

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Direct Mail Automation Playbook



POSTALYTICS
DIRECT MAIL AUTOMATION

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The Ultimate Playbook for Higher Education Student Recruitment: Boost Your Engagement and Response Rates with Direct Mail

When considering a student recruitment strategy for higher education, don't overlook the power of direct mail. Physical mail can stand out and make a lasting impression in ways that digital communication cannot. Postal mail offers a multi-sensory personal touch that digital marketing sometimes lacks. It's an essential part of a well-rounded marketing mix.

Refrain from thinking that your target market of incoming or returning college students is tuned into only what they see on their mobile phones. Contrary to popular belief, younger generations respond positively to direct mail. Studies have shown that these groups appreciate physical mail's tangible nature and infrequency.

- ▶ A study by Keypoint shows that Gen Z has a healthy regard for direct mail. 43% of them check their physical mail daily—a rate that exceeds the Millennials, most of whom are now in their 30s and 40s. ([Who Still Checks Their Mail?](#)).
- ▶ Surprisingly, younger generations are the most enthusiastic about direct mail. According to a survey by Quad Graphics, 57% of 18- to 34-year-olds said they found direct mail extremely or very useful, the highest of any age group. ([The Direct Marketing Revolution Report](#))
- ▶ Canada Post highlights that Gen Z, known for their digital savvy, also values direct mail for its authenticity and personal touch. 56% of Zoomers always look at their postal mail to see if it applies to them. Targeted messages from your educational institution delivered to their mailboxes will surely get their attention. ([How brands, behavior, and direct mail impact Gen Z and Millennials](#)).

This evidence underscores why incorporating direct mail into your student recruitment strategies is so important. You will enhance your outreach efforts and connect with potential students and student influencers in a way that offers a comprehensive view of what your institution is all about.

The Power of Direct Mail for Student Recruitment



Student recruitment and admissions professionals can use thoughtfully crafted physical mail to connect with—and leave a lasting impression on—students and their families. Put it to work when communicating with your audience for occasions, like inviting prospective students to open houses and for campus tours, highlighting campus events, or providing updates.

By showcasing unique selling points—such as prestigious academic programs, state-of-the-art facilities, or vibrant campus life—direct mail allows institutions to emphasize aspects that make them stand out. This tailored approach can attract students aligned with your values and offerings, cre-

ating a stronger fit and a more committed pool of prospective students.

Just like digital messaging, direct mail includes mechanisms for immediate action. **Personalized URLs** or **QR** codes make it easy for recipients to engage further with your institution. At the same time you track their interactions and then use the data to trigger further student recruitment efforts.

Direct mail isn't just about the initial reach, but about staying connected too. It helps support ongoing relationships with parents, alumni, and admissions coaches, keeping them engaged and informed. For distance learners and students who may never set foot on campus, mailed materials deliver a sense of inclusion and belonging that digital communications simply can't provide.

You can drive enrollment via direct mail by providing contact information or direct links to admissions portals. Potential candidates—especially those you may have missed through digital channels—can receive a unique, high-touch communication that compels them to explore your programs more deeply.

What types of direct mail pieces work best?



Depending on the situation, you'll want to choose from the variety of direct mail formats, i.e. letter packages, postcards, and self-mailers, that work best for the level and timing of your communications—and your budget. Pick the type of mail that allows you to communicate, through copy, photographs, special offers, and calls to action that will elicit the desired response without unnecessary overspending.

BROCHURES AND CATALOGS

These pieces show your audience an extensive overview of what your institution offers. Highlight academic programs, extracurricular activities, and campus amenities to create an absorbing narrative. These multi-page bound documents are also some of the most expensive to produce and mail. Reserve them for student candidates who have shown they are seriously considering, or have already committed to your school.

POSTCARDS

Use postcards for quick, impactful messages. Announce upcoming open houses, scholarship deadlines, or unique campus events. Their brevity ensures your message remains top-of-mind and reinforces brand identity, they're easy to produce, and they are the least expensive to mail. Student recruitment campaigns often begin with a postcard, frequently as a conduit to online forms where you can gather information used to personalize future mailings and electronic communications.

LETTERS

Personalized letters are a more formal and can forge a direct connection with the student. Tailor content to individual interests based on earlier interactions or inquiries. Include handwritten notes for an extra personal touch. Communications from top-level representatives like the college president or deans should be in letter-package form, using a single or multi-page letter, tri-folded and in an outer envelope.

FLYERS AND INSERTS

These are ideal for sharing detailed information about specific programs or events. Use eye-catching graphics, concise text, QR codes and/or personalized URLs (pURLs) to deliver your message effectively. You might, for example, include inserts that highlight certain fields of study, groups, or campus life—according to the prospective student's interests. Include this material with a packet that features a personalized letter, forms, or other important information. Learning institutions often include flyers and inserts in envelopes that contain transactional documents such as payment receipts or financial aid, housing, or meal plan applications.

WELCOME PACKAGES

A thoughtfully curated Welcome package can leave a lasting impression. Include merchandise like campus-themed stationery or apparel, along with important enrollment information. Colleges rarely send these top-shelf items near the beginning of the recruitment effort, but reserve them for later, when the student has committed or is nearing the decision. You may personalize some images, copy, calls-to-action, etc. in a welcome package to reference a student's chosen field of study, sports, social groups, and other interests.

Each type of direct mail piece has its unique benefits. By strategically combining these formats—and combining mail with your email and other digital marketing—you can create a well-rounded, omni-channel campaign that appeals to different interests and preferences.

Compelling Messages: What to Say and How to Say It



Begin with a hook that grabs the audience's attention at once. Whether it's a question that sparks curiosity or a bold statement that highlights a significant achievement of your institution, make sure your headline and opening lines intrigue the reader.

You can convey your core message now that you've captured their attention. Clearly outline the benefits of your college or university, such as unique programs, outstanding faculty, modern facilities, and vibrant campus life. Use straightforward language and avoid jargon to make your message accessible and engaging.

Include personalization to make the recipient feel valued and understood. Mention their name, reference their interests, or highlight programs that align with their goals. Personalization shows that your institution cares about their aspirations.

Incorporate interesting visuals and testimonials too. Images of your campus, student life, and successful alumni create an emotional connection, while testimonials from current students and alumni add credibility and provide social proof. A well-placed quote from a satisfied student can reinforce your message.

Last, always appreciate the power of a strong call-to-action (CTA). Encourage the reader to take the next step, whether scheduling a campus visit, attending an open house, or applying online. Make the CTA clear, direct, and easy to follow, guiding them seamlessly toward engaging with your institution.

Personalization Techniques to Increase Engagement



You can make each student feel seen, heard, and appreciated. By leveraging personalization techniques, you can transform a simple piece of mail into a memorable experience. Begin with the basics: use variable-data printing to incorporate the recipient's name and specific interests. This small touch can make a large difference.

Use data collected by standardized test administrators and other outside sources for insights into each student's interests and goals. Use this data to inform your messaging across all communication channels.

Dig deeper into your CRM data to tailor your message. If a prospective student shows interest in engineering, highlight your institution's renowned engineering programs and facilities. Include testimonials from current students or successful alumni in that field. This approach not only supplies relevant

information but also builds trust and credibility.

Don't stop at text personalization. Enrich your direct mail with vibrant images, engaging graphics, and calls to action. Visual elements attract attention and can convey your message more effectively. For instance, an inviting image of campus life, paired with a personalized message, engages students so that they envision themselves at your college or university.

Personalization should continue after the first piece of mail too. Implement a multichannel campaign where direct mail complements your digital outreach. Follow up in a couple of weeks with an email that drives them to the same personalized landing page that you created for your initial mail piece. This integration bridges the offline and online engagement gap, fostering a more comprehensive recruitment strategy.

By personalizing each touchpoint and aligning it with the interests and needs of prospective students, you create a convincing narrative. This cohesive approach significantly boosts engagement and the likelihood of converting prospects into enrolled students.

Enhancing Open Rates: Tips to Make Your Mail Stand Out

FIRST IMPRESSIONS MATTER



Optimize every aspect of your direct mail to enhance open rates and ensure they stand out. Start with an eye-catching envelope or bold designs on a postcard that instantly intrigues the recipient.

Design elements play a crucial role. Use vibrant colors, different qualities of paper, and consider unique shapes or textures that make the mail piece feel special. Sometimes, a simple tweak like a non-standard size can make your mail rise above the rest of the stack. Many Postalytics customers prefer the large, 6" x 11" postcards, as they stand out among the family's daily mail, and present ample room for all the messaging you need to include.

Next, personalize your envelopes. Address the recipient by name and use targeted messaging that speaks directly to their interests or goals. This creates a sense of personal connection right from the start. Incorporate a "teaser" line of copy or a sneak peek on the envelope that hints at the content inside, luring the student to open it.

INTEGRATE PERSUASIVE IMAGERY AND GRAPHICS

A well-chosen image can convey a wealth of information at a glance, whether a dynamic campus photo, a snapshot of student life, a sporting event, or a visual of a key academic program. Such elements make your direct mail visually appealing and relevant.

STRATEGIC MESSAGING

Use short, impactful headings and concise text to convey the main benefits of your institution. Highlight exclusive opportunities, scholarships, unique programs, or national ratings that set your college apart.

INTERACTIVITY

Experiment with interactive elements. QR codes, personalized URLs, or **augmented reality** features can offer an added layer of engagement. These tools capture attention and engagement while bridging the gap between direct mail and digital content.

CALLS-TO-ACTION (CTAS)

Ensure every piece of mail has a clear and strong call to action. Whether you want the recipient to schedule a campus visit, contact an admissions officer, or go online to learn more, make your CTA prominent and easy to follow. A well-defined CTA encourages the recipient to take the next step, enhancing the overall success of your campaign. If the recipient doesn't know exactly what to do next, your mail piece cannot generate the desired results!

Timing is Everything: When to Send Your Direct Mail



Choose your timing carefully to maximize the impact of your direct mail efforts. Begin by evaluating your academic calendar. Sending materials right after significant school events, such as open houses or college fairs that a student attended, can reinforce your institution's presence in their minds.

Consider the academic and personal calendars of your target students as well. For high school seniors, peak periods such as the beginning of the school year, around mid-terms, and pre-holiday breaks provide ideal opportunities. They will engage with their families and decide about their future during these times and are therefore more likely to engage with your message.

Remember to consider application deadlines. Sending reminders as these dates approach can

nudge students to take action. Include clear CTAs like "Apply Now," "Schedule a Visit," or "Join Our Webinar" to direct them toward the next steps.

Plan for multiple touchpoints across your recruitment cycles. More than a single piece of communication is required. Develop a series of mailings and electronic messages that are timed to coincide with critical decision-making points, ensuring that your institution remains top-of-mind throughout the process.

Note that some timing decisions are driven by the calendar and affect all students equally. However, action relevant to individual students requires careful data collection and sophisticated triggering, powered by an automated system. Many Postalytics customers rely on HubSpot or other CRM to supply this functionality, because of the platforms' tight integration with our automated direct mail system. Still, Postalytics works equally well with whichever student-recruitment platform you may use.

Show students that you know them by demonstrating that your institution is on top of things, by recognizing conditions such as a longer-than-expected gap in communications with a student, a birthday, or other important events. Remind them of your last interaction and let them know you await their word to advance the registration process.

Integrating Direct Mail with Digital Marketing Strategies



Combining direct mail with your digital marketing strategies creates a cohesive and powerful recruitment campaign. By leveraging multiple channels, your message reaches potential students in various ways, further maximizing engagement.

COORDINATE CAMPAIGN TIMING

Align your direct mail send dates with your digital marketing calendar. Send teasers or follow-ups via email or social media to coincide with the expected arrival date of your mail piece. This synchronization can build anticipation and reinforce your message. Postalytics tracks the progress of your direct mail as it travels through the USPS delivery network. This built-in feature allows you to issue e-mail or text message reminders on the day the USPS will deliver the mail.

DRIVE ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Use direct mail to guide recipients to specific online actions. Include QR codes, personalized URLs (PURLs), or unique hashtags that encourage prospective students to visit your website, sign up for a virtual tour, or engage with your institution on social media.

TRACK AND ANALYZE RESPONSES — AND THEN PUT THE INFORMATION TO WORK!

Integrated direct mail and digital efforts allow you to make good use of valuable data on how students interact with your campaign. Track responses using online metrics such as click-through rates, landing page visits, or social media mentions. This data helps refine future marketing strategies for better results.

CREATE CONSISTENT BRANDING

Your branding and messaging must remain consistent across all channels. Your direct mail pieces should reflect the same tone, style, and visual elements as your digital content. This consistency reinforces your institution's identity and leaves a memorable impression.

LEVERAGE RETARGETING

Use digital retargeting to follow up with prospects who interacted with your direct mail pieces. Serving tailored ads to these individuals on social media or other websites keeps your institution top-of-mind and encourages further engagement.

Integrating direct mail with digital marketing strategies creates a multi-channel approach that enhances your recruitment efforts and improves overall communication. This synergy between physical and digital touchpoints can lead to higher response rates and more successful recruitment campaigns.

Measuring Success: Tracking and Analyzing Your Campaigns



Begin your measurement efforts by implementing proper tracking mechanisms to monitor the success of your direct mail campaigns. Unique coupon codes, personalized URLs (PURLs), and dedicated phone numbers can help track response rates and conversions effectively. For instance, a unique coupon code in each mail piece can provide insights into the exact number of recipients who responded to your offer.

Personalized URLs serve a dual purpose. They engage potential students by including their names in the URLs and allow you to track interactions with your campaign at the individual level. This level of detail will help you understand which segments of your audience are most responsive, and which messages resonate best.

Analyzing data plays a crucial role in measuring success. Gather and scrutinize the response

data to identify trends and patterns. Did a particular design or message outperform others? Did certain segments show higher engagement? Use this information to make data-driven decisions for future initiatives.

Adopt a mindset of continuous improvement and test elements of your campaign. Experiment with different headlines, offers, and designs to see what drives the highest response rates. Mail small batches, analyze the outcomes, and then scale up your campaign with the winning variations. Within the Postalytics platform, marketers can easily create multiple versions of mail pieces and send them to randomly selected recipients, using the A/B test functionality.

Integrate your findings with broader marketing efforts. Combine your direct mail insights with digital marketing data to gain a comprehensive understanding of your outreach effectiveness. You'll be able to create a cohesive communication plan that maximizes reach, engagement, and budget by aligning both strategies.

By rigorously tracking, analyzing, and refining your approach, you can ensure your direct mail campaigns continually improve and deliver the desired results.

Leveraging Student Stories and Testimonials in Your Mail



One of the most effective ways to connect with prospective students is through the authentic voices of their peers. Student success stories and testimonials add valuable personal touches to your direct mail campaigns.

Start by identifying students who have captivating narratives, whether it's overcoming challenges, academic achievements, or unique campus experiences. These stories build credibility and create emotional connections.

INCLUDE ENGAGING MULTIMEDIA

Use high-quality images and graphics within your mail pieces to make these stories more vivid. A picture of a student in action paired with a heartfelt quote, for example, can res-

onate profoundly with recipients. Consider adding QR codes that link to video testimonials or virtual campus tours for an interactive experience.

HIGHLIGHT DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Prospective students come from many backgrounds and have different interests. By showcasing a range of student stories, you can appeal to a wider audience. When you highlight diversity in your mail it demonstrates inclusivity and shows that your institution values different perspectives.

Remember to align these testimonials with your institution's unique selling points. If your school excels in research opportunities, spotlight a student who has thrived in this environment. If campus culture stands out, share stories of students who have found community and engagement.

A strategic approach to leveraging student stories and testimonials humanizes your institution and increases the likelihood of engagement and response from prospective students.

Creating Multilingual Direct Mail for Diverse Student Audiences



Your institution might attract students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. To connect with these distinct audiences, design your direct mail pieces and campaigns in multiple languages, tailoring each piece to resonate with different cultural contexts. Start by identifying the primary languages spoken by your target student demographics. Then, work with experienced translators who understand the language, any different dialects, and cultural nuances that could impact your message's effectiveness.

Personalize the content not just by language, but by integrating cultural references that are familiar and appealing to each group. This practice shows your commitment to inclusivity and helps establish a stronger connection with potential students and their families. For example, if you're targeting Spanish-speaking students, mention cultural festivities or educational achievements that are significant within Latino communities.

Use visuals thoughtfully. Photos, symbols, and design elements should align with the cultural norms of your target audiences. Inclusive imagery, featuring students from various ethnic backgrounds, enhances the relatability and appeal of your mail pieces.

Consider each element of your direct mail, from the opening salutation to the call to action. A simple phrase like "Join our community" may translate directly, but ensuring it resonates culturally requires deeper insight. Also, recognizing and addressing cultural sentiments in areas like education and community involvement can significantly boost the effectiveness of your campaign.

Be sure your contact methods accommodate language preferences. Providing contact information for bilingual admission officers or offering multilingual online resources allows prospective students to continue their journey seamlessly with your institution. These extra steps showcase your institution's readiness to support a multicultural student body, fostering an environment of inclusivity and accessibility from the outset.

CAUTION: AUTOMATED LANGUAGE TRANSLATION

Language translators available via artificial intelligence platforms can significantly lower the cost of transforming your messages into multiple languages. But here's a caution: Although they can certainly translate the words, they often do not recognize cultural nuances or they may misunderstand the context. Prospective students will instantly recognize any terms or phrasing that is "off", negating the value of the translation. Have qualified humans review your translations before placing the text into production.

Case Studies: Colleges/Agencies That Boost Student Recruitment with Direct Mail



eduConverse is a comprehensive CRM and marketing platform that elevates student engagement through personalized, timely interactions across all channels. They help colleges and universities recruit prospective students, and communicate with parents, guidance counselors, and influencers to encourage students with “curated and personalized recruitment experiences” that “provide colleges the strategy and tools to connect and intelligently engage with students.”

The success of EduConverse’s solutions sets it apart in the landscape of higher education recruitment and marketing agencies. They present a practical strategy for colleges and universities looking to improve their engagements, drive prospects through the application process, and support connections with their alumni.

Before connecting with Postalytics, EduConverse did not include direct mail in their solution. Each school contracted with a local printer to handle the direct mail aspect of recruitment. In less than four years with Postalytics, the company reached an impressive milestone: sending 1 million direct mail pieces annually through their Postalytics Agency Edition account.

“We see print as a premium channel,” says EduConverse CEO John Copeland. “But you can’t send everything to everyone.”

Postalytics is a key component of the EduConverse platform, generating high-impact direct mail that includes special QR codes.

The direct mail piece starts a complex sequence of events, triggered by a completed application. Activities may include follow-up messages to the student, notification to relevant college departments, or an action item for a college official to call the student on the phone.

To learn more about eduConverse’s use of Postalytics, see our [Case Study](#).

Avoid Common Pitfalls in Direct Mail Campaigns



When launching a direct mail campaign, steer clear of these frequent mistakes to maximize your outreach and effectively connect with prospective students. Avoid these pitfalls, and you'll significantly elevate the success of your direct mail efforts, effectively attracting and engaging prospective students.

SKIPPED DATA VALIDATION

Ensure your mailing lists are accurate and up-to-date. Unvalidated data can lead to undelivered messages, wasting resources, and missing out on potential candidates. Fortunately, the PostalYTics automated direct mail platform analyzes delivery addresses and discards any that are undeliverable, allowing the learning institution to make corrections to its database. We also compare the data to the USPS National Change of Address (NCOA) file to correct addresses of mail recipients who have moved and filed a change of address notice.

GENERIC MESSAGES

Personalize every piece of mail. Address students by name, mention specific programs they're interested in, and tailor the content to resonate with their unique needs and goals. You can accomplish personalization without adding to production costs by leveraging variable data text and images in your direct mail pieces.

WEAK CALLS TO ACTION (CTAS)

You have only a brief opportunity to encourage mail recipients to take the next step. If the benefits of doing so are not obvious, the mail will be set aside, and you won't hear from your prospects. A strong CTA drives response. Clearly state exactly what you want recipients to do next. Whether it's to visit a specific webpage, schedule a campus tour, or join a virtual info session, make the desired action obvious and compelling. This is an opportunity to provide the fear of missing out (FOMO).

IGNORING DESIGN ELEMENTS

Mail recipients will quickly overlook boring content. Invest in high-quality, visually appealing designs. An eye-catching mail piece captures attention and encourages engagement. Use professional graphics, readable fonts, and a clean layout to make your materials stand out.

INSUFFICIENT TRACKING

“You can’t improve what you don’t measure.” Analyze the success of your campaign to find and fix weak spots. Use tracking codes, unique or personalized URLs, or QR codes to check responses and gather insights. Evaluating your results helps refine future mailings and improve overall effectiveness.

POOR TIMING

Even the best mail piece won’t prompt a response if it arrives at the wrong time. Plan your mailings strategically around critical decision-making periods. You can reduce their impact if you send your materials too early or too late. Sync your schedule with key recruitment timelines and academic calendars. Make note of important dates or events for each individual and program-triggered communications to make contact at critical times.

OVERLOOKING INTEGRATION WITH DIGITAL EFFORTS

Successful colleges and universities can no longer fill their pipelines of potential students using direct mail alone. Combine your direct mail campaign with online initiatives. Include email follow-ups or social media posts to reinforce your message and create more touchpoints. A consistent and multi-channel approach enhances your reach and success.

Automated Direct Mail for Student Recruitment



Postalytics leverages automation to make direct mail as easy and efficient as sending emails. We have eliminated traditional direct mail's tedious tasks and logistical nightmares, allowing you more time to strategize and focus on your core objectives.

We've shielded institutions of higher education from the most difficult aspects of direct mail, including:

- ▶ List management
- ▶ Postal logistics
- ▶ Minimum mail volume requirements
- ▶ Long creative & production lead times
- ▶ Coordination with printers and multiple vendors
- ▶ Variable data printing
- ▶ Personalization
- ▶ Cumbersome analytics and tracking.

Postalytics makes it easy for college recruiters to add direct mail to their marketing strategies without encountering the roadblocks and challenges that may otherwise keep them from fully using an efficient marketing channel. We integrate with world-class student information databases and CRM and marketing automation platforms. This integration significantly streamlines and enhances the quality of your list management procedures, ensuring every direct mail piece reaches the right student—and student-influencer—at the right time.

With a built-in dashboard for analytics, Postalytics offers real-time views into campaign performance, from production status to postal delivery status to engagement with and response to your mail pieces. These insights can be invaluable in shaping future recruitment decisions and improving the effectiveness of your marketing strategies.

With Postalytics' automated tools, you can create unique messages for each student based on their preferences or behavior, significantly enhancing the relevance of your communications—and doing it at scale.

As you consider leveraging direct mail's power for your learning institution, tools like Postalytics can help make the journey smoother, faster, and more effective. With automation, targeted personalization, and actionable analytics, direct mail can become a strategic hero in your student recruitment toolkit.

READY TO LEARN MORE?

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