



ARE YOUR LEAD VENDORS ABOVE-BOARD?

Ensure ethical recruitment practices by asking critical questions

By Malcolm McLeod, EducationDynamics

Higher education recruitment practices are now front and center as Congress, the Obama Administration and the media scrutinize schools' efforts to reach and attract prospective students. In this climate of review and transparency, compliance monitoring has become an integral part of effective inquiry management.

Not all inquiry generation vendors are created equal, and prudent colleges and universities will take measures to examine marketing efforts, identify where leads are coming from and flag unethical practices. By redirecting resources to credible vendors that are operating honestly, reliably and conscientiously, schools will not only ensure their recruitment practices are on the up-and-up, but will also be able to protect their reputations while maximizing their marketing spend by focusing on highly qualified prospective students.

Career colleges can determine if their lead vendors are legitimate partners or wolves in sheep's clothing by asking critical questions:

Is their information about you correct?

Are vendors promoting the correct programs or are they misrepresenting your offerings? If a vendor isn't accurately representing your program offerings – saying you have programs you don't, or not listing the ones you do – the prospective students it connects you with are going to be dissatisfied and you will be set up to fail when you reach out to them. You can't serve a prospective student if you don't have what they are looking for. Also, does the vendor use the correct copy and descriptions to depict your offerings? Or is the language used to talk about your programs misleading? Does it use the correct logos and images? If the vendor is the first interaction a

prospective student has with your school and your brand, its information needs to be clear and accurate. If the vendor is engaging in deceptive behavior as it relates to your institution, you should steer clear.

Are they making you guilty by association?

Vendors whose conduct is unscrupulous will have a negative effect on your institution's reputation. Be aware of what your school's brand is being associated with. For example, does the vendor participate in false advertising (Free iPod! Click here!) to generate inquiries? Are the prospects truly interested in higher education or are they confused when you call them? Be sure to know what drew the prospective student to your school and demand high standards from your vendors. If the vendor is using your brand to drive leads, you need to be in control of the message they are sending.

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Are they collecting the right information?

Information is vital to determining the viability of a prospective student. Are the vendors including the correct validation field questions on the request form? Vendors that are doing their job well will ask the right questions and gather the right information to make sure that they are validating inquiries in a meaningful way – one that provides only high-performing leads.

Ultimately, lead generation vendors act as conduits between prospective students and a school. Any experience a prospective student has during the initial process may impact the school's brand or the prospects' perception of the school – regardless of whether they request information or not. It is therefore in the best interest of the institution to take all necessary steps to make sure that partnership is beneficial and to sever ties if it is not. Ask questions and demand answers. The last thing a school needs is for a vendor to facilitate an experience that will set the prospect up for disappointment when contacted by an admissions counselor. Make sure you know what your partner vendors are doing so that you can be confident that they are representing you ethically and in a way that aligns with the mission and values of your institution. ■

Malcolm McLeod is Vice President of Inquiry Management Solutions at EducationDynamics, a higher education marketing information and technology services company dedicated to helping schools find, enroll and retain students. He can be reached via email at mmcleod@educationdynamics.com.

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info@mdtdirect.com | 1.888.202.2751
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