LinkedIn

The Sophisticated MARKETER'S GUIDE TO CONTENT MARKETING

HIGHER EDUCATION EDITION

"When you consider LinkedIn's mission and product road map, coupled with the macro trends and new technologies in the higher ed space, it really is the perfect marriage for higher ed marketers."

STEFAN FRANK

Director of Social Media
University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School

Why higher education needs content marketing

Today's prospective students are empowered

The Internet and social media have enabled prospective students to research and make education decisions on their own. In the past, universities could rely on mass media and traditional marketing tactics to drive prospects to lead forms or to pick up the phone and call you. Now, the Internet enables prospects to self-educate and create their short list of schools before they even speak to a school representative.

Content marketing is the best way for schools to make the short list

Last year, we conducted research that proved that if you're waiting for Master's degree prospects to make first contact, it's likely too late. In this new environment, content marketing, aka: inbound marketing, is the best way to engage prospects early in the decision process and drive leads for your programs.

ONLY 3 SCHOOLS

make the prospects' short list

72%

develop their short list before reaching out to a school representative

93%

end up enrolling at a school from their short list

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Meet Sarah

Sarah was just hired by a rapidly growing university to raise its brand recognition while hitting increasing enrollment targets. This year, the university marketing team was determined to use inbound marketing and targeted social media to attract qualified applicants.

Sarah was thrilled at the clean slate waiting for her. But building a content machine to meet their aggressive performance expectations was a huge undertaking.

As her start date drew near, she narrowed her plan of attack down to 10 best practices that she would need to stick to if she was going to pull this off.

Building a Solid Foundation

Tip:

01 Understand the needs of your audience

02 Document your content marketing plan, starting with the end results

03 Audit existing content and enlist content creators

Tip **01**

Understand the needs of your audience

Researching and choosing a university is usually a long and strategic process for students. Becoming familiar with the challenges, fears, and hopes of your audience will allow you to create much more authentic content that speaks directly to them. With such a long decision-making process, effective content delivered consistently is crucial to making and staying on a prospective student's short list.

Develop audience personas, which are composite representations of your typical student prospects. A good persona will include the language they use to describe their aspirations, their key motivators for going back to school, where they turn for information, and information needed at each stage of the decision process.

PRO TIP: Check out this article from GMAC about **how to create a persona.**

CHECKLIST:

✔ **INTERVIEW**
your current students and enrollment advisors to find out key drivers for prospects.

✔ **ANALYZE**
your student database to understand the top industries and companies where your students are coming from.

✔ **CREATE**
personas of your key audiences based on the research above. Include their hopes, fears, pain points, and questions they need answered.

✔ **OBSERVE**
what is being discussed on social media and industry sites about employment trends and skill gaps that your programs help to address.

Tip **02**

Document your content marketing plan, starting with the end results

Begin the planning process by documenting what you hope to achieve with your content marketing. Try to capture all of your goals and develop metrics to measure your progress towards accomplishing each of those goals. In other words, **your goals will dictate your success metrics.**

Trying to drive higher quality leads? Perhaps you should measure the change in funnel velocity or time to close. Want your institution to raise its profile as a thought leader? Perhaps track the number of faculty speaking engagements you secure or conduct a brand tracking survey over time.

Schools with a well-documented content strategy are far more likely to make effective use of all content marketing tactics and social media channels, and much more likely to hit key goals and objectives such as increasing pipeline for enrollment.

PRO TIP: If you're just starting your content marketing program, start with one or two key platforms (ie. blog/website, LinkedIn, etc.) and establish your expertise consistently over time.

CHECKLIST:

✔ SET YOUR GOAL
What's the big picture? What do you hope to accomplish?

✔ BUILD YOUR OBJECTIVES
How will you measure success and by when?

✔ DEFINE YOUR STRATEGY
How will you achieve your objectives?

✔ DETERMINE YOUR TACTICS
Map out your plan of action, including a list of tactical elements (webinars, blog posts, Sponsored Content, etc.).

Tip **03**

Audit existing content and enlist content creators

Universities tend to be unique when it comes to the "content" part of content marketing. Typically, the issue for most companies and organizations is lack of content. Universities and colleges, on the other hand, are usually quite content-rich.

The challenge, and opportunity, is in **breaking down political and organizational barriers** to enlist a team of content creators. You can incentivize this by communicating shared goals and top organizational priorities, while offering your team a larger platform for their own thought leadership and influence.

Be creative with how you repurpose content. Turn a faculty research paper into a more digestible blog post or a SlideShare. Repackage event photos or videos for bite-sized nuggets on social media.

> "A culture of content is an engine of content."
>
> - Altimeter Group

You don't have to go it alone, build a team of content creators

Faculty

Faculty are subject matter expert jackpots and are churning out research and findings regularly. Understand which faculty are actively posting content on social media, and offer them an opportunity to expand their influence.

Public Relations

Your public relations department may also be working with faculty to develop newsworthy stories, so make sure you check-in regularly with them for potential content.

Career Services

Career services can also be a valuable content partner, as career advice is one of the top types of information that prospective students are looking for.

Freelance Writers

Freelancers can act as an extended part of your internal team and foster creativity while inspiring new ideas.

Outside Agencies

Agencies can do the same job as freelancers but at scale and usually offer a wider scope of offerings (such as design and SEO).

CHECKLIST:

✔ **AUDIT**
existing content sources, including faculty, PR, and career services.

✔ **ENLIST**
a team of content creators, both internal and external.

✔ **THINK**
of creative ways to repurpose content into shorter, shareable pieces of content.

PRO TIP: Cultivate a culture of content among senior leadership, departments, and employees to create a virtuous cycle of content production, sharing, and engagement.

Sarah's Story

Part 1

Sarah strolled across campus. It struck her that these students were her audience. This was an audience research goldmine. She worked with the student services team to send out a short online survey about what motivated students to enroll. She confirmed her findings with the admissions and enrollment team and developed distinct audience personas.

Armed with this knowledge, Sarah combed through the university's website and alumni publications, carefully noting the different value propositions being presented, the branding, and the tone of the messaging. She dug deeper and found a trove of faculty blogs that were somewhat dated, but still an indicator of which faculty members were content champs.

She then pored through the online directory and crosschecked faculty activity on LinkedIn and Twitter. She did the same with members of the career services team. She ended up with a list of 10 professors and career services experts to contact for an initial round of content.

Three on her list of subject matter experts were uninterested, but she was left with seven content partners. "I'm starting to see our content story taking shape," Sarah thought to herself.

Managing and Producing Content

Tip:

04 Build a healthy mix of relevant, helpful content

05 Make your mark with "Big Rock" content

06 Stay on track with an editorial calendar

Tip **04**

Build a healthy mix of relevant content

Based on the information from your audience personas, develop a mix of relevant content at each stage of the decision journey. Put another way, the more deeply you understand your prospective students, the more clarity you'll have about which topics to cover.
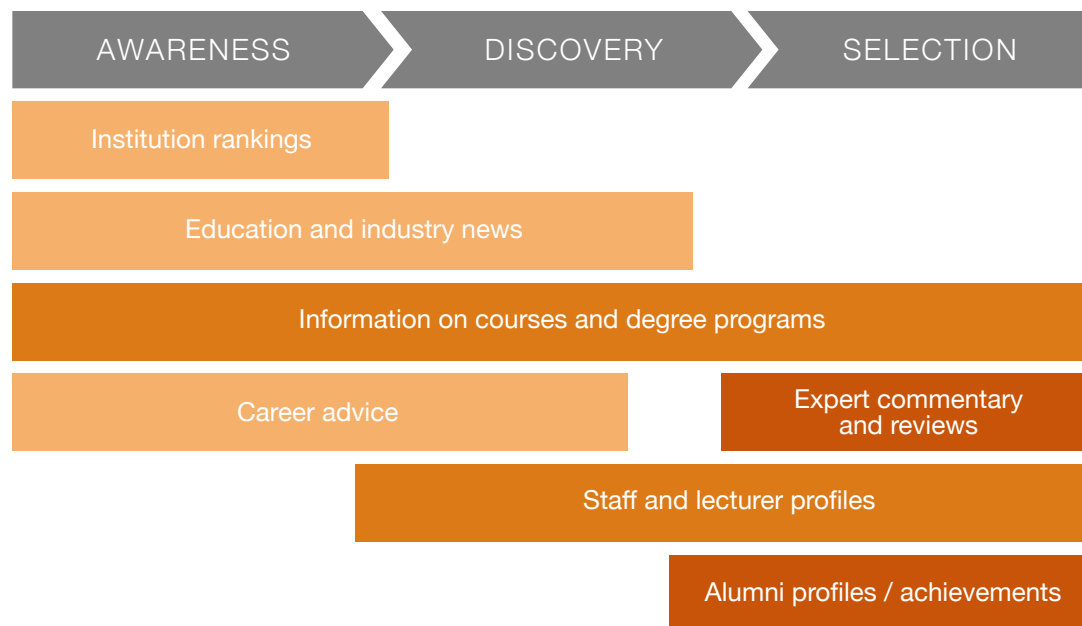
To truly establish your school as a thought leader, **don't just focus on one type of content.** Many schools only share program information, missing an opportunity to differentiate themselves with industry news, career advice, or faculty and alumni profiles.

If you truly embrace the concept of content marketing, you will develop content to help your prospects make an informed decision rather than content that is focused on the hard sell.

" Many schools only share program information, missing an opportunity to differentiate themselves. "

Top types of information sought by intenders in each stage of the decision-making process:

AWARENESS	DISCOVERY	SELECTION

Institution rankings

Education and industry news

Information on courses and degree programs

Career advice

Expert commentary and reviews

Staff and lecturer profiles

Alumni profiles / achievements

PRO TIP: Offer low friction content to prospects at the top of the funnel (e.g., ungated, broad content) and high-friction content to those closer to converting (e.g., gated offers or highly-specific information).

CHECKLIST:

✔ **CREATE**
a list of the different types of content that you know your audience is interested in. Include content that is helpful and not just focused on the hard sell.

✔ **MAP**
existing content from your audit to your master list of content types and determine the gaps.

✔ **DEVELOP**
a plan for prioritizing and developing content with your "content team.

Tip **05**

Make your mark with "Big Rock" content

Create large pieces of content that can be broken up into smaller pieces and reused over time. We call this a "Big Rock" piece of content. It's a substantial content asset (think 15 or 20 pages) that **definitively sets you apart from your competition** or establishes your school as a thought leader around a certain theme.

The beauty of this concept is that your Big Rock content can not only drive leads and establish your school's identity, but also can be chiseled into smaller pebbles for use in a variety of social media channels and tactics – including blog posts, Sponsored Content, infographics, etc. Once you hit upon a piece of Big Rock content that garners high engagement, you can re-use that content throughout the year by repurposing it into a new piece of "evergreen" content every quarter.

PRO TIP: If you have a blog, you likely have a potential Big Rock in the making. Identify 5 or more blog posts that follow a theme and stitch them together.

CHECKLIST:

✔ THINK
about a topic or theme that your school should own and develop a Big Rock around it.

✔ ASSESS
existing content from faculty or career services for Big Rock potential, maybe even your viewbook.

✔ MAKE
your Big Rock visible in every possible channel and break it up into smaller pebbles.

Tip **06**

Stay on track with an editorial calendar

Once you've figured out the topics you're going to cover and who is going to create the content that answers all your prospects' questions, you need a plan and a tool to keep it all organized. An editorial calendar helps tame the chaos, keeping everyone on the same page and on track.

In addition to making it clear who is responsible for what and when, the calendar helps align efforts across departments. That means marketing, faculty, alumni / career services, and external agencies don't duplicate efforts and everyone can take advantage of each other's content.

CHECKLIST:

✔ **DEVELOP**
an editorial calendar using collaboration tools like Google Docs.

✔ **REMEMBER**
for a resource constrained marketing department, don't try to do it alone.

✔ **ASSIGN**
responsibilities to your ad hoc content team and reuse existing content.

Here's a link to a basic editorial calendar template from the Content Marketing Institute.

Sarah's Story

Part 2

It took some buy-in from faculty and the director of career services, but once she had her team of content creators in place, Sarah began to develop her content plan. She started by reviewing the audience personas she'd created and decided on a mix of content focused on program information, career advice, rankings info, and faculty/alumni profiles.

For the "Big Rock" piece, Sarah opted for a 15-page, downloadable prospective student's guide that would incorporate all of the content elements above. "Phew," she thought to herself. "The good news is that half of this content already exists in some form. It just needs to be repackaged." She also saw how each of these topics could work as standalone blog posts, web pages, and checklists.

Once she was happy with her plan, Sarah pulled the existing content together from her content audit and assigned the remaining projects to the content team, clearly communicating the goals for each piece. She created and shared an editorial calendar through Google Docs so each member of the team was clear on their assignment, when it was due and who was working on what.

Publishing on LinkedIn

Tip:

07 Distribute your content with accuracy and proper context

08 Enlist university leaders to be the face of your school

09 Go visual!

10 Prove the value of your efforts and scale what works

Tip **07**

Distribute your content with accuracy and proper context

When distributing your content, remember that relevance and context is key. You've done all the research up front to understand your audience – who they are, what content they're looking for, and what motivates them. Now it's time to target your content to the right people in the right mindset for your programs.

LinkedIn provides best-in-class first-party data for accurate targeting – whether by industry, education level, geography, or seniority. And with over 400 million professionals on our platform, you can scale your messages with a variety of LinkedIn solutions, such as **Sponsored Content** or **Sponsored InMail.**
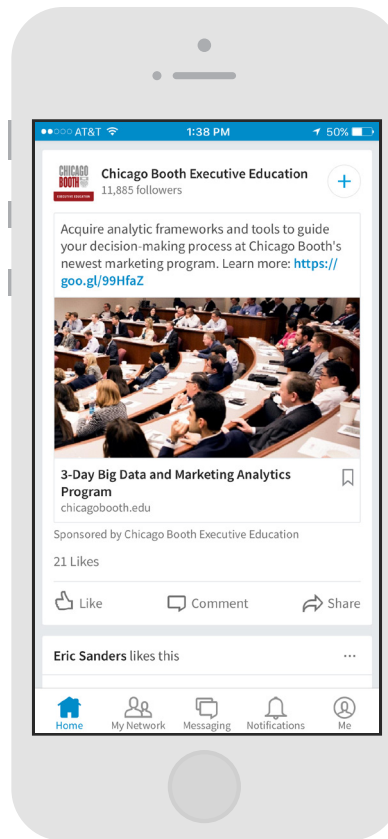
CHECKLIST:

✔ **PERSONALIZE**
your content according to prospects' interests, but be sure your targeting is not too narrow. On LinkedIn, 500,000 members or larger is a good rule of thumb.

✔ **UTILIZE LINKEDIN SPONSORED CONTENT**
to get your targeted content directly into the LinkedIn feed, where our members are most engaged.

✔ **UTILIZE LINKEDIN SPONSORED INMAIL**
to deliver targeted, personalized messages and content right to our members LinkedIn inbox.

PRO TIP: Always test 4 different pieces of content in each of your Sponsored Content campaigns to ensure maximum visibility. Use the **LinkedIn Campaign Manager tool** to come up with target audiences

There are a few ways that we can target the core audiences for each of your programs

Rich demographic data

The authentic, member-generated data that our members include in their LinkedIn profiles (e.g., highest degree completed, seniority, industry, years of experience).

Persona targeting

Aggregated targeting based on member-generated data and behavior, including job searchers, opinion leaders, or small and medium sized businesses (SMBs).

Interest-based targeting

Including LinkedIn Group membership, skills listed on their profiles, or companies followed on LinkedIn.

Your own audience data

Use your own data to target the top companies your students are coming from.

PRO TIP:

LinkedIn lets you target your audience based on their professional profile characteristics. Rather than target your audience by age and gender, try combining two or three of these facets:

- Job Function
- Degree
- Seniority
- Industry
- Skills
- Groups
- Company Name
- Geography

For more info on LinkedIn marketing solutions and case studies, **visit lnkd.in/highered.**

Tip **08**

Enlist university leaders to be the face of your school

LinkedIn is the world's go-to content publishing platform for professionals. Through LinkedIn, your school's executive leaders can directly engage prospects who are the business leaders of today and tomorrow – all in an aspirational mindset. Think of it as "publishing with a purpose."

You can **help your university leaders and faculty establish themselves** as social thought leaders by having them publish both short-form and long-form content on LinkedIn. Sharing short-form content such as third party articles, images, and stats helps them gain followers, while publishing original, long-form content (i.e., blogs) helps spread your school's ideas and unique characteristics.

PUBLISHING ON LINKEDIN: HOW IT WORKS

Short Form

Long Form
Deep dives on topics that matter to you, and watch engagement build in the comments

Short Form
Share links, articles, images, quotes and other content that is relevant to your followers

Your Connections And Followers

Grow Your Ideas

Gain Followers

Global Professional Network

Expand Your Professional Brand
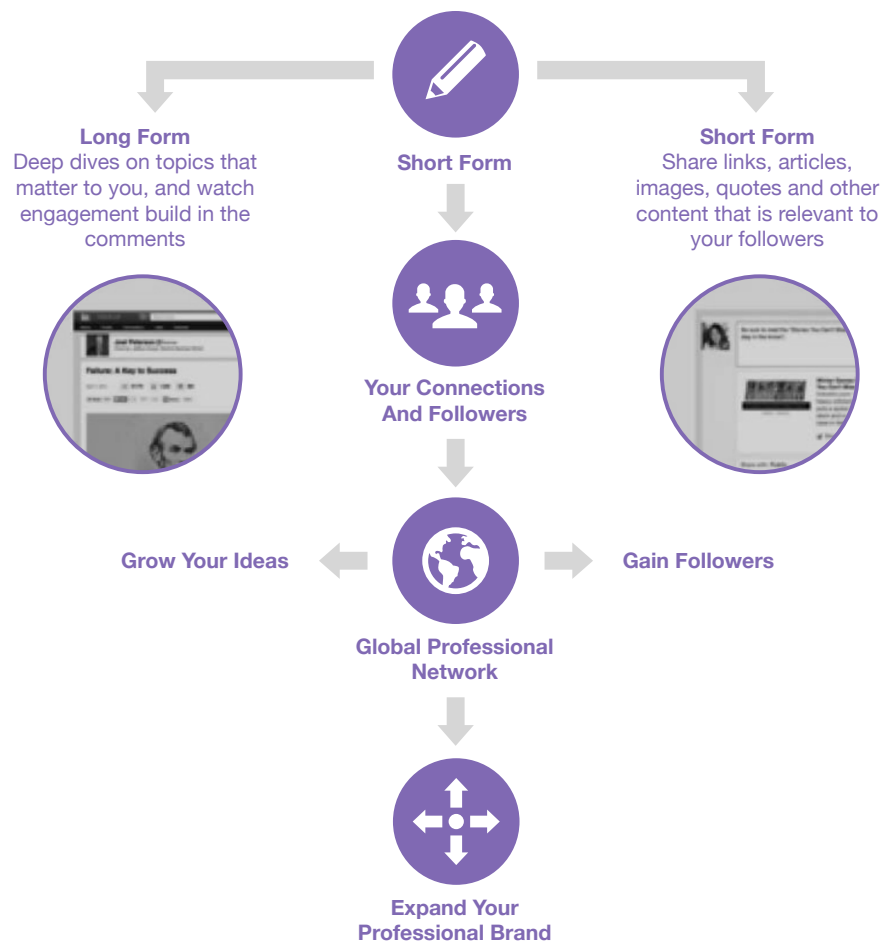
PRO TIP: Share this step-by-step guide with your executive team: **lnkd.in/EDUexecplaybook**

Tip **09**

Go visual!

As humans, we are all visual thinkers. Articles that contain images get 94% more views and posts with images are liked twice as often as text-only updates. Also consider adding video into your content marketing mix.

The good news is that you won't need to create a bunch of visual content from scratch. Reimagine your Big Rock content as smaller visual pieces – for example, overlaying a stat or quote onto a compelling image. Compelling imagery aids decision making, is more persuasive, and leaves a lasting overall impression.

UCLA's Anderson School captures attention with this visual content about the "Bruin Benchmark"

CHECKLIST:

✔ **SKIP**
the stock photos - feature real students and campus shots

✔ **AVOID**
photos that are random or don't add to the subject of your content

✔ **NEVER**
go image-less

✔ **BE MOBILE-FRIENDLY**
in the cropping - test it on mobile

✔ **USE INFOGRAPHICS**
and colorful charts to call out important statistics and rankings

PRO TIP: To ensure your Sponsored Content displays correctly across platforms, follow these **specifications.**

Tip **10**

Prove the value of your efforts and scale what works

Once your content marketing engine is humming along, you need to measure the impact and identify future actions.

There are typically two types of metrics for content marketing. In the short-term, **engagement metrics** measure shares, likes, and click throughs, while **performance metrics** measure what those people do after engaging with your content - i.e. conversion to a lead, cost per lead, and conversion to applications. What should you focus on? We recommend using performance metrics to measure overall campaign effectiveness and engagement metrics to make corrections and optimizations along the way.

When it comes to the Sponsored Content you distribute via LinkedIn, we can provide a few additional ways to gain insight into its performance, including Content Marketing Score, brand lift, and impact on enrollment.

Key metrics for content marketing success

Engagement Metrics

· Shares
· Likes
· Comments
· Click-throughs

Performance Metrics

· Lead conversion
· Cost per lead
· Application conversion

Additional LinkedIn Metrics

· Content Marketing Score
· Brand lift*
· Impact on enrollment*

* Dependent on advertising spend level

CHECKLIST:

✔ **REVISIT**
your original content marketing goals and make sure you're measuring what you set out to accomplish.

✔ **MAKE SURE**
you have the internal resources and data to measure lead conversion, cost per lead, and application conversion by campaign.

✔ **SCALE AND REPEAT**
Perhaps the two most critical aspects to scaling and repeating content marketing success is:

1. understanding why things worked,
2. having the resources to grow things that do work.

PRO TIP: Allow time to test and tweak your campaigns. In a recent case study, the **College of William & Mary** found that experimenting with different targeting facets helped maximize their lead prospects.

Sarah's Story

Part 3

Now that Sarah had an arsenal of well-rounded content, how would prospects find it?

She knew LinkedIn was a resource prospective students trusted, so she decided on a mix of Sponsored Content and Sponsored InMail. She targeted prospects based on the industries and education levels that matched her audience personas. As she worked with the university design team to capture headshots of real students and alumni, she thought to herself, "this feels much more authentic!"

She spoke to the dean, associate deans, and key faculty members about sharing content from their LinkedIn accounts to boost awareness. To her delight, many of them agreed! They appreciated this executive guide to help them optimize their LinkedIn profiles.

Lastly, Sarah prepared a spreadsheet to track the engagement for each piece of content -- making sure to track performance metrics like conversions and cost per lead. With each iteration she would tweak and re-test as needed, and she began to see the numbers rise! Sarah was thrilled to see the fruits of her labor - and even more thrilled to hear the university leadership team commend her on delivering what they really wanted: RESULTS.

Resources

Tactical Plan for Content Marketing on LinkedIn

Print out this handy chart and share it with your teams!

OPPORTUNITIES	WHAT TO SHARE	OBJECTIVES	KEY METRICS	ACTION ITEMS
1 HOUR DAILY **LinkedIn Company & Showcase Pages**	• Brochures • eBooks • Alumni/Student Testimonials • Industry Articles • Helpful How-To Content	• Brand Awareness • Lead Generation • Thought Leadership • Event Registration	• Page Followers • Post Clicks • Engagement • Inquiries & Leads • Event Registrants	• Post 3-4x a Week • Engage With Followers Via Post Comments • Change Cover Image Every 6 Months
30 MIN DAILY **LinkedIn SlideShare**	• University Videos eBooks & Presentations • Infographics • Webcast Decks	• Lead Generation • Brand Awareness • Thought Leadership • SEO	• Views • Leads & Inquiries • Linkbacks & Embeds	• Upload New Content Weekly • Highlight Decks on ProfilePage • Group Content into Playlists • Add Lead Forms
1 HOUR WEEKLY **Publishing on LinkedIn**	• Professional Expertise & Experiences • Industry Trends • Lessons Learned	• Thought Leadership	• Post Views (& Demographics of Your Readers) • Post Likes, Comments & Shares • Profile Views	• Publish Whenever You Feel Passionate • Recommended: Bi-Weekly or Once a Month
30 MIN DAILY **LinkedIn Sponsored Content & Direct Sponsored Content**	• University News • Blog Content • Industry News & Research • Stories and Testimonials • Webcast • Eye-Catching Visuals & Statistics	• Lead Generation • Brand Awareness • Thought Leadership	• Engagement Rate • Impressions • Inquiries or Leads • Company or Showcase Page Followers	• Run 2-4 Sponsored Content/Week • Run For 3 Weeks, Then Test & Iterate • Select Compelling Visuals • Share Links To Lead Forms & Add URL Tracking Code

Go visual with large embedded images with real student and campus imagery.

Don't just focus on the hard sell. Spotlight alumni success.

Fuqua School of Business shared: Follow   •   4mth

Have changes to the industry frightened investors?

Medical Device Business Dries Up

forbes.com   •   Duke Professor Peter Ubel's discusses highlights of recent research pointing to some of the issues killing new investments in the industry.

Like • Comment • Share • 👍 29

Share industry trends to establish your expertise.

Australian Institute of Business shared: Follow   •   9mth

With the demand for MBA graduates remaining strong in 2016, have you considered how an MBA could change your life? Get the MBA information pack to find out more:

http://bit.ly/20EniJk

85%

of employers plan on hiring as many or more MBAs this year than last.

[Year-End Poll of Employers 2015 Graduate Management Admission Council]

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE of BUSINESS
the practical business school

Like • Comment • Share • 👍 407 💬 15

Visualize industry stats and data that speak to the benefits of earning a degree.

Utilize LinkedIn's industry targeting capability to personalize content directly to niche audiences.

Live events like sample classes and info sessions can be considered content as well.

Feature faculty thought leadership with compelling imagery to build the influence of your school.

About LinkedIn

Today, LinkedIn members number more than 433 million professionals. That's over one-half of the 600 million professionals on the planet, representing the world's largest group of influential, affluent, and educated people.

To learn more about how you can market your school to this audience, **visit lnkd.in/highered.**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Top Tips for Effective Content Marketing

Blog Post

LinkedIn Master Class: Content Marketing that Converts Students

On-Demand Webcast

Checklist for Creating, Launching, and Measuring Big Rock Content

Checklist

Executive Playbook for University Leaders

eBook

Linked in®