

College Marketing 101:

An Authoritative Guide to Unlocking the Elusive College Market

White Paper

Understanding the College Mindset

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What is College Marketing?



College students are the economic force of the future!

The college market is unlike any other target market; college students are constantly moving, constantly connected, and newly independent. The core college consumer is between 18-24 years old, while millennials range from 16-34 years old. While college students are a subset of millennials; they're a niche group that marketers should pay attention to.

Most undergraduate students are young, many of them fresh out of high school. As young adults, they suddenly have increased spending power, and they *don't* have monetary commitments that come later like children, pets, or a home. This ideal balance, combined with their newfound independence, works in favor of college marketing. Brands can form meaningful relationships with students during this impressionable period—relationships that could extend throughout their collegiate career and well into adulthood.

At a glance, college marketing is a relatively straightforward concept: brands promoting their products or services to college students. In practice, however, reaching college students is anything but simple. The college demographic is increasingly distrustful of institutions and wary of corporate advertising and brand messaging.

College marketing provides brands with the opportunity to overcome these obstacles—through the use of innovative peer-to-peer marketing tactics utilized on-campus, online, and on mobile devices—in order to reach this highly lucrative demographic.

The benefit of college marketing is that it homes in on this niche demographic—it brings the advertising to the students' physical and online space—reducing the waste of advertising dollars. It drives conversations through organic outreach, which resonates with students.



Why Target College Students?



College students are a worthwhile niche demographic that marketers should not overlook. College students are at a transitional time in their lives—a time where they are developing their independence and establishing consumer buying trends. The beauty of the college consumer is that they haven't formed many strong brand loyalties yet. Their college years are the formative years in their adult consumer lives and brands that reach students during this impressionable period have the chance to gain lifetime customers.

So what about modern students makes collegiate marketing an especially important subset of marketing in general?

- **1. Socioeconomic background.** There is a strong statistical correlation between increasing family income level and a child's likelihood of completing an undergraduate degree. Put simply, the majority of college students are from middle-class or higher backgrounds, and this means they will likely have more disposable income, making them better targets for brands and businesses.
- **2.** Today's college students represent a lucrative demographic. Discretionary spending is on the rise and in 2013, "college students control[ed] a massive \$404 billion in total spending power, including \$117 billion in discretionary purchasing and \$287 billion in non-discretionary spending." College students are the economic force of the future.
- **3.** The "College Image." A medley of cultural influences (movies, television, parents, peers, etc.) work together to create an idealized image of life on campus as some mixture of playground, networking site, academic Mecca, and general promised land. This image drives college students to consume the various products that support it in real or imagined ways: alcohol, designer fashion, textbooks, travel, electronics, even certain kinds of food (energy drinks and pizza jump to mind). Brands can create an ad that resonates with students by relating it to this "college image".
- **4.** Newfound freedom and responsibility. College students want to experience their newfound freedom and the responsibilities that go with it. They haven't established fixed buying habits and are still exploring their surroundings. Many students have to purchase products for the first time. This provides a great opportunity for college advertising as students will welcome product samples and information.
- **5. Strong social clout.** College students have strong influence over others. They make great brand advocates. They value connectivity and if they like a company's products, they will spread the word on social media sites and in person. If you can capture this valuable demographic, they will inspire other generations.



Understanding the College Mindset

They're Digitally Dependent

There's no denying that technology has changed the way college students live. The digital world is an integral component of their everyday lives. They seamlessly navigate between the offline and online worlds and use technology as a tool to boost efficiency, to socialize, and to stay attuned to the latest news and events.



This Plugged-In Generation Uses Multiple Devices Simultaneously

College students spend 60% of the day interacting with technology – 14.4 hours daily.³

A majority (68%) of students use three or more devices every day. 4

87% [of college students] never leave without their cell phone. 5

By the end of 2016, eMarketer estimates nine out of 10 undergraduate students of all ages and enrollment types will own a smartphone. ⁶

They're Mobile Dependent

College students are digital natives and are accustomed to having the internet's vast information pool at their fingertips. They are dependent on the digital world and if that connection is severed they become uncomfortable. College students' phones have become extensions of themselves—their link to the world at large.

"I am very attached to it as I am constantly sending and receiving e-mails, checking Facebook, and playing different games or using applications. Our cellphones have become such a large part of our lives, it is the one thing I always have with me at all times."

A student attending the University of Maryland



They're Wary of Traditional Advertising



The college demographic is increasingly distrustful of corporations and institutions. This is not surprising, given the fact they're living in uncertain times and face economic challenges ahead; they can't even be certain that the degrees they're pursuing will help them gain careers in their field of study.

College students are at a stage in their early adult lives where they're beginning to establish their independence and the last thing they want is for corporations to tell them how to live and what to buy. College students are developing their critical thinking skills and don't take commercials or ads at face value. They are skeptical of traditional advertising, especially when an ad boasts how cool a product is or has a celebrity endorsement they don't find credible. They value word-of-mouth from friends and peers, as they feel these are more genuine than traditional forms of advertising.

"Most celebrity endorsements don't even make sense. There's no reason to believe a multimillionaire celebrity wants that \$29.99 trinket from Target." Male, 26, NC

"We must not forget how peer-to-peer sharing, social media and products like the iPhone have shaped their definition of what 'immediate' and 'consumption' means. Beyond events, trends and products, the most influential shaping comes from their peers. This is often overlooked."

B. J. Birtwell

President of the Armory Ad Agency and Production Company

"News media has made me completely apathetic to the outside world. I get 8 different stories of the same event depending on where I look, so I just avoid it." ¹⁰

Male, 23, IN



They're On the Go and Value Convenience



College students keep strange hours and have busy schedules. Their lives are a combination of work and play. Students have a lot on their plates with classes, studying, internships, research, papers, and projects. Then factor in their social and extracurricular activities in addition to their academic responsibilities and their time is really at a premium.

One of the reasons college students value technology so highly is the convenience it affords them. At any given moment, they can browse the internet's vast pool of knowledge and find the information or entertainment they seek. Their connection to the internet has enabled them to have a "watch it when you want it" mentality, making traditional TV programming less appealing.

College students value convenience and are willing to pay for products and services that meet their on-the-go demands. College students like having options and they value businesses that cater to their wants and needs.

"Eating weird is the new normal. If students eat any square meals per day, it might be one. The rest is filled with snacks and food on the go." 11

Shawn LaPean

Executive Director of Cal Dining at the University of California-Berkeley

"As college students our time is so precious. When we get busy, it's worth spending that extra bit of money." 12

Blaire Burke, a student at the University of Florida

It is obvious that anyone can *survive* without having [a smartphone]. However, the productivity, convenience, time-efficiency, and omniscience are clearly worth it for any student living in 2013. ¹³

Sean Li, a student at Cornell University



10 Best Practices for Reaching College Students



1. Use Peer-to-Peer Marketing

Businesses sometimes have trouble reaching college students on campus due to limited access and students' tendency to shy away from traditional advertising. Brands can reach the elusive college market by breaking advertising barriers using student agents. This allows brands to access college campuses and space typically reserved for students, such as dorm rooms, dining halls, libraries, classrooms, and student unions.

Using student agents does more than just bypass the physical obstacles; it also breaks down barriers with students. College students are more likely to engage with their peers than with companies. Student agents have points in common with other students and can foster organic conversations about your brand with their peers, generating real interest.

The power of influence is huge among the college demographic. This has to do in large part with authenticity and trust. College students are wary of advertising and brand messaging; recommendations that come from a peer or friend carry more weight than traditional advertising. They are more likely to listen to the advice from someone they know, as the source is more credible and the recommendation more personal.

Peer-to-peer marketing is not restricted to the physical campus, but can be used on social media sites as well. Using peer-to-peer influence on social media sites is a great way to attract attention and generate brand awareness. College students like to be the first in the know and love to set trends. They monitor what their peers are doing and buying to maintain up-to-date knowledge of future trends. Unlike banner ads, P2P marketing via social networking channels produces results and garners attention.

"People share, read and generally engage more with any type of content when it's surfaced through friends and people they know and trust." ¹⁴

Facebook Spokesperson Malorie Lucich

Peer-to-Peer marketing is the crux of college marketing



2. Market Experiences with Event Marketing



It's becoming increasingly profitable to market experiences to college students, as they value experience over material goods. The youth mindset is changing and advertisers must change their youth marketing tactics to realign with college students' values. Consumer goods no longer have the appeal that they once did with this demographic. The youth are undergoing an attitudinal reevaluation of their wants and desires. They are no longer satisfied with mere possessions; instead they want to be a part of something larger, to experience something grander.

"The reason we acquire "stuff" is becoming more about what we get from the acquisition. Purchasing something isn't really about the thing itself anymore. Today, a product or service is powerful because of how it connects people to something--or someone--else. It has impact because we can do something worthwhile with it, tell others about it, or have it say something about us."

15

Josh Allan Dykstra, Founder of the consulting firm Strengths Doctors

Advertisers trying to reach the college market need to focus on marketing experiences to the youth. The product itself should not be the highlight of the ad, but rather what the product allows you to experience. The key is to build upon the college experience in fun, innovative ways and to deliver the message in an engaging fashion that is easily relatable. This requires some creativity and forethought as the correlation between brands and the college experience is not always readily apparent.

For example, "the vitamin supplement Emergen-C is providing samples in hotel rooms and bars to re-invent itself as a hangover remedy" to appeal to the spring break crowd. This shows that a product not typically associated with the college scene—in this case vitamins—can be transformed and given a new look as a way of reaching college students. Emergen-C successfully placed their product into the spring break environment by building on the college experience.

Event marketing gives your company the opportunity to interact with students, allowing them to experience your product and participate in your brand's story. It's about engaging students in meaningful, interactive ways. College event marketing has the ability to break into the self-absorbed world of the youth, captivating students and leaving worthwhile impressions. It takes fleeting moments and transforms them into lasting memories. A company should use college event marketing as a way of reaching college students, forming person-to-person connections.

The whole point of event marketing is the interaction—the chance to start a conversation about your brand. It's a way to gain invaluable insight into how your consumers feel about your product, allowing them to voice their opinions.



Example of College Event Marketing

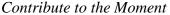
Innovative snack companies and brands are turning towards college experiential marketing and college event marketing in lieu of more traditional marketing approaches when advertising to students.

Associate your brand with an event they'll remember

The whole strategy behind college event marketing is the ability to create a brand experience for students that they'll remember, so they'll form memories of the event and link it with your product. By choosing a day that's significant to them, they'll be more inclined to remember those events. A company that utilized this approach in a creative way was DORITOS® in their DORITOS® Collisions college marketing campaign.

They chose to execute a college experiential marketing campaign at colleges nationwide on the day of and the day prior to the 2008 presidential election. The campuses were already filled with buzz about the upcoming election and DORITOS® capitalized on this excitement by having college street teams pass out bags of DORITOS® and encourage voter participation. They chose a current event that was relevant to college students and used a significant date for marketing the campaign—the day many students were allowed to vote for the first time.







Be a Part of the Experience

Revitalize your college marketing approach by using college experiential marketing and gain an edge over the competition by marketing an experience. Students will appreciate the creative approach and spread the word to their friends.



3. Utilize Cross-Platform Marketing



The best college marketing approach is to have an integrated marketing campaign that utilizes peer-to-peer influence on and offline in a way that contributes to the college experience.

On-campus marketing still plays a vital role in college marketing since college campuses have the highest concentration of 18-24 year olds gathered in a relatively small, compact space.

However, digital marketing cannot be ignored, as the digital world is a prominent component of college students' lives.

"I think that the knee-jerk reaction is, 'Get our brand onto Campus. What matters more is marketing that transcends the college campus and extends more into the college experience." 17

Mike Poznansky Founder of Neato



College students' behaviors are multifaceted. They're constantly participating in multi-screening activities and are huge multi-taskers. However, they still value face-to-face connections highly and recognize the need to "unplug" sometimes.

By utilizing on-campus, social, and mobile marketing, brands mimic students' behavior. This generates awareness across platforms and reinforces the targeted message. There are a lot of advertisements vying for students' attention. One way to stand out among the clutter is through cross-platform marketing.

By advertising online and offline where students study, live, and play, marketers will have a higher return on investment. This integrated approach successfully covers the places students spend their time.





Example of a Successful Cross-Platform Marketing Approach

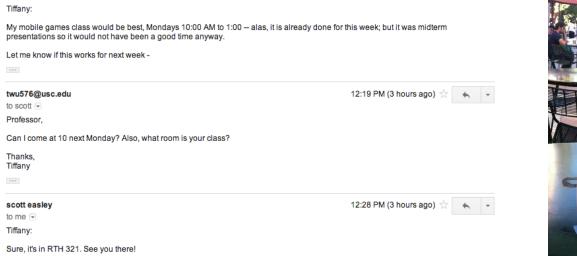
Microsoft's Imagine Cup Increases Student Response Rate Through College Marketing



Microsoft Imagine Cup encourages innovative techsavvy students to participate in their world technology competition. Given the wide range of the contest Microsoft wanted a more effective way of reaching college students---particularly in the United States—to maximize exposure and increase the contestant pool. The company began working with NAM Youth Marketing, utilizing their college advertising network, to increase awareness among STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and computer science students at select universities nationwide through a multitude of marketing channels.

Solution

The campaign outreach effort was conducted at 29 tech-heavy campuses nationwide and consisted of media distribution, P2P marketing, and social media marketing. Campus posters were placed on bulletin boards in STEM and computer science buildings. Table tents and college door room door hangers were used as a branding mechanism by Student Brand Ambassadors who actively went on campus and engaged students through hand-to-hand marketing, classroom announcements, and presentations through career services. They also engaged with professors and department heads, and utilized social media to start organic conversations with student groups. By utilizing student ambassador connections, Microsoft was able to circumnavigate bureaucratic barriers that had previously obstructed college advertising campaigns.





With a heavy focus on STEM areas on campus, combined with a well-balanced media approach consisting of OOH, P2P, experiential, social media outreach and digital marketing via direct email, Microsoft's Imagine Cup increased reach among their target audience and saw a 70% direct marketing response rate.



4. Get Your Message Into the Dorms



Do you know that 40 percent of full-time students live on campus?¹⁸ This makes dorm room door hangers an easy and effective way of marketing to college students—reaching 40% of the student population! Dorms have the highest concentration of students on campus, making it the ideal college advertising arena. Placing door hangers directly on dorm room doors draws students' attention to the highly visible, evocative ads.



In addition to placing the door hangers throughout the dorms, student agents can engage their peers by distributing the door hangers hand to hand and by giving short announcements at target student groups and classrooms. They can access highly-trafficked locations on campus, where they interact with students and start conversations about your brand. This maximizes exposure and ensures that your campus ads reach their intended target.

Bring your message into the homes of students!



5. Tell a Story



Marketing to college students using a compelling story or innovative idea, will lead to a successful college advertising campaign. The focus of any college advertising strategy is to increase awareness of your brand and gain new clientele. A successful college advertising campaign prioritizes the concept above all else. A compelling story or an innovative new experience will capture students' attention.

With so many social media marketing platforms out there, and new ones constantly on the horizon, it takes herculean effort not to be swept into cyberspace. But you must resist this temptation and focus on developing an intriguing idea before ever worrying about the technological aspect.

Constructing a story that demonstrates the connectivity of your product or brand will have huge impact on the college demographic, as they value interconnectedness tremendously. They want to know how your product brings people together and how it will add to their experience. Stories provide insight, relatability, and meaning to their audience, engaging and captivating them. Plus, stories can start conversations, leading to increased brand awareness and social sharing.

First, focus on the message and then, decide on the medium. A powerful story can capture hearts and minds; the medium allows the story to be communicated with the audience. Both are of incredible importance, but it is best to proceed in that order.

"Forget thinking about how to make a Vine or send out the most clever tweet. Instead, focus on how to connect to consumers using ideas so big they'll work on any platform." 19

Marc Pritchard Procter & Gamble's Global Marketing Officer

"I like to know the story about the places I eat. I think it's key to feed one's heart in addition to one's stomach when going out." ²⁰

Vera Chang, 26



6. Emphasize Convenience for the On-the-Go College Consumer



A recent survey showed that 60% of all participants snack in the car, and college-aged consumers are even more likely (by 27%) to snack on the fly. 21

Today's college students value brands that understand that their time is precious and cater to their on-the-go lifestyle. Anything that makes their lives easier and gives them more time for the things they love, they will embrace with open arms. When marketing to college students it is important to show them how your product will contribute to their lives. Whether it's an energy boost to help with late night cramming or an easily transportable grab-and-go snack for the early morning rush, make sure to highlight the ease and convenience of use. If it saves them time and effort, they will appreciate it.

Marketers should consider advertising to students during midterms and finals week. It might seem illogical to have a college marketing campaign during midterm or finals week, when students are at their busiest. However, advertising to students during this time, while taking their needs into consideration, can leave a lasting impression and earn students' respect. Figuring out what product or service might interest students most during this hectic time and incorporating it into your college marketing plan will help foster positive bonds between your company and the students. If they feel like your company genuinely cares about them and is taking positive steps to help them through this difficult period, your company will earn their respect.

Some different college marketing ideas include passing out highlighters with your company's logo to students entering the library, offering college students a free cup of coffee at peak hours at on-campus cafes with your company's logo on the java sleeve, distributing portable snacks or beverages to students on the go, or providing coupons or discounts to local establishments.

"I can't remember the last time my friends waited by the TV for their favourite show to come on, when they knew they could just as easily watch it online on their own time, without any commercials. . . . Forget waiting for business hours when you can get the same thing at 2 A.M. online. And then there's food. Take a stroll through a campus café to see for yourself how popular those pre-made sandwiches are. . . . My friends and I often discuss how we are victims of the on-campus eateries: even though the sandwiches and other food are pretty gross and by no means satisfying, we still manage to shell out seven bucks a sandwich on a daily or even twice daily basis. "²²

Jennifer Turliuk, Marketing to Millennials Blogger



7. Penetrate Students' Space with On-Campus Advertising





College Posters

College posters grab students' attention, imprinting your brand's image and inviting a closer look. College bulletin-board advertising penetrates a student-oriented space, helping to solidify an on-campus presence. Placing college posters throughout campus will act as a strategic reminder of your company and logo. College posters are eye-catching, visual ads used to attract notice and interest.

College Flyers

Once college students become more and more accustomed to your company's ad campaign through the various posters around campus, then it is time to use a more direct approach. College posters generate brand awareness, while college flyers provide detailed information and are excellent call-to-action tools. College flyers are handed directly to students, guaranteeing exposure. Students take the advertisement home with them!

Table Tents

Table tents further expand the number and types of spaces that can be used for reaching college students. They bring ads off the walls and onto heavily used tables in dining halls, study areas, and student lounges, where they'll be that much more visible. Table tents target students' personal, nonacademic space. Many students spend a lot of time at on-campus dining facilities, making table tents an effective college marketing device.

Campus Bus Routes

On larger campuses especially, a significant proportion of the students use campus bus services, either to get around campus or to commute to it. Buses are typically stuffed to capacity during the morning and midafternoon peak hours. This is a space existing outside, or at least in the transition zone, of the "academic" campus. Use campus kiosks or bus shelter advertising to reach students on the go.

Generate brand awareness by establishing an on-campus presence. Reach college students where they live, study, and play!



8. Target Incoming Students at Orientation

Most colleges conduct mandatory orientation sessions involving their entire entering classes—hundreds to thousands of new students—and this presents an excellent opportunity for college marketing.



An added benefit of focusing on students at orientation is the long-term nature of the college marketing plan—it maximizes the exposure to the demographic, because these students still have their entire college career ahead of them. If they get hooked as consumers now, they may remain loyal to the product or service for years to come. And if that product or service is only relevant to college students (such as test prep, dining programs, etc.), such early exposure could mean the difference between having a loyal customer for four years versus a few months.

New students make great college marketing targets:

- 1. **The college experience is new and exciting.** Many of them are fresh out of high school, and college represents the culmination of all sorts of youthful dreams and hopes. This desire for fulfillment of their expectations makes them ideal consumers.
- 2. **Their parents are prepared to spend.** Aware that this transition period involves numerous expenses (and possibly eager to send their kids off as well), parents are more willing than ever to assist their children monetarily.
- 3. **They look up to the older college students.** This characteristic, in particular, would increase the effectiveness of college street teams. Peer endorsement, already an effective college marketing strategy, would have great impact.
- 4. **They are adjusting to a new life.** For the first time in their lives they're totally dependent on themselves, having to worry about transportation, food, when and where to exercise, what to eat—all the daily features of everyday life that have been for the most part provided for them, up until this point, by their parents.

Why orientation is advantageous:

- 1. **Orientation is mandatory and formulaic.** The fact that all entering students have to attend is favorable for obvious reasons—you have a captive audience. The fact that orientations differ little in structure or content means similar college marketing strategies can succeed at different institutions. Also, you have access to a preset schedule ahead of time, which facilitates planning.
- 2. **Large groups move through chokepoints.** At large orientations, students are broken up into groups of a hundred or so. These groups then move to various points around campus, touring facilities, performing administrative tasks, and listening to speakers. This movement presents an opportunity for campus posters or members of a college street team to get complete exposure. Also, the group waits in line at various points (such as when getting a student ID), and this is a great time to approach students.



9. Remain Authentic



71% of students surveyed said that brands that are authentic resonate with them. ²³

45% [of students] report having received product samples during the school year, with two-thirds of those going to purchase the brand.²⁴

College students are avid users of social media. If they disagree with a company's policies, they will write a review, start a petition, post on their social networking sites, and spread the word to their friends. Conversely, they make excellent advocates for brands they respect and believe in. They like to voice their opinions and share products and information they find cool with their friends.

Make sure to maintain positive interactions when advertising to students. Respect school policies when distributing promotional material on campus, as violating them implies that your company does not respect the students' learning environment, which can hurt your company's image. Make sure to maintain professionalism while interacting with students.

"They think marketing is lying. They don't believe something just because it's in the newspaper or on the Internet. They're very skeptical, therefore it's important for a brand to be authentic or genuine."²⁵

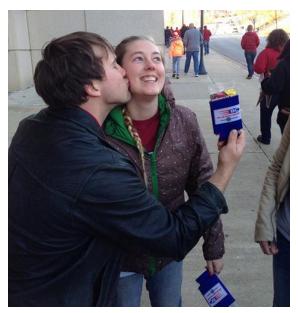
Steve Martin, on millennials Co-Creative partner at Firefly Creative Company

"This is the Relationship Era, characterized for keen public interest in the conduct of brands, not to mention supercharged WOM. In social media, hypocrisy is called out in a heartbeat."

Bob Garfield, Media Post editor



10. Reach College Students Through Off-Campus Experiential Marketing



College students love to push boundaries and experience new things, making experiential marketing a highly effective college marketing approach. College students can't stand to miss out on the latest gossip or news, and they desperately want to be included in events their peers are partaking in. That's why they spend a great deal of time on Facebook despite their frustrations with it. Event marketing plays on this mentality—the desire to be a part of the action—while creating fun experiences and quality interactions.

These events allow young people to escape the stresses of everyday life and have a unique experience. Through these events, Millennials become a part of a community. They hang out with people their own age in a lighthearted environment.

While college marketing is a great way to reach college students, some large-scale events lend themselves to off-campus experiential marketing. Four types of events college students flock to in high numbers:

- 1. Sporting Events (On and Off Campus): Sporting events are a truly unique world unto themselves. College students go to a home game and instantly have thousands of people cheering with them. It enables an instant point of connection and allows students to bond together, leading to feelings of camaraderie. They lose themselves in the game, experiencing the thrills and excitements, hopes and let-downs, and anticipations and fears.
- **2. Music Festivals:** Students love music festivals. Like sporting events, music festivals bring people together and foster feelings of belonging. A weekend at a festival serves as a form of escape and adventure for young people. It's a chance to relax and forget all societal responsibilities.
- **3. Spring Break:** College students travel to spring break destination spots in huge numbers. It's a time to unwind and party with friends. It's a societally recognized time to let loose and act carefree, without judgment. Many students travel for spring break for the experience.
- **4. Metro Area Events:** Many metro area events attract Millennials from around the country, from the New Year's Eve Ball Drop Event in Times Square to the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Chicago. College students love to attend cultural events to expand their horizons and experience city life.

Young people flock to these events to get away from society, so typical college marketing and youth marketing strategies won't work. You need to develop an experiential marketing plan that provides engagement and adds to the event experience.



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Agency Overview

Since 1997, NAM Youth Marketing has been implementing innovative and effective marketing and advertising solutions for clients seeking to improve their presence in the college and youth marketing arena. College advertising can be so much more than media distribution—with NAM, you'll meaningfully connect with students, build brand recognition, and establish a digital and on- campus presence. We offer targeted marketing to millions of students at over 4,000 college campuses in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Canada.

NAM specializes in developing customized marketing solutions. We take the time to truly understand our clients' college marketing goals and then we work with them in determining a plan of action to achieve those goals, utilizing and adapting our extensive P2P networks to suit their needs. We engage the college consumer using a combination of print, online, face-to-face, social media, and experiential marketing techniques. We help companies rise above the noise!

<u>www.namooh.com</u> www.collegemarketing.net

Contributors



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Your resource to unlocking the elusive college market where students study, live & play!