

## The Light at the End of the Funnel: Recruiting the Stealth Applicant

*It all used to be SO easy. Fill up the recruitment funnel with interested prospects and you could predict – with near certainty – how many matriculants would pop out at the other end. Need more students? Simple. Just increase search activities.*

Your website? That was just a way of delivering the information you wanted prospective students to know. Ditto your viewbook... your college fair booth... and a whole host of other communications.

You controlled the message and the media, and life in the admissions office was good.

**New approaches will mean greater efficiency, stronger engagement and dramatically improved yields.**

But that was about to change. There was something lurking in the shadows that would change your life. That something was the stealth applicant – that sneaky prospect whose application is his or her first identifiable contact with your school.

If you're like many schools, over 40% of your applicants are now coming via stealth. And they're wreaking havoc on your entire admissions process. Lowering yield. Increasing wait lists. Changing the dynamics of financial aid offers.

Some blame the emergence of the Common App or the prevalence of free online applications. Some blame the economy and the expense of college visits. Others look to the proliferation of “matchmaking” services and other online tools.

The bottom line is that the emergence of social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, review sites, etc.) has put your prospects in control of the admissions marketing process. Scary? Maybe. It means throwing out most of what you thought about search and nurturing prospects. Exciting? Definitely, because new approaches will mean greater efficiency, stronger engagement and dramatically improved yields.

Here’s how...

## It’s about the Conversation

The old days of pushing out advertising messages to prospective students is over. This generation can smell phony a mile away. They’re looking for messages that are authentic and comfortable. Think of today’s recruitment mantra as “tell, don’t sell.”

Stealth applicants, by their very nature, are not engaged prospects. If we can get them to converse with us, chances are they’ll shed their cloak of anonymity earlier in the process.

## Step 1: Find Something to Talk About

In the not-so-distant old days, discovering a compelling message often meant months of research and testing. With new social media listening techniques, you can quickly learn what people are already saying about your school – what programs are hot, what makes you unique and what’s striking a chord with students and prospects.

Or, if you think you have particularly relevant programs, a unique approach or other compelling characteristics, you can begin to “seed” messages in the social space and gauge reactions to them. Focus your messages toward the kinds of students you want to attract, not the broad general audience of pre-college teens.

## Step 2: Talk about It Where Your Prospects Are

Harris Interactive reports that 57% of youth ages 16 and 17 report visiting social networking sites at least once a week. This is where your prospects are going to explore, learn, share and converse. Facebook... YouTube... Twitter... review sites. Sure, it’s great to be a part of the general conversation. It’s even better to be part of the conversation that’s specific to your **best prospects**. Let’s say your school has a strong bent toward social justice. You’ll need to find those pages, blogs, Twitter threads where students are engaging with others around this topic... and you need to become a part of that conversation.

## Step 3: Influence the Influencers

You know the best way to connect with a prospective student is to get a referral from someone they respect – an admired teacher, counselor, coach, friend or parent. By establishing your school as a thought leader in specialized topics (such as the social justice example above), you'll increase the likelihood that these influential people will create positive "buzz," recommend your school and reinforce the decision to apply and enroll. Social media outlets (such as Twitter) allow you to converse with targeted influencers and establish thought leadership in an efficient and highly effective way.

## Step 4: Establish the "Quid Pro Quo"

The key to "de-stealthifying" the potentially stealthy applicant is, quite obviously, to get them to identify themselves. Since anonymity is a treasure among many of your prospects, every point of contact – from your website to more traditional marketing to social media – must offer something of value to "trade" for information about the prospect. Maybe it's a chance to view senior projects on social justice... maybe it's an opportunity to audit a seminar... or hear a lecture from a famous professor. Maybe it's a chance to chat with another student majoring in a field of interest. To use direct marketing lingo, what "offer" will compel your prospects to come out of hiding?

## Step 5: Nurture, Nurture, Nurture

Once your stealth prospects identify themselves, it's up to you to use their information wisely and appropriately. Continue the conversation – not a sales monologue – both directly and through social media. Offer value along the way to keep your prospects engaged and on the road to matriculation. Setting up a Facebook page for your admitted students to congregate, talk and feel like they are part of a community is a great example.

The ease of online information and application got us into this mess. Social media and the art of online conversation can help get us out of it.

## Let's get started.

How can Media Logic help you achieve your admissions goals? How can we help you leverage innovative media to maximize your initiatives? As competition becomes fiercer, how can your college or university forge true connections with the most sought-after students? Would you like to take us for a test drive – a no-obligation, kick-the-tires, see-how-we-think brainstorm session? Just contact Suzanne Gunther at 866.353.3011 or visit [www.mlinc.com](http://www.mlinc.com).

## About Media Logic

Media Logic is an innovative “conversation-centric” marketing firm with revolutionary products designed to integrate and leverage traditional and social media. Founded in 1984, Media Logic is headquartered in Albany, N.Y., with a West Coast office in Oakland, Calif. The agency provides marketing services across industries. Its clients include Visa, Barclays, Healthways, Carnegie Mellon University, MVP Health Care and Fortitech.

Media Logic is ranked by *Advertising Age* as one of the nation’s top 250 advertising agencies and a top 100 agency by *PROMO* magazine. Visit [www.mlinc.com](http://www.mlinc.com) for more information.

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