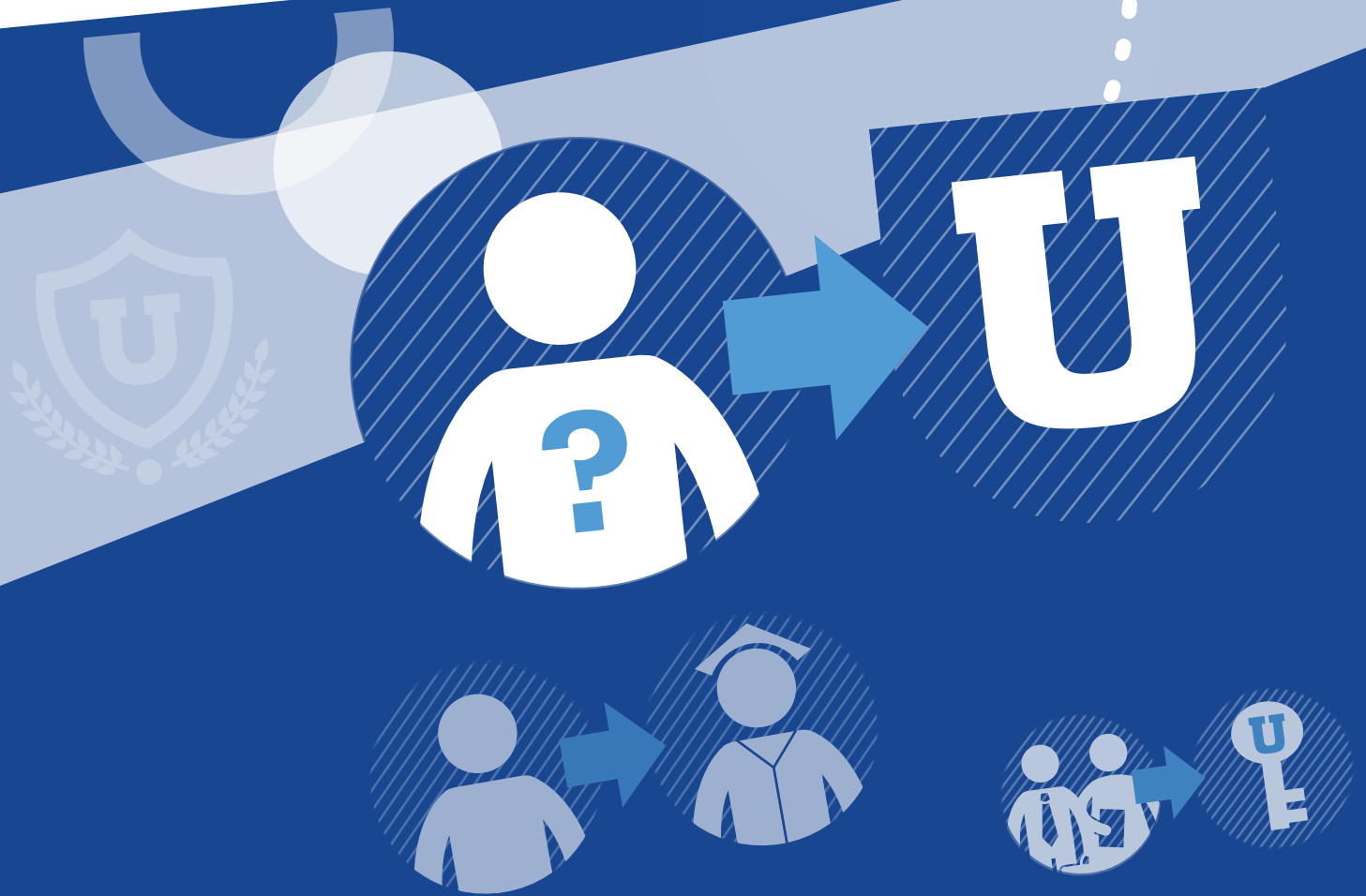


Playbook:

Improving Recruitment In The Mobile World



MOBILE APPS HAVE BECOME TABLE STAKES

A recent [survey by TeleNav Inc.](#) found that 40% of iPhone users would rather give up their toothbrushes for a week, than their mobile devices. So it's no surprise to hear comments like this from students who have never known a world without mobile devices:

"I can choose my bank based on their mobile app... Why shouldn't I be able to choose a college the same way?"

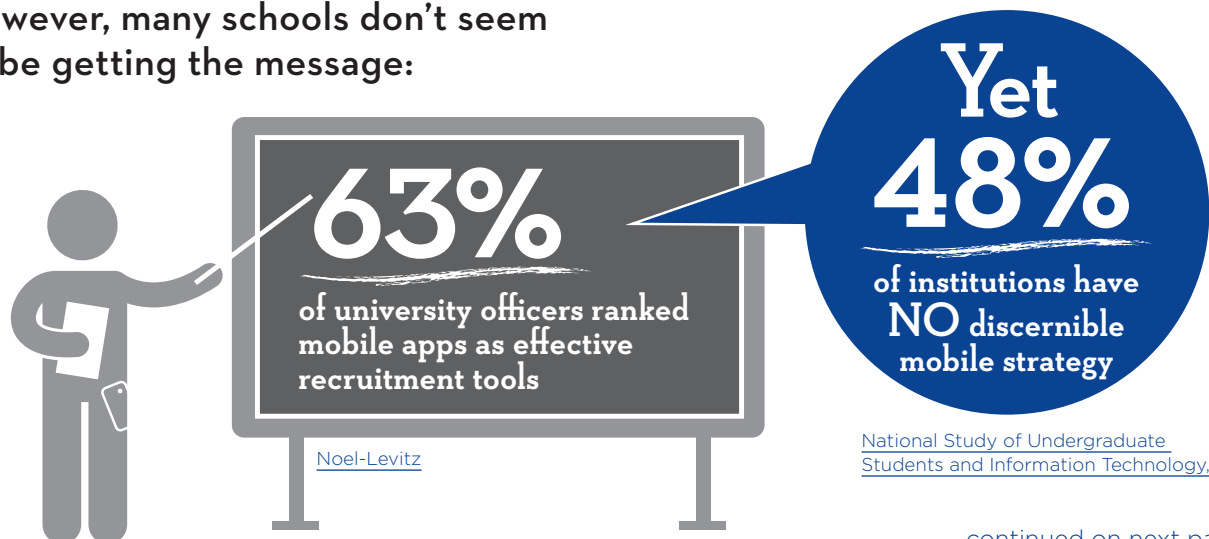
That's just what they're attempting to do:



Clearly, a mobile presence has become a litmus test for many students. So it's no longer a "nice addition," but a "must have" in order for your school to be considered a legitimate option.

Simply making your current web site accessible to mobile browsers isn't enough. According to [Flurry Analytics](#), students spend more time using apps than browsing the Web. And there is [evidence from CEM4Mobile Solutions](#) that native apps keep users more engaged than mobile browsers, perhaps as a result of their interactive user interface and mobile features like location services, cameras, etc.

However, many schools don't seem to be getting the message:



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It's Time to Close the "App-Gap"

The disparity between student expectations and school priorities means many schools are losing more than prospective applicants. They are also missing the opportunity to develop personal connections with current students, parents, alumni, donors and athletics fans. With an app at their fingertips, all of these groups could have a simple and personalized resource available whenever they need it.

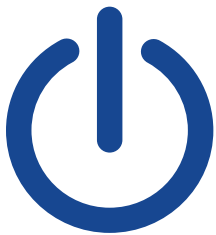
What You'll Learn from this Playbook

This Mobile "playbook" provides practical guidance on how to ensure you stay relevant to both prospective and existing students via mobile apps. It provides recommendations on the most important factors to consider and showcases best practices as you develop and launch a successful mobile strategy.

"Students want to attend institutions that are engaging in using the tools of their age... As a student, why would I want to attend a university that doesn't seem interested in mobile...? We're ultimately talking about an institution's identity, its image, its perceived relevance--and perhaps its survival."

— Tim Flood, education mobile technology and innovation consultant

1. GETTING STARTED



To adequately prepare a mobile strategy, there are number of key questions that need to be answered. These provide a foundation on which to build all the supporting elements that ensure user satisfaction and successfully reaching your goals.

Who are your audiences?

As you begin developing an app, you may feel pressure to launch whatever can be thrown together quickly because "having something is better than nothing." Even though there is an urgency to offer some sort of mobile presence, a poorly designed app reflects negatively on your school—turning away new applicants and disheartening and disappointing even die-hard supporters.

So, take the time to assess your audience. Who are the users that you want to attract and engage? These can include:

Prospective Students — In addition to specifics on admission requirements and extracurricular activities, they also want to get a "feel" for what it's like to be a student on your campus. Interactive campus tours, photo albums, and event calendars will be important to them.

Parents of Prospective Students — These are key "influencers" who will have similar interests to their children. However, they probably desire more substance about topics like academics, tuition, financial aid, campus life, etc.

Current Students — Recruitment overlaps with the retention of students you already have. But in addition to basic university information, this group has a need for more "transactional" content and practical tools; access to e-learning portals, grades, class registration, transportation schedules, menus for campus food venues, maps/directions, etc. In short, they want tools to make daily campus life as simple and efficient as possible.

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Athletic Fans — This segment includes students and outside supporters. They need access to game schedules and updated team news.

Alumni & Donors — In addition to general university, athletics, and academic news, these groups will want access to their alumni portals in order to keep in touch with local groups and future Alumni events.

Thorough examination of your intended audiences and what is required to meet their expectations gives your app a better chance of keeping them engaged and producing the desired results. Plus, identifying all of your intended app users will help solidify internal support and establish productive partnerships across teams within your university.

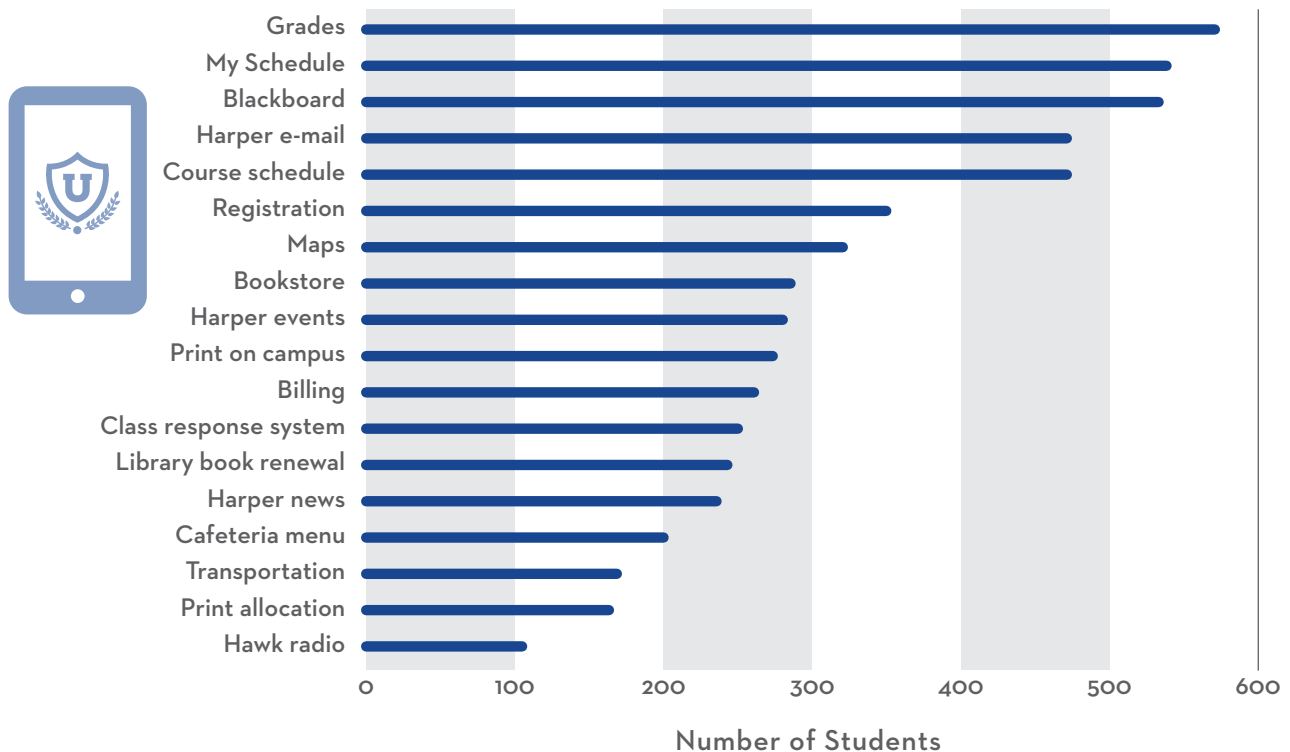
What are your school's most attractive and desirable features?

These are the selling propositions that differentiate your school from competitive institutions. Obviously, they need to be showcased as prominently as possible. There's no limit to what makes you unique, but here are some suggestions to consider:

- ▶ Historic campus
- ▶ Prominent faculty or academic programs
- ▶ Innovative uses of teaching/learning technology
- ▶ Diversity of student population
- ▶ Availability of financial aid/scholarships
- ▶ Mentoring or partnership opportunities with outside businesses/research facilities
- ▶ Successful sports programs
- ▶ Affiliation with research/training facilities
- ▶ Easy access to well known cultural and entertainment venue

Results of 2011 Harper College Student Survey

"I would like to use my smart/mobile device for:"



2. LAYING A SOLID FOUNDATION

Building an app that will have widespread appeal to your entire community is a collaborative effort. However, departmental agendas and “silos” of functionality tend to delay progress. Individual apps per department, for example, are usually limited in scope and frequently compete for attention app stores – confusing potential users. They also lack brand consistency and quality control.

A collaborative approach among departments increases the likelihood that broader institutional goals will be met and that your brand identity will be strengthened whenever your app is available for download.

Integrate Institutional Goals to Strengthen Internal Support

During the planning and development stages, make it clear how your app will support institutional priorities. Aside from developing a meaningful app, this approach will also gain the attention and support of top-level stakeholders.

Additionally, institutional goals almost always require participation from multiple departments, such as admissions, IT and marketing working together to streamline the admissions process. So highlighting how the app will support a given initiative helps garner support and funding, as well as needed cooperation from a range of key stakeholders.

Create an Advisory Panel to Keep Stakeholders Engaged

A collaborative environment makes it much easier to gain access to all the necessary resources, which come from a variety of stakeholders. So include all the participants as part of an ongoing advisory group throughout the development process.

This group also serves two important purposes:

- 1) It maintains a high level of engagement, support and cooperation from partners throughout the app lifecycle.
- 2) Stakeholders provide expertise about reaching their desired audiences on an ongoing basis, which facilitates continual monitoring, assessing and improving app performance and functionality

Representative of on-campus constituents may include: academics, admissions, advancement, athletics, directors of campus life/activities, IT, and marketing. Giving them an active role in which they can make meaningful contributions to the project’s success ultimately benefits everyone’s interests.

You may also choose to include student representatives as well as outside content providers not already covered by the key on-campus groups.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF EXECUTIVE BUY-IN

In the [2011 edition of Mobile IT in Higher Education](#), the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) notes responses such as: “We would be more likely to join such a collaboration when the issue becomes more of a university priority and would more likely join on the back end of such initiatives, when the framework and development are in place and successful.”

The earlier that stakeholders can be persuaded to overcome such hesitation and provide their support, the more successful the initiative is likely to be. So a carefully crafted strategy that focuses on the benefits to the institution and aligns with executive level priorities is essential.

Showcase Successes of Other Institutions

Nothing promotes momentum, collaboration, and action like examples of others' successes. Your own research or personal connections may provide plenty of examples, but here are additional samples of the positive results achieved by several institutions:



[Northern Arizona University](#)

NAU increased applications from mobile devices by 100% within six months of implementing the admissions page into their app, NAU Mobile.



[Harper College](#)

Harper's app was part of a strategic plan to increase engagement with working students, retention, and graduation rates. Early numbers show that they are expected to surpass their goal by 375%.



[Loyola University Chicago](#)

After introducing an Alumni Portal into their app, LUC saw visits from mobile devices skyrocket 500%.



[Loyola Marymount University](#)

With LMU's app at the center of their new recruitment strategy, they increased applications by %15 the very next year.



POTENTIAL ROI OF INTERACTIVE CAMPUS TOURS

Not everyone is able to make in-person campus visits. As a result, an interactive campus tour is an important element of your recruitment efforts. eCampus News has projected a [valuable potential return on investment](#) for interactive maps that include features such as 360-degree views, video and location descriptions (all features that can be made available on a mobile app).

\$30,000 – average annual value of each enrolled student
x 20% – rate of students choosing the school

\$6,000 – value of each applicant
x 20% – rate of students taking in-person campus tour

\$1,200 – value of each student visit
x 5% – rate of visiting students influenced by viewing interactive map

\$60 – value of each map view

With 1,000 views every 30 days, an interactive campus map is estimated to be worth \$60,000 per month.

3. USE A “CONTENT FIRST” APPROACH

Content is king! From weather reports to financial reports, different users have different needs, interests and expectations. Following these content recommendations will attract users and help make your app an indispensable part of their daily routines.

Focus on Your Audiences’ Needs and Interests

The key to improving recruitment and engaging students, alumni and donors is providing content that speaks directly to their interests. That is one of the reasons it is so important to have “experts” from key campus constituencies providing insights into their desired audiences’ expectations.

As you develop content, keep in mind that there is a substantial difference between the aspirational information desired by prospective applicants (e.g., a life-changing experience, meeting new friends, being inspired by wonderful new professors) and transactional content for current students and faculty (registering for classes, instructor office hours, exam schedules, access to digital learning platforms).

Creatively Showcase Your School’s Differentiators for Prospective Applicants

The Getting Started section of this Playbook included a discussion about the characteristics that set your school apart from competitive institutions. To showcase these

elements most effectively, it is important to leverage the features and capabilities a mobile app provides. Here are a few examples of fresh and interesting ways to present your strongest selling points:

- ▶ **Beautiful campus** – Provide virtual tours with images and videos of notable events that take place at that particular location.
- ▶ **Prominent faculty or academic programs** – Include video testimonials or multimedia examples of the related achievements/breakthroughs.
- ▶ **Diversity of student population** – Dedicate photo albums, video streams, or news feeds to various student groups and world organizations.
- ▶ **Availability of financial aid/scholarships** – Optimize online applications to make them easy to complete directly from your app.
- ▶ **Mentoring opportunities with outside businesses** – Provide student video testimonials
- ▶ **Successful sports programs** – Include news, scores, video highlights, and photo albums to showcase their wins.
- ▶ **Affiliation with research/training facilities & Access to cultural and entertainment venues** – Create interactive map showing locations, proximity to campus.

In addition to these desirable attributes, be sure to include “service” modules that address daily details of campus life, such as transportation schedules, directories and maps (with capabilities for directions), links to online learning platforms, etc.



THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON “GOES THE DISTANCE” WITH ITS APP

The University of Dayton sent iPads to high school guidance counselors that were preloaded with their *University of Dayton Undergraduate Viewbook* app. The app provides access to videos, live twitter feeds, and slide shows - all highlighting their student life - as well as information about their academic programs and a direct link to UD’s online application. As a result of their presence in the App Store, UD’s app has been downloaded across 20 countries worldwide.

4. MOVING FORWARD

Let Go of Cautious Hesitation

In closing, it is worth repeating the importance of timing and momentum. As has been pointed out in other sections of this Playbook, this is particularly important for colleges and universities that are used to an exhaustive, methodical and measured approach to most undertakings. But technology, especially mobile, moves at a much faster pace. The truth is that the most efficient and productive approach strikes a balance between deliberation and “swiftly forging ahead.”

In fact, in its [Mobile IT in Higher Education, 2011](#) report, the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) recommends...

Be intentional—but flexible—with strategy. Different development strategies have relative strengths and weaknesses, and the technologies and tools are rapidly evolving. A deliberate strategy is valuable, but so is having the flexibility to pursue different approaches based on specific needs.

So as you review the recommendations in this Playbook, keep in mind that ongoing development and change are inherent in the mobile world. But by continually tweaking and refining the various elements of your strategy, you will learn what is important to your constituents and ultimately improve your mobile recruitment.



BEWARE OF “DEATH BY COMMITTEE”

Decisions in the academic environment can be made through a lengthy deliberative process: form a committee, assess the problem, form a sub-committee, gather solutions, assess their viability, submit findings to the full committee for approval, etc. This may be appropriate for policy and pedagogy, but mobile technology moves at a much faster pace.

Education, mobile technology, and innovation consultant Tim Flood has said,

“(Institutions) want to ‘think it through’ first... but they tend to get frozen in their own impulse to have a campus dialog.. To have mobile, you have to be mobile and that means in the way you decide and implement.”

Because mobile technology is constantly evolving and changing, it’s important to recognize that collaboration does not have to be accompanied by hesitation. As Flood points out, when it comes to mobile technology, being timely is as important as being thorough.

5. ABOUT BLACKBOARD

To learn more, or if you have any additional questions or concerns that have not been addressed in this Mobility Playbook, contact us at <http://mobile.blackboard.com/TalkToUs>

About Blackboard Mobile

Blackboard Mobile, a division of Blackboard Inc., is dedicated to providing innovative mobile solutions to educational institutions around the world. Blackboard Mobile has partnered with hundreds of institutions to enrich teaching and learning and life outside the classroom. Based in San Francisco, the Blackboard Mobile team currently delivers two mobile solutions: Blackboard Mobile Learn, bringing interactive teaching and learning to mobile devices, and Blackboard Mobile Central, providing on-demand access to essential campus information.

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