Oodle

State of Higher Ed Social

Higher education marketing is shifting rapidly. As ad platforms move toward AI-driven targeting and students turn to social media for research and discovery, universities must adopt smarter creative strategies to stay competitive.

Oodle helps higher ed institutions adapt, differentiate, and drive measurable enrollment results across an evolving social ecosystem.

AI-Driven Targeting Is Reshaping Strategy

Ad platforms are rapidly shifting toward AI-driven targeting, making traditional audience controls more restrictive. Meta has led this move by encouraging advertisers to rely on automated, AI-powered targeting options and platforms like LinkedIn, Reddit, and Pinterest are following suit. The message is clear: for best performance, lean into platform AI and strengthen your creative.

For higher ed marketers, staying ahead of these changes is essential. As targeting becomes more automated, your creative and messaging become the primary differentiators.

Students Rely on Social More Than Ever

A recent study, found that a majority of students believe social media posts from a university are helpful and use social media posts to help decide on a university.

Yet most higher ed ads look identical: "flexible," "affordable," "online," paired with stock photography. **When everyone reaches the same audiences with the same message, differentiation becomes essential.**

👍 **84%** found social media posts from a prospective university helpful

📷 **80%** used social media posts in their decision-making process.

Creative Is Your New Advantage
The brands that win will clearly and authentically communicate:

What makes them different

Why students should choose them

How their story stands out in a "sea of sameness"

Meet Students Where They Search

Social as Search

Over **55% of Gen Z searches TikTok before Google**. They ask full questions like: "What are the best colleges for marine biology?"

Platforms are now indexing video transcripts, captions, and comments to answer these queries.

Winning strategies include:
- Influencer/UGC content that mirrors search behavior
- Organic short-form content that answers real student questions
- TikTok Paid Search campaigns using keyword targeting
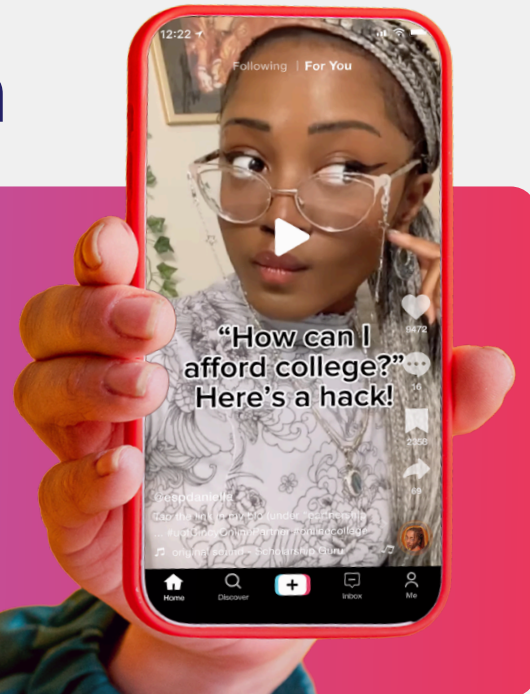
Reddit

Redditors are highly motivated, self-directed learners. **70% prioritize gaining new skills**, and **39% are exploring career changes** or new job opportunities, turning to Reddit for guidance on upskilling, education options, and career advancement.

Key Highlights:
- Reddit **ranks #1 in reaching audiences who have researched educational apps** in the past six months.
- New lead generation ads with Zapier integration allow seamless lead delivery directly to your CRM.
- Advertisers see a **+54% increase in conversion rate** using Reddit's native lead forms compared to website conversions.

Rapid Testing & Iteration

Social media moves at a much faster pace than most other channels. That means quicker audience fatigue, constant shifts in best practices, and more frequent adjustments needed to maintain performance.

Test new ideas, even small ones. More creative variations in the feed lead to stronger results.
[Example: adding both freeform and sponsored posts on Reddit to increase efficiencies]

Gain faster learnings. Social provides rich mid-funnel insights through engagement metrics and sentiment. These signals help identify what's resonating before rolling out larger changes across platforms.

Early Adoption Wins

Being among the first to test new placements yields immediate performance lifts.

- LinkedIn CTV beta: Oodle clients saw a **53% lift** in lead form completion
- LinkedIn Conversation Ads now drive CPLs **85% lower** than Sponsored Content

Lead-Gen Completion Rate

| 0% | 0.5% | 1.0% | 1.5% | 2.0% | 2.5% | 3.0% | 3.5% | 4.0% | 4.5% |

Cold **2.5%**

Warm **3.8%**
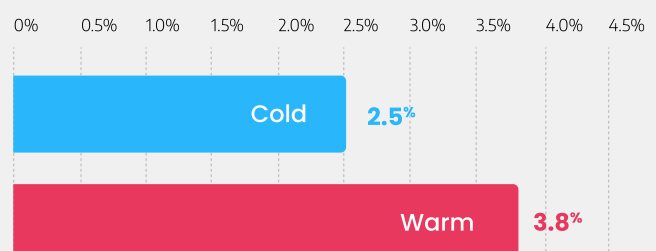
Influencer + UGC

Student ambassador and influencer programs continue to grow as universities leverage student content to enrich recruiting strategies. This authentic storytelling resonates strongly with prospective students and performs well in paid campaigns.

Key Stats & Benefits
- **71%** of students say they are more likely to purchase products endorsed by influencers.
- Personalized marketing matters: **48%** of students engage more with ads tailored to their interests.
- Data-driven tactics like email personalization and retargeted ads help brands speak directly to student needs.
- In higher education campaigns, influencer-driven strategies have generated a **40%** increase in website users and sessions.

Thought Leadership Using Faculty + Student Voices

Authentic voices from faculty and current students play a critical role in establishing institutional credibility and building trust.

Organic
- Drives top-of-funnel awareness: Humanizes the institution and boosts early discovery reach.
- Showcases expertise: Highlights research, innovation, and student life to position the university as an authority.
- Builds trust and advocacy: Personal perspectives from faculty and students strengthen credibility and influence decision-making.

Paid
- Amplifies credibility at scale: Thought Leader ads elevate academic voices and institutional values to targeted audiences.
- Supports brand differentiation: Shifts focus from facilities and rankings to intellectual capital and impact.
- Nurtures consideration: Combines performance tactics with narrative storytelling to move audiences from awareness to loyalty.

I'm excited to be featured in a **Wake Forest University School of Professional Studies** Student Spotlight! 🎉 ...see more

SPS Student Spotlight: Meet Zoe Kurtz, Storyteller and Strategist
In a Q&A, Master of Digital Marketing student Zoe

LinkedIn

Creative & Platform Insights

Creative Best Practices
- Short-form video performs best. Under 10 seconds drives:
  - **+18%** unaided brand recall
  - **+15%** ad recall
  - **+28%** correct brand identification
- More branding = better results: 3+ logo appearances increase brand identification by **20%**.
- Human senders outperform brand senders:
  - **+16%** open rate
  - **+10%** CTR
  - **+10%** conversion rate
- Video excels on LinkedIn: Video ads earn **3×** higher engagement than static ads.

60%
of graduate prospects use LinkedIn during their research process.

40%
higher purchase intent among LinkedIn users for high-value items.

61%
of users trusting brand content, making it the most trusted social platform.

Ohio State Online
1,414 followers
2mo · Edited
+ Follow

From clinical trials to regulatory affairs, Ohio State's online Master of Clinical Research equips you to make an impact in health care.
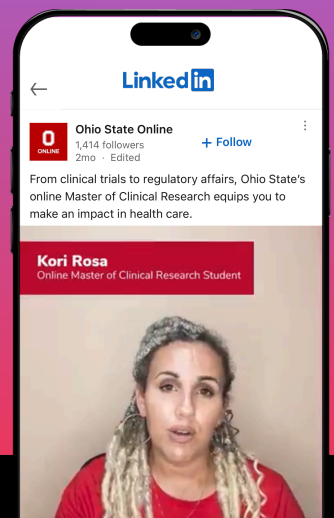
Kori Rosa
Online Master of Clinical Research Student

Turn Insights Into Breakthrough Differentiation

What a Differentiator Is (and Isn't)

Effective differentiators are **specific, provable, valuable, authentic,** and **hard to replicate.** They should directly answer: "Why should I choose this university instead of the others?" Generic claims like "flexible," "affordable," or "fully online" are not differentiators, they're table stakes in today's market.

How to Apply Differentiators in Creative

Great creative starts with a storytelling framework that connects directly to where the user is in their journey.

- **Potential students**: Student testimonials, information sessions, glimpses into real student life
- **Current/past students:** Culture moments, campus experiences, events, and community stories
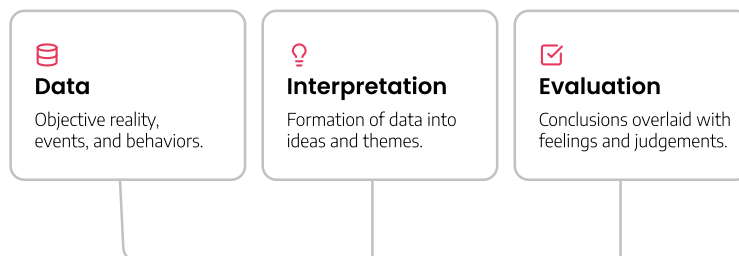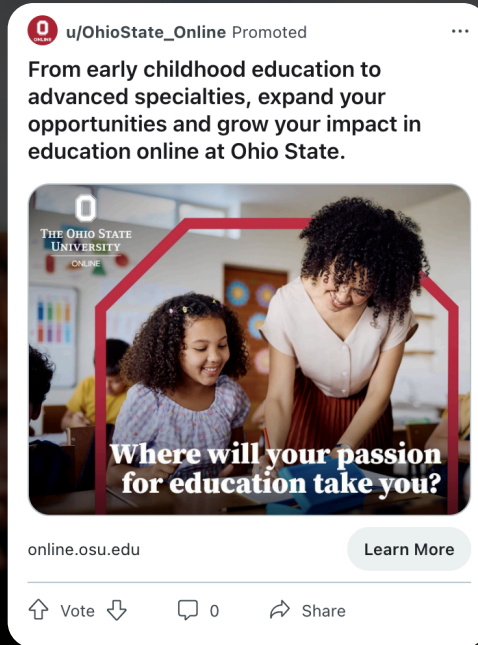
How to Make Creative Truly Memorable

Howard Gossage wrote "Nobody reads ads. People read what interests them. Sometimes, it's an ad." In other words, your creative needs to be interesting and memorable.

- **Evoke emotion**: Create a feeling that lasts beyond the scroll.
- **Tell a story**: Human narratives make complex ideas simple and impactful.
- **Be consistent**: Keep tone, visuals, and messaging aligned across channels.
- **Create experiences**: Go beyond selling. Aim to design moments people remember.
- **Make a clear promise**: Show the problem you solve and why you're the best solution.
- **Be unique**: Push past the "sea of sameness" with an authentic value proposition.
- **Humanize the brand**: Real students, real faculty, real voices. Transparency builds trust.

Oodle's Insight Framework

Use this framework to turn observations into powerful differentiators. The process involves three steps:

Data
Objective reality, events, and behaviors.

Interpretation
Formation of data into ideas and themes.

Evaluation
Conclusions overlaid with feelings and judgements.

Ohio State Online
1,413 followers
Promoted

Guide the next generation of nurses. Shape health care's future. You can make a bigger difference with a Doctor of Nursing Education degree online.

Why get a Doctor of Nursing Education degree from Ohio State online?

0:00 / 0:37

u/OhioState_Online Promoted

From early childhood education to advanced specialties, expand your opportunities and grow your impact in education online at Ohio State.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
ONLINE

Where will your passion for education take you?

online.osu.edu   Learn More

Vote   0   Share

u/OhioState_Online Promoted

How to Expand Your Future in Education

TL;DR Advance your career, deepen your expertise, and open new doors in education with Ohio State's online degrees and certificates. Start or Build Your Foundation Associate of Arts in Early Childhood Development &...

Vote   0   Share

Creative Evaluation Tool

A simple scorecard (1–5) to evaluate whether your creative will break through:

Criteria	Score (1–5)
Emotion	
Does it make people feel something?	_____
Is the emotion aligned withv the goal?	_____
Will it be remembered?	_____
Consistency	
Does it match brand style and tone?	_____
Is it aligned across channels?	_____
Is it instantly recognizable as your brand?	_____
Clear Promise	
Is your promise obvious?	_____
Does it show the problem and solution?	_____
Is the takeaway easy to recall?	_____

Criteria	Score (1–5)
Story	
Is there a clear narrative?	_____
Does it simplify the message?	_____
Is it easy to grasp quickly?	_____
Experience	
Does it create a memorable moment?	_____
Is it more than just a sales pitch?	_____
Will it leave a positive impression?	_____
Humanity	
Does it feel human and empathetic?	_____
Is it authentic rather than generic?	_____

Match KPIs to What Actually Matters

Measure What Matters

A strong social strategy starts with aligning KPIs to your broader brand and enrollment goals—not vanity metrics.

- If your focus is lead volume, prioritize CPL, conversion rate, and downstream lead quality.
- If your focus is awareness or site traffic, look to CTR, CPC, CPM, and ad recall.
- Regardless of what your goal is, use benchmarks (see below) to assess tactical performance and make sure you can track which touchpoints contribute to applications and enrollments.

Lead Quality & Why Conversion APIs Matter

Social can deliver consistent, cost-efficient lead volume, but questions about lead quality often arise. With increasing privacy regulations and the loss of third-party cookies, platforms are pushing Conversion APIs—server-to-server data connections that dramatically improve measurement accuracy and optimization.

For higher ed marketers, this unlocks a major advantage:

- Clear visibility into the entire journey from lead form submission to enrollment
- Optimization toward higher-quality leads based on real enrollment data
- Stronger performance as platforms shift away from detailed targeting

Industry Benchmarks (and How We Outperform)

Benchmarks vary by platform and objective, but these serve as a baseline starting point:

in LinkedIn

Message Ad Lead Form Completion
- InMail: 32%
- Conversation Ad: 49%

In-Feed CTR
- Image: 0.64%
- Video: 0.31%

∞ Meta

CTR:
- Traffic: 0.84% / Lead: 0.40%

CPC:
- Traffic: $1.09 / Lead: $8.42

Cost per Page View: $1.58

CPL: $73

Reddit

CPC: $1.50
CTR: 0.31%
eCPM: $5.50

Takeaway: Test, Measure, Iterate

A robust measurement and testing framework ensures you're optimizing toward improving performance over time.

Build a Smarter Social Approach for Modern Enrollment Today.

Oodle