How to Make Student Communications Stick

#LetsDoThis
Today’s Agenda

- The Problem—Noise, Competition
- The Rule of 7
- Communication Channels
- Top 5 Channels To Optimize
- Group Exercise!
We Help Schools Change Lives

- The only student financial services platform
- Remove barriers from the student journey
- Boost enrollment and student satisfaction
- Streamline efficiencies and communications
- Improve financial aid completion rates
Problem: Communicating Effectively with Students Is Exceedingly Difficult
A Lot Happens in Just One Second

- 2,619,856 emails sent (a lot are spam)
- 70,603 YouTube video views
- 1,281 Tumblr posts
- 43,642 GB of internet traffic
- 880 Instagram photos uploaded
- 62,263 Google searches
- 7,740 Tweets
Students Are Overwhelmed

- Relationships
- Family
- Bills
- Grades
- Living Expenses
- Military Deployment
- Health
- Employment
- Peer Pressure
How Do You Break Through?

- Persistence
- Consistent Messaging
- Multiple Channels
The Rule of 7: Students Need to See Your Message at Least 7 Times to Take Action
Available Communication Channels

Your Message

- Television
- Social Media
- Direct Mail
- Text/SMS
- Email
- FinAid Website (External Facing)
- Student Portal
- Office Counselling
- Ground Events
- Phone Calls
- Radio
- Online Chat
- Out of Home (Billboards)
Relevant Financial Aid Channels

- Social Media
- Direct Mail
- Text / SMS
- Email
- FinAid Website (External Facing)
- Student portal
- Office Counselling
- Ground Events
- Phone Calls
- Radio
- Out of Home (Billboards)
- Online Chat
- Television

Your Message
Optimize Mobile & Online Channels

- The **average college student** brings 7 Internet-connected devices to campus.

- **60% of Gen Zers** (born 1997–2016) won’t use an app or website that’s too slow to load; **62%** will close out of a site that’s too hard to navigate.

- **77% of Gen Zers** say they want relevant information from their colleges via text.

- **More than half** of smartphone users used their phone to look up **health information** or do **online banking** within the last year.
5 Channels to Optimize & Personalize

1. Email
2. Social Media
3. Smartphones: Texting & Phone Calls
4. FinAid Website (External-Facing)
5. Student Portal
1. Email

Email Trends

Pros

- Unlimited word count, can explain in-depth
- School branding adds credibility and familiarity can lead to higher open rates
- Can be customized and automated
- Analytics available on open/click rates
- Can test effectiveness of headlines, time for send, and more

Cons

- So. Much. Spam.
- Unlimited word count leads to long emails no one reads
- Inboxes are crowded
- Students have multiple email accounts

45% of all email are spam

14.5 million spam messages/day
Email at Rivier University (NH)

- Use emails sparingly—so students know it’s important information
- Use compelling subject lines
- Keep messages short and sweet
- Make your ‘Call-to-Action’ (deadlines, specific instructions) clear; add hyperlinks as needed
- AwardLetter is a BIG WIN for Rivier...It’s the email that gets opened, read—and acted on—the most
2. Social Media

Student Social Habits

Pro
- Students already use these channels
- 75% of students use social during college search
- Students will engage w/ schools on social, but they want to initiate
- Many channels are free and easy to set up
- In-channel analytics refine strategy

Cons
- Many platforms to consider
- Highly public, channels, must be monitored
- Students expect immediate answers on social media
- Responding & monitoring takes staff time
Social Media at Grand Valley State (MI) and D’Youville College (NY)

- Ensure consistent communications across all social channels (Facebook, Twitter)
- Use strong visuals to create eye-catching posts
- Make it easy to retweet/share FAFSA and other relevant, outside posts
- Be prepared to respond, as quickly as possible—or set expectations about the timing of responses
3. Text/SMS...and Smartphones

Student Texting Trends

Pros

+ Instantly & directly delivered to students
+ Students can communicate with you, anytime, anywhere
+ People tend to read all their texts; they don’t read all their emails
+ 77% of Gen Z students say it’s ok for schools to contact them via text

Cons

+ Must keep message short
+ Some students may be wary of receiving unsolicited text messages—get their buy-in
+ Regulations exist around communicating in this format—be informed

99% open rate
4,000 texts a month
Texting at Mineral Area College (MO)

- Texts pushed fast adoption of new financial services processes
- Text alerts saved all but 8 of the 250 students at risk of getting dropped
- MAC experienced so much success, it’s looking into using this channel for other school initiatives
- **Warning:** Students expect your immediate response; they don’t care about office hours

MAC saved 242/250 students at risk for dropping due to non-payment
Texting at Rivier

- Always include a Call to Action (CTA)—like this link to the student portal
- In addition to including a CTA/link, other best practices for texting include:
  - Always ask for, and document, recipients’ permission to receive texts
  - Keep it short and sweet—this example may be too long for some users that can only see messages up to 155 characters
  - Be prepared: Students expect immediate responses—and they don’t care about your office’s 9–5 schedule
4. School/FinAid Website

**Website Trends**

72% of mobile users say a mobile-optimized website is important to them, according to Google

**Pros**

- A well-designed, informative website allows students to find information easily
- Websites can be branded
- Websites can house an expansive array of information in multiple formats
- Robust analytics available

**Cons**

- Poor user experience causes visitors to disengage
- You have to actively drive students to visit the website
FinAid Website at D’Youville

- Website is mobile-optimized—use this analyzer site to make sure yours is: https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly
- It’s the single source of truth—especially for recruitment and FinAid
- Use callout boxes, menu, and links to make relevant information easy to find
- Videos, especially those from FaTV, are highly valued—engaging, easy to follow, and a great step toward FinLit
5. Student Portal

**Design Matters**

75% of users judge your credibility on design and user experience.

**Pros**

- Primary point of contact between students & school; secure, personalized
- Often can target unique messaging by student ID
- Visitors are already in “school mode” when they log into the student portal
- Secure; single-sign-on (SSO)
- Analytics available, sometimes

**Cons**

- Portals aren’t viewed as the most engaging channel by students
- Portals can offer a disjointed, clunky experience if not maintained
- Controlled by IT
Banner Self-Service portal is helpful for...

+ Timely announcements
+ Relevant documents/forms
+ Personalized account information

...but not a great student experience for personalized messaging
Putting It All Together:
Missing Paperwork Exercise
Don’t get dropped from class! Is all your paperwork in? #FinAid
Scarier than zombies? Verification paperwork. We can help. Learn more >

Calls or TEXT: “Psssst, we need paperwork from you. Check your email / login for more info. Your FinAid Dept. [link]”

Subject Line:[First Name] Missing paperwork may keep you from class

Callout Box on FinAid page: Owe Us Paperwork? Next Steps Here >

Please file your missing paperwork immediately! More info >
Thank you!
APPENDIX – MORE TIPS!
Social Media Tips

Facebook
✓ Tell a story, show faces, people, outcomes
✓ Be conversational
✓ Focus on providing info, not on generating likes or shares
✓ Link back to relevant FinAid resources
✓ Provide your social media team with talking points and guidelines on who to direct questions to

Twitter
✓ Say something worth listening to in 140 characters
✓ Visuals help you stand out
✓ GIFs are eye-catching and give your feed variety
✓ Use for immediate information dissemination: systems down, office closures, deadlines approaching
✓ Include relevant hashtags #FinancialAid #FinLitMonth #FinAidFail
Texting Tips

• Keep things short and sweet
• Identify yourself and your reason for texting clearly
• Include a CTA (call to action), a reason for the text
• Provide an opt-out process
• Text during hours your students will consider ‘normal’ but know they’ll likely respond at all hours
• If you need to use shorthand, start with most obvious words
Email Tips

▪ **Content Counts**
  ▪ Keep things short and sweet
  ▪ Use subheads to guide readers
  ▪ Avoid embedding forms-link to them instead
  ▪ Don’t overdo it on fonts, styles, colors

▪ **Optimize your email for mobile devices**

▪ **Use Analytics**
  ▪ A/B test where possible (subject line, time of day)
  ▪ Monitor analytics and refine

▪ **Avoid spam filters**
  ▪ Use recognizable sender name
  ▪ Keep email send list clean
  ▪ Stay up to date with ISP practices and anti-spam laws

▪ **Subject Lines Matter**
  ▪ Try to stay around 30–45 characters max
  ▪ Questions get higher open rates
  ▪ Avoid all caps, exclamation marks in headlines
In the USA, **94% of people with smartphones search for local information on their phones.**

- Make sure your site is mobile optimized here: [https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly](https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly)

- Use channels to drive traffic to your website: email, social

- Website visitors will usually stick around for 59 seconds max—but the first 10 seconds matter most. Make info easy to find, scan, navigate.

- Meet ADA Standards for Accessibility design
Student Portal Tips

- Target messaging by student ID, driving engagement

- Request high-visibility portal spaces to pass along timely information: Landing pages, right rails, banner ads


- Request analytics on student usage: High traffic times, most visited pages, most clicked links

- Pay attention to least-visited pages, links that are not clicked on, high bounce pages, and rethink their use / strategy

- Many portals include community-building initiatives, monitor FinAid streams and groups, and provide information