

2025

MYSTERY SHOP RESULTS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** Introduction
- 02** Mystery Shop
- 03** Key Findings
- 04** Slow or No Response
- 06** Measuring Progress
- 07** Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

Increased competition among universities and the rise of mobile search have driven rapid changes in higher education. What makes leading online universities like SNHU, Liberty, WGU, and GCU so successful? Beyond media spending and program options, a key factor is their ability to effectively capture, respond to, and nurture inquiries.

Too often, we hear from smaller schools that their online and graduate programs are struggling, so they respond to the challenge with more creative media spending and/or technology. It is clear to us why universities are struggling with online enrollment. They do not execute best practices.

We recently mystery shopped 100+ non-profit universities, all tuition-driven schools, offering graduate and adult online programs to:

1. Identify opportunities for increased organic leads or inquiries
2. Measure inquiry response time and persistence with live humans
3. Measure nurturing channels and frequency

MYSTERY SHOP



Who we looked at

100+ non-profit universities offering and advertising an online program or graduate program. Organic Inquiry submitted to the school website.



What we measured

Inbound Quality: On-page Inbound Optimization

- Presence of Request For Information Form (RFI)
- Prominent Phone Number
- Live Chat

Inquiry Response: Speed to Contact & persistence during peak enrollment interest – 21 business days

Type of Response:

- Phone
- Email
- SMS



Admissions shop focus

Measured key indicators, including:

- Response time & Speed-to-Contact
- Subsequent voice – voice frequency
- Email communication & frequency

Our goal was simple: measure a school's Conversion Rate Optimization – a school's main website's ability to capture organic traffic and overall, on-page conversion, which allowed us to arrive at an "Inbound Quality Score."

This Inbound Quality score would help us measure the opportunities and ability to capture current organic traffic. More than that, we have identified several opportunities for these schools to immediately grow organic inquiries and total enrollment specifically the presence of an RFI, Live Chat, and a prominent inbound phone number.

Key Findings—Inbound Quality Score

What you should know:

- Schools are spending money on paid media and technology but have not optimized their main EDU site for organic lead generation
- Few schools leverage response devices (CTA's) that capture inquiries and circumvent competition
- 11 % of schools did not have a Request For Information on their main .EDU site
- 85% of schools did not have a prominent phone number present on program pages to capture inbound calls
- Only 10% of schools use Live Chat

Based on the opportunities we identified will believe the following results are possible:

- ***An increase of 25% in unpaid, high-intent organic inquiries monthly for graduate and online programs***
- ***Increased web traffic and expanded reach for ALL audience types***
- ***Higher Return On Marketing Investment***

MEASURING CONVERSION RATE OPTIMIZATION

Key Indicator	Activity / Project	Data / Outcome
Presence of RFI, Live Chat, and a prominent inbound phone number	Strong = Presence of all three response devices	4% of schools had a Strong Inbound Quality Score
	Average = Presence of two	12% of schools had an Average Inbound Quality Score
	Weak = Less than two	84% of schools had a Weak Inbound Quality Score (Missing 20% of Organic Lead Volume)

SLOW OR NO RESPONSE

Schools are competing for prospects, spending big budgets on marketing, yet the real question is do they value leads? Universities have some of the most demanding customers in the world: students.

As digital natives, your students have access to the entire world's information at their fingertips, instantly, when they want it and how they want it. In other words, their "always-on" expectations are set by the digital experiences they get every day.

SLOW OR NO RESPONSE

Overwhelmingly, these digital experiences are mobile. In today's digital revolution, digital-first means mobile-first. When a prospect expresses interest and that interest is captured, how will the school respond? Prospects are digital natives demanding responses after they express interest.

If You Can't Engage Your Leads ASAP, Chances Are Someone Else Will.

Every minute counts. Typically, prospects for undergraduate programs will inquire at three to five different schools, while graduates typically inquire at two to three schools. We do not need to tell you that it's competitive out there. Prospects are spoiled and able to choose from multiple schools. But every moment that passes between that initial outreach and your response, their interest starts to wane, or worse, your competitor contacts them first.

Prospects are going to be eager to work with the school that gets back to them. At the point of inquiry, interest is at an all-time high. It is when buyer motivation, receptivity and intent are at the highest point.

Faster response = higher conversion rate.

According to Harvard Business Review, organizations that respond to customers within the first hour of contact are seven times more likely to convert them to sales. Read that again. Seven times more likely. In other words, you could be losing thousands in tuition revenue due to poor response time.

Fortunately, the payoffs are immense for schools that act. At Education Connex, our advice is simply to put your speed to lead and persistence rate with real, live humans at the top of your to-do list. In fact, it should be your number one priority. Admissions leaders should prioritize it; presidents, CFOs and marketers should demand it because students demand it.

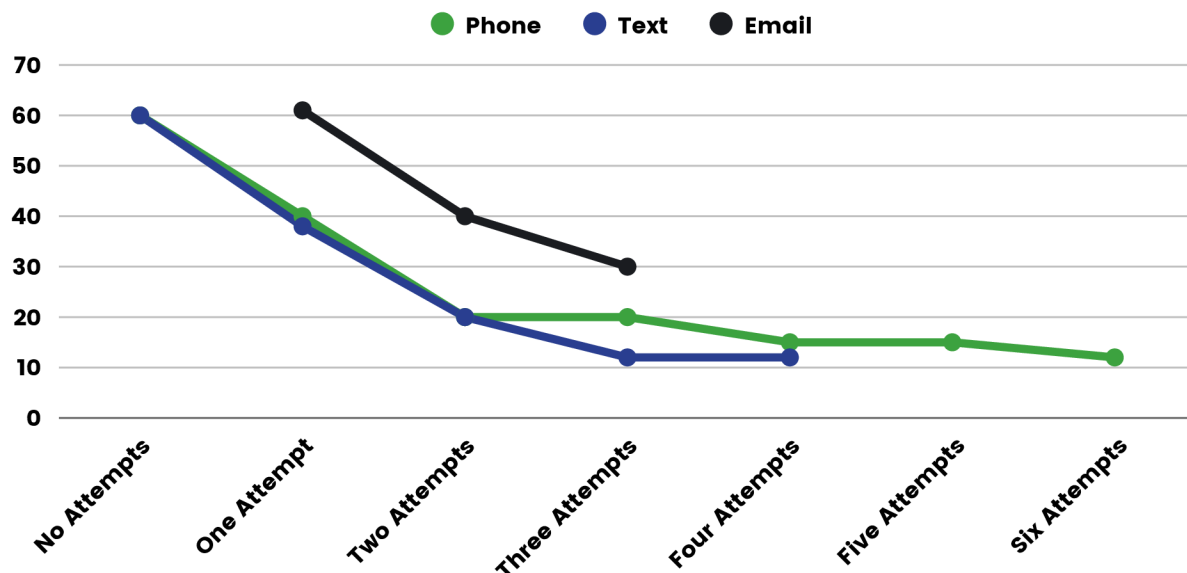
SLOW OR NO RESPONSE

Leverage SMS and Email

Sales or admissions cadence is the number of interactions you have with a prospect. Based on our recent mystery shop, schools fail to reach out enough to prospects and most schools do not integrate their nurturing channels in truly omnichannel nurturing strategy that is personal and includes phone, voicemail, SMS, and email and they do not persist in outreach. In today's landscape, multiple tools are needed to drive impressions or interactions that can be the difference maker.

Likewise, If you aren't texting or leveraging email, you're losing. With so many tools and CRM options, there's no reason not to leverage email and texting.

**What should your cadence be? Reach out to us,
we'd love to help you increase your enrollment.**



CONCLUSION



Since 2008, Education Connex has helped non-profit universities grow enrollment, providing the tools and strategies that will lead to a positive return on marketing investment. We create and capture demand, then convert it into a spectacular student experience.

Let us help your university bridge the gap between admissions and marketing.

Contact

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