



Higher Education Marketing in a Post-Pandemic Future:
Strategy Adjustment for Tufts to Attract More Students

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It is not a stretch to say COVID-19 has disrupted nearly every aspect of daily life. The Covid pandemic has influenced everything from the way people work, to shop, to exercise. Just look at [Peloton](#) - the at home exercise equipment and media company's sales increased by 232% over the course of the pandemic. Sadly, Peloton's success story does not represent the majority of companies. Looking at the Dow Jones during March 2020 gives insight into the struggles the American economy has faced – “In barely four trading days, Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) plunged 6,400 points, an equivalent of [roughly 26%](#). Many industries have needed to shift their sales and marketing strategies to combat the effects of the pandemic. Education is not immune to this either – in the fall of 2020 only [4%](#) of colleges were planning on having an entirely in person semester. That being said, this has led to the rise of virtual learning, which is projected to be [a \\$370 billion/year](#) industry by 2026. The question then becomes, how will higher education change post-pandemic? For Tufts University, two clear answers emerged from the pandemic – virtual learning is a viable and desired option for many students, and in-person learning remains at a premium. The overarching objective for Tufts is to increase the number of students in the short term while ensuring the quality of both the candidates and the education.

Marketing-guru Peter Drucker says, “Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two--and only two--basic functions: marketing and innovation.” Tufts is a business – their clients are their students, and their service is education. That means Tufts must directly market to prospective students during the college application process and must innovate to provide those students with the best possible education. Innovation must come in the form of remote education. During the pandemic it became clear that online learning is a viable option and that top universities are still able to educate students at a high level, regardless of the modality. Online education is gradually moving from introductory and growth stages to the maturity stage. Tufts can implement everything that they learned in the past to make a standout online program: Use the 2020 school year as a beta test

for online learning and launch an improved version for the fall. Virtual education plays into the first of the two student personas Tufts must market towards.

There are two main personas that Tufts must market towards: the first being the post-pandemic virtual student. Tufts provides a world class education and is oftentimes ranked within the [top 30 schools](#) in the country. Tufts does not have a quality of education or brand problem, but they do have a growth problem. Given Tufts' location, they simply cannot expand physically. Campus has a limited number of dorms and cannot buy many more off-campus apartments. One area of innovation resides in virtual education. This is by no means a plan to replace the in-person education that is offered historically. This is a plan to attract highly qualified students who would either remain virtual after the pandemic or want to have the Tufts brand at a reduced price. If Tufts were to build and offer an entire online school - which would require hiring new staff and faculty – then Tufts could market towards students who would prefer a remote college experience. The main selling point here is the reduction in cost. The [price of higher education](#) drops off quickly when on-campus resources are not a factor. Tufts must convey the message that they can offer the same quality of education at a fraction of the cost. Tapping into the virtual market would allow Tufts to grow its student base and allow Tufts to compete for quality students who do not want to pay the premium for a private college education.

Another key message to convey, is that employers do not differentiate between in [person and online degrees](#), and online programs have become more normalized due to the influx of virtual learning. Tufts is in an optimal position for growth by venturing into the virtual education market through leveraging their brand and offering their high-class education at a reduced cost.

Because Tufts spent the second half of the 2020 Spring semester and the entirety of the 2020-2021 school year primarily doing remote learning, they have a massive catalogue of online classes and pre-recorded content. They can use this to their advantage when marketing to prospective students. Colleges oftentimes send carbon-copy emails to prospective students.

They attach bland newsletters that could be sent to any given student. Tufts has the opportunity to personalize the experience and to excite their prospective students. When reaching out to students via email, Tufts should ask students what their favorite subject in school is and once they learn this information, send a video of a sample online class (or pre-recorded lecture) with the top faculty member from the chosen subject. An example would be a student responding saying they are interested in mathematics, and Tufts sends a pre-rerecorded sample lecture from a Discrete Math class. This would allow for students to engage with the university before attending and would be given insight into the engaging content that Tufts has to offer. It would make a personal connection with the student as their interests would be listened to, and it would give the student first-hand experience with Tufts' quality of education.

The second persona to market towards, is the "Ivy-School Reject." Although Tufts is a highly ranked and well-respected university, they cannot compete with the brands of Ivy League schools, or MIT or Stanford. But Tufts *can* compete with similarly ranked schools like NYU or Bowden. It serves Tufts no purpose to market against Ivy League schools – Tufts simply will not outcompete Harvard or Yale in both academics and athletics perspectives. However, Tufts can tap into the pool of rejected students from those schools in the ED round. This should not be misconstrued as Tufts not seeking to attract the best and brightest students – it's exactly the opposite. By focusing marketing efforts on students who did not get into their dream schools, Tufts can attract highly qualified students who were unlucky and slipped through the cracks of other top tier colleges.

This plays into the article "Growth Opportunities for Brands During the Covid-19 Crisis." Tufts' goal should not be to compete with the behemoths at the top of the college food chain, but it should excel at differentiating itself as the next best option.

The optimal way to market to these students is to buy into ED2. Tufts needs to make itself known immediately after ED schools return their acceptance and rejection letters. Tufts has the opportunity to differentiate itself in the eyes of highly motivated and highly qualified

students before they enter the regular decision pool. This is at the heart of inbound - deliver the right message, at the right time, to the right people. What is the right message? Tufts provides a better education than any other NESCAC school (Tufts can highlight their strong engineering and CS departments as they are the only NESCAC other than Trinity that has an engineering program). When is the right time? Right after the top 15 colleges have released their ED decisions. Who is the right person? The students who were qualified to attend but rejected from a top 15 school and are currently looking for their next best option. It has been shown that about [1/4 of perfect SAT](#) score students get rejected from Harvard and other Ivy league schools - those students are likely to be as competent as any accepted student, and Tufts needs to make a statement on the ED II admission benefits such as higher acceptance rate, thus incentivizing these students to apply.

Tufts could make waves in the world of academia by leveraging President Tony Monaco. The marketing plan would be centered around "The Tony Monaco Scholarship Fund." During the pandemic, US unemployment rose [to 24.5% at its peak](#). Tufts, which offers a year of schooling for \$60k + another \$15k for room and board, is too expensive for the vast majority of families, particularly in a time when 1/4 of the population is currently or was recently unemployed. The fact that only less than 40% of incoming students at Tufts get some form of financial assistance also sets a barrier between qualified applicants and Tufts. The Tony Monaco Scholarship Fund is a novel idea but would be highly marketable, allowing Tufts to provide significantly more financial aid. As it stands, President Monaco makes [\\$975,015 a year](#), which does not include the presidential house and office also provided by the school. For the 2021-2022 school year, Tony Monaco would halve his salary (while keeping his house and other assets) and the \$487,507.5 would go into a scholarship fund for incoming students whose family have been affected by the pandemic. This would be virtually unheard of, while showing a sign of unity from the school. Tufts' president is willing to make a sacrifice on his salary so that Covid-affected students can still have the opportunity to attend a world class institution (in case there is any protest on the

“fairness” towards President Monaco, \$487,507.5 would still put him in the top 1% of all earners in the USA).

This scholarship fund would essentially market itself, but here is what Tufts could do to promote it. The Tufts administration could write a newsletter outlining the program and record an interview with President Monaco, who would speak on the benefits of the program and the need for selflessness in a time of disarray. The school could add an “affected by covid (in any capacity)” question to their application and would offer the scholarship money to as many students as possible who respond “yes” to that question. Between the novelty of the program, a newsletter, outreach by president Monaco himself, and an additional question on their application, Tufts could make a large splash in the upcoming recruiting class.

Tufts is in a prime position to expand. The university can add a virtual program on top of their already existing in-person education. They can leverage their brand and a reduced cost of remote learning to attract highly qualified students who cannot afford a conventional college education or who are fearful of getting sick even post pandemic (or prefer the convenience of studying from home). Tufts can hire teaching staff specifically for virtual learning, which is both cost and space efficient. Programs including but not limited to Computer Science, Data Science, Math and International Relations all have been taught effectively in the remote setting, and more courses can be specifically designed to adapt to the virtual environment.

Please see below for a table of tactics and a graphic representing the budgetary expenses that Tufts should implement for the upcoming college application cycle.

Table of Tactics

Tactics to use	Why use it	Frequency of Usage	Estimated budget
Video clips: send through email and post on social media pages	Engages with prospective students on more personal level and shows Tufts' quality of class	Sent to every student who shows interest in Tufts via email or online sign ups (could add this option to the "scheduling tour" section of admissions page).	Professional video editing rates range between \$75 to \$150/hr. To reduce cost, perhaps the school can incentivize students to help create the video clips through prizes of \$100 in Jumbocash.
Paid traffic on social media(Instagram, Facebook and YouTube)	High school students use social media every day, especially Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Tufts only has 41.8k followers on Instagram, 59.2k on Facebook, and the most viewed video published by Tufts has only 12.3k views on YouTube. It's extremely difficult for prospective applicants to notice Tufts on social media without external marketing methods.	Tufts should implement the paid traffic tactics starting from December 5th to 25th, which matches the range between ED results release and the deadline to apply for Tufts ED2 on January 1st.	Paid traffic charges by the total clicks on the advertisement content that you post. The average Instagram ads CPC (cost-per-click) is around \$0.50 – \$1.00. Using the median, \$0.75, as a price reference for all platforms, if the promotions receive 20,000 clicks in total, the cost by paid traffic would be \$15,000, which is only 25% of the annual tuition of an undergraduate student.
Marketing outreach targeting international students, especially Chinese students: 1)effectively use social media including WeChat, Weibo and Xiaohongshu 2)approach admission	Over 370,000 Chinese students currently attend U.S universities, making China the number one source of international students. Most Chinese parents only know about Ivies, Stanford, M.I.T and big public schools such as UCLA. Even among the ones who are considering	Tufts should market to both Chinese students and their parents. An effective way to do so is to regularly post blogs on popular Chinese social media that's suitable for content related to education, such as WeChat. <i>One blog or article every two weeks throughout the year is sufficient.</i> Tufts can also approach admission counseling agencies, which are very commonly	Tufts can incentivize their Chinese student body to assist with the marketing process by providing \$20 per blog as reward. By the frequency of 1 blog per two weeks, the estimated total cost is \$420 annually. Tufts can also communicate with TCSSA to plan outreach events in China.

counseling agencies	studying abroad, only a few know about Tufts.	used by native Chinese students when applying for U.S colleges.	
Making virtual classrooms independent from in-person school	Tufts cannot grow physically, but they can grow virtually while offering the same quality of education at a reduced price	A select number of classes would be added for fall, spring and summer, and condensed courses would be offered over the winter.	Zoom for Education is billed on an annual basis starting at \$1,800 per year. The Large Meeting add-on is \$50 per month, per host.
User Review and Q&A responses	High school students rely heavily on review sites and ranking websites when comparing colleges. High-quality user reviews will provide potential applicants with more authentic information about Tufts, giving a deeper impression.	10-15 reviews on each platform, including US News, College Confidential, Niche, and Quora.	Incentivize students to write reviews through prizes of \$15 in Jumbocash or equivalent gift cards. 15 reviews will incur a cost of \$225.
Monaco Scholarship	A featured scholarship program could attract a large new pool of applicants who didn't consider applying to Tufts for its expensive tuition.	Depending on how much money is allotted to each student, anywhere from 7-50 students per year would be offered the scholarship.	No cost on Tufts' end, but President Monaco is expected to sponsor \$400,000 to implement the plan.
Monaco Scholar Fund (MSF) Newsletter + Blog	Increase visibility and information for the program	1-3 Newsletters following the launch of the program	Communicate with Tufts Now to publish the marketing content without charge.
"Affected By Covid-19" Question of Application	Show Tufts cares about its perspectives students and acts as a built-in survey for MSF	Added to common application - will be seen by every student.	No cost