

HOOK THEIR INTEREST ... AND KEEP IT

FINDING A PLACE IN AN EVER-SHRINKING ATTENTION SPAN



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Let's face it: Grabbing (and keeping) the attention of a high school student can be difficult.

Thanks to the digital age, 21st century teenagers are accustomed to quick, simple and direct. In fact, a [Microsoft study](#) found that today's average attention span is a mere eight seconds — compared to 12 seconds in 2000.

The point being, if you can't hook them, they're on to the next tweet, snap, email or news article that will.

SO HOW DO YOU HOOK THEM?

You get to know them. *What are their interests? What keeps them engaged? Why do they do the things they do?* Your goal is to understand what drives them to take an action and then use that knowledge to perfect your communication strategy.

In the case of higher education, we ask ourselves, *"What spikes the interest of a 16 to 19 year old?"* The answer, we've found, includes three top contenders: **media, money and free stuff.**

According to a [report by Common Sense Media](#), a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that tracks technology use, teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 spend an average of nine hours a day surfing the web, listening to music, uploading photos to Facebook, snapping their friends, and the list goes on ...

Most students also depend on financial assistance to help afford tuition and other expenses. That's why free money is a huge perk when it comes to keeping a college shopper interested.

Now that we know a little more about our audience, our next step is to formulate our communications to align with their interests. We give them what they want, and in return, they give us what we want.

What do they want? They want media, money and free stuff. What do we want? We want inquiries, visits, applications and enrollments.

This is where we implement the “hook.” It's a very common marketing term that can be used to elicit a response. Here are a few examples we use to engage students and encourage them to take action:

SPOTIFY PLAYLISTS

Teenagers love music — especially free music. So giving students access to a playlist created just for them is a great way to grab their attention. Want students to fill out an inquiry form? Up the odds by offering a free Spotify playlist.

MEDIA PACKAGES

What else do teenagers love? Social media. The myriad of surveys and studies that have been done as social media applications have continued to grow in popularity all generally say the same thing: high school students are online *all the time*, and they're looking at you.

“Today's high school students were born when Google began and in elementary school when Facebook took off,” wrote Laura Hagan, in a paper for Capture titled, [Reach Prospective Students With Social Media](#). “Almost 70 percent of high school students use social media to research colleges.”

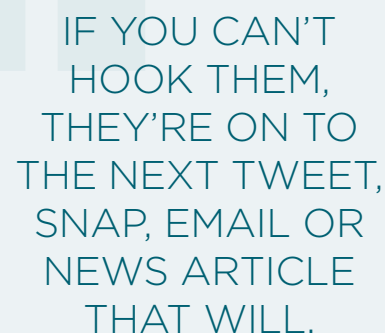
What do you have to say to them?

Media packages give students access to university-sponsored profile and cover photos for Facebook and Twitter, as well as wallpaper photos for desktop, mobile and tablet.

Not only does this get students excited about your school, it puts your brand in front of their friends and followers for an even greater reach.

SCHOLARSHIP ESTIMATES

We already touched on the fact that financial assistance weighs heavily on the student decision journey. For that reason, many of our partner schools include specific or general awarding language in their communications with students. While this is a great way to garner interest, it's not the most efficient or the most error-proof.



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NEWS ARTICLE
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Enter: the academic scholarship calculator. Scholarship calculators allow the student to input their personal information and receive an instant award estimate based on test score and GPA. We are then able to send the student a follow-up email that keeps them engaged and encourages them to apply.

We recently launched our first few scholarship calculator landing pages, and they're already showing some impressive results. For one of our partner schools, 15 percent of the students who received an email with a link to the calculator went on to visit the landing page. Of those who visited, 251 — or 63.7 percent — completed the calculator form within 24 hours (The results haven't been much different across other partners.).

To put that into perspective, the higher ed industry's average email click-through-rate is 3 percent. That means the scholarship calculator hook beat the industry average by 12 percent! Not only did this spike interest, it enabled our partner to increase their identified pool and begin communicating with these students on another level.

“WHAT SPIKES THE INTEREST OF A 16 TO 19 YEAR OLD?”
MEDIA, MONEY AND FREE STUFF

VISIT AWARDS / TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

Have you considered offering an award or reimbursement to students who visit campus? Not surprisingly, students respond well to free money. (Had we mentioned that already?)

The average click-through-rate for Capture popovers is between 4 and 7 percent. Add awarding language to a visit popover, and don't be surprised if you see something closer to 25 percent.

DIRECT MAIL

Direct mail may not be quite as popular in the era of technology, but it's not dead! Have you ever noticed how teenagers love to line their walls with photos, posters and just about anything meaningful? There's your in!

Hook their interest and say thanks by sending them a poster that doubles as an interactive planning document to use throughout their college search.

NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters will keep your brand front-and-center and are a great way to introduce students to new and unique aspects of your university. While they may not be the most popular tactic to hook a teenager, they're a great way to keep interested students engaged. Hook them with the Spotify playlist, and keep them hooked with a monthly newsletter.

OTHER GIVEAWAYS

And last but not least ... free stuff. When a student is interested in your university, they'll love sporting your gear. T-shirts, hats, pens, bookstore coupons ... if it's free, it's hard to pass up — and that goes for pretty much everyone, not just teenagers!

Now that you're familiar with the marketing hook, are you ready to spruce up your communications game? Try it out, and see how it goes — we'd love to hear if it was a success!