



EAB

Reimagining Graduate & Adult Learner Enrollment in the AI Era

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Adult Learner Recruitment

Quick Poll



How confident are you in your/your team's knowledge and use of AI?



Join using the QR code or
by visiting slido.com and
entering #4735810

Present link



The Moment We're In

Higher Ed Can't Afford to Lag Behind

A Growing AI Imperative



Students are increasingly using **AI preparedness as a factor** in evaluating programs.



Institutions that can **demonstrate their AI-related capabilities** (faculty expertise, practical applications) will have a competitive advantage.

Broader Leadership and Strategy Are Needed

► Growing demand for AI fluency

Students need both concrete GenAI skills useful today and the ability to learn new ones as the technology evolves.

► More than just one field

All fields will need to use GenAI as it reshapes the makeup of the economy.

A Dizzying Rate of AI Developments



New Developments Include...



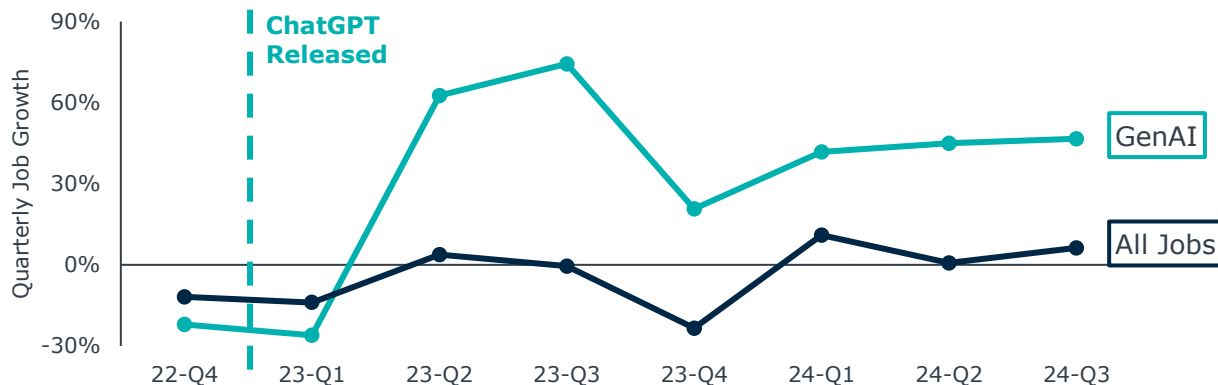
- ▶ ChatGPT Pulse
- ▶ Agentic web browsers like Comet
- ▶ Meta using chatbot conversions for ad targeting

The Market Has Moved



Skyrocketing Demand for Generative AI Skills

Quarterly Growth of Job Postings Containing Generative AI Terms, October 2022–September 2024



Monumental Growth for GenAI Skills Compared to Past High-Growth Fields

Growth in Monthly Relevant Job Postings as Field Interest Peaked

GenAI, 2024

644%

Oct 2022–Sept 2024

Fintech, 2022

104%

Jun 2020–Apr 2022

Smart Manufacturing, 2021

25%

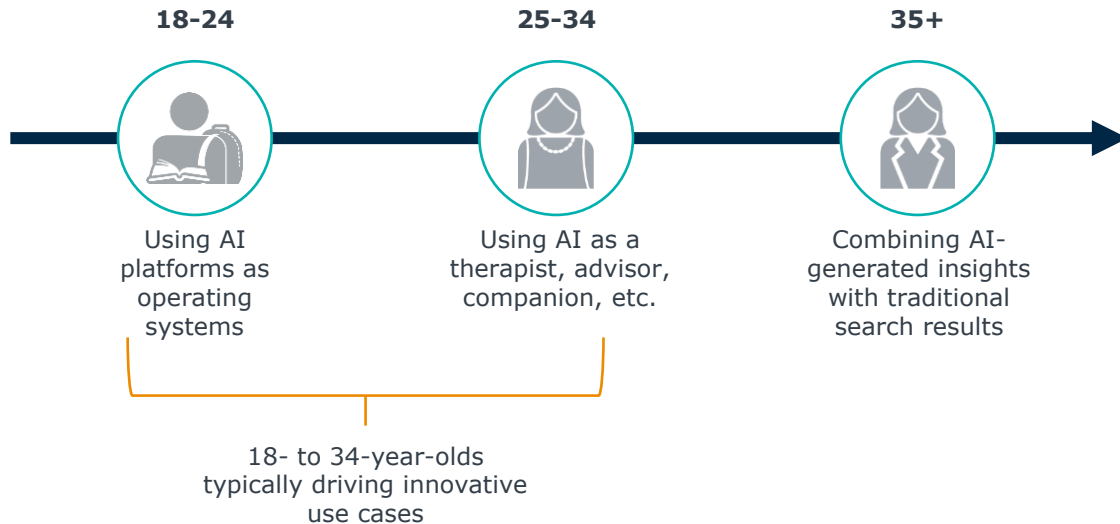
Oct 2019–Sept 2021

Meet the AI-Native Learner

But with Some Key Differences by Demographics

GenAI Platforms Have Carved Distinct Niches Across Age Groups

Common Ways Individuals Are Using GenAI by Age



AI Powers Prospective Student Research



Initial Exploration

Awareness

Consideration

Decision

“

Students live in a world where Spotify builds them playlists, Amazon knows their preferences—and now, AI powers their research.”

Dr. Michael Horn
The Future of Education

Turning Disruption Into Direction



3 Imperatives for an AI-First Marketing Strategy



**Traditional Search Engine
and AI Answer Engine
Visibility**



**Hyper-personalized, Multi-
Channel Student Journeys**



**Always-On, AI-Enabled
Conversational Marketing**

Keep Watch...

College and universities must evolve from being passive information repositories to machine-executable assets capable of participating in this new, action-oriented ecosystem.

1

Search Behavior has Changed

Universities are losing visibility

Exercise: Program Visibility in Various Search Engines

1 Google Search (Traditional Search): Identify a high-priority program at your institution. Then, think about how a prospective student might search for your program and plug that query into Google.

Ex: "What are the best [Your Program Type] in [Your State/Region]"

Ex: "[Your Program Type] with online option"

2 AI Search: Conduct the same search on ChatGPT and Gemini.

Reflection Questions

- Is your program appearing in search results?
- How are the traditional and AI search results similar? How are they different?

AI Moved the Goalposts for Search

Optimizing for Generative and Answer Engines, Not Just Search Engines

AI Engines are the new front door to discovery

- Tools like ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Claude are edging out Google.
- Two-thirds say they turn to AI first, and 93% of Gen Z use multiple AI tools each week.

Traditional Search Engines are Adapting to AI

- Google's AI Overviews dominate the top of search results, pushing down both paid and organic listings.
- AI Overviews appear in 70% of Google searches. *When they do, CTR drops by nearly 35%.*

*The **website** is where students go to **validate** what AI already told them.*

Top SEO rankings no longer guarantee clicks

- Top organic rankings (positions 1–3) are getting buried.
- Zero-click searches and AI Overviews are slashing performance—click-through rates drop when AI Overviews appear.

Paid Search is getting costlier and less effective

The cost-per-click for higher ed terms is up 45% over last year, while click-through rate is falling, especially when AI Overviews are present.



3 Trends to Know

1 CPC is Up

Cost-per-click is up year-over-year for high-intent higher ed keywords, making it **more expensive to gain visibility**, especially for non-branded, informational queries.

2 CTR is Down

When AI Overviews appear, paid search **click-through rates drop by more than 20%**. Even strong, well-optimized ads are losing ground—not because of poor creative, but because AI is crowding them out.

3 More Visibility, Less Quality

Impression share is up +2% year-over-year, but clicks haven't followed. Visibility isn't the issue. **AI answers are disrupting the path from search to site.**



AI is not replacing search (organic or paid). **It's reshaping it.**

Traditional Search Isn't Dead—It's Just Smarter...



The Changing Landscape of Search



Traditional Search

Google circa 2010



Featured Snippets and Voice Search

2015-2022



AI-Powered Answers

2023-present



The Impacts of AI Search



AI-powered summaries are the new top results



Search queries are longer, more conversational



Students are “meeting” you through an AI-generated responses

26%

of Gen Z students used AI Chatbots during their college search

AI Overviews Disturb the Content Model

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Schools Are Not Just Competing with AI, They're Feeding AI

The screenshot shows a Google search interface with the query "what can i do with a msw". The AI Overview section provides a summary of career paths, including clinical social work, school social work, medical social work, child welfare worker, community organizer, advocate, researcher, policy analyst, working in hospitals, schools, government agencies, and private practice. It also lists specific career paths with an MSW: Clinical Social Worker, School Social Worker, and Medical Social Worker. The right sidebar shows related results, including "What Can I Do with an MSW Degree? MSW Career Paths", "What Can I Do With an MSW Besides Social Work? Alternative ...", and "What Can You Do with a Degree in Social Work?".

Google what can i do with a msw

All Images Forums Videos Shopping News Web : More

AI Overview

With a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, you can pursue a variety of careers in social work, including **clinical social work, school social work, medical social work, child welfare worker, community organizer, advocate, researcher, policy analyst, working in hospitals, schools, government agencies, and private practice**, utilizing your skills in empathy, communication, and problem-solving to help individuals and communities facing challenges.

Specific career paths with an MSW:

Clinical Social Worker:
Provide individual and group therapy to clients dealing with mental health issues, substance abuse, or trauma.

School Social Worker:
Support students, teachers, and families by addressing behavioral issues, academic challenges, and family concerns within a school setting.

Medical Social Worker:
Assist patients and their families in navigating healthcare systems, coping with medical diagnoses, and accessing necessary support services within hospitals or clinics.

What Can I Do with an MSW Degree? MSW Career Paths
Geriatric Social Worker: Using their expertise in legislation, policies and social programs that impact older patients, these...
Social Work License Map

What Can I Do With an MSW Besides Social Work? Alternative ...
With an MSW, you can explore careers in human resources, policy analysis, grant writing, education, and healthcare...
Social Work Guide

What Can You Do with a Degree in Social Work?
Mar 17, 2023 — Child Welfare Practitioner. Child welfare practitioners specialize in safeguarding children from harm by...
University of Kentucky College of Social Work

Show all

National University

University of North Dakota

University of Kentucky

How Are Institutions Thinking About AI Search?

Early Findings from Our New Survey of 120+ CMOs

53%

Report wanting vendor help to improve AI search visibility

#2

"Search visibility" is an area where CMOs wish they could invest in more heavily, second only to "paid media"

60%

of surveyed CMOs have researched tools to adapt to improve AI search visibility

Uncover Traditional and AI Search Visibility Gaps



1/3

Only 1/3 of surveyed marketing leaders have conducted an audit to assess their visibility in AI search



The Audit Identifies Opportunities to...

- Fix traditional and technical SEO errors
- Improve AI search engine visibility
- Benchmark your site's competitiveness against peers

We Start Each Audit with 3 Strategic Questions

How do you appear in traditional and AI search engines?

1



How is your brand showing up in AI-generated results?

2



3



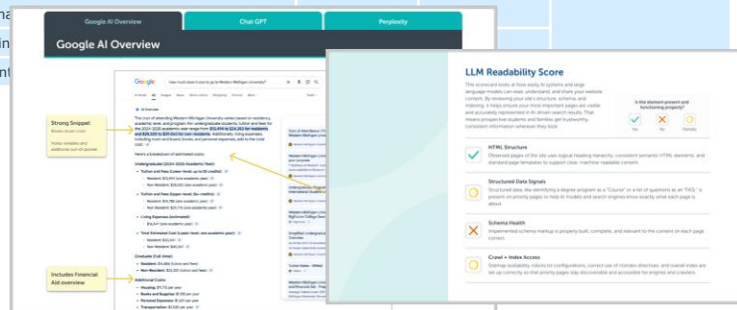
Who's outranking you in AI search?

Know Where You're Winning & Where AI Ignores You 17

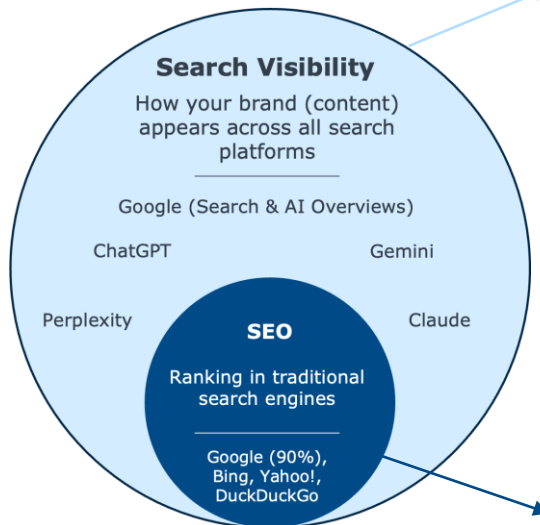
Evaluate Your Site's Visibility and Performance in AI-Powered Platforms

- ▶ **What content** is ranking in traditional search engines and being mentioned across AI platforms?
- ▶ Is your content credible and **accurately represented**?
- ▶ **What questions** are prospective students asking?
- ▶ How does your share of voice compare to **your competition**?

Audit Deliverable	Typical SEO Audit	Search AI Visibility Audit	Areas of Focus
On-Page SEO Best Practices	✓	✓	SEO
Page & Traffic Analytics	✓	✓	
Organic Keyword Rankings	✓	✓	
Search Console Analysis	✓	✓	
Technical Errors & Issues	✓	✓	
Competitor Keyword Analysis		✓	Competitor & Higher Education Analysis
Organic Competition Discovery		✓	
Program Page Optimization		✓	
Google Featured Snippets Analysis		✓	
Analysis of AI User Behavior		✓	AI Visibility
AI Traffic Performance		✓	
AI Prompt Analysis		✓	
HTML Structure Review		✓	
Schem			
Indexin			
Content			



Inside an AI Visibility Audit



AI Engine Audit

VISIBILITY

AI Share of Voice
Mentions
Average Position
Enrollment-Related Searches
Competitor Benchmarking

BRAND PERCEPTION

Brand Sentiment
Key Attributes
Competitive Perception

STRATEGY & ACTIONS

Prioritization
Benchmarking & Trends
Reports

AUDIENCE & CONTENT

Real Student Questions

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Audit

Visibility & Ranking

Keyword Rankings
SERP Features Presence
Impressions

Traffic Engagement

Total Traffic
New Users
Click-Through Rate
Engagement Rate

Technical SEO Health

Technical Errors/404s
Duplicate content
Hygiene
Missing Titles

2

Relevancy Matters Even More

Hyper-personalization answers the call

What if you could make your program's
best case to every right-fit student...



...at the **right time**, on the **right channel**, with
the **right message**?

A 1:1 Student Experience



Previous

Static Campaigns

Student receives content at the scheduled time regardless of interaction.

Manual Execution

Creatives manually write and design across separate channels.

Generic Messaging

Content feels like something any student would get.

Current

Responsive Campaigns

Student receives content as soon as they become an inquiry.

AI-Assisted Execution

Creatives can use AI in ways they choose.

Personalized Messaging

Content feels like the most appropriate pre-written message was chosen.

Near Future

Orchestrated Journeys

Student has many paths to engage and receives optimized content across channels.

AI-Infused Speed & Scale

AI is a central part of the creative process as it allows for necessary volumes of variations.

Hyper-Personal Experiences

Content takes full student profile (behavior and data) into account to share most relevant info.

EAB's Hyper-personalization Learning Agenda



Lessons and Results



Approach

Emails and Subject Lines

Select Emails

Data Points

- Student Type
- Funnel Stage
- Program
- Location/Distance
- Survey Responses (Goals, Obstacles)

Vary which paragraphs get which data points and how they're combined



Phase 1 Results

Phase 1

- *Phase 1 Complete*
- Hyper-personalized emails lifted response rate by **+51%** and **+56%**
- Hyper-personalized emails and subject lines lifted response rate by **+220%** and **+422%**

Phase 2

- *In Progress*
- Testing personalized content gives, landing pages, call-to-action variants, etc.



Additional Findings

Collect More Survey Data

Key data variables (i.e., goals and obstacles) naturally have low fill rates at the start of the email campaign.

Audience Differences

Prospects may benefit more from hyper-personalization than inquiries

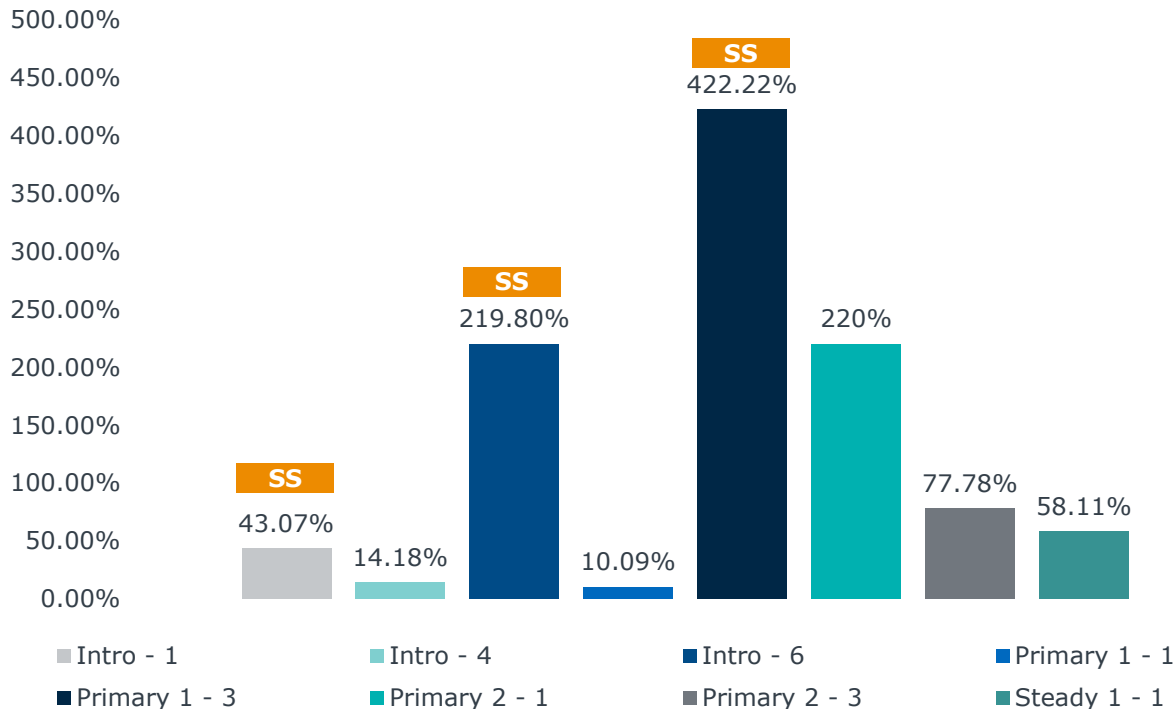
Distance Matters

Records with distance from campus incorporated tended to engage more positively

Impact on Copy

Up to 70% of the email content changed using just 2-3 selected data variables

A Promising Lift in Email Engagement

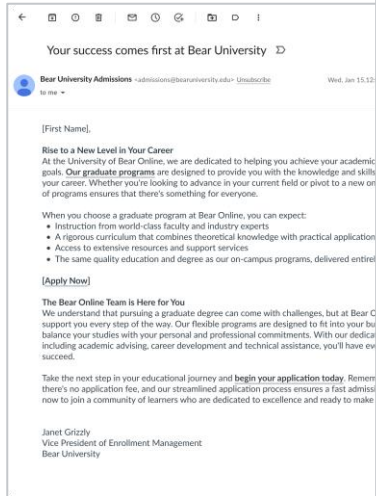

SS

Indicates statistical significance

Hyper-Personalization in Email

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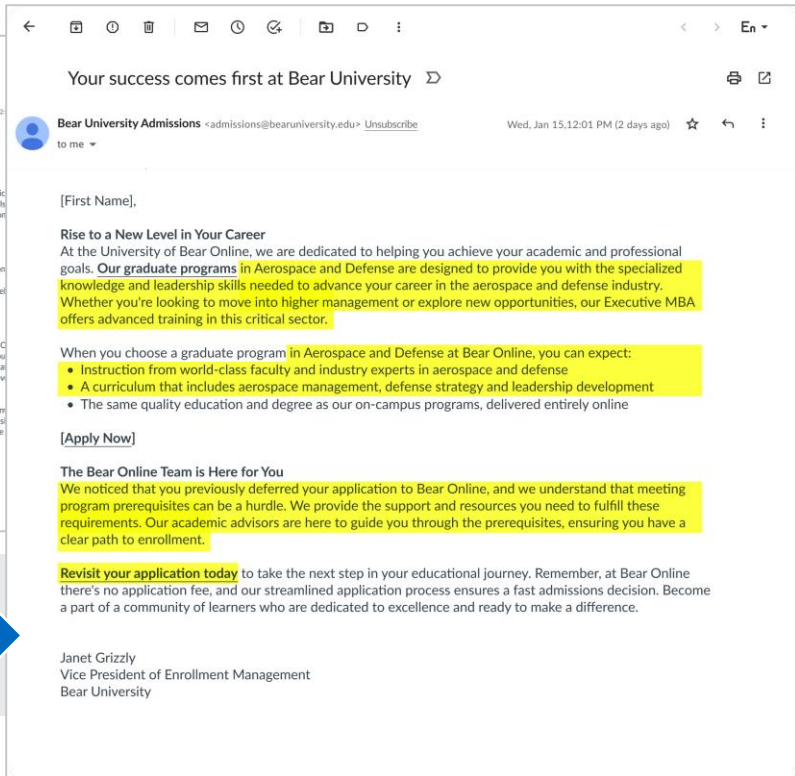
DEFAULT



Test: Goal, Program,
Funnel Status, Interests

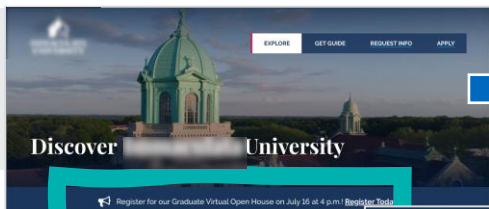


HYPER-PERSONALIZED

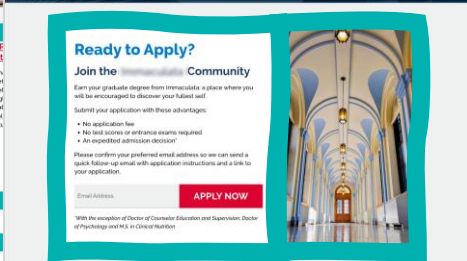
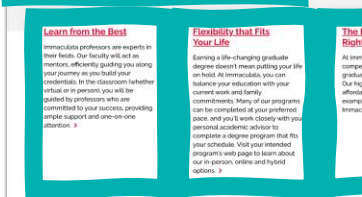


Hyper-Personalization in Landing Page

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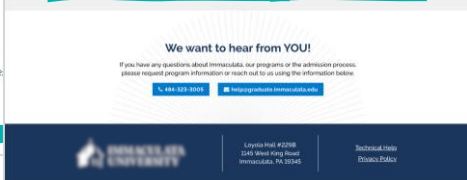


Test: Dynamic text and visuals that change based on key data variables.



Data variables:

- **First Name:** "Bob"
- **Program/Area:** "Business"
- **Motivation:** "Advance my Career"
- **Obstacle:** "Finances"
- **Funnel Stage:** "Prospect"
- **Distance:** "Far"



Moving from AI-Vision to AI-Action

Key Capabilities Shaping Our Roadmap

Hyper-Personalizing ... Everything



Makes the message more relevant, meaningful, and personal

Includes details specific to the individual to share the most interesting info

Adding Conversational Marketing



Continues conversations across new (SMS, chat) and existing channels

All contacts feel like communication is with, not from, the school

Building Dynamic Orchestration



Determines the right type of message to send with next best step

Meets student where they are and moves them through the funnel

Data Piping & Coordination

+ Ingesting Apply Advance data

+ Augmenting survey data

+ Adding behavioral data

A Quick Word on Conversational Marketing

What Is Conversational Marketing Anyway?



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Conversational Marketing Creates Instant, Two-Way Dialogue with Students

Examples Include...



Two-Way SMS and Voice

Real-time, personalized text messages or calls that let students ask questions, get deadline reminders, and receive instant support right from their phones



Embedded Chatbots

AI chat assistants on landing pages and portals that answer questions, recommend programs, collect data, and guide students through their next steps 24/7

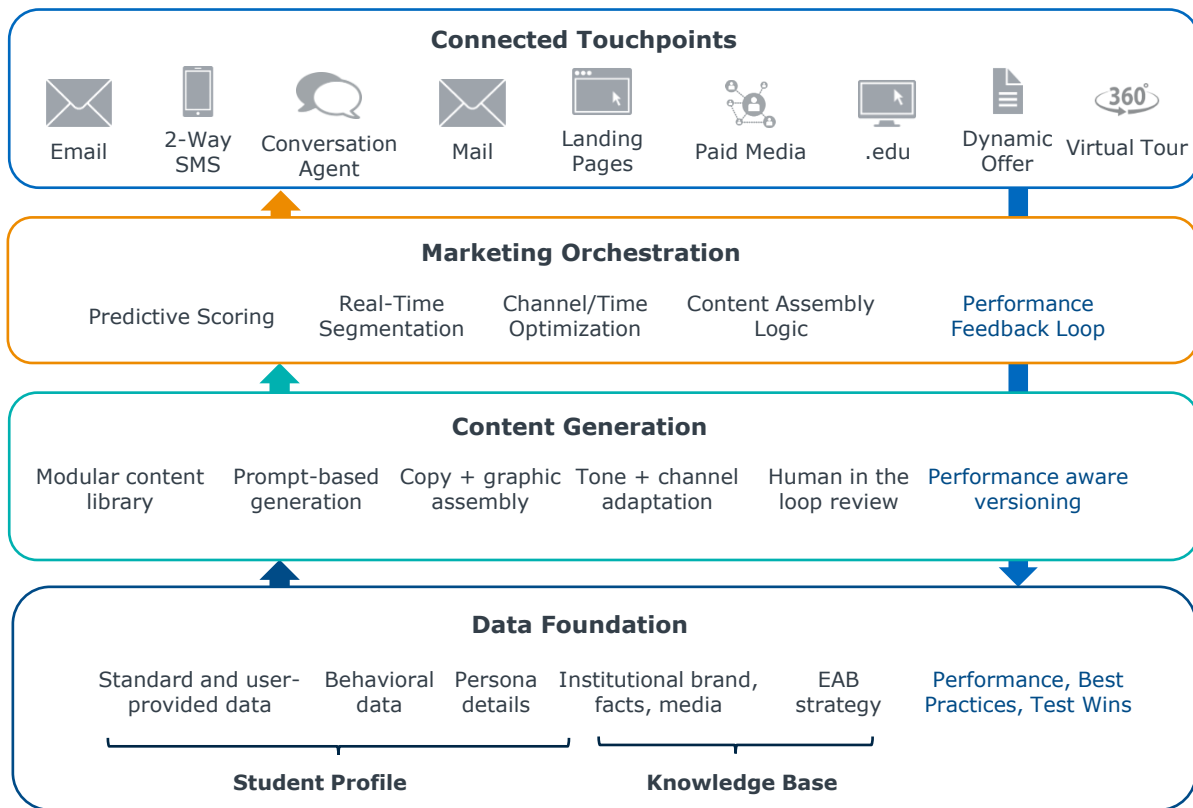


Conversational Search

Search bars or widgets on .edu sites or landing pages that respond to natural language queries ("Which majors have the highest job placement?") and return instant, relevant answers or links

EAB's Marketing Ecosystem

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Key Takeaways



AI Is Reshaping How Students Search for and Choose Programs

Students increasingly rely on AI engines first. Schools that fail to adapt risk being invisible in the discovery process.



Hyper-Personalization Is the New Standard for Student Engagement

Institutions using hyper-personalization strategies see meaningful lift in engagement and applications and ensure prospective students feel understood and supported throughout their journey.



Conversational Marketing Can Fundamentally Change Your Recruitment

By creating instant, two-way dialogue through channels like chatbots, institutions can meet prospective students with relevant info at the exact moment of inquiry, which then informs further hyper-personalization.



Effectively Using AI in Student Recruitment Requires a Coordinated Marketing Ecosystem

AI platforms alone aren't sufficient—to get personalization right, you need to coordinate communications and engagement signals across channels



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