



LITTLE FOXES
DIGITAL MARKETING for HIGHER ED

how to create the

**ULTIMATE
HIGHER ED
MARKETING
PLAN**

LITTLEFOXESMARKETING.COM



Little Foxes Marketing partners exclusively with higher ed institutions to help them grow their programs and brand through digital and social media marketing.

When I was working inside of a higher ed institution, it was impossible to find a free marketing plan template online that was specific to higher ed.

I'm excited to change that, and I'm grateful that you took the time to download our plan!

I've spent my entire career marketing in higher ed - first, working on campuses, and later as an online program manager (OPM). I've used a version of this plan to market **hundreds of undergraduate and graduate programs** for colleges and universities across the country, and I hope it helps you hit your marketing targets.

If you get stuck or have a question, let me know.

All the best,

Tim Prusha

President

tim@littlefoxesmarketing.com

*If this guide helps you, feel free to share it on social media.
Just tag us so we know you liked it!*



STEP 1:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The executive summary comes first in your plan, but it is usually written last, after you've completed your plan. Here are the elements you will want to include in your summary:

1. SCOPE OF YOUR PLAN

Is this plan for a specific degree, a set of programs, a department, or an overall institution/brand? If this is for a degree, what level is that degree (i.e., bachelor's, master's) and how is it offered (on campus, online, or hybrid)? Is this plan measuring performance for the calendar year, academic year, semester, quarter, etc?

2. PREVIOUS YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

Look back at the previous year and list any highlights for this degree/brand. This will provide context and build momentum and positivity. This could include marketing or enrollment goals achieved (or, perhaps you missed them but you got closer than the prior year), successful campaigns, lessons learned, knowledge gained, improvements to the degree/brand, etc.

3. KEY FINDINGS

If someone only had time to read this specific section of your plan, what would you want them to know? List key takeaways, challenges, opportunities, things you are excited about, etc.

4. GOALS + KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

Your success will be measured by these KPIs. Some of these you'll learn in Step 2; the rest are simple division.

New Student Enrollment Goal

Marketing Cost Per Lead

Application Goal

Marketing Cost Per Application

Lead Goal

Marketing Cost Per Student

Marketing Budget

Include any other goals or KPIs that you want to measure

STEP 2:

MARKETING GOALS

In this section, you will lay out your marketing goals for the period.

To determine your marketing goals, start with your enrollment goals and use historic conversion rates to work backwards to determine what your lead goals should be. To keep things simple we will just use enrolls, applications, and leads, but if you have other enrollment stages that are important to you, add them in the appropriate place.

A Note About Leads: Many schools have different definitions of a lead or inquiry. Anytime we refer to "leads" in this document, we mean qualified leads who at one point expressed interest in your program as a result of a marketing or brand effort; they filled out a form, called a number, completed a chat, etc. "Leads" does not factor in lists of names that were purchased, lower-quality leads from an aggregation site, or any leads that didn't individually opt-in to inquire information.

New student goal		App to enroll conversion rate		This is your application goal
<input type="text"/>	÷	<input type="text"/>	=	<input type="text"/>
Application goal		Lead to app conversion rate		This is your lead goal
<input type="text"/>	÷	<input type="text"/>	=	<input type="text"/>

Now that you know how many leads you need for the year, it is helpful to plug in those numbers into a schedule, broken out by month. If you don't have a CRM or software that does this for you, an excel or Google sheet will suffice. You can work with an enrollment counterpart to get their input and sign off. They may be tracking some of this data already. Either way, having alignment on goals will reduce the tension that can sometimes develop between enrollment and marketing.

Extra Credit: If you're feeling ambitious at the moment, take your monthly lead goal and break out the main channels where those leads will come from. Otherwise, we will revisit this when we get to the final step, Step 7.

You can use the table below as a guide. Break social media out in to specific platforms if you can. "Campaign" is a placeholder for the miscellaneous campaigns you may run that month (i.e., inbound, radio, email, events, outdoor, direct mail, etc.).

Repeat this for each month. You can do the same thing for applications. Adding an "actual" column to the right of the Lead Goal column will help you track your performance and provide something to build off of next year.

Example: Month 1

Lead Source	Lead Goal
Website	
Paid Search (AdWords)	
Social Media	
Campaign	
Campaign	
Campaign	
Total	

STEP 3:

TARGET AUDIENCE

Your plan really revolves around your audience. In fact, everything your institution is about - and everything you do in marketing - should revolve around your audience. Being clear about who you serve will allow you to target them in marketing efforts, speak directly to their pain points, help them form an emotional connection with your brand, motivate them to act, and ensure that you are providing the best value possible to them.

1. TARGET STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

This question will help you **identify and locate** your target student. List all the demographic info you can on the target audience. Where they live, work (for adult/grad programs) their age, gender, etc. If you don't feel you have enough data, be creative: work with your admissions team and those who have the closest relationships with your prospects, consult your CRM, use Google Analytics/AdWords, etc.

2. TARGET STUDENT PSYCHOGRAPHIC PROFILE

These questions will help you **understand and engage** your target student.

Pro Tip: Throw these questions into a free service like Survey Monkey and send it to your current prospects, current students or alumni. You can also do informal, in-person interviews with current students you know or host a qualitative session by offering to meet over coffee with small groups of students.

- Why did your target student choose your program/brand (and not your competitors)?

- What are your target student's pain points?

What problems do they have? What are their worries, pressures and concerns? What keeps them up at night?

- What are your target student's future goals?

What are their biggest dreams and life aspirations? What motivates them to choose and pursue these goals?

- What are your target student's interests?

Hobbies, passions, likes, etc. Look for trends or similarities that will help you identify the proper marketing channels to use, images and messaging to choose, etc.

- How do you help your target student?

What problems does your program/brand solve for them? How does it (or could it) address their pain points? What emotional needs are being met, specifically?

3. WHERE DOES YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE LIVE ONLINE?

Where do they spend their time? What are their preferred social channels? Which music services do they subscribe to? How do they stay informed on current events?

4. HOW DOES YOUR TARGET STUDENT DO THEIR HIGHER ED RESEARCH?

Where did they learn about their educational options? How do they identify their final pool of program/college options? How much do they rely on friends, family or other influencers?

5. HOW DID YOUR CURRENT STUDENTS FIND YOU?

Hopefully you have access to this data in your CRM. However, asking students via surveys or interviews will allow you to hear it in their own words, which will shed more light on their decision process and path. Sometimes people confuse how they first heard about you (their initial source of awareness) with what finally motivated them to act. Both of these are great pieces of information to know, so don't be shy about digging in with follow up or clarifying questions.

STEP 4:

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

It's important to do some competitive research so you know who your target audience is comparing you against, and so you can stay ahead of the game.

Pro Tip: *When you look at your competitors, use analyst eyes and not copycat eyes. If you start imitating competitors, you'll end up looking more like them, which is the opposite of what we are going for here. And if they have a slick site, impressive photos, on-point messaging, or a ton more students, don't let it discourage you. You are putting in the work, developing your unique strategy, and you got this. We promise.*

1. IDENTIFY YOUR COMPETITORS

Try to find your 3-5 most serious competitors. Use any cross-app data or previous research you have, include 1-2 schools from your niche, local competitors within a 100 mile radius from campus, consult IPEDS, or do a good ol' Google search. Include their most relevant URL - for example, if you are writing this plan for a specific degree, post the address of the program page that most closely corresponds to your program. And if you are comparing degrees specifically, be sure it fits your same modality (only compare your online program to another online program).

Competitor	URL

2. COMPETITOR STRATEGIES

Go through your competitors' sites and social media accounts to determine what their strategies and goals are.

- How are they promoting their program/brand?

Are they promoting campus visits, connecting with a recruiter, a free application period, giveaways, etc.? Are there any strategies that many of them seem to use? Are they active in any particular social or paid channels? If you're planning a specific program, what types of content, links, or features are on their program page?

- What sets each competitor apart from the others on your list?

3. KNOW YOUR COMPETITOR'S PRICING

How do they present their pricing - is it hidden or highlighted on their site? Is it presented as a per credit cost, per program cost, annual cost, or full tuition? This will give you a clear picture of what your target market sees when they boil it down to cost. You can identify which brands have a commodity, value or premium pricing strategy.

4. LIST YOUR COMPETITORS' STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Finally, after looking at your competitors' sites, social accounts, and offerings, you should have a good idea about how these institutions are marketing (or not marketing) their unique values. What do they do well? Where could they improve? How can you take advantage of this knowledge to create your own, well-rounded strategy?

	Strengths	Weaknesses
COMPETITOR 1		
COMPETITOR 2		
COMPETITOR 3		
COMPETITOR 4		
COMPETITOR 5		

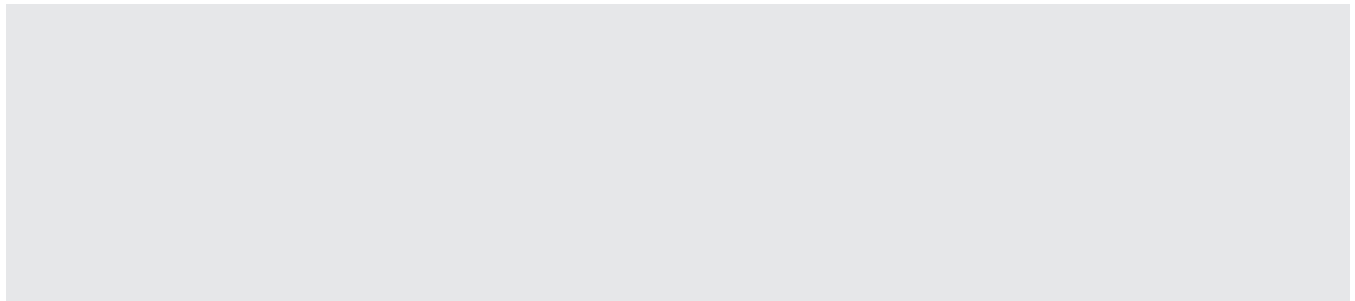
STEP 5:**UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION**

A unique value proposition (UVP) is a fancy MBA term that basically boils down to: a benefit or feature of your program/brand that is: 1) difficult for others to imitate and 2) something only YOU can claim.

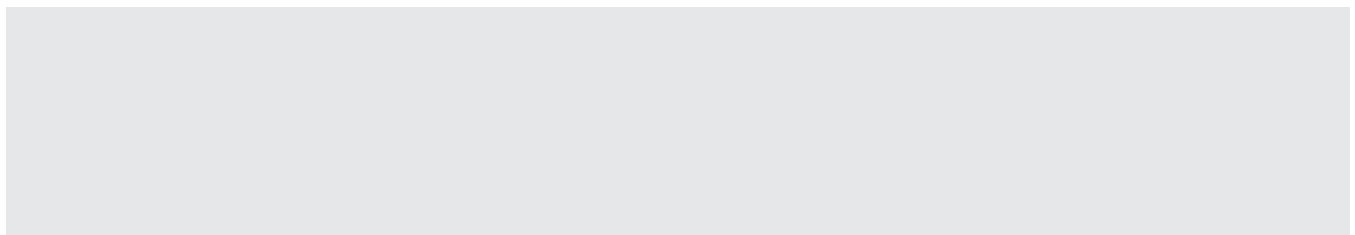
The simple truth is that in today's competitive higher ed landscape, you NEED to be different in a positive way. If your college has not already identified its UVP, it can be an intimidating process to start. And we get it, you're not Harvard (but if you are Harvard, hit us up). If you can't find something that makes you unique among all the programs/colleges in the world, then limit it to just your competitors, so that you can at least stand out in the mind of your target audience.

1. WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE?

List any features or benefits that are unique to your program/brand and cannot be easily imitated. You can start with the ways that you help your target audience (Step 3.2). If you're still stuck, here are some launching off points that might apply to you: being the "oldest" in a niche, a distinguished award or recognition, having a well-known faculty or staff member, being the first to do something noteworthy, having a famous alum, or being "known" for something unique.

**2. REFINE YOUR UVP(S)**

If it's not already, put your uniqueness into short, clear, concise phrases. These should answer the student's question of: "why should I choose your program/institution?"



STEP 6:**MARKETING MATERIALS**

It's helpful to have a single source that lists all of the marketing collateral that you have for a program/institution. You generate so much production during a year that it's helpful to step back and see all of the good work you've done. It's also a good way to look for gaps or opportunities to improve. But this section may be more helpful to those OUTSIDE your department. Sharing it with an admissions recruiter will ensure they know every resource that is available to them, or help generate ideas on new materials that might help sell the degree/brand.

1. WHAT MATERIALS ARE ALREADY CREATED?

If you're recreating your plan in a separate document, you can include visuals or screen shots of everything you've done. Otherwise, list out everything you've created for this program/brand.

Pro Tip: Displaying everything you've done, either in print or on a screen, in your department, hallways or meeting rooms can create a sense of accomplishment and pride for your colleagues, students and visitors.

2. WHAT NEEDS TO BE UPDATED?

List any materials that you want to tweak. This will include materials with dates that need to be changed, images that should be swapped out, messaging that feels stale, display ads that need to be resized, video that is looking dated, alternative versions of ads or copy for A/B testing, etc.

3. WHAT NEEDS TO BE CREATED?

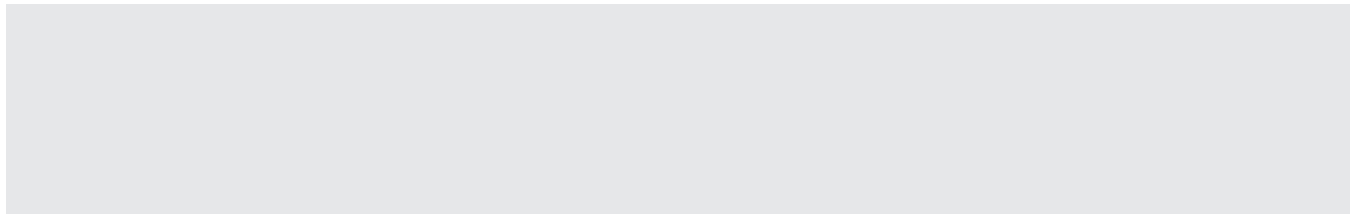
Dot down new collateral that will need to be created this year for any new campaigns you will run. Will any of it need to be outsourced? How will you prioritize and execute projects?

STEP 7:**PROMOTION STRATEGY**

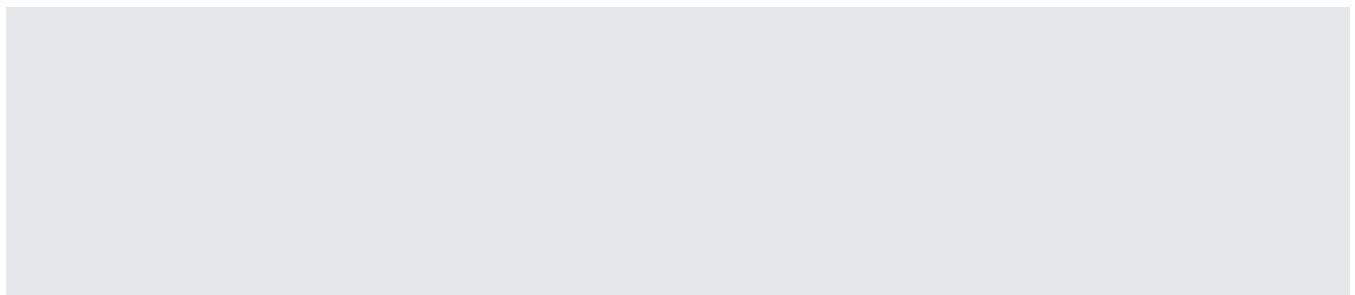
Congrats on making it to the final step! This portion is what most people think of when they want to see a marketing plan. They want to see the activity that will generate the demand that hits the enrollment goals. This section should incorporate all that you've learned so far and tie everything together.

1. WHAT STRATEGIES ARE WORKING?

List the tactics that have proven to be successful and that you want to repeat as a part of this plan. If possible, include metrics that made it successful (i.e., cost per lead, cost per enroll). Be sure to add any tweaks that you want to make to those strategies. For example, lets say you are marketing to a traditional undergrad audience and your paid Instagram campaigns were a success, with an acceptable cost per lead and conversion rate. To improve those KPI, you might want to add a remarketing strategy so that your website visitors start seeing your ads in their Instagram feed, or you might choose to allocate budget to begin advertising in Instagram Stories (*AHEM*, we know someone that can help you with that).

**2. WHAT STRATEGIES AREN'T WORKING?**

List what didn't work, and should be avoided. If you can, include why you think it didn't work and if you plan on revisiting it in the future. Sometimes strategies that are perceived as outdated (like direct mail or outdoor) can deliver value after all your competitors stop doing it.



3. CREATE YOUR PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY CALENDAR

It's helpful to have everything laid out, as much as you can, so you can see (and demonstrate to others) when and where you will be advertising. Let's go back to the table we looked at in Step 2: Marketing Goals. You can modify and add columns to build out your calendar for each month.

Example: Month 1

Strategy	Desired Results (i.e., leads)	Budget	Campaign Dates	Notes (special promotions, audience targeting, etc.)
Website/SEO				
Paid Search (AdWords)				
Social Media				
Campaign				
Campaign				
Campaign				
Total				

Selecting Channels

We wish we could tell you which channels to select, but that is unique to each program/brand. Use the information you unearthed during Step 3: Target Audience, choose channels where your target audience is most likely to be, and do as much testing as you can.

Now you should go back, complete the Executive Summary, and you'll be done with your strategic plan!

WAS THIS HELPFUL?

IF SO, SHARE IT VIA YOUR FAVORITE SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNEL AND @ US SO WE CAN GET YOUR FEEDBACK!

