despite all your efforts and good intention, **you can't always prevent a PR crisis from happening** - simply because it's out of your control.

From school databases **being hacked**, sensitive student and staff personal information being leaked, to occasions of **violent incidents** and **staff going rogue** - a lot of events can turn into a PR crisis

Things that you cannot always control can eventually damage the reputation of your school.

Now, things that you can control can help safeguard the reputation of your school.

Just in August 2019, [TechCrunch released a story](#)* questioning the safety of school record after Bill Demirkapi, an 18-year-old, hacked in Blackboard, his school's (and many others') learning management system software.

When confronting the school with this security issue, Bill said that he didn't access any other record but his and that his intention was only to report the problem.

The good news is that the vulnerability was fixed following Bill's warning. Had any other hacker with different intentions done the same, students and alumni's personal data could have been stolen, turning this worrying news into a major data crisis.

While you cannot control other people, you need to **make sure that there's no loophole on your end. This means:**

- Taking measures to **limit all potential risks on campus** (security, data management, quality of infrastructures, etc.).
- **Being as ready as one can be to face them when a crisis hits.**

Being ready matters as things can get ugly, very quickly. Also, when a crisis does hit, parents, students, teachers, partners, and journalists will potentially overreact, making things escalate very quickly.

Wearing your crisis management hat, **your job is to reassure them.**

Reassuring requires facts. And facts gathering requires **social listening**. Besides, crisis prevention is always better than crisis management. Here are **6 steps to follow to better manage such situations.**

“Schools can gather a lot of information from monitoring social media channels, which allows them to be more proactive, avoid any crises and improve the they communicate with students.”

— AI ADDYSON-ZHANG, WRITER AND FOUNDER OF CLASSROOM WITHOUT WALLS



Before a school crisis hits

1. Engage with your community to build trust and credibility

Your school's general reputation will determine how people react if and when a disaster happens.

If you have a great track record of keeping the school a safe and enjoyable environment for students, your community will trust that you can handle the crisis.

Engage with students, staff, and parents regularly to show your school cares about the wellbeing of your community. Social media is a channel of choice to spread messages and engage with students.

2. Talk about potential crises before they happen

Crises should not be taboo. In fact, **an open discussion about them is the best prevention.**

The more you mention potential crises, the better you – as an institution – will be prepared to face them. People need to be prepared.

Here's an example.

Each year, schools are inevitably hit by flu epidemics. Reminding staff and students about standard hygiene procedures all year long on information boards, on bathroom walls, and on social media will contribute to reducing the risk of propagation if and when a contagious virus hits your campus.

Not addressing potential problems leaves too much room for random events. There's already so much you don't control.

Besides, this shows your community that you're actively working and investing in everyone's well being by trying to prevent anything *unexpected* from happening.

3. Have a crisis management strategy

Having a strategy ensures that you can manage the situation more smoothly. You should have a response team ready at all times, with someone in charge of all internal and external communications.

While every staff member is important, they can't all be part of your crisis management team.

Put together a crisis management task force and assign each member with their dedicated role. You need a good mix of executive personnel (to enforce decisions), management (to coordinate), and creatives (to craft the right message). As you build your team, **answer the following questions:**

- Who will take ownership of the overall strategy – assigning tasks and ensuring the team stays on target?
- Who is responsible for identifying and monitoring potential crises?
- Who's going to inform management and/or key stakeholders?
- Who will manage social media and respond to questions?
- And who will be handling messages that come in through other channels?
- Which executive will act as a spokesperson for the media?

If you want to build a solid crisis communications strategy so that if you get hit, you can spring into action ASAP, here's a [\[free\] cheatsheet](#) you can use.

4. Listen proactively to prevent a potential crisis

Keep an eye on abnormal activity on social media. It could be a trending hashtag, a surge of negative mentions or sudden an increase in your school's mentions. Even something small can quickly turn into a major catastrophe. **There's no fire without smoke and this is usually how a crisis starts.**

An example of this is the ILSC Education Group. They [use social listening](#)* to jump on negative mentions *before* they can hurt them.

*"Sometimes we see a complaint, so we make sure it's taken care of and the situation doesn't get bigger (...) We receive a **Pulse Alert**, and we can get to work."*

* MARIA PAULA MURAD, DIGITAL MARKETING MANAGER, ILSC GROUP

A **pulse alert** is a notification you get via Mention. The tool notifies you whenever there's a sudden increase in mentions on one of your alerts.



When a school crisis hits

Sometimes, however, there is nothing you can do to prevent a crisis from happening.

5. Listen to assess damage after a crisis hits

When a PR crisis strikes, you need a [crisis management plan](#)*. You can't ever be a hundred percent prepared, but a crisis management plan gives you steps to follow to try and resolve a situation as fast as possible. Here are a few steps you can take:

Uncover what happened

Before you make a public statement on social media, make sure you know what happened. Identify the source of the problem first. You need to know who is responsible (especially if your school was the source).

Evaluate eventual impact

Once you know what happened, evaluate the impact. Using a listening tool, you can see who already knows about the crisis.

- Can you take the conversation offline?
- Are influential people talking about it?

6. React when you know what happened, and be transparent

Being honest will not always be the easiest way to go as you may face a lot of criticism, but there's no way around it.

Always take the blame if it's justified

You may have heard of an [unfortunate event](#)* back in June 2018 at the University of Maryland when a student died after fainting during football practice. It took months of investigation and an article [from ESPN](#)**, but the President of the school did finally speak out to take full responsibility for it.

"The university accepts legal and moral responsibility for the mistakes that our training staff made on that fateful workout day (...) I made this commitment to the parents this morning that no Maryland student-athlete will ever be in a situation where his or her life and safety will be at risk."

- WALLACE LOH, UMD (UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND) PRESIDENT

The school took the time to understand what exactly happened, took responsibility, and put an end to this devastating PR crisis.

Share updates as often as you can

Speculation is the perfect fuel for gossip. If you don't inform the public regularly about an ongoing situation, people will start speculating and drawing their conclusions. The last thing you need in these situations is misinformation and rumors spreading online.

The only way to prevent this from happening is to be transparent: **send regular updates to keep everyone informed-until the crisis is over.**

Unfortunate events happen at every school. But you can do your best to prevent them, have a solid plan, and manage them effectively when the time comes without losing your cool.



After a school crisis hits

7. Learn from online crises and make sure they don't happen again

According to Murphy's Law, *"Anything that can go wrong will go wrong"*. This means that no matters how hard you try, **failure and crises are inevitable**. And there's nothing you can do about it.

Now, what you can do, is learn from these tough experiences, especially if you managed to identify **what happened**. From there, modify your existing crisis management strategy so you're better prepared next time.

- **If you** (or your institution) **were at fault**: what did you do wrong? Was there a breach of security? Bad staff management? Investigate and create preventive measures to ensure similar situations won't happen again. Bottom line, is it something that you can fix?
- **If you were not at fault**: take measures to prevent any other event that could hurt the image of your institution.

Conclusion.

Time to do your homework

Brand awareness, recruitment, crisis and reputation management are all interconnected.

To project a respected and popular school reputation, you'll need to have a strategy for each of these areas. Social media management is no longer a nice-to-have for schools - it has become a must-have. Now, the challenge is far from being simple as having a social media presence is not enough. **HigherEd institutions need to master their communication strategy for the digital age.**

Besides, with so many universities and colleges using social media the right way, there's no way around it. This is especially true when it comes to student recruitment - if they can't find what they're looking for at your school, they'll go elsewhere.

People want to be part of something bigger, and they want to be part of a community – they want to find others like them. Social media is one of the most effective tools you can use to increase the awareness of your school's brand, elevate your reputation, and grow your community.

Now, all you have to do is set out a proper strategy to use it.

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Mention is a social media marketing suite enabling brands and agencies to compare and analyze important conversations online, plan and schedule social media posts, create content based on relevant insights, and keep up your social media calendar wherever you are.

Our all-in-one social media management suite offers superior listening capabilities, social media publishing, and community management. We've helped over 4,000 enterprise clients and over 750,000 users worldwide improve their communications and marketing strategies.

Learn more on mention.com

