Small College Admissions and Marketing:
How can TLC.edu be improved to better recruit students?
Constance Wohlford
Trinity Lutheran College

Question: Small College Admissions and Marketing: How can TLC.edu be improved to better recruit students?

Abstract

This research studies college admission websites. The sites are studied in an effort to better understand college websites and how they are best used to recruit potential students. Peer institution's pages are coded against an ideal college website, using a system constructed in the researcher's previous study. The results will be used by Trinity Lutheran College's admission and marketing department to improve the college website to better attract potential students.

Problem and Motivation

The Trinity Lutheran College Communications Department asked the researcher to review peer institution websites. This was requested in order to gain insights about improvements that can be made to their own webpage, specifically involving recruiting potential students. In order to review peer webpages, a system of qualitative and quantitative measures was developed. These measures were tested against Trinity Lutheran's college website to track efficacy. Now they can be used on peer pages.

Background and Related Literature

College websites, and what college bound prospects expect of them, have been studied before. In 2001 a team from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill studied 55 students in North Carolina and Michigan. They found that these high school students were looking for information that was meaningful for them. "Participants were generally unaware of other constituencies of a university (alumni, faculty, donors, etc.) and therefore viewed any information not directly specific to them as superfluous (Poock & Lefond, 2001, p. 19)." For the pages that did relate to them, they wanted less clicks to access information. Advanced users would simply use the school's search function to find their requests. Regarding content, it was better when the pages held enough pertinent information that the users did not have to click too many times to access it. Poock and Lefond found that "a general mix of 70 percent text and 30 percent graphics was optimal" (p. 19). The images and graphics that were included "should help the prospective student answer the question, 'Will I fit in?'" (p. 19).

The findings of Poock and Lefond are all fantastic measures for which to score a college webpage by. In 2013, these measures were tested against TLC.edu webpages. The researcher has access to the TLC.edu Google Analytics data. For the study highly viewed pages were scored against least viewed pages. The measures proved to be accurate; pages with higher view counts scored more closely on these scales to the ideal webpage described above, while lesser viewed pages score as more different than the ideal.

The sample is being done from ten peer institutions from around the nation. For each college, the main admissions page will be scored and analyzed as well as the 'first year admission' page. With the results, suggestions will be made to Trinity Lutheran College's admission department to improve the TLC.edu page and hopefully better recruit new students for years to come.

Methodology and Uniqueness

Pages from peer institutions are being measured on the following variables: Number of clicks it took to get there from the index page. Scale % of the page that is text verses the percent that is image. Category (Communication, Access to tools, Promotion and marketing, etc.). Likert scale of "Will I fit in?" Was there an opportunity for dialogic loop? Point values will be assigned to these variables so that pages can be compared to one another. These will be recorded on a form designed by the researchers and modeled after those of Dr. David Schultz (Qualitative, 2013, & Coding, 2013).

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Results and Contribution

The general admissions pages ranged from 5 (closer to ideal) to 26 (further from ideal). The first year admissions pages ranged from 15 to 41. The average score on the admissions page was 14.6 and the average score for the first year admissions pages was 27.1.

The General Admissions pages ranked in this order (closest to ideal to furthest from ideal): 1) Biola University, 2) Calvin College, 3) George Fox University, 4) Seattle Pacific University, 5) Wheaton College, 6) Nyack College, 7) Concordia College Portland, 8) Bethel College, 9) Colorado Christian, 10) Westmont College. The 'First Year' admission pages ranked in this order (closest to idea to furthest from ideal): 1) Colorado Christian, 2) Westmont College, 3) Concordia College Portland, 4) George Fox University, 5) Biola University, 6) Wheaton College, 7) Calvin College, 8) Bethel College.

When viewed together and in order these pages show the motivation behind admissions departments. Generally they put good effort into designing effective general admissions page but colleges fall short with 'First Year' admissions pages. These targeted pages offer a second and arguably better opportunity to convince first year students uniquely that the college is a good fit. All colleges, including Trinity Lutheran College, could benefit from improving their student-type specific pages.

The next step for this research will be analyzing the best practices for dialogic loop tools in these peer institutions.

References

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