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CASE STUDY

Reaching Gen Z students through mobile communications

Midlands Technical College modernized their communication strategy and event registration process with Ellucian CRM Recruit

Each semester, the admissions team at Midlands Technical College (MTC) invites area high school seniors to visit their campuses, learn about MTC, and get excited about going to college. These Senior Day events are held several times a semester, usually on Fridays.

MTC was primarily using email to communicate with prospective students about the event but soon found that students weren't responding or even checking their email. They would show up on the wrong date or at the wrong time. When staff asked if they had gotten the email reminder, many students didn't know which email address they had provided.

"We wanted to move into a communication method where students were already communicating, so that it was more likely that they would see our messages, and also, hopefully respond to them," says Bryan Peebles, associate director in admissions and testing, Midlands Technical College. "We needed to modernize our communications strategy and text messaging was the next step in getting that done."

But that wasn't all. MTC wanted to modernize their event registration process, too. On event day, admissions staff would set up a table outside of the event and manually check names off a printed registration list as students arrived. If the student hadn't registered in advance, staff would sign them up there on the spot. This process created bottlenecks at the registration table, and frustrated students and staff. Eventually, they traded paper registration lists for an electronic list on a laptop, but there was still only one place to check in to the event—and a long line to get in.

By implementing a mobile strategy, not only could MTC improve their communication with prospective students by reaching them where they are but they could also improve their experience on campus.

"Rather than just having everybody in one location with a piece of paper, or just signing them in on the laptop, we could have four or five different stations around campus. Students could come in from various locations, get signed in, and then go into the event," says Peebles.

Fast tracking event registration for students and staff

To get started, MTC worked with Ellucian to connect a text messaging application to their constituent relationship management (CRM) solution, Ellucian CRM Recruit, and then create an advanced find for mobile communications. Text messages are sent from the CRM and, when a student responds, added to the student's record. The messages appear on a dashboard in real time, so staff have all information in one place during the event.

"What we really wanted to do was be able to have the messages and our communication history right there on the student records, so we could see everything right there and know what they've been told, what information they may have missed, anything like that," says Peebles.

"We could easily access and see who has responded, who has received text messages," continues Peebles. "And then, also, we could send and receive messages directly in Recruit without having to rely on several different methods."

Before going live, the admissions team tested sending messages to a staff smartphone. They wanted to see when the message went through, what it looked like, how it was formatted, and make sure that what they were sending would have the biggest impact.

Now, in addition to sending out email invitations and reminders, MTC sends out text message reminders on the Wednesday before and the morning of the Senior Day event. Students are encouraged to reply to the text message with just their name to be added to the Fast Lane. This lets them skip any lines at the event. When they arrive, they confirm with a staff member that their name is on the Fast Lane list and go right into the event.

"So, if you respond, all you have to do is come in, and get your bag, and go in, rather than even just waiting to be signed in on the mobile phone, which is obviously a quicker process than how it originally was," says Peebles.

For students who don't respond to the text message, or who don't have a mobile phone, they can still take advantage of mobile check-in stations. Staff are positioned around campus with the list of registrants on their smartphone. As students arrive, sometimes by the busload, they can check in with a staff member and go straight to the event.

For staff, the most important part of the process is creating the advanced find before the event. Then, on the morning of, they can access the list from wherever they are on campus.

Mobile check-in stations allow staff to assist students, especially those who may feel lost on a new-to-them campus, in multiple locations. And it eliminates bottlenecks and congestion, especially when large groups show up at the same time.

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Associate Director in Admissions and Testing, Midlands Technical College

What used to take minutes, now takes mere seconds

"When a student comes in, as long as we have everything pulled up on the smartphone and ready, it's seconds to sign in a student. Whereas, it could maybe take up to a minute or more per student, the way we used to do it," says Peebles.

"It's made us look a lot better, much more tech savvy than just having a piece of paper or the laptop on the table," Peebles adds. "We want to give a good impression to our students. As much as possible, show them that we're trying to be up-to-date on the latest technology."

The response from students has been great, says Peebles. MTC has seen an increase in the number of students who register and show up for the event. The mobile communication strategy has decreased the number of no shows in addition to reducing wait times and improving efficiencies at the event itself.

Staff have responded favorably, too. When they are signed into the CRM, whether on their phone or laptop, they have all the information they need at their fingertips. They can see how many students were sent a text message and of those how many responded, which according to Peebles is about 75 to 80 percent of students.

There's a smaller chance of missing someone's name on the list when everything appears on the dashboard in real time. And if students sign up at the event, they can enter their name and contact information directly into the system.

"It ensures the accuracy of the data and the timeliness that we can respond to that when they're being signed in directly into Recruit," says Peebles.

"It gives our staff more information and gets students into the event quicker," Peebles adds. "Then, our staff will do what they do to get the students from the event to apply, be admitted, and get them to be an MTC student."

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