



Deep Dive

Enrollment Marketing Benchmarks Report

For Graduate Student Marketing



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Executive Summary

Has graduate enrollment marketing *really* changed because of the pandemic?

The answer to this question is actually “yes” and “no.” In one sense, the pandemic has forced schools to rely more on digital communications and advertising methods in order to reach prospective students and promote their programs (especially graduate schools that relied heavily on in-person events). And in this sense, the pandemic has been the catalyst for schools to adjust their enrollment marketing tactics in order to meet students where they are.

However, in another sense, the enrollment journey for the modern day student has not changed all that much (if at all!). Prospective students are still engaging with content, asking the same questions, and moving through the primary journey stages of awareness, consideration, and decision. They still have a lot of the same pain points, passions, goals, and information needs as they had before the pandemic, and they need all of those areas addressed before they can make a serious decision to enroll at any institution (especially at the graduate level). They may be going through the mental process faster, and in a more self-service manner, but the overall process is still the same.

In other words, **most institutions still need a comprehensive enrollment marketing strategy** – one that attracts prospects at the very top of the funnel, engages them through application completion, and all the way down to enrolled and showing up on the first day of classes.

The biggest change since the pandemic is not on the side of the prospective student. The truth is that the pandemic uncovered the reality that most schools don't have enough answers in digital format to the important questions prospective students are asking. Enrollment management teams and marketing communications departments alike have realized that there are huge gaps in their content pathways, and that they cannot overcome these challenges by simply buying more ads, more lists, or blasting out more emails.

If anything, enrollment marketing has changed because schools have changed what they are doing. And today, more schools are choosing to adopt better technology tools and fill the holes in their digital marketing foundation with many of the following tactics:

- Improved SEO to rank for more keywords
- Better performing emails
- Optimized landing pages
- Streamlined website experiences
- Implementing chatbots
- Offering virtual and/or semi-live events
- Running a wider variety of ads on a wider variety of platforms to more targeted audiences
- Publishing more educational content vs. sales-y brochures

And with this increase in activity since the start of the pandemic, it's more important today to look at the data and be aware of the new benchmarks for enrollment marketing, especially at the graduate school level. That's why we decided to do the research and put together this report – which we've been working on for the last 6+ months – in order to uncover the new standards for each tactic, and learn from the top-performing campaigns about what's working, what's not, and what this means for graduate schools marketing to prospective students in the post-pandemic reality we're moving into.

Enrollment marketing *has* changed, and this report provides the data-based benchmarks that your school can use to make smarter decisions for your enrollment marketing strategy.

What enrollment marketing tactics does this report cover?

The research conducted for this report was primarily focused on the following enrollment marketing tactics that were executed to prospective students from the very top of the funnel (first conversion) all the way down through application to enrollment.

CONTENT MARKETING	EVENT MARKETING	EMAIL MARKETING	DIGITAL ADVERTISING
Blog Articles	Virtual Information Sessions	Content Promotion Emails	Facebook Ads
Premium Content	Webinars	Thank-You Triggers	LinkedIn Ads
eBook Landing Pages	Open Houses	Lead-Nurturing Comm Flows	Paid Search Ads
Pillar Pages	Admitted Student Events		Display Ads
Admissions Resources	Thought Leadership Events		
Video Landing Pages	Program-specific Events		
Recorded Webinars	Admissions/Financial Aid Events		
Resource Libraries	Event Invitation Emails		

Why is 2020 significant?

This report reveals the results of various enrollment marketing campaigns that took place throughout the entire year of 2020, with a particular focus on active prospect engagement between March 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. By tracking active campaigns during this time period, we are able to study the changing trends that emerged as the global pandemic accelerated exponentially across the world.

This new data represents a long enough period of time to **effectively establish new benchmarks** for how prospective students are engaging with content and what the new conversion rates are. This 12-month period also represents the necessary length of time to cover an entire annual recruitment cycle for most schools, and is thus comprehensive enough to capture seasonal market changes and a breadth of start terms.

For anyone responsible for enrollment management and/or marketing communications at educational institutions, you need to understand how prospective students are engaging with content, and what the new standards are to effectively communicate with and enroll new students. **This report contains the newest benchmark data needed to make smarter decisions on future enrollment marketing strategies and tactics.**

The Research by the Numbers

The research conducted for this report spanned a period of 12 months looking at hundreds of marketing campaigns that involved thousands of content pieces and prospect actions. The vast majority of marketing tactics and channels were targeted to prospective graduate students roughly 18–50 years of age, across an extremely wide variety of demographics, psychographics, industries, professions, and education levels. The following statistics allow you to understand the breadth and depth of data we scoured that is the backbone of this report.

Where the Data Comes From...

- 16 higher education institutions
- 360+ gated landing pages
- 65+ ungated landing pages
- 120+ downloadable eBooks
- 1,200+ active blog posts
- 130+ recruitment events
- 1,050,000+ emails transmitted
- 280+ event invitation emails
- 260+ display ad campaigns
- 45+ paid search ad campaigns
- 435+ paid social ad campaigns
- \$150k+ digital ad spend

Which Marketing Metrics Were Analyzed...

- 1,500,000+ page views
- 38,000+ form submissions
- 30,000+ new contacts
- 21,000+ eBook downloads
- 3,400+ blog CTA clicks
- 5,000+ event RSVPs
- 2,500+ event attendees
- 340,000+ email opens
- 20,000+ email clicks
- 50,000,000+ ad impressions
- 800,000+ ad clicks

The New **Content Marketing** Benchmarks

How Content Plays a Role in Graduate Student Recruitment

For prospective students researching graduate programs, or looking to professionally develop themselves to achieve career goals, content plays a critical role in attracting and converting both new and existing prospective students. Within an enrollment marketing strategy, content is meant to be educational, informative, and engaging. It takes the shape of a variety of media formats, but the goal is to compel the prospective student to take an action that leads to a real conversion – one in which the school gains valuable information with which to communicate and nurture the prospect along the journey (with more relevant content) towards applying and potentially enrolling at the school.



This method of using content to gain traction is rooted in the inbound marketing methodology, which involves an understanding of the **three basic journey stages for prospective students** – awareness, consideration, and decision. All content ultimately fits into one of these three journey stages, which are defined as follows:

- 1 Awareness-Stage Content:** *Top-of-the-funnel media that is about an industry, a career field, higher education, current trends, or graduate programs in general. Awareness-stage content is not so much about your school or your program, but rather is focused on the prospect's needs, pains, interests, or goals.*
- 2 Consideration-Stage Content:** *Middle-of-the-funnel media that is about your school or program, that enables a prospect to become more informed about your offering and value proposition. Consideration-stage content is comparative in nature, and should help the prospect be able to evaluate your programs against other competitors at a more detailed level than the awareness stage.*
- 3 Decision-Stage Content:** *Bottom-of-the-funnel media that is intended to help a prospect be very comfortable making final decisions and/or taking serious actions towards becoming a student. Decision-stage content is action-oriented, and typically involves actions of higher commitment.*

We've analyzed thousands of content pieces, prospect actions, and conversion opportunities in order to identify which tactics are winning and what the new benchmarks are for each type of content.

What We're Tracking

Blog Articles

- Admissions-related articles
- Student testimonials
- Alumni success stories
- Field-specific thought leadership
- Career-specific resources
- Program-specific information
- Popular trends/reports
- How-to/instructional topics
- Faculty research/content

Premium Content

- Gated and ungated long-form content resources
- Downloaded eBooks
- Pillar pages (hosted web pages)
- Videos (recorded webinars, explainer videos, student testimonials, etc.)

Landing Pages

- Program-specific landing pages
- Request More Info (RMI) landing pages
- eBook landing pages
- Video landing pages
- Admissions info landing pages
- Recording webinar landing pages
- Multi-resource library landing pages

(NOTE: Event landing pages are covered in the [Event Marketing Benchmarks](#) section)

Blogging Benchmarks

The following table represents the average results for key blogging metrics. Data is pulled from 17 different admissions blogs with a total of 1,284 active articles, of which 500 were newly published in 2020.

	Blogging Benchmarks <i>(All Data)</i>	Blogs Active for 1.5+ Years	Blogs Active for < 1.5 Years
Average New Articles Published/Year	29.41	33.67	19.2
Average Blogging Frequency	Every 15 Days (biweekly)	15.6 Days	Every 14 Days
Average Total # of Active Posts/Year	75.53	97.25 (+29%)	23.4
Average Total Blog Page Views/Year	10,545	13,954 (+32%)	2,364
Average Views Per Post/Year	136.6	157.2 (+15%)	87.1
Average Clicks Per Post	2.68	3.6 (+36%)	2.4
Average Time Per Page View	175 seconds	192 seconds	134 seconds
% Blog Traffic from Organic Search	55.1%	57.2%	2.1%

Metrics That Matter for Blogging:

- **Hitting the 18-month mark matters!** Blogs that are active for at least 1.5 years generate 5x more page views, 80% more average views per post, 54% more clicks/post, and **26x higher traffic from organic search**.
- **Longer blog posts get more engagement.** Prospective students are demonstrating continued interest in blog content since the pandemic, **especially longer posts** that are more educational, how-to, and provide deep/tactical information. Shorter posts (less than 700 words) are getting low engagement as students are looking for more answers they can find on their own in their research process.

- **The 75/25 rule applies.** Looking at grad school blogs with at least 50 active blog posts, just **the top 10 most viewed articles** for those blogs, on average, were responsible for **69% of total traffic** and **58% of all CTA clicks for the entire year.**
 - **WHY THIS MATTERS:** *This stat points toward the 75/25 rule, which is that 75% of your traffic will come from your top 25% of articles. Not every article will be a grand slam, but you need to try multiple topic clusters and article styles in order to achieve the big wins*

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Blogging Strategy

If you already have a blog...

- Make sure you have multiple text links and CTAs inserted throughout your blog posts to increase clicks to relevant content pages.
- Identify your top 5 articles that rank for organic keywords and re-publish them with more content optimized for those keywords.

If you don't have a blog...

- Start with student-created content that is a response to a questionnaire that asks questions about their decision to enroll in your school.
- Repurpose faculty content you already have.
- Favor quality over quantity - few longer articles in the 1500-2000 words range will be more worth your limited time than attempting more posts of shorter depth!

Gated Content Benchmarks

The following table represents gated premium content offers that include program-specific content, general admissions content, and recorded webinars. That data comes from over 140 landing pages with forms of various lengths for prospective students to complete in order to access the offered content.

	Gated Content Benchmarks	Program-Specific eBooks	General Topic eBooks	Recorded Webinars
Average Page Views	3,063	4,909	1,201	346
Average Submissions	163.7	209.9	161.6	43.3
Average Submission Rate	5.3%	4.3%	13.5%	12.5%
Average New Contacts	87.2	128	65.6	4.1
Average New Contact Conversion Rate	2.9%	2.6%	5.5%	1.2%
Average Time Per Page View (seconds)	138	155	119	117

Metrics That Matter for Gated Content:

- Program-specific eBooks are best for generating leads.** They generate *60% more views, 28% more submissions, and 50% more leads* than the average for all gated content offers.
- General content gets faster conversions.** General topic eBooks are the most efficient at conversions, generating a *2.5x higher submission rate and 1.9x higher new contact conversion rate* than the average for all gated content offers.
- MOFU content is most common across schools.** Analyzing content across the three main journey stages (awareness, consideration, and decision), middle-of-the-funnel (MOFU) content pieces were the most common, representing 58% of all views, *67% of submissions, and 70% of new contacts.*
- 4 Form fields is the most common amount of fields.** Looking across all gated content landing pages, 73% of forms had only four required fields. The average number of fields was 4.1, so if you're adding more than 4 required fields, make sure your content value is worth the additional barriers to entry.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Gated Content Strategy

For graduate schools with multiple programs...

- Start at the bottom of the funnel with decision-stage content and work backward..
- Favor general content first, then program-specific according to your program priorities.
- Make sure you're gating any existing content resources that you already have on your website to increase engagement.

For small departments with only a few programs...

- Start at the middle of the funnel (consideration stage) with program-specific content resources.
- Record your virtual recruitment events and re-promote them as recorded webinars.

Ungated Content Benchmarks

The following table represents a variety of ungated content pages that include pillar pages for program-specific and general topics (career/industry guides, admissions guides, etc.), videos, and resource libraries with multiple content resources (that redirect to gated landing pages). The data comes from over 85 landing pages that host the ungated content, most of which have **secondary conversion opportunities** within those pages (not redirects to other pages) for prospects to submit RMI forms, register for events, or download other related content.

	UnGated Content Benchmarks	General Pillar Pages	Program-Specific Pillar Pages	Resources Libraries	Program Info Page	Ungated Video
Average Page Views	1,170	1,195	436	987	2,214	300
Average # of Secondary Conversion Offers*	1.8	2.2	2.3	1.7	1.3	0.6
Average Secondary Content Submission	17.3	35.8	9.2	9.2	12.6	3.4
Average Submission Rate	1.5%	3.0%	2.1%	0.9%	0.6%	1.1%
Average New Contacts	8.4	16.4	5.8	2.6	6.9	1.6
Average New Contact Conv. Rate	0.7%	1.4%	1.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%
Average Time Per Page View (seconds)	169	194	203	117	117	251
Average # Words Per Page	2,749	4,044	4,579	913	1,065	546

*NOTE: "Secondary Content Offers" refers only to offers that have forms for prospects to convert on within the landing page, and do not include links to content offers on other pages.

Metrics That Matter for Ungated Content:

- **Pillar pages grow authority + drive engagement.** With a combined average of 4,312 words per pillar page — 10x the average for gated landing pages — these lengthy landing pages are doing the job of increasing brand authority on specific topics and keeping visitors engaged on your website with above-average time-per-page-view as well as the highest submission rates on secondary content offers.
- **Video is best to increase session time.** With a 50% higher session time than the average for all ungated content, video is clearly keeping prospects on your site longer, which is big for improving your SEO rankings. Want more content synergy? Place relevant videos on pillar pages to really triple down on session time *and* secondary conversions.
- **2+ Secondary conversion offers yields 2x the conversions!** Ungated content pages that had 2 or more opportunities for prospects to submit a form within the page (e.g. RMI, or download related content) averaged a 4.3% conversion rate, which is more than 2x the average.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Ungated Content Strategy

If you have little to no educational content (thought leadership)...

- Start at the top of the funnel with a general topic that covers multiple programs and/or multiple career paths.
- Leverage any existing pages that already rank for off-brand, industry-specific keywords, and double-down on that content.
- DON'T make a pillar page out of your program "brochures" that is filled with selling points about your program (that's not thought leadership!).

If you already have moderate to significant ungated content...

- Add video and deeper content (1,000+ more words) as much as possible on those pages.
- Ensure each page has at least 2 secondary conversion opportunities within the page (not redirected links!).
- Add at least 5 inbound links TO your ungated content pages from other website pages, blog articles, and in your email comm flows.

RMI Landing Page Benchmarks

The following table represents data from standalone 'Request More Information (RMI)' landing pages that include both general/multi-program RMI forms as well as program-specific RMI forms. This data does not include RMI forms that are placed on other types of landing pages or website pages as a secondary offer, and is intentionally limited to landing pages where the primary purpose is to generate an inquiry for the school/program.

	RMI Landing Page Benchmarks	General RMI Landing Pages	Program-Specific RMI Landing Pages
Average Page Views	1409	2,266	485
Average Submissions	299.4	525.4	17.6
Average Submission Rate	21.3%	24.8%	3.6%
Average New Contacts	224.3	423.2	10.1
Average New Contact Conversion Rate	15.9%	18.7%	2.1%
Average Time Per Page View (seconds)	123	114	133

Metrics That Matter for RMI Landing Pages:

- **The Fab 5 rule applies.** The average number of form fields for RMI forms is just over 5, which is also the most common out of all RMI forms analyzed. Hands down...this is the sweet spot for most schools!
- **Multi-program RMI get the most leads, with a catch.** These inquiries expect program-specific information quickly, which means you need to be ready to provide relevant content and not just the same boilerplate admissions information for any graduate program.
- **Keep it simple.** RMI landing pages are the rare exception to the norm; they do not need to have secondary content offers on those pages. In fact, the vast majority of RMI landing pages don't have any other content offer to convert on *within* the landing page, and only use redirected calls-to-action that go to separate pages for next actions.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for RMI Landing Page Strategy

For grad schools with multiple programs...

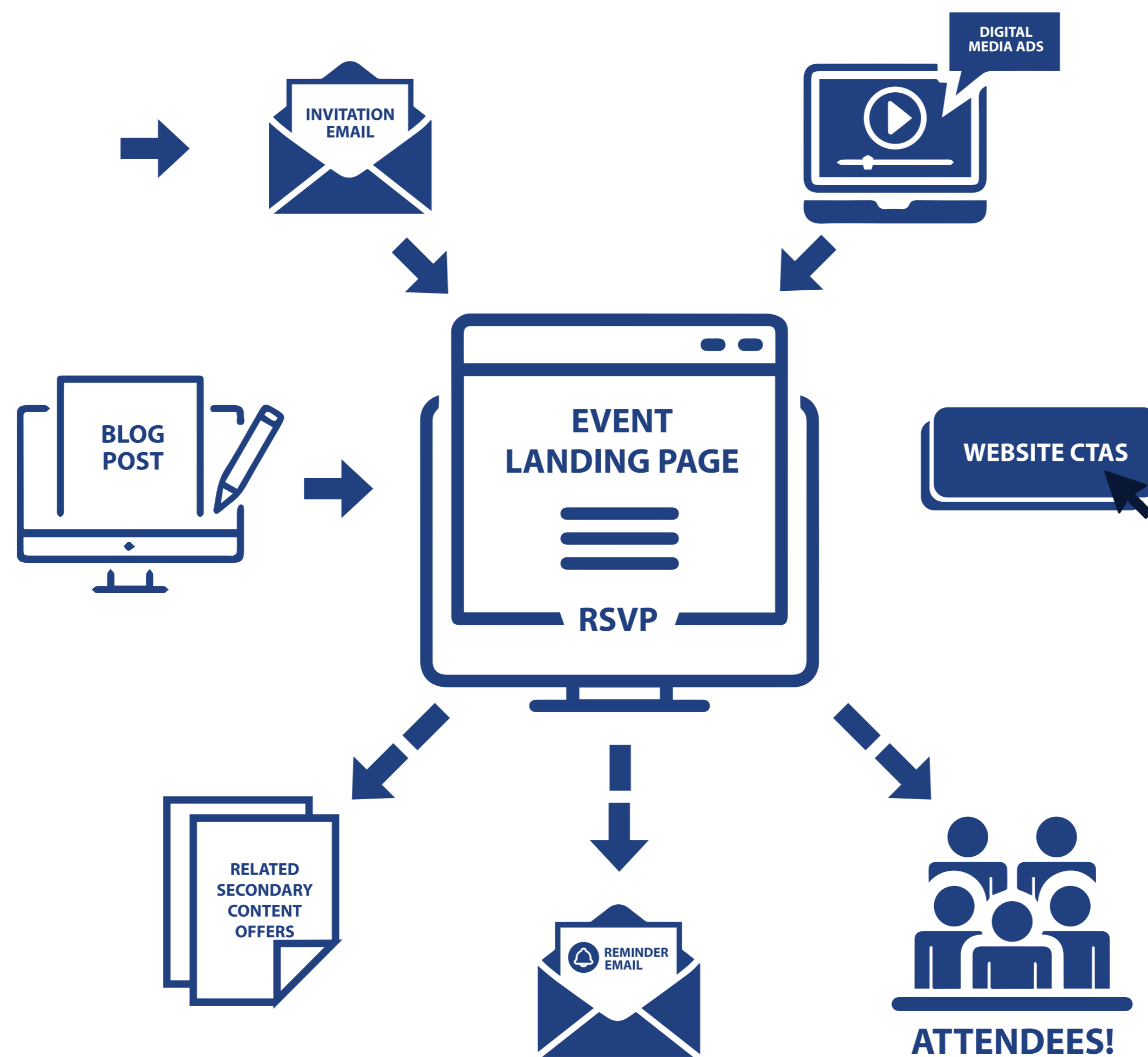
- Make sure you don't have more than 5-6 required form fields on your RMI forms.
- Make sure just about every other website and landing page has a link that drives prospects to this landing page.

For small schools with just 1-3 programs...

- It likely makes more sense to have program-specific RMI landing pages.
- Limit required fields to no more than 6, if possible.

The New **Event Marketing** Benchmarks

Events: The Critical Recruitment Tactic for Grad Schools



The way schools used to rely on physical, in-person recruitment events has dramatically changed over the past few years, but has been especially impacted since the start of the pandemic. Grad school fairs are no longer the mass-recruitment lead source they once were, and schools have moved to hosting their own information sessions and open houses.

The biggest change in the last year is the predominance of virtual events as a result of the pandemic, which means we now have more data on virtual admissions-related events than ever before to analyze and identify the new benchmarks. This is extremely important now that the average prospective student has been forced (along with the rest of the world) to adopt virtual experiences as part of their research process in considering various education opportunities. Before the pandemic, virtual events typically achieved 25-40% attendance rates out of registrants, but as you will see in the data below, more students are signing up and attending recruitment events than ever before.

What We're Tracking

Event Emails

- Invitation emails promoting program-specific info sessions
- Invitation emails promoting broad grad school events (open houses, admissions webinars, etc.)
- Invitation emails promoting industry/thought leadership events
- Triggered confirmation emails to registrants

Event Digital Advertising

- Facebook event ads
- Paid search event ads
- Display event ads

Event Landing Pages

- Single-event landing pages with one registration form
- Multi-event landing pages with multiple registration forms
- Website CTAs linking to event landing pages

Event Invitation Email Benchmarks

The following table represents data from over 280 event-related invitation emails, where the primary purpose was promoting a recruitment event of some sort, hosted by the institution (not general grad fairs) either for a specific program, a general admissions event, or an industry event with thought leaders speaking on a relevant topic.

	All Event Invite Emails	Event Invite Email #1	Event Invite Email #2	Event Invite Email #3	Event Invite Email #4
Average quantity sent/email	2,277	2,055	2,461	2,515	2,243
Average # of Opens	703	659	803	830	609
Average Open Rate	36.4%	39.7%	34.6%	33.9%	35.2%
Average # of Clicks	28.2	30.6	26.8	26.2	20.9
Average Click Rate	3.1%	4.0%	2.4%	1.3%	5.1%
Average Click-to-Open Rate	6.9%	8.3%	5.5%	3.6%	10.7%

The Impact of Primary CTA Quantity

	Open Rate	Click Rate	Open to Click Rate
Average of All Event Invite Emails (1+ Primary CTAs)	36.3%	3.1%	6.9%
Event Invite Emails with 2+ Primary CTAs	35.9%	3.1%	7.0%
Event Invite Emails with 3+ Primary CTAs	37.4%	3.2%	6.8%

Summary Analysis: For primary calls-to-action, there is not a significant difference in impact on email opens or click-through engagement related to the quantity of primary CTAs used within the email.

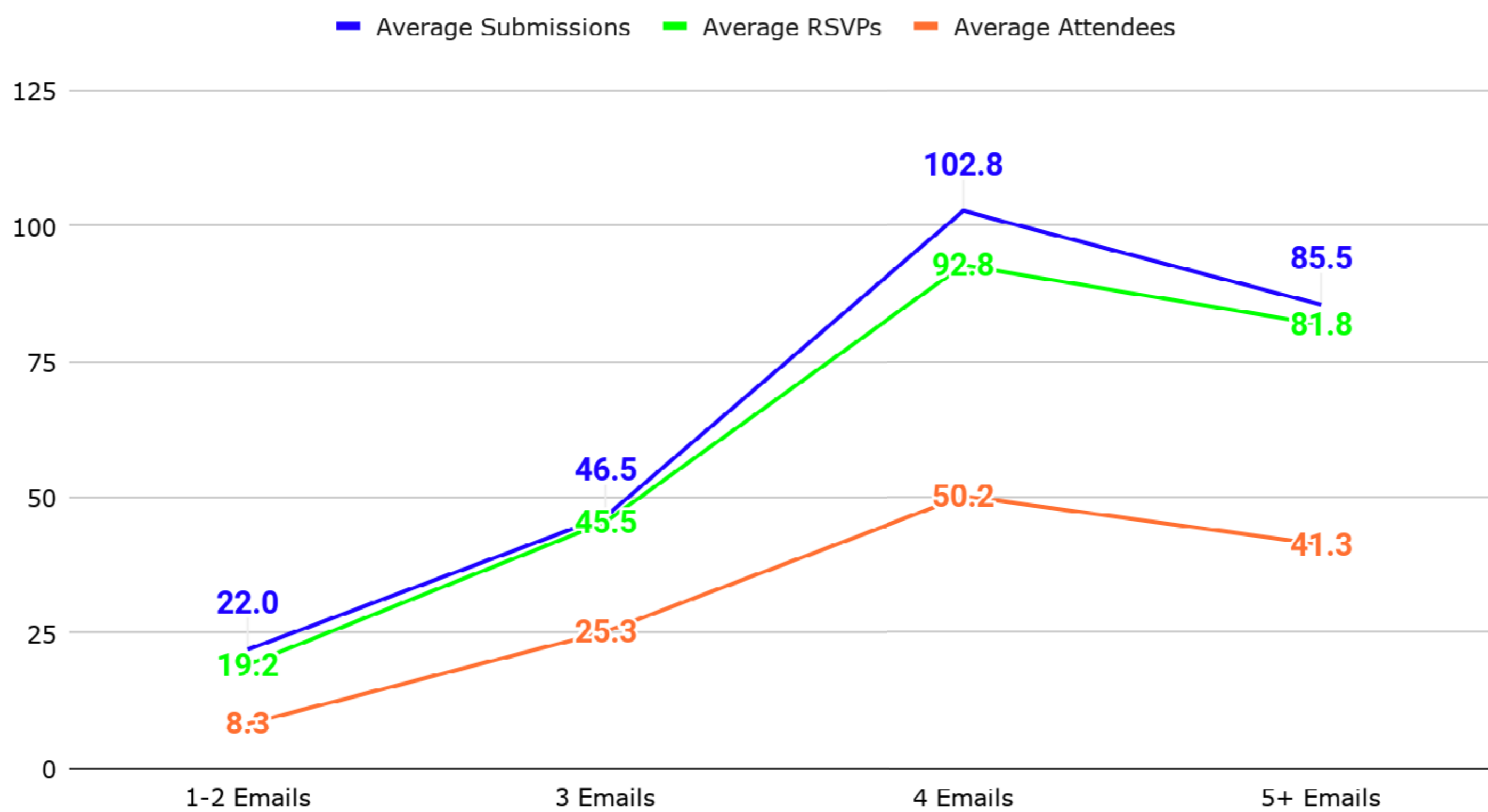
The Impact of Secondary CTA Quantity

	Open Rate	Click Rate	Open to Click Rate
Average of All Event Invite Emails	36.3%	3.1%	6.76%
Event Invite Emails with 1 Secondary CTA	38%	2.64%	6%
Event Invite Emails with 2+ Primary CTAs	33.4%	3.09%	7.34%
Event Invite Emails with 2+ Primary CTA3	32.7%	4.9%	10%

Summary Analysis: For secondary calls-to-action, there is a significant increase in click-through engagement achieved when using 3 or more secondary CTAs

How Many Invitation Emails Should You Send?

Impact of Email Quantity on Events



Summary Analysis: Sending 4 invitation emails (of varying style) achieves the peak performance when it comes to total submissions, total RSVPs, and total attendees for an event. After 4, additional emails see diminishing returns.

Metrics That Matter for Event Invite Emails:

- **Keep the main thing the main thing, but offer 5+ options.** 93% of event invitation emails provided at least 2 different ways to click through to register for the event.
- **Secondary CTAs are critical.** Event invitation emails that offer 3+ secondary calls-to-action generate the highest click rate, nearly 60% higher than the average.
- **4 Invitations is the sweet spot.** Schools that sent out 4 event emails achieved, on average, the highest total engagement, and the 4th email achieves 65% higher click rates than the average. Additionally, open rates did not fall off and stayed very steady between 34-40% across all invitations.
- **The rule of 3x3 applies.** Sending 3+ invitation emails with at least 3 different CTA styles will generate more than 2x the RSVPs and 3x the attendees than anything less than that amount of emails or CTAs.
- **Variety works the best.** For schools that sent out multiple invitation emails (which is recommended), it was common to include more CTAs in the first two messages of the flow, and nearly all schools varied the length of each email, so no two invitations were the same.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Event Invitation Email Strategy

For any school promoting events via email, regardless of size or type of program...

- Make sure to include other content offers for prospects who aren't interested/able to attend the event.
- Craft an email communications strategy that allows for at least 3, if not 4 event emails leading up to the event (or multiple events relatively near each other).
- Vary CTA styles from text links, to button-style links, to image links, to P.S. lines, etc.

Triggered Event 'Thank You' Email Benchmarks

The following table represents data from over 95 event-related 'Thank You' trigger emails, where the primary purpose was post-registration confirmation and follow-up communications with related content and conversion opportunities.

	Event Thank You Confirmation Emails	Thank You Trigger Email Benchmarks (All Data)
Average Quantity Sent/Email	60	142.2
Average # of Opens	45.3	73.4
Average Open Rate	75.3%	51.6%
Average # of Clicks	11.1	18.8
Average Click Rate	18.5%	13.2%
Average Click-to-Open Rate	24.5%	25.6%
Average # of Primary CTAs	18	19
Average # of Secondary CTAs	2.5	2.8

Metrics That Matter for Event TY Trigger Emails:

- **Take advantage of high open rates.** 'Thank You' trigger emails to event registrants achieve an unbelievably high open rate of over 75%, which is above average compared to all types of TY trigger emails. And nearly 25% of those openers are clicking through on links in these emails, which is a click-to-open rate you won't see in other types of emails!
- **Provide 2-3 other content offers.** The average event TY trigger email has 2.5 secondary calls-to-action, which is how schools are successfully getting registrants engaging with other related content before they actually attend the event.

Event Digital Advertising Benchmarks

The following table compares paid digital ads promoting events for over 130 different ad campaigns across Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google (search and display ad campaigns).

	Paid Social Media Event Ads	Paid Search/Display Event Ads
Average Spend Per Ad Campaign	\$209.53	\$181.87
Average # Impressions	40,776	121,510
Average # Clicks	288	1,834
Average Click-Through-Rate (CTR)	0.71%	1.51%
Average Cost-Per-Click (CPC)	\$0.73	\$0.10
Average # of New Contacts Generated Per Ad**	1.6	0.8
Cost-Per-Acquisition (CPA)	\$138.10	\$217.36

**NOTE: New contacts generated per ad does not represent total submissions on event landing pages from digital ads that were retargeted to existing prospect audiences; this data only represents brand new contacts whose first conversion came from that ad campaign.

Metrics That Matter for Event-related Digital Ads:

- **Pound-per-pound, paid social is the better bet.** Looking at bottom-of-the-funnel conversions, paid social media ads that promote events are more effective at generating new contacts at a lower cost-per-acquisition compared to paid search or display ads promoting events.
- **General events are easier to promote than program-specific events.** Overall, general admissions events, such as open houses, and multi-program info sessions achieved an 87% higher click-through-rate compared to program-specific event ads.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Event-Related Digital Ad Strategy

If you have *less than \$1,000* to spend on ad promotions for any recruitment event...

- Stick with paid social ads on Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Make sure to vary ad types between Lead Ads, Traffic Ads, and Boosted Posts to ensure a variety of ad types that directly or indirectly promote your event.

If you have *more than \$1,000* to spend on promotions for a general recruitment event...

- You should consider diversifying your ads across both paid social and paid search networks.
- Test both paid search and paid display ads before determining which type works best for your particular event and market.

Event Landing Page Benchmarks

The following table represents the findings from analyzing 135 separate event landing pages, including single-event landing pages and multi-event landing pages that enable prospects to view several different events on one page with multiple registration form options within the page.

	Event Landing Page Benchmarks (All Data)	Single Event Landing Pages	Multi-Event Landing Pages
Average Event Landing Page Views	1,966	676	10,218
Average # of Submissions	43	82	502
Average View-to-Submission Rate	7.9%	12.1%	4.9%
Average # of RSVPs per Page	39.2	76.3	435.8
Average # of RSVPs per Event	39.2	76.3	45.4
Average # of Attendees per Event	19.7	37.1	24
Average Show Rate	50.3%	48.6%	52.8%

Metrics That Matter for Event Landing Pages:

- **Event-specific landing pages convert the best.** With a 12% submission rate, event landing pages that promote a single event are the most effective vs. multi-event landing pages, and also result in 88% more attendees per event compared to the benchmark averages.
- **Boost results with website CTAs.** Schools that added one or more calls-to-action on their website pages (banners, pop-ups, etc.) that directed to event landing pages received, on average, 32% more landing page views + 3x more submissions and RSVPs to their events vs. the overall benchmark averages.

- **Secondary offers on event pages account for 9-13% more conversions.** 4 out of the 43 (9.3%) average submissions on event landing pages are for secondary content offers other than the event itself. For multi-event landing pages, that number jumps to 66.2 out of 502 (13.1%).
- **Virtual events are here to stay.** 98% of all recruitment events in 2020 were virtual events, and the average show rate of 50% is an all-time high for web-based events targeted to prospective students (previously 40% was considered “excellent” for virtual event attendance). While in-person events are still very effective, the healthy show rate for virtual events demonstrates the willingness of prospects to attend them as part of their student journey.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Event Landing Page Strategy

If you have *less than 6 events* per recruitment season to promote...

- Make separate event-specific landing pages for each event.
- Include other related content offers and calls-to-action on event registration pages.
- Make sure to add website CTAs that link directly to each event’s landing page.

If you have *more than 5 events* per recruitment season to promote...

- Consider using a multi-event landing page to promote multiple admissions events for a variety of programs/topics (depending on total quantity).
- Use single-event landing pages for your major recruitment events (especially general admissions events).

The New **Email Marketing** Benchmarks

How Are Prospective Students Engaging With Emails?

When it comes to email effectiveness, it's important to identify the type of email first, and compare to similar types of emails in order to evaluate success. All too often benchmarks are established for emails in general, which is a very unreliable statistic without being broken down into specific sub-tactics.

That's why we've analyzed and categorized over 875 different emails across dozens of marketing campaigns, including 42 different comm flows with over 225 emails. **The data findings from our research point to winning strategies across a variety of email types and tactics.**

Want to know how many emails to send in your comm flows? What about how many invitations for your upcoming virtual info session? And how many different types of CTAs you should include in your emails?

Take a deep dive into the benchmarks (and benchmark breakers) we reveal hereafter, and learn how to optimize your emails to get more opens, more clicks, and more overall engagement from your prospect communications!

What We're Tracking

Content Promotion Emails

- Emails promoting program-specific content resources
- Emails promoting general graduate school/admissions related resources

Triggered "Thank You" Confirmation Emails

- RMI confirmation emails
- Event registration confirmation emails
- Blog subscription confirmation emails
- Guide download/access confirmation emails
- Booked meeting confirmation emails

Prospect Nurturing Email Communication Flows

- Linear drip sequences to prospects who have inquired
- Behavior-based comm flows
- Seasonal comm flows
- General and program-specific comm flows

(NOTE: Event invitation emails are covered in the previous section on ["The New Event Marketing Benchmarks"](#) and intentionally excluded from this section.)

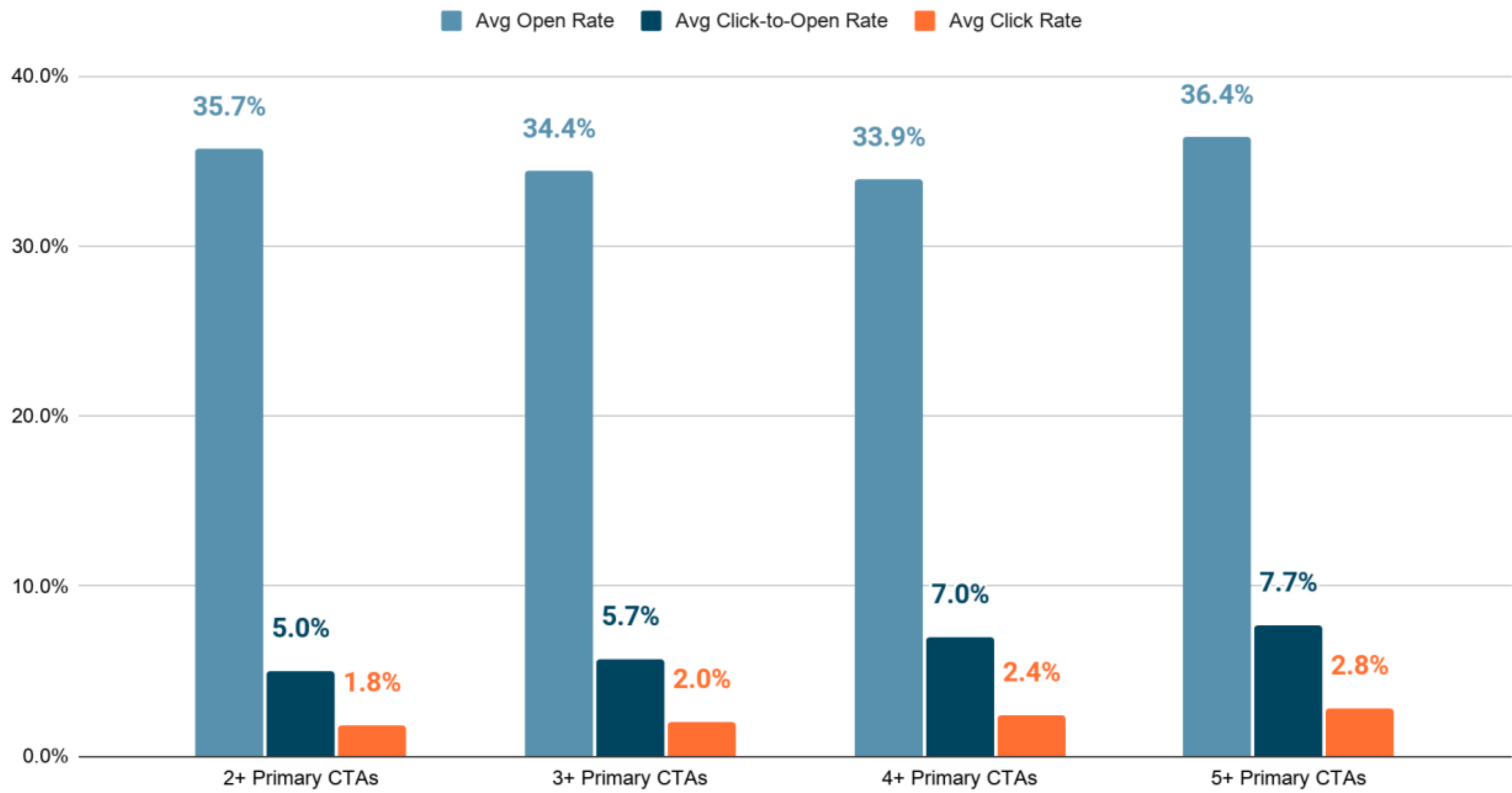
Content Promotion Email Benchmarks

The following table represents the primary metrics for content promotion emails where the primary purpose was to engage prospective students with premium content resources in the format of eBooks and pillar pages. We analyzed over 85 emails that promoted content at all three stages of the student journey (awareness, consideration, and decision), as well as both program-specific and general admissions resources.

	ContentPromotion Email Benchmarks (All Data)	Email #1	Email #2	Email #3
Average Quantity Sent/ Email	3,433	3,497	3,023	4,324
Average # of Opens	1,228	1,157	1,195	1,705
Average Open Rate	35.74%	33.1%	39.5%	39.4%
Average # of Clicks	61	66.7	46.5	79.3
Average Click Rate	1.78%	1.9%	1.5%	1.8%
Average Click- to-Open Rate	4.98%	5.8%	5.5%	4.7%

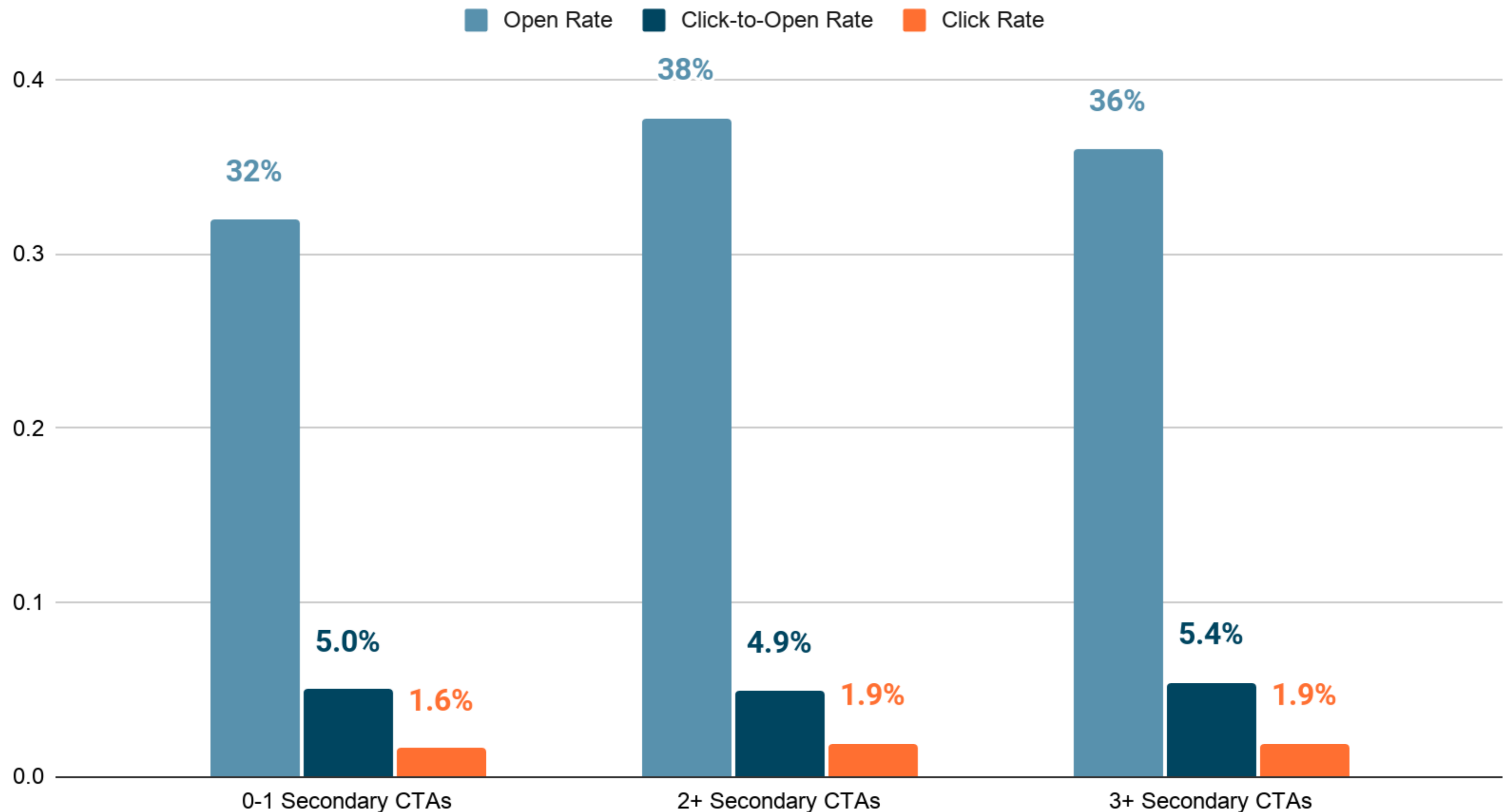
Summary Analysis: Overall, the variance among open rates and click rates across multiple emails sent promoting specific content resources does not vary significantly enough to warrant limitations in # of emails sent per content piece. While Email #1 tends to get the highest click engagement, the data above supports the theory that prospects respond well to multiple email promotions for content resources.

Impact of Primary CTA Quantity on Content Promotion Email Performance



Summary Analysis: Including more primary calls-to-action in content promotion emails directly correlates to improved click engagement. Prospects are more likely to click through when these emails include multiple different ways to click through to the primary offer.

Impact of Secondary CTAs on Content Promotion Email Performance



Summary Analysis: Prospective students are more likely to click through on content promotion emails that include secondary calls-to-action, especially if there are 2 or more secondary CTAs included.

Metrics That Matter for Content Emails:

- **It pays to send multiple emails promoting content.** The first and third emails promoting the same content resource typically have above-average click-through rates, and overall it pays to send more than one email to keep major content resources in front of your prospective students.
- **The more (CTAs), the merrier [within reason].** The best benchmark-beating content promotion emails had 4+ primary CTAs and 2+ secondary CTAs, which, combined, can increase your click-through rates by 30-50%!
- **Both program-specific and general content promos perform well.** There is no clear winner when it comes to content promotion emails that offer program-specific vs. general content resources. Both types achieve similar open rates and click rates.
- **Variety is the spice of (email) life.** In nearly all cases, schools varied the copy and length across content promotions emails for the same primary offer. This variance combined with the consistent email performance metrics across emails demonstrates the prevalence of this practice over sending the same email multiple times.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Content Promotion Emails

For graduate schools with only a few deep content resources...

- Consider linking to relevant articles, student videos, or FAQ pages as secondary content offers.
- Keep the content offerings relevant to the journey-stage of the student. Using a secondary CTA for starting an application might be too much for a student who is in the awareness stage.

For graduate schools with several (5+) deep content resources...

- Use a resource library page that displays all of your resources and link to it as a secondary content offer.
- Include related articles that align with your primary content piece in your emails to increase click-throughs.

Triggered 'Thank You' Confirmation Email Benchmarks

The following tables look at over 185 examples of various types of triggered 'Thank You' confirmation emails, including blog subscriptions, event registrations, premium content downloads/access, booked meetings, and RMI form submissions.

Breakdown of Triggered Emails by Type

	All TY Trigger Email Benchmarks	Triggered Event Confirmation Emails	Content Guide Download Emails	Blog Subscription Confirmation Emails	RMI Form Submission Emails
Total # of Emails Triggered	26,309	5,711	19,091	530	842
Total # of Opens	3,580	4,299	8,209	351	607
Open Rate	51.6%	75.3%	43.0%	66.2%	72.1%
Total # of Clicks	3,479	1,055	2,153	98	159
Click Rate	13.2%	18.5%	11.3%	18.5%	18.9%
Click-to-Open Rate	25.6%	24.5%	26.2%	27.9%	26.2%

Summary Analysis: Compared to all other types of emails, triggered 'Thank You' confirmation emails got the highest open rates and click rates, by far! Triggered confirmation emails are critically important opportunities to not just confirm an action but, more importantly, to generate additional engagement by compelling prospects to convert on other related content and actions.

Breakdown of Triggered Emails by Primary CTA Quantity

	All TY Trigger Email Benchmarks	TY Email w/ 1 Primary CTA	TY Email w/ 2 Primary CTAs	TY Email w/ 3+ Primary CTAs
Average # of Emails Sent per Trigger	142.2	138	142.8	162
Average # of Opens	73.4	56	94.5	82.0
Average Open Rate	51.6%	40.6%	66.2%	50.6%
Average # of Clicks	18.8	12.3	26.5	21.0
Average Click Rate	13.2%	8.9%	18.6%	13.0%
Average Click-to-Open Rate	25.6%	22.0%	28.0%	25.6%

Summary Analysis: Providing 2 primary CTAs is the clear winner when it comes to triggered ‘Thank You’ confirmation emails, which reinforces the value of offering more than one way for prospects to click through on a primary conversion offer.

Deep Dive Discovery:

The top 10 triggered ‘Thank You’ emails (those with the best open to click rate) had at least 5 total CTAs (a combination of primary and secondary CTAs).

Comparison of Primary + Secondary Calls-To-Action in Triggered Confirmation Emails

	All Triggered Confirmation Emails
Average # of Primary CTAs	1.9
Average # of Secondary CTAs	2.8
% of Triggered TY Emails w/ 2+ Primary CTAs	54.2%
% of Triggered TY Emails w/ 3+ Primary CTAs	25.7%
% of Triggered TY Emails w/ 2+ Secondary CTAs	61%
% of Triggered TY Emails w/ 3+ Secondary CTAs	45.3%

Metrics That Matter for Triggered 'Thank You' Confirmation Emails:

- **Secondary CTAs are a must-have.** Triggered confirmation emails that did not include any secondary calls-to-action achieved below-benchmark results, which led to 10% lower open rates and 20% lower clicks rates compared to those that included at least 1 or more secondary CTAs.
- **Permission-based marketing proves value.** Prospective students are demonstrating the highest open rates and click rates with triggered confirmation emails because they have opted in to receive them based on an action they took. By sending these emails immediately after prospects take an action, you are capitalizing on the prospect's attention when their given permission is at its highest level of interest.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Triggered Confirmation Emails

If your immediate trigger emails are boring and transactional, and not getting at least average click-through engagement...

- Make your emails from a person, instead of your school in general.
- Change the tone of the emails to sound like they are from a human and not a robot.
- Add obvious links to the primary purpose of their action, but also...
- Include secondary links to other related content and/or the most logical next action steps.

If your immediate trigger emails are already awesome and performing above the benchmarks, here are some more advanced tips.

- Add a 2nd or 3rd trigger-like email that is delayed 1-4 days after your immediate trigger email, and have it remind the prospect of the primary action, but also nudge them more intentionally toward the next action you want them to take (e.g. book a 1:1 meeting).
- Include a P.S. line in your TY triggers that is **not** “start your application today!” because that’s stating the obvious and not what you would normally put in a P.S. line!

Prospect Nurturing Email Communication Flow Benchmarks

The following table represents the average performance of email communication flows targeted to prospective students before they have started an application. The data analyzed includes over 40 different comm flows that included anywhere from 3-16 emails per series, and covers both general and program-specific audiences.

Email Comm Flows: General vs. Program-Specific

	Prospect Nurturing Comm Flow Benchmarks	General Comm Flows	Program-Specific Comm Flows
Average # of Emails/Comm Flow	5.4	4.8	5.6
Average Quantity Sent/Comm Flow	2007	2082	1969
Average # of Opens	700	1100	500
Average Open Rate	34.9%	52.8%	25.4%
Average # of Clicks	94.4	181	51
Average Click Rate	4.7%	8.7%	2.6%
Average Click-to- Open-Rate	13.5%	16.5%	10.2%

Summary Analysis: While general comm flows achieved 2x the open rate and 4x better click rates, this data does not mean program-specific comm flows are less effective than general ones. It's important to keep in mind that general comm flows have broad appeal to prospects at all stages in their journey and for multiple program interests, and the higher engagement with general comm flows is due to the broad appeal of the general content offers that are more about admissions process, app requirements, and overall institutional brand (student stories, research, etc.).

Email Comm Flows by Type

	Prospect Nurturing Comm Flow Benchmarks	Post-Inquiry Comm Flows	Post-Content Engagement Comm Flows	App Deadline Comm Flows
Average # of Emails/Comm Flow	5.4	5.4	3.5	3
Average Quantity Sent/Comm Flow	2007	2050	505	1076
Average # of Opens	700	1132	186	293
Average Open Rate	34.9%	55.2%	36.8%	27.2%
Average # of Clicks	94.4	203	27	21
Average Click Rate	4.7%	9.9%	5.3%	2.0%
Average Click- to-Open-Rate	13.5%	17.9%	14.5%	7.2%

Metrics That Matter for Prospect Nurturing Comm Flow Emails:

- **More emails is NOT always better.** The average number of emails per comm flow was between 5 and 6. However, comm flows that had 7 or more messages suffered from below-benchmark performance, with 22% lower open rates and 55% lower click rates.
- **Behavior-based comm flows beat all others.** The top-performing communication flows are ones that are triggered from prospect *actions* (i.e., their behaviors) rather than prospect *status* or upcoming deadlines. Note the very low performance of app deadline comm flows vs. post-content or post-inquire comm flows!

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Prospect Nurturing Comm Flows

For small departments with only a few graduate programs...

- Don't just offer the obvious drives-to-apply in your comm flows. Find ways to pepper in CTAs that are both program-related and to more general, value-based messages.
- Measure your comm flow success by engagement across the board, and not just app starts..
- Don't over-email your prospects... consider setting up journey-stage specific comm flows that are shorter and more behavior-based rather than status-based.

For large schools or central grad admissions teams with several graduate programs...

- Don't put "apply now" in every email...that's not how to achieve the higher click rates in your general comm flows.
- Provide easy ways for prospects to find the program-specific information they want, but also be sure to offer more general content on admissions processes, your institutional brand value, or real student stories.
- Don't talk to prospects like the massive central department that you are; speak like a human and take a more personal approach!

The New Digital Advertising Benchmarks

What's the best way to promote your programs with digital ads?

When it comes to generating new leads at the top of the funnel, most schools incorporate digital advertising as part of their overall enrollment marketing strategy. And while there are many different types of digital advertising options available today, the majority of graduate schools are targeting prospective graduate students via two main channels: **paid social media ads** (predominantly on Facebook and LinkedIn) and **paid search and display ads** (predominantly on Google search and the Google Display Network).

Where do schools struggle with digital advertising?

Indeed, in response to the global pandemic, more schools jumped into digital advertising to make up for other lost opportunities to build their inquiry pools and generate new prospect leads. But there are **5 common challenges with digital advertising** that most schools face when it comes to making smart decisions with how best to spend their digital advertising budgets:

- 1 **Lack of Attribution Reporting** — Most schools don't know how many applicants and enrolled students were influenced or sourced from their digital ads. Without more advanced tracking, enrollment marketers really struggle with how to optimize future ad campaigns.
- 2 **Addicted to Over-Spending** — Many schools over-rely on digital advertising to provide the bulk of their leads, without knowing which ad campaigns are actually working and which ones are wasting their budgets. And they end up afraid to stop spending out of a fear that their lead funnel will disappear.
- 3 **Copying Competitors Doesn't Always Work Well** — Many schools are driven to placing digital ads because they see ads their competitors are running. They want to be present in certain advertising spaces, but have no real idea how it works, what audiences to target, what keywords to buy, etc. This leads to copycat ads that don't perform well, but make some schools feel good because they see their ads "out there" in the digital marketplace.
- 4 **Most Vendors Report Only Vanity Metrics** — Many schools receive digital ad reports that only really report on impressions, clicks, traffic, and general "conversions" (without 1:1 attribution) - i.e, mostly "vanity metrics" - and don't know true bottom-funnel ROI of their investment in digital ads.
- 5 **Disconnect Between Enrollment Managers and Marketing/Communications Depts** — Many enrollment managers are not aligned with the institution's marketing/communications dept when it comes to digital advertising, and have little-to-no input on the direction, themes, tone, or audience targeting for their schools/programs. This disconnect often leads to wasted time and spending on digital ad campaigns.

This report provides the critical benchmark data needed to address these challenges, which both enrollment management and university marketing/communications teams can use to make smarter decisions for their digital advertising strategy.

Keep in mind that “digital advertising” today can include a wide variety of platforms, networks, and media formats, and this report is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of the entire available market for this tactic. Instead, we’re only reporting on the specific digital advertising sub-tactics where we had enough data to cross-analyze and where most graduate schools are spending a majority of their digital ad efforts since the start of the global pandemic.

What We’re Tracking

Paid Social Media Ads

- Facebook ads promoting content, events, program information, inquiries and applications
- LinkedIn ads promoting content, events, program info, and applications

Triggered “Thank You” Confirmation Emails

- Google Search ads for various keywords, both general and program-specific terms, including content resources, events, program information, and inquiries
- Google Display ads for both general and program-specific offers, including content resources, events, program information, inquiries, scheduled calls, and applications

Paid Social Media Ad Benchmarks

The following tables summarize the data findings from analyzing over 450 paid social media advertising campaigns across Facebook and LinkedIn. The data represents over \$105,000 in paid social media promotions, over 16,800,000 impressions, over 96,000 clicks, and over 2,300 new contacts generated.

Paid Social Ad Benchmarks: Breakdown by School Size

	Paid Social Ad Benchmarks	Small Schools 1-5 Programs	Medium Schools 8-24 Programs	Large Schools 35-150+ Programs
Average # Campaigns per School	31	27	34.7	35
Average Total Ad Spend	\$8,442.38	\$6,192.29	\$11,236.44	\$7,935.49
Average Ad Spend per Campaign	\$272.33	\$229.34	\$323.82	\$220.43
Average # Impressions	1,223,331	761,333	1,801,106	1,106,999
Average # of Clicks per School	6,978.3	3,639	11,431	5,307
Average Click-Through Rate (CTR)	0.53%	0.50%	0.59%	0.49%
Average Cost-per-Click (CPC)	\$1.58	\$1.77	\$1.38	\$1.49
Average # New Contacts per School	204.1	120.3	277.2	278
Cost-per-Acquisition (CPA)	\$71.26	\$95.13	\$54.01	\$39.45

Summary Analysis: It is no surprise that the smaller schools with fewer programs have to spend more-per-click and more-per-contact because they are mostly targeting very specific audiences for specific programs. However, mid-sized schools promoting multiple programs are getting a very good bang for their buck with the lowest cost-per-click and a very respectable \$54 cost-per-contact.

Paid Facebook Ads by Offer Type

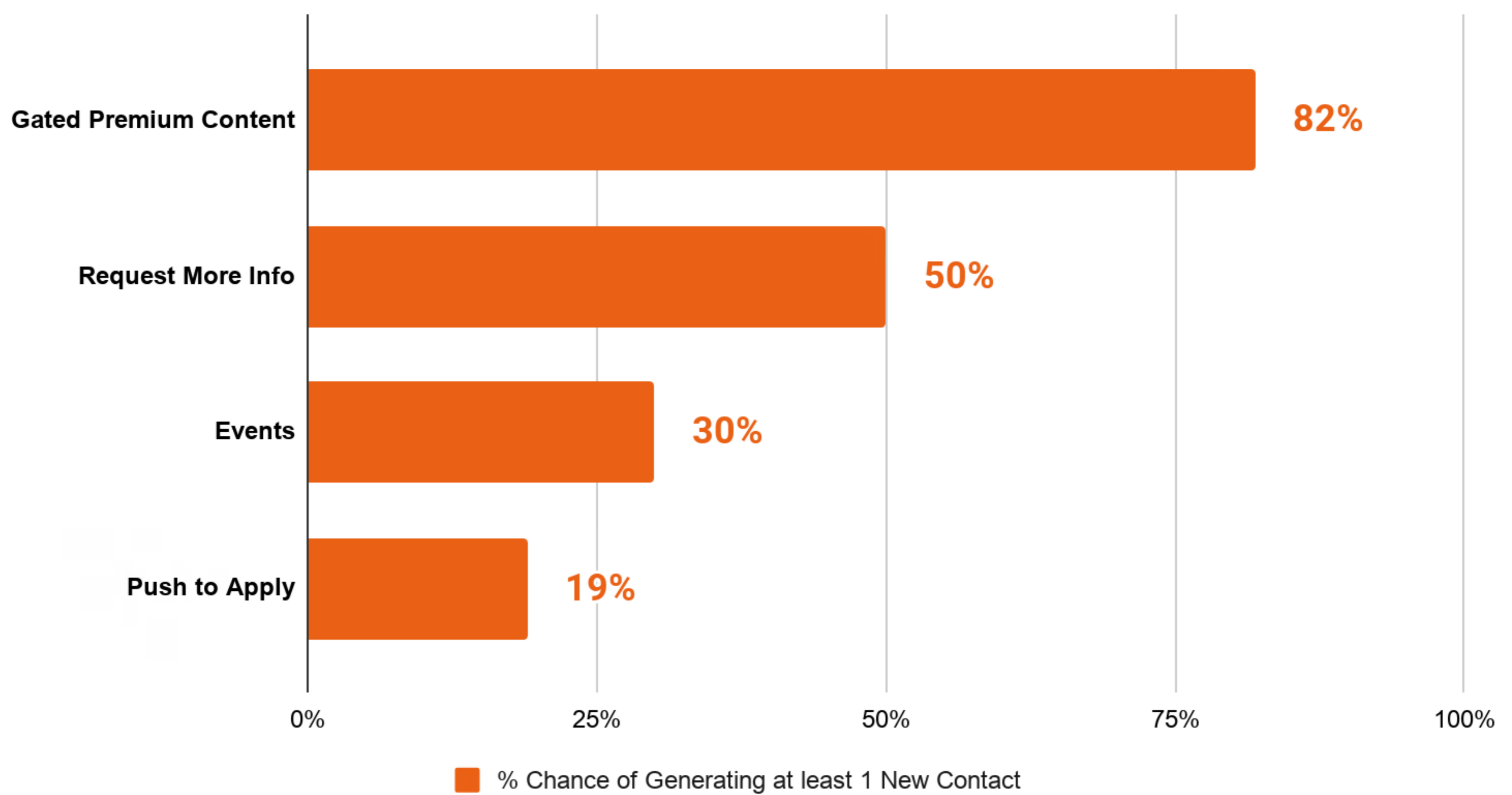
Per Ad Group	All Data	Events	Gated Content	RMI/Inquiry	Apply	Ungated Content
Average Ad Spend /Ad	\$256.63	\$223.76	\$390.91	\$224.63	\$278.33	\$49.55
Average # Impressions	40,766	39,379	58,820	51,980	35,092	7,664
Average Clicks/Ad	221.2	264.8	291.9	197.9	211.2	57.7
Average Click-Through-Rate	0.54%	0.67%	0.50%	0.38%	0.60%	0.75%
Average Cost-Per-Click	\$1.16	\$0.85	\$1.34	\$1.14	\$1.32	\$0.86
Average New Contacts/Ad	6.8	3.1	13.1	6.1	0.44	N/A
Average Cost-Per-Acquisition (CPA)	\$37.88	\$72.72	\$29.95	\$36.67	\$636.18	N/A

Summary Analysis: Facebook ads to gated content offers are the best value when it comes to price and lead generation, but RMI offers are not far behind, and events clearly get the cheapest clicks. The important thing to note here is that Apply offers are not great for lead generation, and the data points to a very low likelihood of new prospects acting on “Apply Now” offers in Facebook.

Deep Dive Discovery: Which types of ad offers have the greatest chance of converting NEW leads?

On average, Facebook ad campaigns with conversion offers have a **54% chance of generating at least 1 NEW contact**. Here’s how that breaks down across different ad offers...

NEW Lead Conversion Rates for Facebook Ad Offers



Comparison of Facebook Ads by Ad Type

	All Data	Traffic Ads (convert outside of Facebook)	Lead Ads (convert inside Facebook)	Boosted Posts (link to article or video content - no conversion offer)
Average Ad Spend/Campaign	\$256.63	\$332.08	\$429.98	\$45.93
Average # Impressions	40,766	65,872	31,468	7,249
Average Clicks/Campaign	221.2	358.1	140.75	59.73
Average Click-Through-Rate	0.54%	0.54%	0.45%	0.82%
Average Cost-Per-Click	\$1.16	\$0.93	\$3.05	\$0.77
Average New Contacts/Campaign	6.8	5.0	24.5	N/A
Average Cost-Per-Acquisition (CPA)	\$37.88	\$66.15	\$17.55	N/A

Summary Analysis: While Traffic ads are great for getting the most amount of traffic to your website, Lead ads, by far, are best for quick lead generation with 5x more new contacts generated compared to Traffic ads. And Boosted Posts are best used as a cheap way to generate traffic to thought leadership content, such as blog articles, podcasts, and videos. There are benefits to all 3 types of Facebook ads, and you need the right mix to optimize your results!

LinkedIn Ads by Offer Type

	All Data	Events	Gated Content	RMI/Inquiry
Average Ad Spend/Campaign	\$545.40	\$157.69	\$627.91	\$825.76
Average # Impressions	12,223	3,755	10,008	13,663
Average Clicks/Campaign	286.4	32.7	383.7	405
Average Click-Through-Rate	2.34%	0.9%	3.8%	3.0%
Average Cost-Per-Click	\$1.90	\$4.82	\$1.64	\$2.04
Average New Contacts/Campaign	2.5	1.7	3.1	3.3
Average Cost-Per-Acquisition (CPA)	\$220.26	\$92.76	\$202.55	\$250.23

Summary Analysis: LinkedIn is certainly more expensive than Facebook, on average, when you're looking at both cost-per-click and new lead generation. However, LinkedIn is more of a quality vs. quantity lead generation platform, and it's important to understand these benchmarks separately from other paid social media channels.

Metrics That Matter for Paid Social Media Advertising:

- **Gated Content Wins With Paid Social Ads** — Across the board, paid social media ads to gated content pieces – eBooks, guides, resources, etc. – get the most leads and the engagement from prospective students. If you're looking for quick wins on paid social, start here!
- **Events Promos Need Extra \$\$\$ for Success** — The average event traffic ad on Facebook was \$300.63. The average lead ad on Facebook was \$381.67. But what's really interesting is that event promos on Facebook that were \$300 or more were 15x better in new contact generation than ads that were less than \$300 per campaign.
- **Getting Leads from Traffic Ads Directly Correlates to Ad Spend Levels:**
 - Average Ad Spend of \$228 = 1 New Contact
 - Average Ad Spend of \$437 = 2-9 New Contacts
 - Average Ad Spend of \$644 = 10-50 New Contacts
 - Average Ad Spend of \$2,788 = 55-160 New Contacts
- **Give LinkedIn Ads Longer Run Time for Success** — LinkedIn Ads that ran 30 days or more generated 50% more leads than ads that ran for 23 days or less.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Paid Social Strategy

If your paid social ad budget is less than \$5k...

- Prioritize Facebook ads over LinkedIn
- Plan out 15-20 different ad campaigns, with an average spend of \$150-\$250 per campaign
- Spread your efforts out to test Lead ads, Traffic ads, and Boosted Posts in order to identify which ones work best for your goals (but lean heavily on Leads ads to gated content and/or events first!)

For medium or large schools with at least \$10k designated for paid social ads...

- Don't spend a lot on push-to-apply type ads
- Plan out 25-30 different ad campaigns, with an average spend of \$250-\$500 per campaign
- Optimize your RMI/Inquiry form landing pages with gated content offers to get more conversions from paid social prospects

Paid Search & Display Ad Benchmarks

The following tables summarize the data findings from 64 paid search ad groups and 260 paid display ad groups. The search/display ad campaigns tracked include a variety of ad types, including gated content, events, RMI/inquiries, and program-specific website pages.

Google Ads Benchmarks: Breakdown by School Size

	Google Search + Display Ads Benchmarks	Small Schools 1-5 Programs	Medium/Large Schools 8-50+ Programs
Average # Ad Groups per School	30.5	4.6	46.4
Average Total Ad Spend	\$6,690.07	\$2,456.89	\$10,923.24
Average Ad Spend per Ad	\$219.35	\$168.28	\$235.41
Average Total Impressions	4,083,571	1,403,807	6,763,335
Average Total Clicks per School	76,618	17,453	135,783
Average Click-Through Rate (CTR)	1.88%	1.24%	2.01%
Average Cost-per-Click (CPC)	\$0.09	\$0.14	\$0.08
Average # New Contacts per School	498.7	27.6	969.8
Average Cost-per-Acquisition (CPA)	\$13.55	\$89.02	\$11.26

Summary Analysis: There is a higher “pay-to-play” price for schools to jump into paid search and display ads, but for smaller schools, they need to expect a higher cost-to-acquire real leads compared to the larger schools. It should also be noted that medium and large schools are able to get higher numbers of clicks and new leads because they are promoting more broad/general content that covers a wide range of career paths and professions.

Comparison of Paid Search Ads by Offer Type

	All Data	Event Ads	Program Page	RMI	eBook
Average Spend per Ad Group	\$224.47	\$192.72	\$142.55	\$433.31	\$162.13
Average # Impressions	3,241	4,536	2,418	1,441	3,948
Average # Clicks	103.2	148.22	152.1	73.4	85.92
Average Click-Through Rate (CTR)	3.2%	3.3%	6.3%	5.1%	1.9%
Average Cost-per-Click (CPC)	\$2.17	\$1.30	\$0.94	\$5.90	\$2.16
Average # of New Contacts Generated	1.3	0.9	0.5	1.6	1.6
Average Cost-per-Acquisition (CPA)	\$179.58	\$202.93	\$285.10	\$263.75	\$102.40

Summary Analysis: For paid search ads, the most efficient type of ad offer is gated premium content (eBooks) as they provide the lowest cost-per-lead (over half the cost of other offers). Next best are RMI forms with the 2nd-highest click-through rates and better new contact generation rate than the benchmark averages. Program pages may get a lot of clicks, but they are generally poor at converting new prospects.

Comparison of Paid Display Ads by Offer Type

Per Ad Group	All Data	Apply Now	Event Ads	Program Web Page	RMI	eBook
Average Ad Spend /Ad	\$216.84	\$220.04	\$184.43	\$399.04	\$218.07	\$185.60
Average # Impressions	162,999	96,803	142,112	382,223	149,570	157,953
Average # Clicks	3,127	1,781	2,122	8,586	3,556	3,091
Average Click-Through-Rate (CTR)	1.92%	1.63%	1.14%	2.74%	2.07%	2.42%
Average Cost-Per-Click (CPC)	\$0.07	\$1.16	\$0.33	\$0.13	\$0.21	\$0.26
Average # of New Contacts/Ad	18.9	0.36	1	2	4.18	35.1
Cost-Per-Acquisition (CPA)	\$11.54	\$611.22	\$184.43	\$199.52	\$52.17	\$5.29

Summary Analysis: Display ads are most effective in promoting gated premium content (eBooks, guides, resources, etc.), with a CPA that is 50% less than the overall display ad benchmarks, and 10x better than the next best display ad offer type (RMI). With an average of 35 new prospect leads for display ads promoting gated premium content offers, gated premium content is the cheapest way to generate new lead conversions from paid display advertising.

Metrics That Matter for Paid Search and Display Ads:

- **Promote Program-specific Resources with Paid Display** — More than paid social ads and paid search ads, when it comes to program-specific premium content resources (that are gated), paid display ads are the most effective, and have the lowest cost-per-click and cost-per-lead.
- **Join the \$100+ Club!** — For both paid search and paid display ads, 48% of ad groups had an ad spend of \$100 or more, and that really makes a difference because \$100+ ads generate 17x more clicks and 7x more contacts than ads that spent less than \$100 per ad group.
- **Avoid Push-to-Apply Ads in Paid Search/Display** — Similar to paid social ads, ads with “apply now” type CTAs had the worst overall performance and the highest cost-per-lead at over \$600 a pop! When it comes to all types of digital ads, apply-related offers just aren’t an effective way to spend your ad budget.
- **30 Ad Groups Per School is Average** — The average graduate school is launching 30 different ad groups across Google search and display ads throughout the year, and many of those ad groups include variable-ads for A/B testing of ad copy, creative, etc. If you want to play in this space, you need to be ready to test a variety of ad variations over a period of at least 3-5 months.

Smart Marketing: How to Use This Data for Paid Search/Display Ad Strategy

For small departments with only a few graduate programs and smaller ad budgets...

- Don’t invest in search ads and instead start by testing out display ads to content, events, and RMI offers
- Plan out 5-10 ad campaigns targeting different audiences and testing different offers
- Err on spending more \$\$ per ad group vs. spreading your dollars too thin across too many different types of ads

For medium-to-large schools or central grad admissions teams with several graduate programs...

- Invest a minimum of \$10k across a variety of paid search and display ad
- Plan out 20-30 different ad campaigns targeting different audiences and testing different offers
- Build a remarketing list based on site visitors who hit key pages

How to Beat These Benchmarks

If you work in enrollment marketing in any capacity, you already know that recruiting students isn't easy. The rate of change of best practices that work in today's hyper-connected media world is extremely high. Don't try to conquer all of these tactics without first developing a strategic plan!

How Are Prospective Students Engaging With Emails?

We've learned a lot about how to approach making improvements to enrollment marketing and student recruitment plans over the past 20+ years of partnering with schools of all sizes. Here are some pro tips for where to get started and what to avoid as you work to optimize your enrollment marketing strategies and tactics.

First, figure out your current baselines.

Don't dive into any specific marketing tactic and start making changes before you first establish your current baselines. If you don't know your current metrics, you can't measure the impact of whatever changes you will make.

Establish measurable goals for each marketing tactic.

What do you want to achieve and how would you define "success" for any tactic you intend to improve? For instance, if you're looking to improve your event marketing efforts, how many more registrants and attendees are you shooting for? If it's an email you want to optimize, what sort of click rate do you want to hit?

Focus your energy on holistic marketing campaigns...don't just tweak individual assets.

It's really tempting to tweak emails, edit landing pages, adjust ad copy...and think that's going to make a big difference. It's better to spend your energy on one comprehensive marketing campaign rather than dozens of individual marketing assets and content pieces. You'll see a bigger impact from your efforts!

Balance your enrollment marketing strategy with both short-term and long-term tactics.

Don't spend all of your time and resources on any one channel or type of marketing. It's important to balance your portfolio and make sure you have both short-term marketing tactics (like digital ads) as well as long-term marketing plans (like SEO and content marketing).

Get Outside Help from Professionals

Even if you were to follow all of the strategic insights and smart marketing guidance included in this report, you will quickly realize that today's marketing ecosystem is more complex than ever. You're going to need help from specialists who know how to customize the channels, tactics, and strategies in ways that are uniquely valuable to your institution.

And that's why we're here - to help your school develop smarter enrollment marketing strategies, and to help you execute better-performing marketing campaigns that align with your school's unique goals.

We Help Schools Slay Benchmarks Every Day

Here's the services DD Agency provides to help stay school stay ahead of the benchmarks:



About DD Agency

We're a team of marketing wonks who are passionate about higher education. Our mantra is "We help Davids beat Goliaths" because we want enrollment marketers to overcome their challenges; whether their giants are the bigger-in-size-and-budget colleges across town or the daunting enrollment goals they're up against, our enrollment marketing strategies are designed to slay.

To learn more about us or to schedule an exploratory call, contact us today at agency.directdevelopment.com/contact-us.