The student marketers guide on:

HOW TO NURTURE AND CONVERT PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS WITH LONG LEAD TIMES

From awareness to enrolment: our seven-stage conversion process

NATIVESGC

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INTRODUCTION

Based on our experience, and from the findings of our leading research projects such as the National Clearing Survey and the European MBA Survey, we know what makes the minds of prospective students tick. We also know how long it can take to nurture a student from an enquiry, all the way through to enrolment.

So with this in mind, we've put together an essential guide, sharing our Seven-stage process for nurturing long-term leads. After all, you want to make sure that your conversion journey ends with an enrolment to your institution.

- Research and understanding your audience
- Student journey mapping
- Keyword research
- Landing page optimisation
- Tracking and tags
- Lead nurture
- Reporting

The diagram gives an overview of where each of the seven-stages fit into the process of building an effective conversion strategy. Acknowledge that this a cyclical cycle process; everything you do influences all other stages and you should always be thinking about what you can learn from in each step, in order to improve the next round of the cycle.

RESEARCH

STUDENT JOURNEY MAPPING

REPORTING

KEYWORD OPTIMISATION

LEAD NURTURING

LANDING PAGE OPTIMISATION

TRACKING AND TAGS

WHO ARE NATIVES GROUP?

Natives Group is a collection of specialist brands who can either solve individual problems or work collectively as partners to their clients.

NATIVES.GROUP

THE WORLD'S STUDENT MARKETING GROUP

NATIVES GLOBAL CONSULTING

Natives Global Consulting specialises in making data meaningful. Their services include: desk and field based research, analytics, business intelligence (BI), SEO, training and conversion strategies.

RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Before you set up any conversion strategy for your campaign, you need to understand who you are targeting, and what data points you need in order to inform this activity.

At Natives Global Consulting we use a large variety of data sources (some of these are listed below). These sources range from real-time data, like Google, to undertaking primary research which allows us to understand various student motivations. Youth groups, and the student audience, in general, are always evolving with their media consumption changing, it's important that your teams keep up to date.

SEARCH DATA

Google

WEBSITE DATA

SimilarWeb

Google Analytics

SURVEY/FOCUS GROUPS

SOCIAL MEDIA DATA

edurank

MEDIA DATA

semrush

nielsen

ADVERTISING DATA

DoubleClick by Google
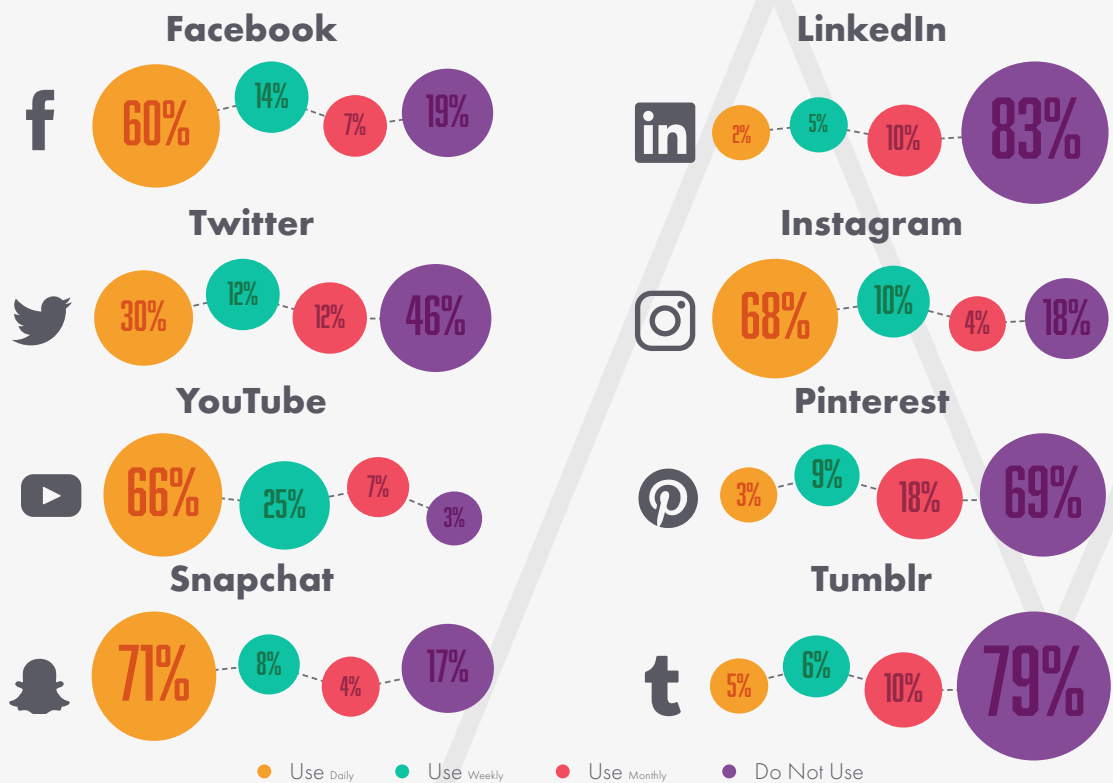
SOCIAL LISTENING DATA

NETBASE

RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Here's some top tips and data sources to inform your student recruitment campaigns.

> ## THE NATIONAL CLEARING SURVEY

250,000 data points,2,000+ qualitative interviews and benchmarked against the previous two years - the 2017/18 edition of the National Clearing Survey is the biggest of its kind, independent and representative. We've shared just one insight below, which highlights the range of social media platforms used by 18 year olds during the Clearing research period. Visit **The National Clearing Survey website** to download the report.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

Facebook
60% · 14% · 7% · 19%

LinkedIn
2% · 5% · 10% · 83%

Twitter
30% · 12% · 12% · 46%

Instagram
68% · 10% · 4% · 18%

YouTube
66% · 25% · 7% · 3%

Pinterest
3% · 9% · 18% · 69%

Snapchat
71% · 8% · 4% · 17%

Tumblr
5% · 6% · 10% · 79%

● Use Daily   ● Use Weekly   ● Use Monthly   ● Do Not Use

RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

> ## GOOGLE SEARCH DATA

Learn when your audience is researching. The darker box indicates when the most searches are happening and where the higher PPC rate is. You want to promote your course and institution during a time when search volumes are high, but be mindful of cost, competition and ROI. Seek the 'white spaces' and be smart on what terms you are bidding on.
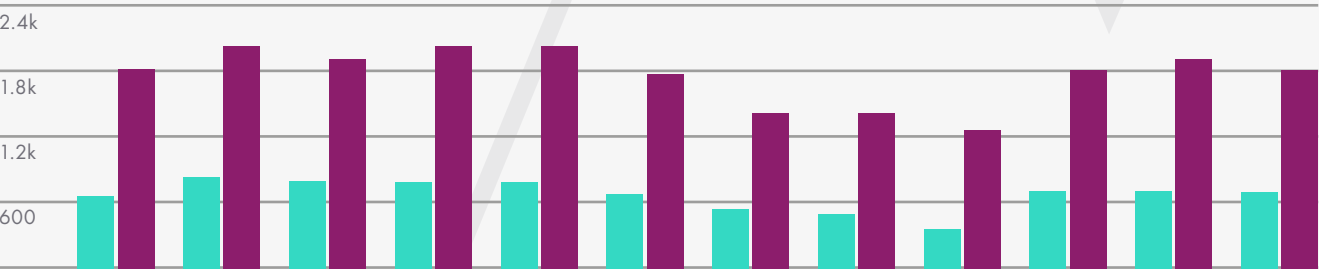
Google search data
Average monthly searches

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Queries												
CPC												
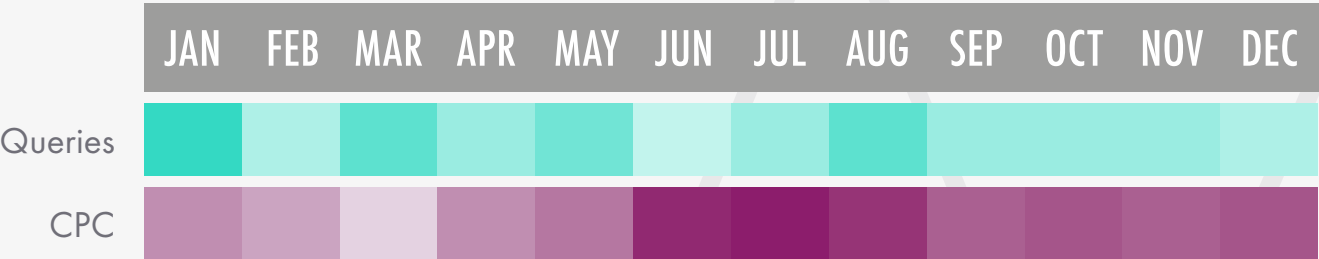
Mobile trends
Average monthly searches

RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

> ## SOCIAL LISTENING DATA

It's really important to understand where your audiences are, both on a local, regional and national level. We would recommend using Social Listening tools, to get a topline understanding of what your audiences are talking about. Target prospective students with your courses based on geographical factors.
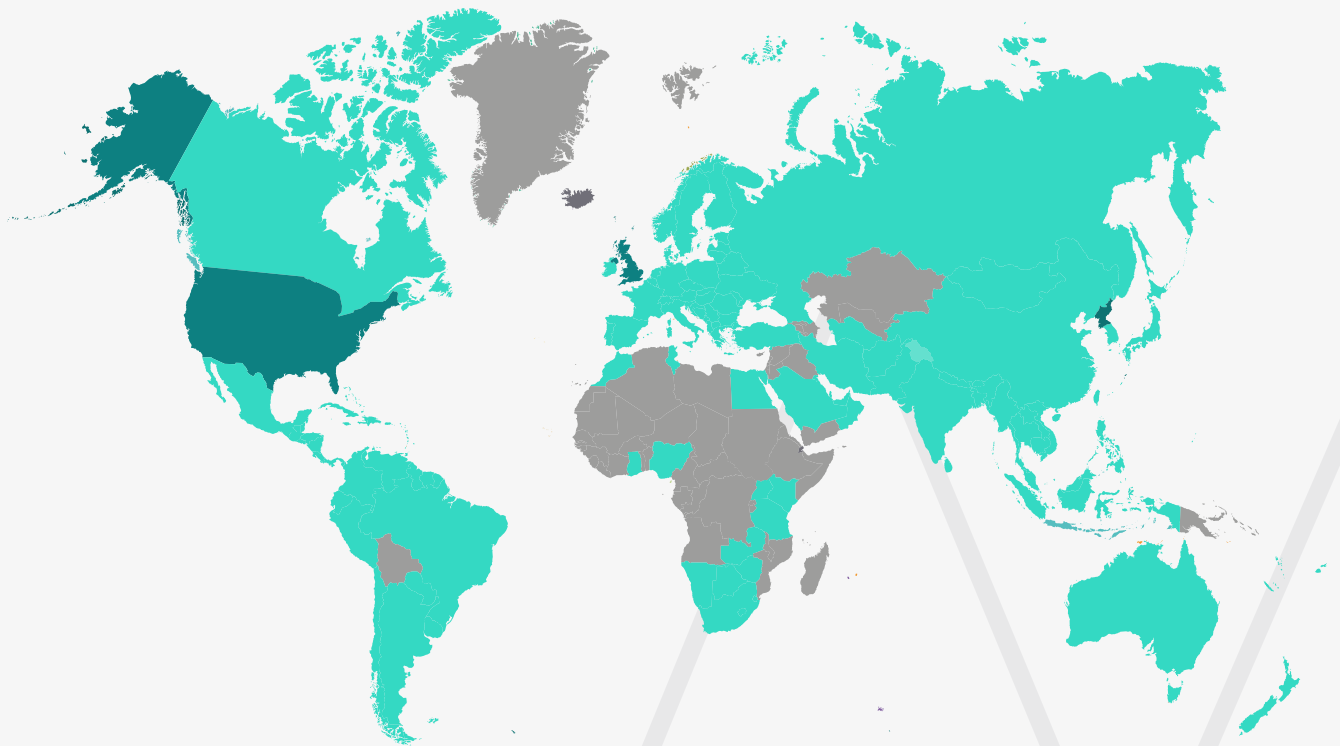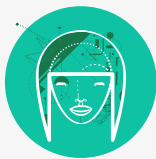
> ## CONDUCT PRIMARY RESEARCH

Use primary research, surveys, focus groups or even a poll on your website to understand what motivates your audience. Understanding what it is they want from you will, in turn, help boost your conversion strategy.
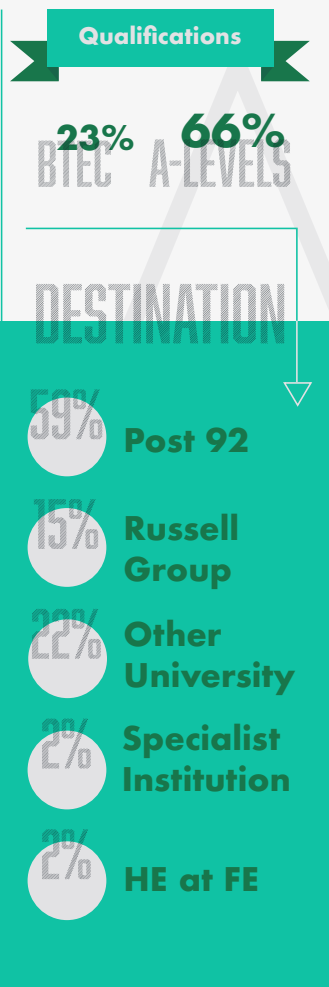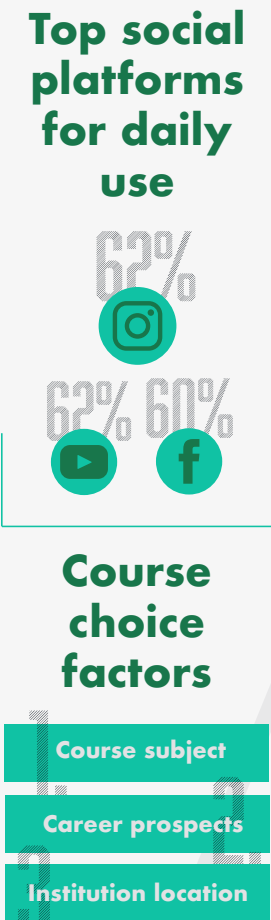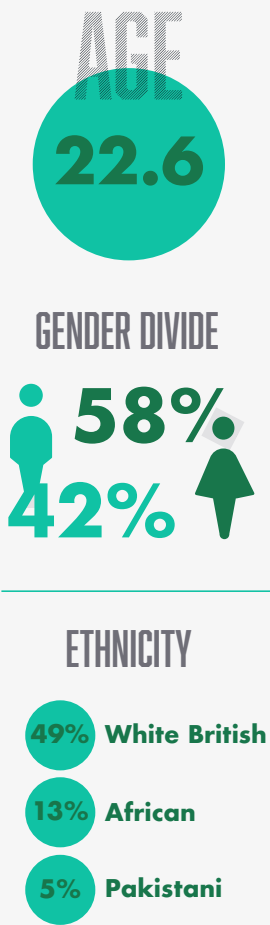
RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

> ## BUILD USEABLE PERSONAS

Once you have collected your data, you can look at 'bringing it alive' and visualise the persona you're going to target. Here is an example of a Clearing persona, which we have built from the data in the National Clearing Survey.

The Direct Applicant

AGE

22.6

GENDER DIVIDE

58%
42%

ETHNICITY

49% **White British**

13% **African**

5% **Pakistani**

Top social platforms for daily use

62%

62% 60%

Course choice factors

Course subject

Career prospects

Institution location

Qualifications

23% **66%**

BTEC A-LEVELS

DESTINATION

59% **Post 92**

15% **Russell Group**

22% **Other University**

2% **Specialist Institution**

2% **HE at FE**

STUDENT JOURNEY MAPPING

What is student journey mapping? Well, it's about taking a step back from the everyday process of reacting to your inbound enquiries, and looking at where your audiences interact with your institution.

The simplest way to do this is to think about your micro and macro conversions.

So, what are these types of conversions? They are simply the actions that signify a lead's interest in your institution. This could be a click on an advert, a page visit, a prospectus download or video view. All of these are small, micro-actions that are expressions of a visitor's intent.

After they've engaged, they could go on to make an enquiry, attend an Open Day, or even start their application. These are your macro conversions – the 'big deal' events that signal this person is serious about coming to study with you.

By mapping these out, you're beginning to see the user journey that a lead goes through. By doing so you can then make sure that you've delivered the right content, to the right people, at the right time.

CONVERSION FUNNELL

Think about where your leads sit within the funnel; after all, not everyone comes in and out of your funnel linearly. For example, a point from a paid media (Facebook) campaign will match your target audience, as the campaign is building awareness, but might not have any specific intent. Whereas, a lead from a PPC campaign will come in with some degree of intent. The key is to make sure you have mapped these sources, to the relevant place in the funnel. You need to put a system in place to ensure that the leads from those sources are getting the right information at the right time.

Take stock of every touchpoint your contacts have made with your institution and begin mapping out precisely what you have to say. This audit process gets you thinking about your content, goals, lead sources and the platforms prospective students are interacting with.

AWARENESS

CONSIDERATION

INTENT

DECISION
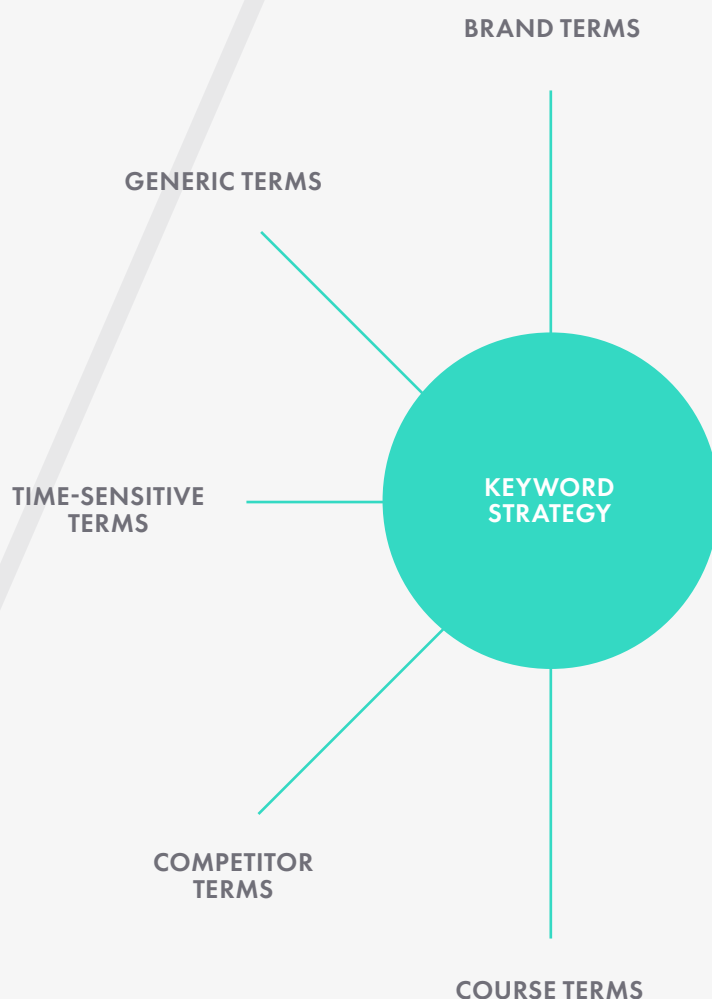
ENROLMENT
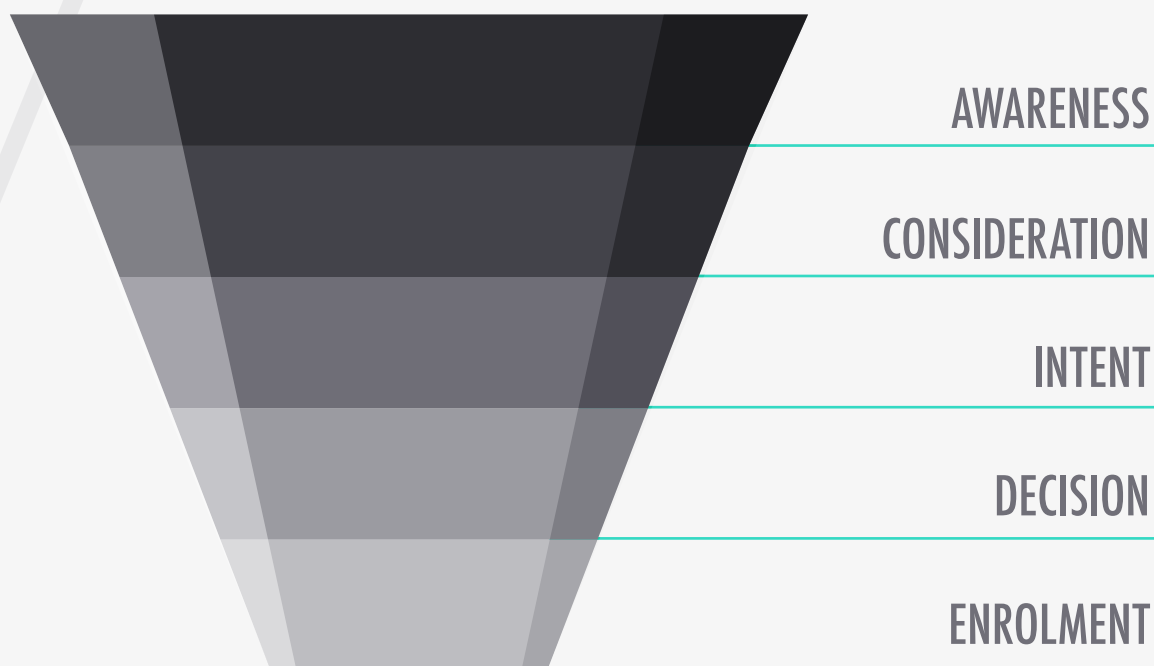
KEYWORD RESEARCH

You should now know your leads a bit better, so start looking at what types of content you are producing and how you can best resonate with this audience. Look at the keywords your audience are using from these five different categories. You'll want to use all, or at least a combination, of these categories in any copy that you write.

Understand the nuances of each market. Some factors are more important than others depending on which country you are targeting. For example, people in 'Country A' are far more interested in top performing institutions and subjects, whereas the keywords are more generic in 'Country B' and 'Country C.' This insight will help you see the best wording and terminology to use in your marketing.

And here are some examples of where you might apply this knowledge:

- **Keyword bidding**
- **Advert messaging**
- **Landing page copy**
- **Course pages**
- **External content**

Understanding these factors, which may be specific to your institution, and applying this knowledge to your content will improve your conversion rates.

BRAND TERMS

GENERIC TERMS

TIME-SENSITIVE TERMS

KEYWORD STRATEGY

COMPETITOR TERMS

COURSE TERMS

LANDING PAGE OPTIMISATION

Once you've attracted your audience to your content; you need to make sure you're efficient at converting your leads - this is why a stunning landing page is really important. We use a framework called 'The Three W's' which helps create an effective landing page.

> WHAT?

What is the reason for your page existing? Depending on the page and the campaign, this could be your institution in general, a specific course or a specific event like an Open Day. The page should convey what the campaign is about, without any confusion or multiple CTAs.

> WHY?

Why should the lead fill in the form? This could be as broad as student testimonials, or it could be more specific such as incentives or extra content to help inform their decisions.

> WHERE?

Where should they go next? Be generous in your next steps and think about your lead's interest. Are they given links to other relevant pages on your website? Are they sent an automated, personalised follow-up email?

> LANDING PAGE QUICK WINS

■ Keep the form above the field

This is the most important recommendation we can make. Few users will scroll down a landing page. Make sure the form is seen instantly.

■ Reduce distractions

Make sure your landing page is specific, not a generic course or event page. Your lead will be distracted from your main CTA by your website structure.

■ Use second part forms

Use second part forms to gain more qualifying information or market research, which might help you in future campaigns.

■ Give them next steps

Following a form completion, your lead is the warmest it will ever be. Take advantage of this by providing additional information or resources to let them nurture themselves and feel more connected to your brand.

TRACKING AND TAGS

Once you have understood your audience and attracted them to your content, it is important to track their activity.

Understand the key steps in your student journey by splitting your conversions into macros and micro conversions (yes, those terms again). This will enable you to understand how both types feed into the bigger picture. If you can increase the number of micro translations, you will, in turn, increase the number of macro conversions, which is the end game.
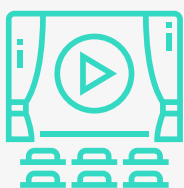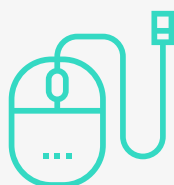
MICRO EVENTS

IMPRESSIONS
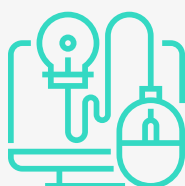
CLICKS

VIDEO VIEWS

DOWNLOADS

BRAND SENTIMENT

SCROLL DEPTH

MACRO EVENTS

ENQUIRES

APPLICATIONS

ENROLMENTS

LEAD NURTURE

Once you have started to think about your micro and macro conversions, you then need to identify how you're going to get your converted lead to those different stages. You want to see where people are in the process and how likely they are to convert.

The diagram below shows the different routes people might take, depending on who they are and where they've come from. For example, someone could come in from a Google Search campaign, where you could hit them straight away with a loud call to action. Or, perhaps they are from a social media source, where you're nurturing time might be a little longer? Fundamentally, what you need to do is connect all touchpoints up through an email nurture strategy.
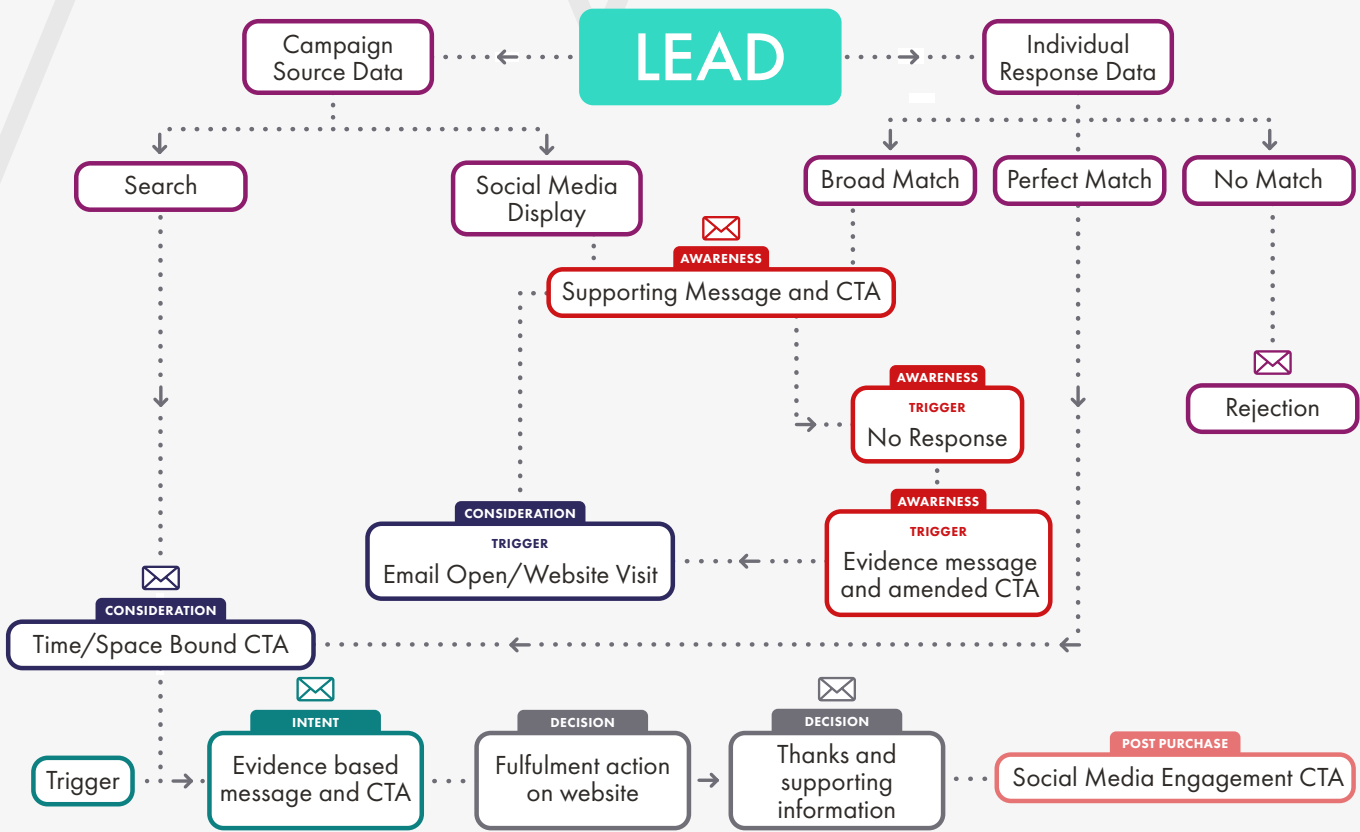
LEAD NURTURE

Our framework, made up of The Four As, will help you do this. By thinking about each one of these, in turn, you can make sure your emails are relevant and targeted with a clear call to action.

> AUDIENCE

How do you know that a person who has completed an online form, is the right person? To make sure they are, you need to make sure you're asking the right questions on each of the forms. Think about how you're going to identify with specific groups, use second part forms to qualify your leads before sending your first email.

> ASSETS

This is the perfect opportunity to show off and prove to prospective students that studying at your institution is the right thing to do. Think of all the amazing content you can create and deliver to slot into your long lead nurture strategy. This type of material could be testimonials, student stories or invitations to Open Days. Don't shy away from interactive content; Facebook Live, videos or webinars are all ways students can learn more about your university.

> ACTIONS

Match your objectives to your leads. For example, if they attend one of your events make sure you nurture them afterwards with the right messaging and the right type of content. Think about the touchpoints and student journey, and lead them to do something else.

> ACTIVITIES

This is slightly more technical than the other three, as it looks at how you actually build, send and trigger an email. As mentioned, everything should be tested, this enables you to find out exactly what is going on in your automation campaigns. Look at which subject lines had the most email opens, and base the remainder of your campaign around that knowledge. You continuously want to make sure you're showing ROI on your efforts.

REPORTING

Learn what is working well and optimise accordingly.

Reporting is one of the most time-consuming activities that marketers face. With most institutions running a significant amount of marketing activity, it's essential that there is one central space to check how all campaigns are performing. One singular reporting hub will allow you to have a more holistic view of the activity that's working.

Here is an example of marketing activity, which shows how data could be broken down. As you can see there are top line metrics, costs and clicks; you can then filter this down to see how it can vary per platform, per country, or perhaps by faculty. This real-time data will then let you identify what is good, and allow you to move budget towards platforms that work the best and that are generating the most qualified leads for your institution.
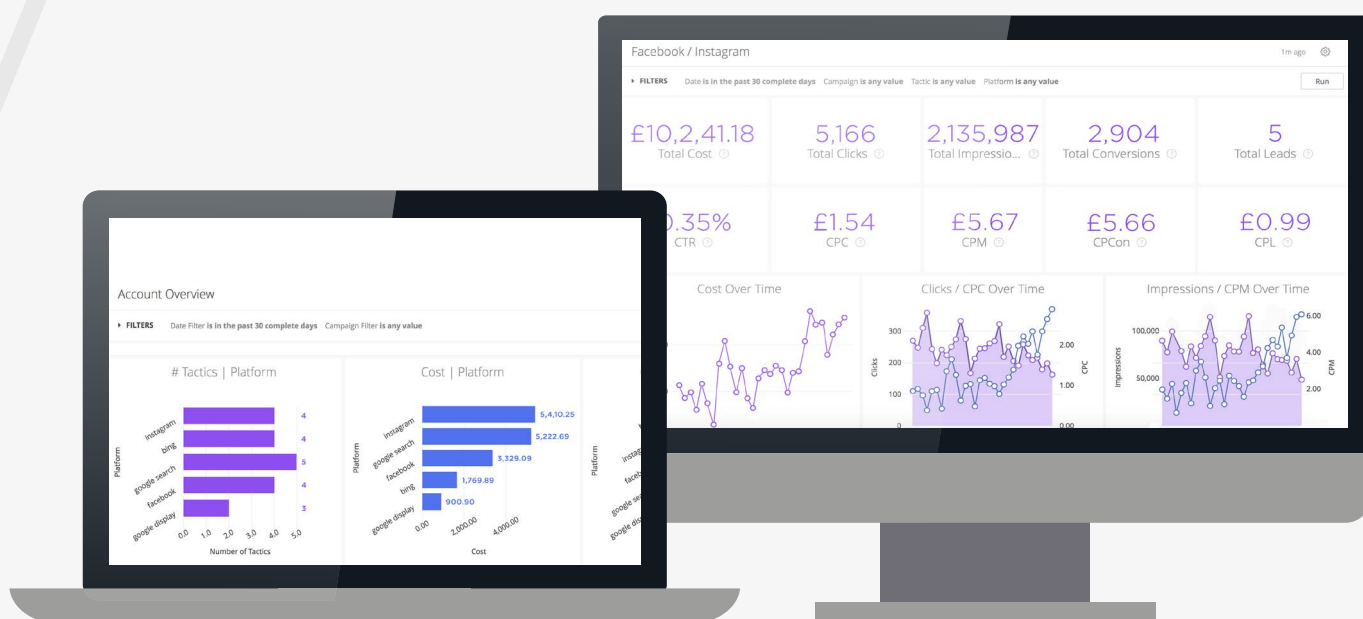
SUMMARY

Remember, we've outlined the seven processes to increase student lead conversions but every campaign is different, and every institution is different. Make sure you review, learn and action these learnings each time, to ensure long-term strategic success. Everything you do should be informed by your contacts themselves. Never make assumptions about the content, platform and messaging unless you have tested.

RESEARCH

Understand who your audience are, where they are and what they want

STUDENT JOURNEY MAPPING

Map every interaction that a potential student will have with your institution

KEYWORD OPTIMISATION

Identify what keywords you want to use in your advertising and on your mobile

LANDING PAGE OPTIMISATION

Identify the What, Why, and Where to create great designs

REPORTING

Learn what is working well and optimise accordingly

LEAD NURTURING

Address the Audience, Assets, Actions, and Activities

TRACKING AND TAGS

Split your conversions into Micros and Macros to help understand the attribution

ABOUT NATIVES GLOBAL CONSULTING

Natives Global Consultancy and our expert practitioners blend technology and expertise to help education institutions make better decisions through understanding their data.

Trusted globally by over 250 institutions, Natives GC helps them understand and solve unique challenges.

We are the leading audience insights and conversion strategy consultancy. We specialise in student and global recruitment and marketing for the education sector. We help you understand your data and make better decisions.

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