2023 Guide to Recruiting Generation Z

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A Message from Goodkind

There's no doubt about it - Gen Z is the most tech-savvy generation that has ever existed. And keeping their attention is a difficult task. It's a generation that grew up, and now lives, online. As a result these future students expect quick, digestible information, presented in a visual way, without fodder or flourish. Gen Z thrives on authenticity. That's why 46% of them select jobs based on the values of a company, namely, their diversity initiatives.[1] And they interact with what you send them with one, simple rule: if they don't believe in it, they won't engage with it.

When we speak to schools about their experiences with recruiting over the last few years, there are clear, apparent trends that exist. There is a need to personalize outreach, be authentic and to ensure that students can trust the person recruiting them. Why? Because 75% of Gen Z believe that college is not the only way to receive a strong education.[2] This challenge is a great opportunity for universities and colleges to adapt and affirm their identity, helping to future-proof their institutions while simultaneously showing students that they are cared for at an individual level.

The Goodkind team has sat down over many, many (did we mention many?) pots of coffee to analyze the myriad data sets which could help us understand: How are students engaging with schools? What do students want from your institution? What don't they want? How do you get them to make a decision? How can schools stand out from others? How can you encourage students to show up to events and be present in your community?

All of that curiosity and hard work, paired with dozens of conversations with leaders in student recruitment and retention, has culminated in this. This guide is intended to succinctly analyze, using data and experiential knowledge, the trends seen in catering to the Gen Z audience and offer advice on a synthesized strategic plan for your recruitment cycles in 2023.

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CEO, Goodkind

Defining Gen Z

Gen Z is the cohort of individuals born between 1997 and 2010 who were raised by social media. This tech savvy bunch are hyper vigilant on the internet. They can identify what feels like marketing vs. what is genuine. This is why Gen Z has been found to respond better to social media ads that do not reflect traditional advertising methods. It's for this reason that influencers, creating videos of themselves using and endorsing products in their day-to-day, have a far greater impact on whether or not Gen Z will purchase a product. Not only this, but their expectations include fully aligning with the overall values of a brand. In fact, 94% of Gen Z have been found to expect companies to use their products to address social issues or environmental problems.[3]

So how does this impact student recruitment?

In order to authentically recruit the incoming generation, we have to consider their typical values…

Gen Z is…

- Willing to challenge tradition
- Ethically-minded
- Concerned with diversity
- Passionate about change
- Pragmatic with decisions
- Not easily influenced
- Determined to be independent
- Drawn to personal experience and anecdotal stories more than accolades or labels

Control Your Destiny

How should we be sourcing students?
You've heard the old adage about teaching someone how to fish... It's important that your recruitment team doesn't rely on fishermen, but can fish for themselves. A clear trend we have noticed from speaking to several student recruitment teams across North America is the increasing reliance on paid, third-party data sources for lead generation. Relying on partner networks can be great for quantitative lead generation, but over-reliance on these networks can leave you vulnerable to rate fluctuations and changing laws.

More importantly, Gen Z is also skeptical of how companies are storing this data. A poll shows that 77% of Gen Z expect, at baseline, that their data should be protected by company policy (i.e. not shared with those looking to purchase it).[4] It's clear that how you source your data is an impactful choice to make when attempting to earn the trust of this generation.

This self-owned data, known as 'first-party' data, is a collation of the information you've gathered from prospects based on website visits, campus visits, social media interactions, etc. Your Customer Relationship Management software (CRM or SRM, for students) is a key place for holding this data and allowing you to sort and group prospective students accordingly.
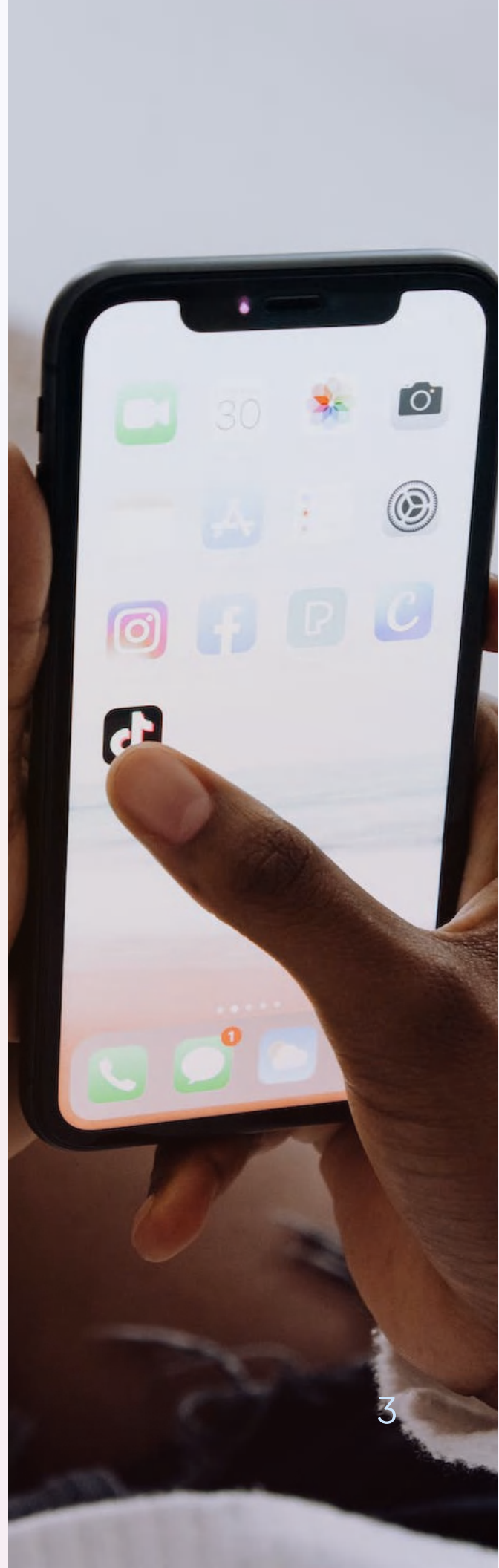
Equipped with this arsenal, it's possible to track behaviors and understand the needs of prospective students. It certainly takes time to build this up, but it is short-term pain for long-term gain when it comes to your recruitment strategy. Not to mention that **first-party data sees the highest ROI compared to any other data type**. First-party data is also far more personalized and will therefore be the right data for assisting your recruiting efforts with a generation that values individualism. Not to mention it is entirely in your control.

It's highly important, as well, to consider the costs of this to your recruiting budget. Third party lead generation can be overwhelmingly expensive and take up a sizeable portion of your yearly spend. In fact, during our attendance at the Houston NACAC conference in 2022, several schools reported spending almost a third of their entire recruitment budget on lead generation from third parties. Furthermore, RNL reports that the average cost to recruit an undergraduate student in 2022 was upwards of $2700, factoring in those same third-party data costs.[5]

What if those acquisitions could cost half or even a third of the initial cost? It would mean more money freed up to invest in giving back to those students instead of obtaining them in the first place. In short:

If you own your funnel, you own your destiny.
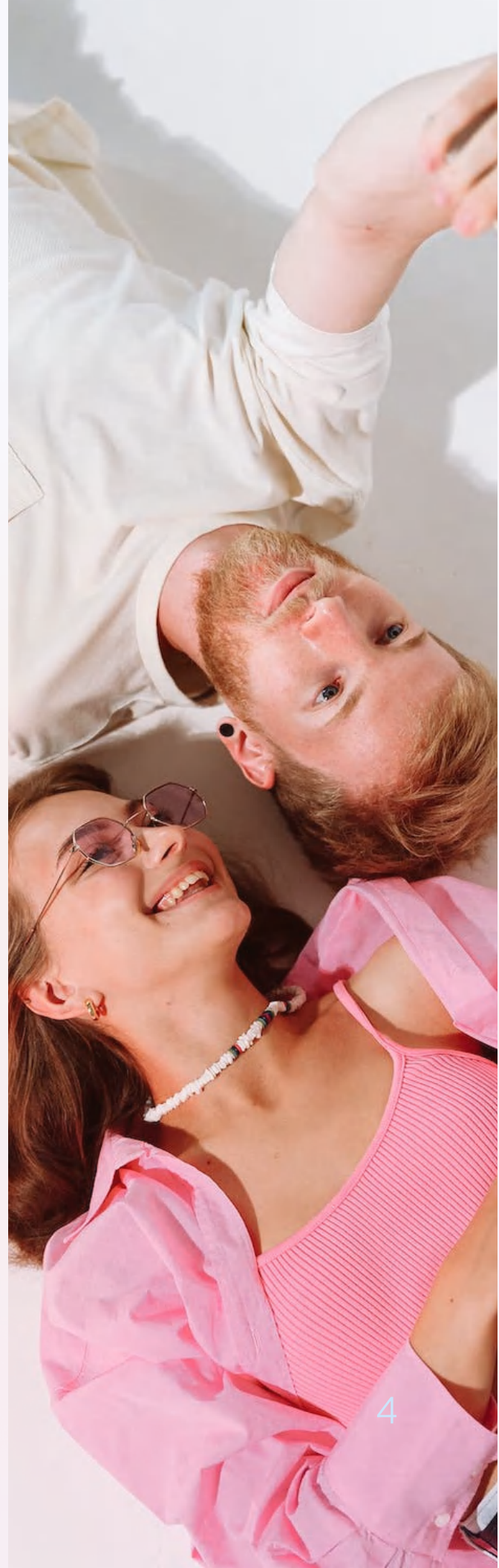
Power down your bots.

It may be tempting to use chatbots as sources of first-party data, but don't lean into them too heavily. It turns out that Chatbots are the least favored method of communication amongst Gen Z.[6]

Sure, chatbots are great for answering simple, straightforward questions, but selecting a college or university is one of the biggest decisions a student will make in their lifetime!

Don't leave it up to AI to show your school spirit. Be human.

Common Complaints of Using Chatbots

|	
They don't have enough data about me	20%
They have bad suggestions	28%
They redirect me to FAQ	40%
They keep me from speaking to a live person	51%

A Quest for Quality

We all experience it. You purchase from an online store once and the emails are automatically sent to your inbox until the day you croak. We are oversaturated with email campaigns from all angles!

It turns out that **only 29% of Gen Z prefer to receive communication via email.**[7] That means more than two-thirds prefer to engage with a medium that isn't written. And, surprisingly, **research shows that Gen Z's preferred method of communication is in-person**! Seeing people's faces, body language and general demeanor hold far more value for a generation fixated on the authentic. But you can't talk directly to every single student... or can you?

Considering Personalization

Gen Z are purveyors of personalization. Social media charges the way they interact with the world and every platform requires profiles that imbue individualism. Consider the rise of influencers. Gen Z is responsible for making several TikTok presenters famous. In 2020 alone, it's reported that over 106,000 people on TikTok had multiple videos with over 10 million views![8]

What resonates with Gen Z most is when *you* pick up your phone and record a video with your front-facing camera.
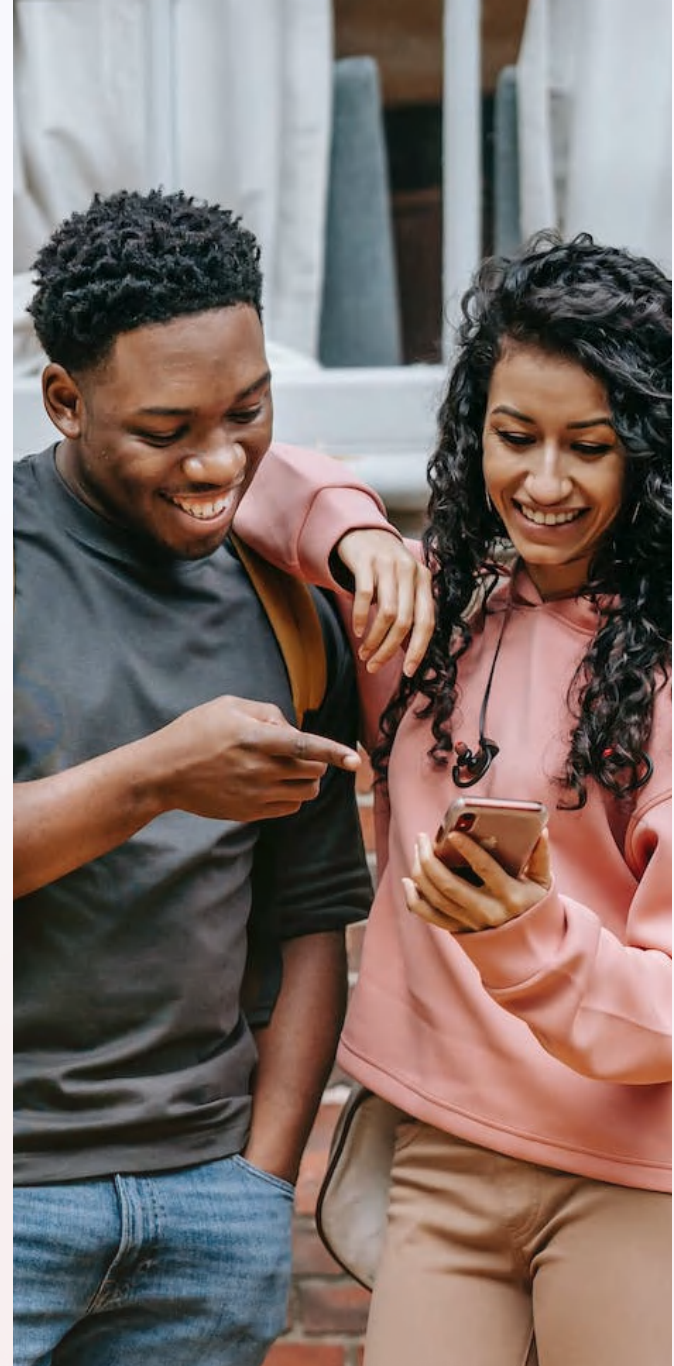
HOW GEN Z PREFERS TO COMMUNICATE

- Face-to-Face
- Email
- Texting
- Phone Calling
- Chatbots

4% 3%
21%
43%
29%
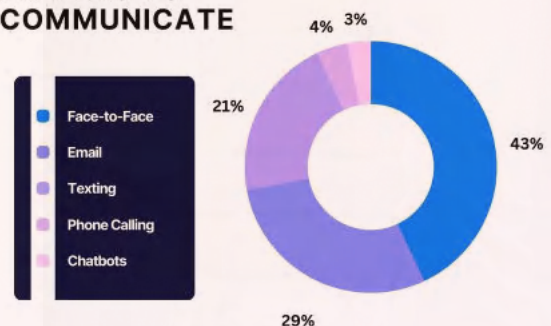
As a result, prospective students in Gen Z have expectations that communication is driven in this personal, authentic way. So how do we manage the demand for personalization while also achieving scale? How do we reach thousands of students and still remain authentic?

The Power of 'When'

Any great student recruitment strategy is uplifted by its ability to catch students at the right moment. We all know Gen Z is tech savvy and we are constantly adapting our processes to cater to this, but the timing of the outreach still holds the highest importance.

Instead of strategizing around your deadlines, you need to ask yourself – *Am I reaching out to a student at a time that is most opportune for them?*

Studies show that Gen Z behaves like high-earners when it comes to how they prefer to communicate.[9] Considering their time as valuable and ensuring you are picking the right moment to reach out could make the difference between a future enrolled student and a cold, apathetic drop-off.

What this means is that your recruitment strategy needs to be equipped to understand the exact moments when it is most crucial to send a prospective student pertinent information. It turns out that 31% of Gen Z claim to have over 1000 unread emails in their inbox![10]

If you're trying to reach them when your messaging is not immediately relevant to them, you aren't going to grab their attention.

But, if you happen to notice they've visited your website a few times this week, it may be a great time to send a reminder. This is where the first-party data comes in most handy. The key is paying attention to students' behavior in a way that allows you to trigger outreach, via your CRM, at these key moments.

Bridging the Gap

Personalization and timing are valuable pieces of the recruitment puzzle, but there are plenty of variables to consider when it comes to the different cohorts of students that we are looking to recruit. Income disparity is a large barrier to certain students applying to certain schools.

Considering that a student who visits campus is 2× as likely to enroll as a student who doesn't, this is a large hurdle to overcome for recruiting first-generation prospective students.[11]

And while virtual tours are on the rise, they tend to be a robotic experience of what campus can actually feel like. How can we bridge the gap and invite students into our campuses without expecting them to travel to us?

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The Video Generation

Gen Z's favorite brands are Tiktok, YouTube & Snapchat. We cannot deny the obvious commonality here. This is a generation obsessed with video!

Catering to Attention

It's often said that younger generations have short attention spans. And now, in this modern, tech-fuelled world, so does everyone! Round of applause if you were able to get this far in the document without checking your phone.
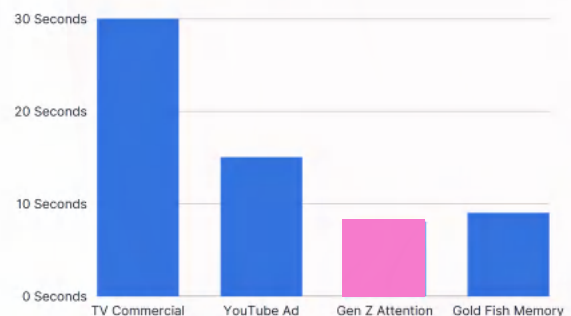
Gen Z, specifically, has been found to have an average attention span of 8 seconds! This doesn't come as a surprise because that's approximately the same time it takes to check a notification. It makes complete sense, then, that this is the TikTok generation – swiping through hours of endless, short videos, giving the attention span a constant reboot to remain entertained. In fact, Gen Z makes up a whopping 60% of TikTok's entire user base.[12]

The strategy for getting a student's attention, then, becomes more clear with these data trends.

If you want to capture the attention of Gen Z – you have to be quick, succinct and visual.

Gen Z expects video and you are now in the same arena as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube.

ATTENTION SPAN OF GEN Z

	Attention Span
TV Commercial	30 Seconds
YouTube Ad	~15 Seconds
Gen Z Attention	~8 Seconds
Gold Fish Memory	~9 Seconds

Over 40% of Gen Z spend more than 3 hours per day watching videos on Tiktok.

90% of Gen Z open Instagram at least once per day and nearly half of them prefer to use it for search instead of Google.

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The average Gen Z Snapchat user opens the app's camera function 20× per day!

12

97% of Gen Z report watching at least one YouTube video per day.

Video Builds Trust

Approximately 70% of Gen Z social media users claim to fact-check the information they receive over their favorite socials.[13] And more than half consider politicians and celebrities to be untrustworthy from the outset. So how do you earn trust with Gen Z?

There is no roadmap to building trust. But, simply put, most people are indifferent to emails from a name they don't recognize. And, even moreso, phone calls from strangers or unfamiliar numbers typically lead to dropped calls or defensiveness on the other line.

Australian Gen Z TikTok influencer, Tommy Cockram, has said "I only really use actual phone calls to call my mum and stepdad, that's about it."

We have observed, from our data, that unedited videos massively outperform seemingly high-quality, produced videos aimed at students. Why? Because edited, polished content looks inauthentic! That's why 67% of Gen Z prefer to see real people in advertisements rather than impersonal, highly-designed content.[14]

A combination of your personality, body language and tone of voice work to convince Gen Z that they can trust you.

Video Breaks Barriers

Not only does video allow us to grab attention and build trust, it also means that geographical barriers are no longer an issue. Video allows you to showcase your campus, faculty and student community in a real way. It's the <u>real</u>, authentic, visual medium. Not a photo. Not a 'video library'. Not a virtual tour. Video messaging is especially useful for students coming from abroad or those who don't have the opportunity to visit.

Everyone knows it can be tricky to navigate diversity initiatives because there is a delicacy required which most of us remain undereducated about. The truth is that student priorities don't necessarily change just because they have a different racial background. Research shows that racially and ethnically diverse students' top deciding factor in a post-secondary institution includes academic reputation, choice of major and cost of attendance. All of these rank higher than whether there is a diverse student body or faculty.[15] However, the same study mentions that almost all students recorded diversity as an important factor, even if it didn't make the top three.

The key to incorporating DEI into your recruitment is understanding that it is not just a periodic initiative.
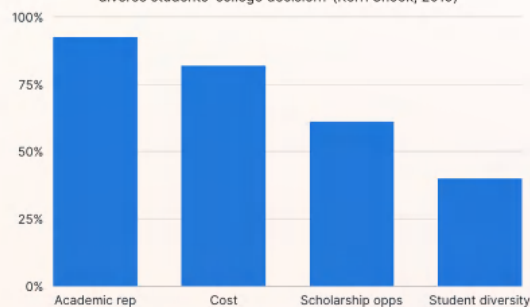
Diversity is fundamental to this generation's value set, so it must be foundational in our approach.

So how do we weave DEI into our recruitment strategies respectfully?

A SURVEY OF UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

What are the most important factors in racially & ethnically diverse students' college decision? (Kerri Shook, 2019)

We have seen schools show underrepresented students the existence of campus communities by sending videos recorded by faculty and students involved in these initiatives. This imbues authenticity without appearing like tokenization.

But there is more to video communication than simply recording, sending and waiting for the results.

Who Am I Talking To?
Considering that the data insists a real person should directly address students – is a student recruiter or application counsellor the best person for them to be speaking with about whether or not a school is right for them? Of course! But keep in mind that Gen Z may be suspicious of whether you are incentivized to get them to apply.

This is a perfect opportunity to bring the human element front and centre. Consider that an email signature will likely show your name and job title, meaning these two aspects become synonymous with one another. In a video, however, your personality and demeanor become synonymous with who you are before your title or role does.

Knowing that Gen Z are fixated on finding the authentic, your greatest resource, as a recruiter, is you!

Overall, we find that *who* records the video has the most substantial impact. Student ambassadors are highly useful to a recruitment team when looking to build trust. We already know that Gen Z values lived experience. So, who better to share their lived experience than a current student?

This example is applicable to several use cases. It would be best if the recorder of a video is pertinent to the recruitment stage the student is in. If they've just had a campus tour, the tour guide should be the one reaching out. If they attended a webinar, then the presenter should be on the other end of the video. We've seen upwards of a 92% watch rate on videos where a relevant member of faculty has reached out to students. Having a professor from the applying discipline reach out to a prospective student can be invaluable in gaining their trust.

If we can reframe 'recruitment' to be 'relationship building', we find a more authentic path to our Gen Z prospects.

Ask Yourself...

- Is this message providing value?
- Am I being consistent?
- Does each subsequent video improve upon the last?
- How many different points of contact does this student have?
- Am I delivering via the right channels?
- Is the timing right?
- Are we gradually getting this student towards the goal?
- Have we shown students that they are able to join or build a community at our school?

Moving Forward

Gen Z is a tech-savvy generation, fixated on getting information quickly and concisely. Simultaneously, they have very strong values, which make them tough cookies to crack. Considering that 65% of higher education employees have reported burnout, we know it is a lot to consider and keep on your plate.[16]

The following is clear:
- ☑ **Students want authenticity.**
- ☑ **First-party data will yield far better results.**
- ☑ **Gen Z prefers communicating with real people.**
- ☑ **Timing is everything.**
- ☑ **Gen Z loves video.**

While the takeaways are simple, applying them is not. To win over Gen Z, you have to honor their values in your recruitment strategy.

Incorporating video messaging is the obvious choice, but how you use video to your advantage is of the utmost importance.

When it comes to Gen Z, hard work pays off. The good news is that these prospective students are asking us not to overthink it, but, simply, to be real.

About Goodkind

Goodkind is a video-first recruitment platform used by recruitment teams to engage, excite and motivate prospective students. With Goodkind, recruitment teams record personalized, short-form videos that send to prospects over email, WhatsApp and SMS. These videos are intended to bridge a human-to-human connection and make students feel more included in their potential future community, improving the school's annual enrollment rate by creating authentic connection.

Goodkind has helped dozens of schools throughout North America reach students from home and abroad with its unique, modern video messaging platform. Goodkind has been used throughout various stages of the recruitment cycle, including:

- Campus tour invites
- Application deadline reminders
- Introductions to an application counselor
- Encouraging accepted students to enroll

And several other use-cases, all designed to increase yield and reduce melt.

Want to learn more? Click the link below!

Book a Demo

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