



The student marketers guide:

*How can universities smash their
Clearing campaigns this summer?*

June 2018

The student marketers guide:

NET NATIVES

How can universities smash their Clearing campaigns this summer?

We lift the lid on how to deliver agile and effective advertising solutions that will seriously revolutionise your marketing strategy ahead of results day.

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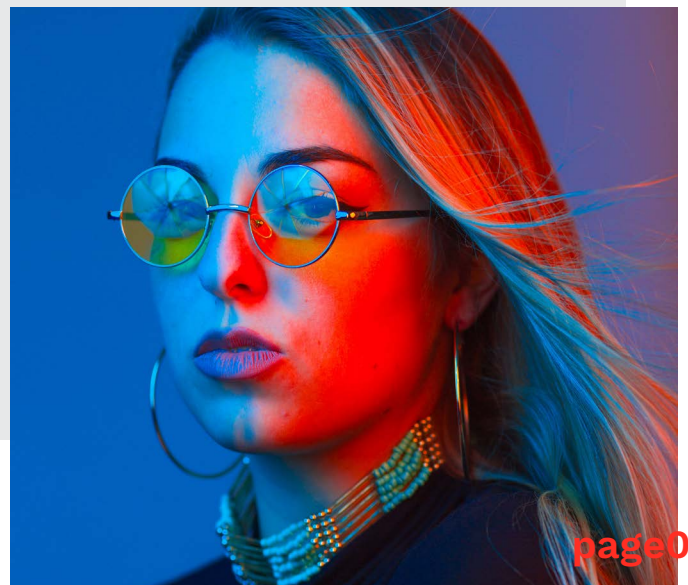
INTRODUCTION

Let's talk Clearing

With a shift in the way students are applying to university, it's more important than ever for institutions to bring their A-Game in time for A-level Results Day. For the last four years, we've been the leading agency in delivering Clearing campaigns, we've crunched over 250 thousand data points in the National Clearing Survey and even have our Google Account Managers in the office on the day itself.

This whitepaper will give you:

- Recommendations and inspiration on how to deliver state of the art Clearing campaigns across multiple platforms.
- Examples of successful advertising campaigns and concepts.
- Insights into the different personas of Clearing students and what makes them tick.
- Expert advice and calculated predictions using our unique access to student audiences and meaningful data.



THE CURRENT CLEARING LANDSCAPE

Clearing Insights - Overall

Clearing is something that changes a lot, year on year. We've learnt this from our National Clearing Survey which has been running for three years now; providing decision makers, HE leaders, and marketing professionals unique insights into the minds of Clearing students. The piece observes trends, behaviours, motivations, barriers and personas of students during the entire period, so make sure you visit thenationalclearingsurvey.com to download a copy.

increasing. This is because the largest decrease was in mature applicants, which could result in either of the following:

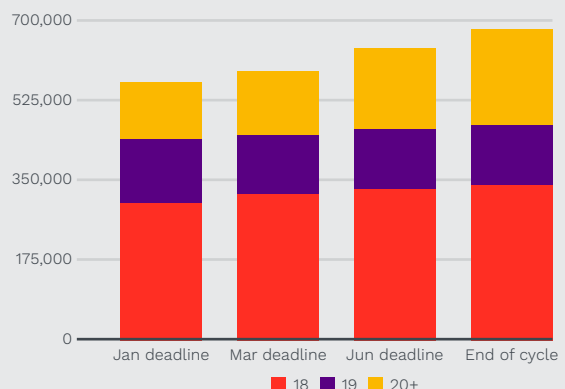
- We see a bigger increase in mature applicants over Clearing.
- Or, mature applicants are in fact just down, which will affect those HEIs who rely on these students over A-level Results Day.

The graph below looks to give us some indication. It shows that mature students will apply later on during the entire application process, this is why advertising and conversion strategies are important when reaching out to this demographic. Each year, Natives Global Consulting analyse data after Clearing to see what the trends are.

March 2018:

- Applications down 2% across the UK
- The largest decreases were in mature applicants
- Applications rates for 18 year olds have increased

Our data shows us that applications are down by 2% from March, year on year - despite application rates for 18 year olds



THE CURRENT CLEARING LANDSCAPE

Clearing Insights - Subject

Course subjects need to play a key factor in your Clearing campaign approach. We have found that applications to some subjects have increased, year on year. These types of subjects are what we would consider to be professional programmes. Therefore, if you haven't filled these types of programmes ahead of Clearing 2018, then you're likely to see quite a lot of competition. We would suggest having dedicated budgets for these types of keywords, especially if your institution offers these courses but you've not seen an increase in applications to date.

The following subjects have seen **increased numbers of applications in 2018 compared to 2017:**

- **Medicine and dentistry**
- **Biological sciences**
- **Veterinary science, agriculture and related subjects**
- **Mathematical sciences**
- **Computer sciences**
- **Architecture, building and planning**
- **Law**
- **Combined sciences**
- **Combined social sciences**
- **General, over combined and unknown**

THE CURRENT CLEARING LANDSCAPE

Clearing Insights - Subject

The following subjects have seen decreased numbers of applications in 2018 compared to 2017:

- **Subjects allied to medicine**
- **Physical sciences**
- **Engineering**
- **Technologies**
- **Social studies**
- **Business and administrative studies**
- **Mass communications and documentation**
- **Linguistics, classics and related subjects**
- **History and philosophical studies**
- **Creative arts and design**
- **Education**
- **Combined arts**
- **Sciences combined with social sciences or arts**

On the flip side, we have seen some similar trends to last year with the same subjects, primarily those relating to History, Education and Creative Arts decreasing in applications. We find that some institutions tend to spend budget to promote these subjects simply because they have to; they may be getting pressure from academics or senior leadership teams. However, our prediction this year is that universities will spend a lot promoting these subjects, but they won't see a large amount of ROI - this is because the market is shrinking. It will become more competitive to bid on these terms and if search volume is down then their won't be as many people coming across the adds anyway.

However, this could change if we find that the majority of institutions abandon those terms, with the view that the market is no longer big enough for them to justify spend.

HOW TO RANK

Appearing on search engines

A significant proportion of calls made on the day of Clearing 2017 came from Search (both organic and paid). This enforces the fact that ranking high on search engine results pages is important.

Studies have shown that around 75% of searches lead to someone clicking on one of the result options on the first page. This means that if you are ranking on page two then you've only got a one in four chance of a prospective student even visiting page two of results, let alone clicking to visit your website. Couple this with the fact that students are in a rush, they're probably more likely to click on a result earlier than trawl through dozens of search results pages.

We've put together six key points, which we believe you should be doing and starting as soon as possible.



Get your pages live

You can't have visibility if you haven't got any content featuring on your website pages. Many institutions choose to publish their Clearing pages a week before A-level Results Day; this does not give Google (or other search engines) enough time to crawl the page and index it. If it hasn't been indexed, then you're not going to appear.



Conduct keyword research

Once you have your pages live, you need to make sure you are using the right type of keywords. Conduct keyword research to find out what it is your target audience are searching for. Do you want to be ranking for courses that are decreasing? If so, then your organic activity needs to be strong, and detailed keyword research on terms surrounding these courses needs to be on point.

What can you do to improve your visibility?

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HOW TO RANK

Appearing on search engines



Optimise the copy and meta tags

Spend time building these keywords into the body of your text, your meta tags and headers to show Google that your pages are relevant to those search terms. You will then see your ranking position begin to improve.



Ensure pages are mobile friendly

Last year, we found 60% of students used a mobile device (when using multiple devices) during their Clearing searches. Mobile-only accounted for 20% of all searches, an increase of 3% on 2016. Google will know if your website is not properly optimised and will penalise you for this.



Check those page load times

Yes, it's great to have a landing page with loads of graphics and animations - but it can really slow down the load time of your page time. Make sure your page is loading efficiently, especially on

3G and 4G networks. As we have mentioned before, students are in a rush on A-level Results Day and if they are unable to load your website they may go elsewhere.



Get some links

Build up the authority of your page by creating content around Clearing which links out to different pages. In the past, students have told us that they want to see content which outlines the Clearing process, when it opens and how it works. This type of information, which isn't always readily available, is the perfect opportunity for you to share your knowledge with prospective students as well as build up the quality of your site for Google. Why? Because other sites will link to your content from their own website - giving you the links you need.

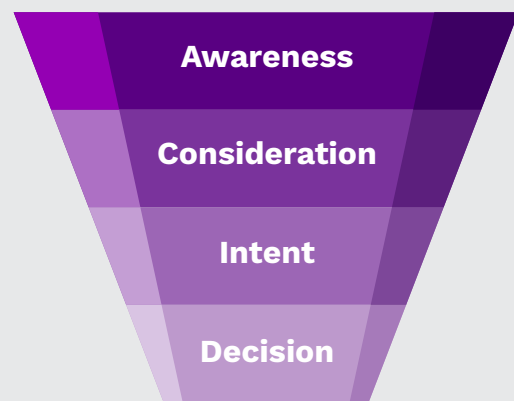
ADVERTISING

The Funnel

A good Clearing strategy should align with the marketing funnel. There are different versions of the funnel - these often depend on the industry you're working in. Here at Net Natives, we use the Awareness, Consideration, Intent and Decision funnel.

Each individual Clearing student will enter the four stages of the funnel at different times.

So, for example, we can't say that the Awareness stage is most relevant in June, the Consideration stage in July, the Intent stage in August and the Decision stage on results day. It doesn't work like that because every Clearing student is different, has different motivations and is at a different stage in their university journey. What this highlights is the importance of an integrated Clearing advertising strategy, that incorporates every stage of the funnel.



ADVERTISING

Awareness

We recommend kicking off your awareness stage as soon as possible. We already have Clearing-focused awareness advertising up and running for some of our clients.

The purpose of a Clearing awareness stage is to reach as many potential Clearing students as possible prior to Results Day. This will help you educate the student about why they should study with you, so that come Results Day, they're:

- Already aware of you.
- May have even made up their mind to choose your institution.

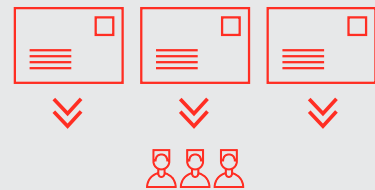
Reach and Frequency Buying

Reach and Frequency is an ad buying tool that allows you to purchase advertising campaigns in advance at a fixed cost, whilst also having increased control over how many people you reach and how frequently they see your ads.

Reach



Frequency



It makes your campaigns highly predictable as you know exactly when and how often your ads will appear, as well as the total reach and impressions you're likely to achieve. You can also use Reach and Frequency to sequence the order in which your ads are shown so it's great for delivering your content like a story.

- **Transparent media buying and planning**
- **Predictable delivery and outcomes**
- **Efficiencies in delivery costs**
- **Higher levels of control**
- **Tell your brand's story**

ADVERTISING

Awareness

Advertising developments that we recommend using:

Out of home

It's recently been found that OOH is the most effective channel for driving online searches, with over 45% of people having gone online after seeing an OOH ad, which makes OOH fantastic for brand awareness. Think about where a student hangs out to find where you can reach them offline. Is there a bus stop outside the cinema, or a local Nando's where you could advertise?

You could also consider using dynamic content feeds to link your OOH activity to the student's digital behaviour.

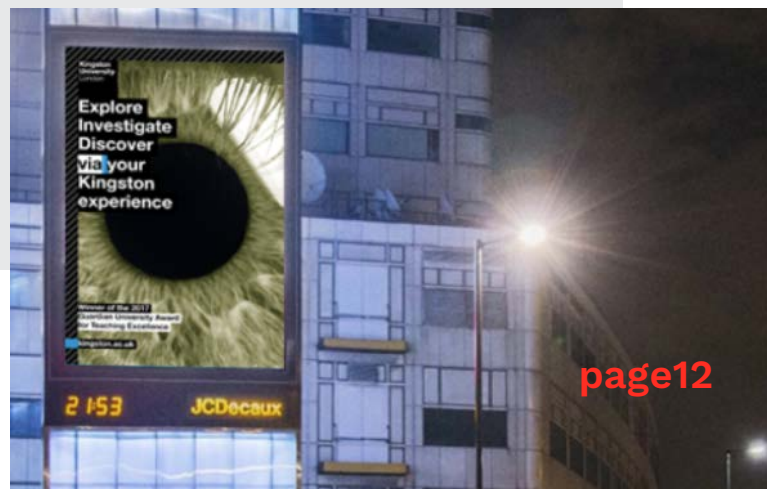
Video

Video isn't a new development but it is a key format to include when it comes to awareness-raising. There's a common misconception that video can't be used unless you have the resource to make them look well-

polished and professional. When actually, we sometimes find that the simplest, DIY-style videos deliver the best results. Another way to save time and resource is to repurpose your videos, but do think about the channels that you're using and adapt your video for each one.

Programmatic

Programmatic is a great format for awareness-raising as you can reach the student wherever they are on the internet, without limiting your adverts to a specific search engine or social media platform. Programmatic facilitates the use of large-scale, interactive advert formats such as Skins. Programmatic also has extensive targeting options. For example, we use household targeting to advertise to both the potential Clearing student and their parents as we know from the National Clearing Survey that parents and guardians play an important role in how Clearing students discover institutions.



ADVERTISING

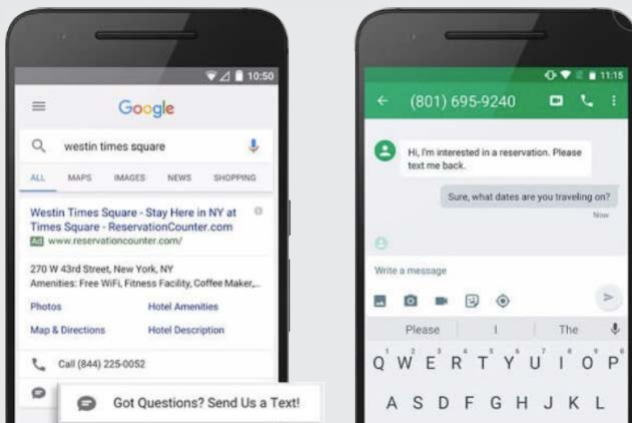
Consideration

During the Consideration phase, the aim is to get the potential student onto your website to find out more about you and your Clearing process. Here, the student is in intense research mode. You want them to engage with your content.

To reach the potential student online, it's recommended to take a cross-channel approach so your institution remains at the forefront of a student's mind. Placement Optimisation is a great new feature from Facebook that can help you do this.

What is Placement Optimisation?

- Placement Optimisation is the process of serving ads across Facebook's family of apps to help drive the best campaign results.
- Facebook's algorithms will determine the place where you will achieve your objective at the lowest possible cost.
- As a result, you may find that the majority of the budget is spent on either Facebook, or Instagram, or Facebook Messenger.
- Placement Optimisation provides us with a great way to advertise on multiple platforms using the same budget. At Net Natives, we are starting to introduce it as standard with all of our clients.



ADVERTISING

Intent

At the Intent phase, the student is aware of your institution so they can be shown messaging that includes more specific benefits of studying with you or more details on how your Clearing process works. Now, they're likely to leave their details or take an action. The formats that we recommend using for your Intent advertising are:

Facebook Click-to-Messenger

This involves using Facebook Messenger as the destination of your ad, rather than a landing page. It encourages the potential student to interact with you personally. It's mutually beneficial for you and the student as they can have their Clearing-related questions answered. Click-to-Messenger is particularly powerful when combined with Facebook's Sponsored Messages advert format, which can be used closer to Result's Day to retarget profiles that have messaged you previously.

Using Click-to-Messenger first will help you build the number of profiles to re-engage during your Sponsored Messages campaign. If you're going to use these message-based formats, you need to ensure that you have the resource in-house to respond to messages. At Net Natives, we are no longer recommending building chatbots to do this for you due to the growing distrust amongst today's youth audience, as well as to the practicality of Facebook and Instagram's API access and stability.

Similar to Facebook's Click-to-Messenger ads, Click-to-Text extensions are available with Google Search adverts. When the extension is clicked, the student's mobile will prefill a text message directed to a phone number that you choose. For example, this could be a request for a call back. You can then reply to the message by text, or follow up the lead with a phone call. This could be really helpful for managing students expectations on A-level results day when it can get really busy. Perhaps just letting them know that they'll get a call back in five minutes so they don't feel ignored.

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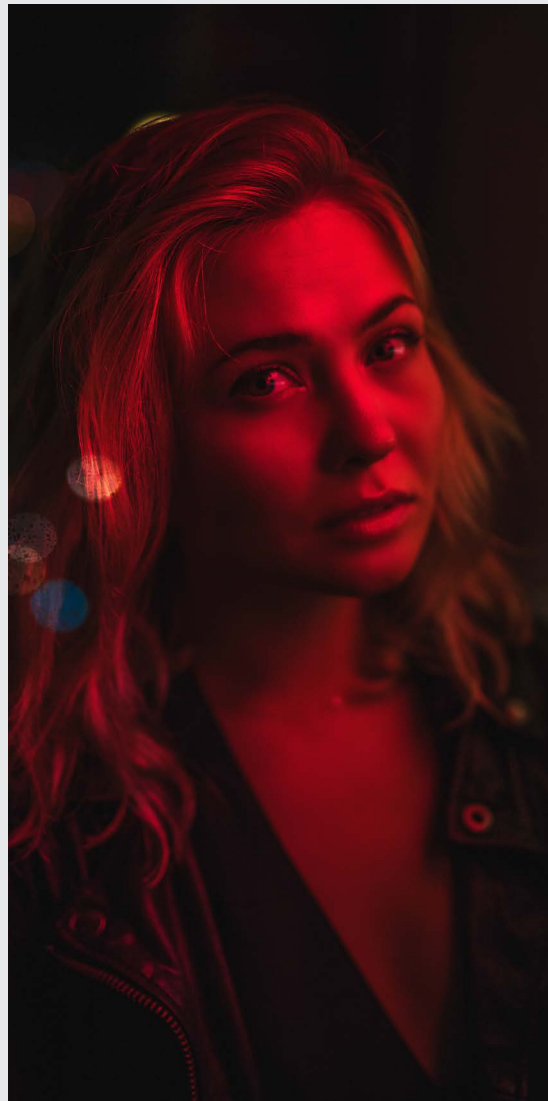
ADVERTISING

Intent

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Programmatic Dynamic Remarketing:

Dynamic Remarketing is a really exciting advert format for personalising messaging to the Clearing student. It allows you to tailor your messaging to what you know the student is interested in from the website pages they've previously browsed. For example, if a student has previously been on a maths page, you can show them an advert about maths, whilst if a different student previously visited an architecture page, they would see the same ad but with different messaging, about architecture.



ADVERTISING

Decision

Here, the student is ready to make a final choice on where they are going to study. Of course, when it comes to Clearing, this phase typically occurs on and after A-level Results Day.

Retargeting

The most important aspect of your Decision strategy is retargeting. You should re-engage all the potential students that you reached during your other phases of advertising and ideally, anyone else that has engaged with you throughout the year. In an ideal world, you want to have retargeting pixels set up on your website throughout the whole year to build these contact lists. But don't worry if you haven't done this, as it's not too late. Just make sure you set this up as soon as possible. You can then focus on driving traffic to your website starting now, so that come Results Day, you have a good number of potential students to retarget.

Google Search

The 2017 National Clearing Survey found that Google Search is the third most used platform on Results Day. The only two sources used more than Google Search in the quest for a university place are UCAS and institutions' own websites.

Competing on Google around Clearing can get very expensive. Particularly if you are bidding on competitor names or general Clearing-related search terms, such as the word "Clearing" itself.

It's also important to use negative keywords in your campaign. Every year we see the same mistakes time and time again and cringe at institutions whose ads appear against irrelevant search terms that include the word "Clearing." A good example from last year was "Clearing my acne."

ADVERTISING

Decision

Clearing Dashboards

Using real-time data is a great way to make sense of how various advertising platforms are performing and to see how budgets should be best spent. Using dashboards is the most efficient way as it means you and your teams don't have to waste time collating various data from each platform. You can use this time to analyse the data instead. This is ideal for Clearing when there is little time to collate and potentially make mistakes.

Our dashboards will let you know:

- What platform is delivering for your institution.
- What keywords are having the greatest impact.
- Which adverts are driving calls.
- Which faculties still have spaces and which are full.
- How much budget is left.



CONVERSION

The process from when students receive their results, to enrolling, can be both long and complex. Especially if they are going through a number of channels to reach their end goal and, let's not forget that emotionally it can be a really tough day. However, there is a lot that can be done to make the process run as smooth as possible.

The graphic below details the top line stages from when a student collects their results to when they officially enrol at an institution. There are two places on this journey that you really need to focus on to help students during this intense process.



What can your institution do when Clearing students get in touch

- Ensure there is enough staff.
- Provide students with enough information.
- Reduce the number of times students are put on hold/transferred.
- Send offers out within the day (or as close to).

We surveyed students to get a better idea of how the Clearing process was for them in order to feedback to our clients. Here are a couple of responses which give really important feedback on what your institution might need to improve on. It's really key to keep these points at the forefront of your mind.

“X uni contacted me over 24 hours after my offer to answer any questions - I did have questions but I had already decided on a different uni by the time they contacted me.”

“During clearing, having to wait for email replies or phone lines that were busy was stressful.”

CONVERSION

Following up

When you've offered a student a place and they've accepted it you want to make sure that they then actually enrol.

Map out the student journey

The process they went through to bring them to your institution.

Build a conversion strategy

Noting all the key points of their journey. For example, the variety of emails you send to keep them engaged.

Engaging content

Think about how you're going to keep them sweet. For example, have you thought about creating videos that show off your University's accommodation? This type of content could be great in calming a prospective student's nerves and painting them a real picture of life at your University.

Multiple platforms

Build up a solid brand ethos and instill a sense of community. For example, a private Facebook group, where students can interact in a safe space. You want them to feel comfortable with your brand.



THE FUTURE OF CLEARING

Clearing predictions

We asked our team of experts, and webinar hosts, what they thought about the future of Clearing. Here are their predictions...

Last year, half of those that secured their place through Clearing did so for reasons other than lower grades. I think we'll see this continue to increase. Clearing is becoming more of a choice.

- Rosie Neill
Advertising Account Planner
Net Natives

Rosie is the 'go to' person for any queries our clients have regarding their advertising campaigns and broader marketing strategy. Rosie will conduct creative asset reviews to provide recommendations on campaign and media planning. She uses her platform expertise to match this with your brand to get the best outcomes.



THE FUTURE OF CLEARING

Clearing predictions

Students won't wait around for you. If you do not have the correct information or are unable to come back to them with an offer in a reasonable time they will look elsewhere. I predict that more people will be contacting more universities than in the previous years, especially the traditional students.

**- Kas Nicholls
Head of Natives Global Consulting
Natives Global Consulting**

As Head of Natives Global Consulting, Kas heads up the research and data-led elements of our service offering. She'll oversee the quality assurance of your audience insight and research deliverables. Kas works with various specialists within her team to ensure that all data and insight presented to you is meaningful and actionable.



THE FUTURE OF CLEARING

Clearing predictions

I predict Clearing won't be called Clearing for much longer.

**- Murray Simpson
Director of Education
Natives Group**

Murray consults a number of Universities globally on their digital marketing strategies including content, brand, analytics, paid advertising, media buying, tracking, CRM integration and new developments within the Digital and HE sectors. He has close relationships with HEFCE, OFFA, BUILA and AMBA, meaning he is always in the know on what's happening in the sector. Murray is able to recommend the best mix of media for the best ROI.



ABOUT NATIVES GROUP

Who are we?

We are a collection of specialist brands who can either solve individual problems or work collectively as partners to our clients.



NATIVES GLOBAL
CONSULTING

NATIVES PP



edurank

CEREBRO™

THE
NATIVE



your objectives. Then we add knowledge, expertise and superlative execution. And we make something amazing.

We deliver a range of creative solutions that will make your college stand out from the crowd, including; digital and print advertising, email template and microsite design, video production, photography, experiential and animation. We pioneer the use of the latest innovative creative formats for the education sector.

What is the secret to a successful advertising campaign? Combining your data with inspiring creative and copy. We believe in the importance of collecting and using your audience data to inform our targeting and messaging.

Who are Net Natives?

We are **creatives, thinkers, makers, planners and doers** - tenacious, talented and together, more than the sum of our parts. We know great campaigns all start with one thing: understanding. So that's where we begin - with you, your audience, your ambitions and

Contact Us

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/netnatives

SERVICES:

Here are just some of the services our team of experts can work with your institution on:

Advertising

- Direct media planning and buying.
- Biddable media (search, social & programmatic).
- Attribution tracking.
- End to end reporting.

Creative

- Video and photography.
- Creative concepts.
- Graphic design.
- HTML5 displays ads. Copywriting.

Analytics and Insight

- Desk and field-based market research.
- Analytics.
- Business intelligence.
- SEO Training.
- Conversion strategies.
- Strategic content development.
- Lead generation and nurturing.
- Competitive analysis.
- Performance analysis.

Student Engagement

- Student audience panel.
- Brand advertising.
- Lead generation campaigns.
- Community management.

International Expertise

- Chinese social platform management.
- China digital advertising.
- Local website and microsite development.

Social Media

- Social media and social content strategy.
- Social media training.

Strategic Marketing

- Reputation and SEO management.
- Consulting and project management.

Marketing Software

- Marketing performance software.
- Data visualisation software.
- Social media content performance software.