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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT PRACTICES
IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
USING INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

by
Alisa L. Hogan

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
June 23, 1999

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved June 23, 1999

ABSTRACT

Alisa L. Hogan

**A Comparative Study of Recruitment and Enrollment Practices in Colleges and Universities Using Integrated Marketing Communication
1999**

**Thesis Advisor: Dr. Suzanne Sparks FitzGerald
Master of Arts-Public Relations**

A study was conducted to determine if using an integrated marketing communications (IMC) approach to college and university recruitment and enrollment helps institutions better achieve their enrollment goals.

This study involved a review of related research, in-depth interviews with education-specific marketing consulting firms, and admissions and marketing professionals at various institutions of higher learning. Primary research involved a 14-item self-administered questionnaire mailed to selected four-year colleges and universities across the country. The questionnaire asked institution executives familiarity and general institutional marketing questions, marketing activity questions, use of IMC, opinion inquiries and demographics.

Mean scores through coded responses, frequencies and percentages assessed resulting data.

Findings revealed a great deal of attention is devoted to IMC by many institutions. Colleges and universities using an integrated marketing approach to recruitment and enrollment believe their student yield has improved significantly since fully incorporating IMC strategies. Institutions not using an integrated approach to marketing communications feel they are not as successful at enrolling neither the number nor the type of students desired for their school.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Alisa L. Hogan

**A Comparative Study of Recruitment and Enrollment Practices in Colleges and
Universities Using Integrated Marketing Communication
1999**

**Thesis Advisor: Dr. Suzanne Sparks FitzGerald
Master of Arts-Public Relations**

Institutions are facing tough competition and declining success in recruiting and enrolling desired students.

A study was conducted to examine the use of integrated marketing communications in higher education. Findings showed that schools using IMC were more successful in attracting and enrolling students than schools not using strong marketing approaches.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation, and thank those whose contributions of time, assistance, support and encouragement have made this study possible.

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Thanks to my wonderful and patient children, Fran, Kate and Sean, who understood the demands on my time, and recognized this was important. No more time-sharing the computer, and we can go to the mall now.

Finally, this is dedicated to my Dad, who didn’t see this to completion, but I know he would have been proud of the effort. For a man who always said “can’t means won’t,” I did.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Each year thousands of high school students around the United States choose a college, apply to college, and ultimately attend college. Most students base their decision on their perception—or image—of the institution. The reputation of the institution is the most influential factor for both students and parents. The reality is that all educational institutions have an image. Fred Gehrung (Sevier, 1998a), president of Gehrung and Associates, a media relations company in Keene, New Hampshire, affirms this point:

In today's uncertain economy and intensely competitive environment, there is one thing a college or university cannot economize on—its reputation. Prospective students and families need to be even more certain about the institution they select, about the quality of education it offers, and about the outcome, meaning the return on the investment of effort and money. Reputation now is more important than ever. Every mention of your college or university is an investment in its future, for it nourishes awareness that converts to respect. Like it or not, the public equates a high profile with quality. (p. 68)

Institutions with strong images are able to recruit and retain better faculty, and have greater alumni contribution. According to Sevier (1998a) any effort to enhance the institution's reputation will increase the value of the degree and build pride and ownership among alumni, donors and other key audiences. And, image building is seen as a legitimate pre-student-recruiting function at market oriented institutions.

According to Kotler and Fox (1995), successful marketing efforts begin with definition of the process and understanding of the potential benefits. A proper and dynamic definition of marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives.

Very little of the current literature on higher education marketing pertains to colleges, universities and schools. Most is theoretical rehashing of marketing principles from the corporate world. Some ideas may be useful, but not quite fitting the academic world.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is a concept introduced in 1990 by Don Schultz, Stanley Tannenbaum and Robert Lauterborn at an IBM seminar. In their 1993 book, *Integrated Marketing Communications: Putting It Together and Making It Work*, the authors, Professors Schultz and Tannenbaum of Northwestern University and Professor Lauterborn of the University of North Carolina, see integrated marketing communications as a new way of looking at the whole where once we only saw parts such as advertising, public relations, promotion, purchasing, personal communications and so forth. According to Ritson (1998), the concept of integrated marketing centers on combining four basic tools—advertising, public relations, direct marketing and promotion—into a consistent and coherent campaign. The IMC strategy is designed to establish an effective interactive relationship with a target audience to produce desired results. For colleges and universities the desired result is the highest and best possible enrollment yield for each incoming class.

In a recent article published in *On Target*, author Robert Johnson (1998) believes highly personalized communications based on the interests of the people receiving them

will produce a higher enrollment yield of students that are a better “fit” for each institution. The IMC concept uses these effective maxims of marketing: you have to talk to people about what they want to know, not what you want them to know, in order to establish a relationship with them. The problem is that colleges and universities are reluctant to adopt this approach. A growing number do realize that effective marketing can work. This realization is bringing changes to student recruitment, admission policies and processes.

For years college officials feared to tread the waters of slick Madison Avenue-style marketing, worried it might backfire by placing style over substance, damaging their credibility. Universities must compete for students in an ever-tighter market. Many institutions have no increased funding for higher education and must rely on increasing student enrollment.

It is not as if universities have never sent out promotional brochures to prospective students or guarded their image with public relations care. Once brochures and school marketing were an amateur affair—zealous alumni urging viewbooks (a brochure a college sends to high school students in hopes of persuading them to apply) with the obligatory photo of the school’s oldest building and loads of tweedy chalk-dusted professors.

Corporate style marketing has become popular in academia. From slick brochures and viewbooks that look like trendy magazines, to corporate-sounding slogans, to prime-time television and radio commercials, to professional recruiters, educational institutions compete for a deflating market of students. Competition among colleges and universities is leading them to unconventional means of attracting the best and brightest students. “With tuitions soaring and the number of 18-year-olds shrinking, competition among

colleges for new students has become fierce,” says Caroline Considine, former marketing professor and manager of Simmons College (Boston) school marketing program (Reidy, 1998).

As a result, more colleges and universities are turning to professional communication firms to assist with repositioning strategies and to help differentiate themselves from rivals.

“Universities are not marketing ice to Eskimos,” said Eustace D. Theodore, president of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the international professional association for college public relations officers. The council published in spring 1998 its first marketing primer for colleges and universities. According to Theodore, universities are turning to marketing simply to tell their stories better and to more people, not out of any desire to put style ahead of substance.

The State University of New York (SUNY) is eager to enhance its reputation nationally and recruit more out-of-state students. More aggressive marketing has begun to pay off. According to Scott W. Steffey, vice chancellor of university relations, the freshman class entering for fall of 1998 is about six percent larger than the previous year’s, even though the number of graduating high school seniors has remained flat (Arenson, 1998).

It is important to study the marketing approach of various institutions of higher learning to determine what tools and techniques work successfully to enroll students. Validity of this study stems from the fact that some institutions have implemented aggressive IMC plans showing recent successes, yet other institutions are reticent to try any marketing beyond the traditional industry standards. The nay-sayers, such as Larry Arbeiter (1998), director of communications for the University of Chicago, feel

universities did not become what they are by focusing on what people want to hear or by doing market research. While Arbeiter acknowledges many public universities do not have the benefit of large endowments to ensure financial stability, he questions whether the money spent on marketing could be better used for scholarships or faculty salaries. Margaret Miller, president of the American Association of Higher Education (1998) argues that marketing is puffery and manipulation. Miller emphasizes that getting serious information out about what schools do is more important.

Proponents of strong integrated marketing communications plans for higher education say that is exactly what they are trying to do.

The effect of this problem on the field of higher education will be low student enrollment at some schools. Colleges and universities without strategic plans are impaired by the inability to target well-qualified students and continue a relationship with these students in order for the students to enroll. Students will attend those institutions that market successfully. A recent study by Stamats Communications, Inc. (1999), shows students accepted to two similar or competing institutions chose to attend the school with the stronger “image” or reputation. Long reaching effects of smaller enrollments may be fewer programs offered, fewer faculty retained and a reduction in quality facilities at under-enrolled institutions—possibly causing such institutions to cease to exist. Since IMC appears to be such a highly successful process, all colleges and universities should be eager to see what works and why IMC works better than other approaches to student recruitment and enrollment.

Problem Statement

Many institutions are experiencing declining success in attracting, recruiting and

enrolling the type and numbers of students desired. Currently, there are too many colleges trying to recruit fewer full-time traditional students. Add to that mix unavoidable tuition increases and the effect becomes clear. If this trend continues, some colleges and universities may not stay in business (Sevier, 1998a).

Many institutions have failed at attempts to overcome this decline. The challenges have had a profound impact on how schools do business. Many institutions of higher learning are shifting paradigms and borrowing aggressive marketing approaches from the business world.

Some schools have succeeded in attaining and maintaining a strong image with innovative, one-voice, integrated marketing communications solutions achieved through a two-way communication mode. This equates to the bottom line—more student applications, higher enrollment yields.

This study asks the questions: which colleges and universities incorporate an aggressive IMC strategy plan for marketing, recruiting and admissions? What types of IMC programs do colleges and universities successfully use for recruiting and admissions? And, what IMC components are the most effective for college and university enrollment management?

Take the example of Pennsylvania State University. Recent market surveys conducted by the institution showed that state residents had overestimated the university's tuition by several thousand dollars. With cost being an important factor in college selection and student applications, Penn State initiated a successful effort to counter the false perception.

Penn State's marketing office has conducting institutional image studies as one of its primary missions. The institution has even begun testing new academic programs

through focus groups. Through research, information, promotion and communicating in one voice the university is better able to serve its current students, prospective students and other publics.

Delimitations

Over 3,500 colleges and universities exist in the United States alone. Due to the magnitude in numbers, and the variables equated with each individual institution, the study will be limited to medium-sized schools located in the continental United States as determined by *Peterson's 1999 4 Year Colleges* (1998). This publication provides current statistical information about colleges and universities throughout the country with regard to size, affiliation, enrollment, academics, tuition costs, entrance profiles, etc. It is assumed that similar sized schools will look to enroll the same types of students. This study will use both public and private institutions because the differences in funding available to each may have a bearing on how many and what marketing tools can be implemented. The study will not look at two-year community colleges or program specific type schools, for example, music or choir colleges, art schools, religious seminary schools, technical schools, etc.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if using a comprehensive integrated marketing communications approach to college and university recruitment and enrollment works or not. This study will determine how many and which higher education institutions are using integrated marketing approaches, how they are doing so, and what tactics and approaches work. This information will be made available to other colleges and

universities. Upon completion, this study will yield not only what IMC plans have been successful in higher education enrollment, but what marketing tools college and university executives can use effectively. By this, schools can attempt to more efficiently and effectively improve their communication voice in recruiting and enrollment tactics by looking at examples of institutions that have successfully implemented concise marketing communications plans—with desired results—and follow their lead.

Hypotheses

This study will test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis I:

It is expected that at the time of research the number of institutions of higher learning using integrated marketing communications will be considerably less than the number of institutions not using such a program.

Colleges and universities are now realizing they need to become more customer-oriented, and use business-like marketing approaches to remain competitive. The concept of integrated marketing communications, while not entirely new, is a different way of operating for many institutions. According to Schultz and Kitchen (1997), IMC does not appear to be a fad, it has become a proven method of successful marketing. It has moved from the “what is it?” to the “how can we do it?” stage of development. This researcher expects to find some institutions incorporating IMC methods and strategies, but many more not fully accepting or using this full approach.

Hypothesis II:

It is expected that those colleges and universities using a comprehensive integrated marketing communications program plan will be more successful in achieving appropriate enrollment than other institutions not using an IMC strategy.

This researcher will compare the institutions reporting to have incorporated an IMC approach with the schools using traditional means of marketing for recruitment and enrollment, and look at those institutions' perceived level of success in student enrollment. This researcher expects to find that while many colleges and universities may use similar tools and tactics, the institutions using IMC will be far more successful due to the coordination of strategies.

Hypothesis III:

It is expected that higher education institutions that do not use any type of collaborative marketing and communication campaign will be less successful in recruitment and enrollment efforts.

This researcher will examine the perceived success of institutions reporting using traditional methods of recruiting strategy. This researcher expects to find that these colleges and universities, while enrolling students, may not meet intended enrollment goals. According to Ben Gose (1999) in "Colleges turn to consultants," colleges need people who understand coordinated strategies and analytical concepts. If a college is not paying attention to its enrollment planning, they can run into serious admissions and enrollment trouble.

Hypothesis IV:

It is expected that certain tools, techniques and tactics through an integrated communications approach, will better persuade students to enroll in particular schools.

According to Robert Johnson (1998), highly personalized communications, and paying attention to establishing relationships between the message sender and receiver, will produce a higher enrollment yield of prospects. This researcher will explore the tools used by successful IMC institutions. This researcher expects to find a combination of tools used to convey the message, with certain tools providing a strong desired response.

Procedure

To test these hypotheses, this author will survey colleges and universities throughout the country to determine the use and success of integrated marketing communications for admission recruiting and enrollment. Research will include interviews with higher education specific marketing firms to determine current and rising trends in institutional marketing. Intensive in-depth interviews will be conducted with several college admissions, marketing or enrollment managers whose institutions currently incorporate some form of intensive, integrated marketing communications strategy. These interviews will be used as a qualitative source to determine the status and focus of higher education marketing, and as a basis for constructing the quantitative survey instrument.

A questionnaire will be constructed for college and university admissions or enrollment managers. The schools to receive the self-administered mail survey will be chosen from *Peterson's 4 Year Colleges* (1998) guide book from the group of schools

meeting the mid-sized school criteria. The survey will be designed to discover which institutions use any form of integrated marketing communications strategies, what techniques are used, and what successes these schools have met in student recruitment and enrollment yields since incorporating the strategies.

The information collected from this study will help college and university admission and enrollment managers provide higher profile and appropriate numbers of students for their institutions using tools that attract the best and brightest.

Terminology

The following terms are used throughout this thesis. To help the reader gain a better understanding of this study, it is necessary to define these terms:

advertising—any paid form of nonpersonal presentation of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor to persuade or influence an audience.

CASE—Council for Advancement and Support of Education, an international professional association for college public relations officers.

college—establishment for further or higher education. When used in this study refers to a four-year process (see four-year college). Other words for college used interchangeably in this study: university, school, educational institution, higher education institution.

direct marketing—a printed marketing medium, targets specific publics and reaches them at the time and in the place where they can make the most of their decision. Also provides a means for accounting for desired message response.

enrollment management—a process or an activity that influences the size, shape, and characteristics of a student body by directing institutional efforts in marketing,

recruitment and admissions as well as pricing and financial aid. The process also exerts a significant influence on academic advising, institutional research, orientation, retention and student services.

enrollment yield—the proportion of admitted students who decide to enroll.

four-year college—the commonly used designation for institutions that grant the baccalaureate, since four years is the normal duration of the traditional undergraduate curriculum.

IMC—integrated marketing communications, calls for the integrated management of all corporate communications to build positive and lasting relationships with customers and vital stakeholders.

marketing communication—encompasses advertising, special promotions, publicity/public relations, visual merchandising/environmentals, personal (selling) communication.

personal (selling) communication—an oral presentation by a (salesperson, representative) in a conversation with one or more customers.

private—schools that operate primarily through donations, gifts, endowments and tuitions.

promotion—sending both internal and external constituents the information you want them to have. Can include special efforts, offers, events, to create interest in purchasing a product.

public—schools that are funded by a state, commonwealth, province, county or city and tuition. Must follow government guidelines.

public relations—the deliberate overall effort to create and maintain a firm's good image in the eyes of the various publics with whom it deals.

publicity—used to increase the public's awareness of and change attitudes about products,

services and businesses or organizations. Publicity is what appears in print or broadcast media as the result of public relations efforts.

university—see college

viewbook—a booklet a college delivers to prospective students succinctly highlighting the best of the institution with the intention of persuading students to apply.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Literature relating to integrated marketing communication, marketing and higher education was discovered using numerous different sources. This researcher conducted searches using the following on-line databases including: inter-library database, Proquest, Lexis-Nexis, SearchBank, Academic Universe, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts, ABIInform, Infotrac, Firstsearch, the World Wide Web, and others. Also, Internet requests and professional organization searches provided additional findings.

The following summarizes key findings referenced in the relevant articles, books and scholarship used in this research.

Integrated Marketing Communications

During the 1990s, integrated marketing communications became one of the most talked about ideas in marketing. While there has been a great deal of discussion and interest in the concept, true implementation may still be lagging. Many companies and organizations feel they use IMC, but may not truly implement all fundamentals of the concept.

According to Larry Percy (1997), in his book *Strategies for Implementing Integrated Marketing Communications*, effective IMC is more than simply using several means of delivering a company's message. It is a way of thinking and planning, a way of approaching marketing communications strategy. This thinking must be translated into

real ads, real promotions and other forms of communication that will require a strong coordinated effort. The process critical to implementing effective IMC means thinking about strategic marketing communications planning in an integrated way. Percy believes the key to IMC is planning, and the ability to deliver a consistent message.

In their 1993 book, Professors Don Schultz and Stanley Tannenbaum of Northwestern University's Medill School and Robert Lauterborn of the University of North Carolina see integrated marketing communications as a new way of looking at the whole where once we only saw parts: advertising, public relations, promotions, marketing, internal and external personal communications. IMC is realigning communications to look at it the way the consumer sees it—a flow of information.

The authors go on to say IMC means talking to people who buy or don't buy based on what they see, hear, feel and sense, and not just about the product or service. The group's initial working definition of IMC is:

Integrated marketing communications is the process of developing and implementing various forms of persuasive communication programs with customers and prospects over time. The goal of IMC is to influence or directly affect the behavior of the selected communications audience. IMC considers all sources of brand or company contacts that a customer or prospect has with the product or service as potential delivery channels for future messages. IMC makes use of all forms of communication which are relevant to the customers and prospects, and to which they might be receptive. In sum the IMC process starts with the customer or prospect and then works back to determine and define the forms and methods through which persuasive communications programs should be developed. (p. 53)

At its most basic level, integrated marketing communications means that all an organization's products and messages, positioning and images and identity are coordinated across all marketing communication venues. It means that public relations materials say the same thing as the direct mail campaign, and advertising has the same look and feel as the web site. P. Griffith Lindell (1997), acknowledges that an integrated attitude is necessary to complete the path to IMC. As an attitude, IMC begins with the product management level along with those responsible for marketing the product. It also involves those responsible for sales, marketing communication, public relations and promotion, to figure out the customer's dilemmas and the resources needed to solve these dilemmas. Lindell suggests that from this meeting should come a positioning statement identifying the target market, the current dilemma, the products that meet those needs and the organization's differentiating features and benefits. By understanding this level, the organization can integrate all marketing communication elements under one relevant umbrella to accommodate all marketing communications tactics. Lindell further stresses that entire divisions and organizations can adopt an integrated attitude to implement an effective marketing program. Beyond the adage that everyone is a salesman, integration as an attitude uses input from all members of the organization to offer solutions to customer needs.

The IMC project at the University of Colorado–Boulder (1999) assesses integrated marketing communications as a process that involves strategic message coordination. The IMC faculty feel IMC calls for an organization to control and influence all the messages that affect its image or relationship with customers, prospects and other stakeholders. They assert that in today's marketplace mass media has considerably less importance than it had in the past regarding message dissemination. What was once a

single audience has fragmented and so companies and organizations must communicate with many groups in a wide variety of media. There are more kinds of messages than ever before and they must all be strategically coordinated. Companies and organizations can no longer have one-way conversations with customers and stakeholders. They must listen and respond. To be successful they must initiate and maintain a dialogue that can lead to long-term relationships. IMC is critical to that process by providing the skills and new way of thinking necessary to manage such a dialogue.

With so many messages affecting so many audiences, it should not be surprising for organizations to feel fragmented. Many departments within an organization provide communication strategy and varying techniques, often in competition with one another, defeating the purpose of coordinated messaging. Todd Hunt and James Grunig (1994) in their book *Public Relations Techniques* assess that to avoid duplication and unproductive competition within, many organizations develop a strategy of integrated marketing communications—marketing communication programs that combine public relations, advertising and sales promotion.

In *Marketing Communication*, Patricia Anderson and Leonard Rubin (1986) suggest that it is up to the executives in marketing, advertising, promotion, public relations and visual marketing to present the entire organization with a unified position and image. Using all the marketing tools in a coordinated and meaningful way takes a great deal of cooperation, planning and integration. The authors go on to say that when properly done, the whole communications impact is greater than the sum of its parts.

Whereas coordination of marketing tools is a recognized necessity today, historically, most organizations have operated marketing communications as a support for direct customer functions such as sales, or serving as a lead generator or interest builder

among prospects. Most marketing communications activities were designed to support. They were an afterthought. Increasingly, communication is one of the most important assets and the most powerful competitive tool an organization can use.

Don Schultz (1998) explains that in the 21st century marketplace the communication surrounding, enhancing or leading the organization may become the driving factor that increases sales and profits. Schultz affirms that product differentiation may become impossible. Distribution will become equal, particularly with the Internet and the World Wide Web. Pricing and even promotion will easily be matched in the new marketplace. The only thing an organization has to add value to the “brand” is communication and the relationship that communication builds with customers and prospects. That means communication should stop being a support activity, and become the strategic lead function. Schultz believes if people look at communication as all the ways an organization comes in contact with customers, prospects, influencers and decision-makers, then marketing communication becomes responsible for “brand contact.”

According to the Communication Institute of the University of Utah (1998), the integration of marketing and communication into marketing communications is essential. In the past, many of the marketing mix variables—advertising, public relations, promotion, personal contact—were departmentalized. The communication impact of one on the other was not strategically framed or realized. The Institute chronicles that the essence of integrated marketing communications is the recognition that all marketing and communication variables impact one another, the communicator and the stakeholders. All of the marketing variables communicate and all communication variables affect marketing.

Integrated communications and integrated marketing is useful in reaching the same number of consumers that had been reached in the past. The vast channels of media

available such as radio, television, the World Wide Web, trade shows, periodicals and outdoor advertising make it necessary to reach splintered audiences in several different ways. In the article “Integration: Myth and Necessity,” Drew Neisser (1997) asserts that the premise of integrated communication is good. According to Neisser, if an organization doesn’t aim for integration, the alternative is dis-integration. Integrated marketing is more of an imperative than ever in effectively reaching the same number of consumers that marketers used to reach in a simpler marketing landscape. Neisser suggests thinking of all the communication disciplines as building blocks, which when bound together may break through the collective indifference of an organization’s target audience.

While virtually all current literature and papers on IMC deal with the theoretical aspect of integrated marketing communications, one wonders if the tactical concepts are being applied to industry and organizations.

A recent study examining integrated marketing communications practices across various industries (McArthur and Griffin, 1997) revealed significant attention to IMC. According to the study, “A Marketing Management View of Integrated Marketing,” IMC has been viewed as a valuable concept by marketing practitioners, but some believe organizational factors have imposed constraints on instituting IMC strategies. According to the authors, organizations are preoccupied with functional focus—functional people are being constrained to ‘do advertising’ or ‘do public relations’ or ‘do direct marketing’, and constrained not to solve problems. In addition, many organizations were unsure of who should direct the IMC program, and what tools or techniques would be appropriate. Also, since no single tool or technique is suitable for every situation, one way organizations choose which tool to use is by studying what others have done.

In a study on IMC use by advertising agencies, authors Don Schultz and Philip

Kitchen (1997) sought to ascertain the current state of IMC and level of implementation and use in this marketing communication landscape. The authors discovered that the concept of IMC is still undergoing development, yet there are sure signs that IMC is progressing into acceptability. Schultz and Kitchen discovered that IMC is not a fad. It is being driven into organizations due to real business needs. Their study concludes that IMC has moved from the “what is it?” to the “how can we do it?” stage of development.

Businesses have long recognized the need for marketing and communications programs that set them apart from competition. But, what kinds of programs, and what results? Mark Semmelmayr (1998) in “Accountability: The Final Frontier for Integrated Communications,” argues the gap can be narrowed or closed with integrated communications programs that give equal weight to careful planning, execution and thorough analysis of results. Integrated communications is a process of assessing customer needs, crafting messages perceived to be of value in purchase decisions, delivering them and monitoring feedback. An integrated marketing communications program uses this feedback in creating a “learning cycle” to maximize future results. That feedback, when analyzed, constitutes a real-time yardstick of program accountability.

Semmelmayr further explains the key components of a successful plan are the definition of a vision, the establishment of a market position and the development of a set of objectives. Equipped with appropriate marketing intelligence, development of selling messages and selection of delivery vehicles, the message effectiveness can be gauged in terms of affecting attitude, awareness and purchase.

Finally, future marketers think and plan differently. Starting with the customer or consumer, the marketer adapts to suit the customer’s needs. In their newest version of integrated marketing communications, authors Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn

(1997) assert that organizations need to focus on what customers and prospects want or need to know about the organization, product or services, not just what marketers want to tell them. According to the authors, accountability is most important. Marketers measure success not just in soft terms like awareness and favorability, but in the hard currency of return on marketing communications investment.

Higher education, colleges and universities, across America are in their own type of business competition. Institutions provide a service and a product, and compete for the same ever-dwindling pool of students. More and more institutions now subscribe to business-like marketing tactics such as integrated marketing communications. It is to this end this researcher hopes to relate the use of integrated marketing communications concepts and strategies to the marketing of higher education. Because this researcher's focus is IMC in college admissions, literature in this specialized area was reviewed.

College Admissions and Higher Education Marketing

The marketing perspective does not come easily to educational institutions. In *Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions*, authors Philip Kotler and Karen Fox (1995) acknowledge that the problems in marketing higher education often do not stem from a lack of marketing expertise, rather a lack of vision and leadership for transforming the institution into an innovative, customer-focused, market-driven organization.

The authors explain how some educational institutions got a hint of vulnerability when the 1980s enrollment boom turned into the 1990s bust. The market shrank abruptly and institutions found business as usual was not good enough. Although institutions have seen a recent upturn in college-bound seniors, Kotler and Fox believe the upturn is only temporary. It seems likely that the educational institutions in many parts of the

country—especially the college-rich Northeast region—will compete for a smaller and smaller pool of students. Add to that families questioning the value of education with rising tuition costs and sources for government grants and loans depleting. Colleges are turning inward to find savings, efficiencies and quality improvement. The bottom line: they are stressing value in their relationship to customers. Kotler and Fox point out that strategic marketing provides the underpinning for these efforts. The institution that focuses on customer satisfaction is functioning at the highest level of marketing, according to Kotler and Fox.

One of the signs of the current academic climate is the active way colleges and universities go about marketing themselves. Mark Neustadt (1994), assesses that institutions of all types have turned to sophisticated marketing techniques to communicate with their varied publics. Neustadt observes that deans, vice presidents and even presidents are now expected to possess a “marketing orientation” as part of their management arsenal. Most faculty adamantly feel marketing is not good for institutions. Many view marketing as a blight on the institution—moreover a foreign blight imported from the world of business. Some faculty with sympathy for the problems faced by their institution may suffer marketing as a necessary evil, but view it as having nothing to contribute to the ultimate mission of the institution.

According to Neustadt, the sort of quality control becoming popular in higher education is an outgrowth of the “market orientation” where the demands of clients (students, parents, donors) are met by responses from the institution. Through market research, institutions of higher education are able to define more precisely the services they provide and to learn to communicate more effectively with those audiences interested in the services. Neustadt argues that given the growing need of colleges and

universities to promote themselves, the trend toward greater marketing will not soon abate.

According to journalist Marilyn Much (1996), universities are promoting themselves like never before. Much explains that universities are trumpeting their academic virtues with splashy public relations and ad campaigns, including TV spots. Universities face challenges similar to those of consumer product firms. They need to break through the clutter with more effective and compelling messages to target audiences. And, that means better communicating who they are and what they stand for. Much adds that the global academic landscape has become more competitive at a time when the number of students attending college has stabilized. Colleges and universities no longer entrust their reputations to catalogs and testimonials. Now they are expanding marketing efforts to include glitzy ads and high-powered public relations.

For years college officials called it the “M” word, explains Ian Zack (1998) in *The New York Times*, the slippery slope of marketing most universities feared to tread. According to Zack, academics worried that marketing might backfire by placing style over substance and damage their credibility as an institution. But, years of no increased funding for higher education, declining enrollment and fierce competition have prompted institutions into new marketing efforts—with positive, measurable results.

In “The New College Try in Luring Applicants,” Chris Reidy (1998) shows another case of Madison Avenue meeting the “ivory tower.” Simmons College of Boston is using a new marketing campaign to define itself as a brand name and a niche market. And, according to Reidy, Simmons is only the latest school to join this trend. The Universities of Massachusetts, Cincinnati, Tennessee, Marquette and Notre Dame are among schools airing TV ads, with slick ad campaigns and strategic marketing plans.

In New York, the State University of New York (SUNY) is eager to enhance its reputation nationally and recruit more out-of-state students. According to Karen Arenson (1998), Channel One has become a powerful marketing tool to reach students in about 5,000 high schools. SUNY is sponsoring Channel One's video series, College Channel, on how to apply and pay for college and how to prepare for the college entrance examination. SUNY's sponsorship of the College Channel means that the university's name will be placed on the college package and it will be acknowledged as sponsor at the start of each video. The college kits are distributed free to each of the high schools that receive Channel One's news programs. Arenson notes the programs have a potential audience of about four million high school students and their parents nationwide. The marketing plan is one more step by SUNY to make better use of its potential.

Surges in freshman enrollment have many colleges surprised, mentions Leo Reisberg (1998) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Those enrollment rises at many schools can be directly attributed to stronger marketing efforts. According to Reisberg, freshman enrollment at the University of Northern Colorado rose 13 percent in fall 1998 due to stronger marketing by the institution. Eastern Washington University enrolled its largest class in a decade. According to the university, harder marketing has helped the turnaround. And, freshman enrollment at the University of Connecticut rose 16.9 percent due to a strong recruiting effort.

Some colleges are turning to admissions/marketing consulting firms specifically geared toward institutional recruitment and enrollment. According to Ben Gose (1999) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, companies use demographics, credit records, and sophisticated financial-aid strategies to identify the most desirable applicants, and to develop and carry out sophisticated recruiting strategies. Gose explains that the days are

gone when a college could hire a personable admission's dean, send out handsome viewbooks, and consider its recruiting strategy complete. If a college doesn't have someone in the admissions office who understands concepts such as logistic analysis, predictive modeling, and financial aid leveraging, it had better go find someone who does.

A study on the role of marketing and communications in recruiting and retaining business students (Bush, Ferrell, and Thomas, 1998) shows a need for universities in general to become more marketing oriented. The authors show how marketing can play a valuable role in recruiting and retaining students—the livelihood of a university's existence, and the basis for many budgetary allowance decisions. Institutions have turned to increasingly sophisticated marketing techniques to boost or retain enrollments, communicate with various publics and raise money.

Recent trends in higher education are seriously influencing many institution's abilities to succeed in a demanding market. According to Dr. Robert Sevier (Stamats, 1997), too many colleges are trying to recruit fewer and fewer full-time traditional, residential students. Add to this unavoidable tuition increases, and the effect could be that by the end of the century, some college and universities may not stay in business. Sevier explains that these challenges have already had a profound impact in many institutions. Students today are heavily focused on careers and outcomes. They are less interested in campus life, and more concerned with the cost of higher education and value received for money spent. Sevier adds that the trend toward national recruiting and the use of marketing media to reach larger and more diverse populations has led to saturation. Prospective students are inundated with increasingly sophisticated marketing pieces designed to sway their decisions. The extremely compelling stand outs will get their attention. The rest will more than likely end up in the garbage.

In “Measurement Matters in Admission Placement,” Richard Canterbury (1998) suggests that college admission officers need to examine their role in providing information and assisting potential applicants with the decision making process. Canterbury feels admission officers have a responsibility to communicate information as objectively as possible. Canterbury further argues that if the goal of higher education marketing is to distinguish the particular institution from the 3,000 or so other competing schools, and to make intellectual and emotional sense out of the student’s confusion, then it has a way to go. Canterbury feels marketing consultants offer products that inadequately express institutional differences or variety; prospects and their families develop distorted impressions; institutions work hard at being all things to all people rather than reflecting on their strengths and distinctions. Canterbury asserts that marketing as practiced in higher education has not yet achieved enough understanding of the choice process to represent the complexity of the educational process, its institutions, and its constituents. This author feels that what prospects are choosing and what influenced those choices is too infrequently addressed for a successful marketing effort.

Higher education is becoming entrenched in marketing—some schools are successful by default, some meet their goals through careful planning, some are not successful at all. This give and take of theory versus practice, what marketing tools higher education currently uses, and what should be used toward a more successful marketing application, is the basis of this study. This researcher will endeavor to uncover which higher education institutions are pursuing concerted marketing efforts, and in what ways they have been successful.

The following section of this chapter reviews several documented institutions pursuing a strong marketing approach. Chapter three addresses primary research

performed to determine which institutions are using strong marketing strategies and what tactics they approach.

Institutional Marketing Communication

For colleges and universities to realize the full potential of marketing, they must understand and then meet the needs of students. Dr. Robert Sevier (Stamats, 1999) suggests that colleges overcome the barriers to marketing and institutional resistance to change. The author notes market-oriented institutions embrace a comprehensive definition of marketing, develop strategic responses to audience and marketplace needs, and communicate these strategic responses tactically through aggressive promotion. Sevier adds that market-oriented institutions emphasize anew student-centered definitions of quality and success. While accounting ledgers should balance, facilities should shine, and endowments should grow, it must be recognized that these are all means to a larger end of educating and enriching students. And, a market-oriented institution creates clear criteria for evaluating progress—ideally established a priori rather than ex post facto. The greatest difference between business and education is the reluctance of colleges and universities to systematically evaluate whether or not programs, strategies, activities, and plans make sense, whether they are effective, and whether they contribute value. These are measures of success of a market-oriented institution.

David Cravens (1998) presents a useful perspective on marketing strategies intended for large for-profit companies, yet equally useful for colleges and universities. Cravens notes that many for-profit organizations are shifting from a focus on functions to a focus on processes. Successful marketing involves both marketing and sales, and these two can no longer be viewed as separate entities. The author suggests that the most

promising approach for linking marketing and sales is the concept of modularity. Modularity consists of developing a complex set of activities that are the product of a group of independent, but linked, smaller sub-systems. For instance, a successful marketing campaign organized by an office of public relations at a public university might include efforts to increase institutional visibility among prospective college students, but also include a totally separate focus on improving the image of the campus among state legislators. Under the principle of modularity, the office of admissions would be responsible for designing a recruitment strategy that would attempt to increase applications and the number of new students as a result of the increased visibility.

However, not everyone in academia is a proponent of a customer-centered, marketing-oriented approach to higher education. Cathy Driscoll and David Wicks (1998) feel there are problems and possible dangers related to including higher education in the domain of marketing. The authors have encountered examples advocating a customer-centered, market-driven approach on the part of universities toward their students including: 1. A university brochure describing its programs as “products that are client-centered and market-driven,” 2. A student accosts a professor and says, “I’m the paying customer and I don’t like the fact that your class is sold out,” 3. The dean of a large business school states that “our goal is to become more like Wal-Mart in satisfying our customers.” Driscoll and Wicks fear that a strong customer orientation can subordinate the values and objectives of academics and other stakeholders to the perceived needs and wants of students. They continue to critique the idea that students are customers and the recommendation that universities need to become more customer focused. The authors argue that clearly students are an important consideration, for without them, universities would cease to exist. But, they feel a strong marketing orientation may be a potential

threat to program quality. Driscoll and Wicks insist that treating a university degree as a product to be sold in a competitive market poses inherent dangers to the university's ability to serve the long-term interests of society and maintain the quality of degree programs. They assert that the quality of higher education is threatened by the use of a commercial exchange as the basis of the relationship between students and the school.

Authors Virginia Hart and Robin Gurovitsch (1995) acknowledge that colleges and universities are being thrust into a new world of marketing. Faced with a competitive environment, colleges are using strategic marketing to attract new students and retain existing students. Whatever the program, though, the authors feel schools must follow through and support it or risk hurting their reputation. Hart and Gurovitsch provide the case of a law school in Texas. The school began a quality improvement program. Its goal was to improve the image of the school with the end result of increasing overall attendance. The school commissioned a custom market research project to determine the image of the school, evaluate specific programs and issues, and determine perceptions. The school surveyed its customers: school officials, current law students, alumni and the legal community at large. The results of these studies provided the law school with enough information to develop a strategic plan and implement programs to meet its goals. The school will not be able to evaluate the results immediately; the public relations image campaign will take time to fully develop. Some results will be obvious, such as increased enrollment. True evaluation will come through market research done on a regular basis.

What does a college need to know about itself and its market before it attempts strategic and marketing planning? Most colleges and universities collect pounds of data showing how their competition compares with their institution on such variables as endowments, library holdings, faculty salaries, tuition, and so on. These institutions will

not make a strategic move without assuring themselves their competitors have already taken such steps. In a report on data for effective marketing, authors David Brodigan and George Dehne (1997) insist that colleges and universities must continually assess their environment in creative and original ways. Strategic and marketing plans are merely wish lists if a college or university does not thoroughly understand its audiences—attitudinally and demographically. Brodigan and Dehne argue that any institution that simply wants to emulate its more selective competitors will always be second or worse. Institutions must obtain fresh data on their own situation, students and positions, and they must act upon what they learn. Categories of information the authors believe colleges should use for effective marketing and planning include: current student satisfaction, effectiveness in the admission process, evaluation of price versus quality, non-applying inquirers, and alumni information and satisfaction.

Robert Sevier's book *Integrated Marketing for Colleges, Universities, and Schools*, (1998a), has become the sourcebook, hands-on planning guide and primer for integrated marketing efforts in higher education. This guide is written for, but not limited to, admissions, fund raising, marketing and public relations. Sevier addresses issues of campus leadership, market research, developing a strong image, market segmentation, and developing and implementing an integrated marketing plan. The author challenges the traditional four Ps of marketing: product, promotion, place and price, and discusses the need for enrollment managers or marketing directors to replace them with the four Cs of successful integrated marketing: customer (product), cost (price), convenience (place), and communication (promotion/plan). While many of his ideas are not new, Sevier identifies the practical reasons for institutions to implement a strong marketing plan, and some of the barriers institutions encounter when trying to realize a strategic, integrated marketing

plan. Sevier provides a step-by-step process for instituting and evaluating marketing plans.

Robert Johnson (1998) approaches integrated marketing communications from the impact of college and university admissions publications. According to Johnson, print publications are an essential part of making an IMC plan work. Despite increasing interest in electronic communication, publications are at the heart of most recruiting programs and are likely to remain so for at least the next five years. The author asserts that publications are moving beyond placing the sole emphasis on the quality of design, photography and copywriting, and paying more attention to establishing an on-going relationship between the sender and the person receiving them—the prospect. Implementing IMC requires research to develop different messages for different audiences, and flexibility in the admission office’s specific responses at different stages of communication. Johnson explains the basic principle to be kept at the forefront is that one recruitment message doesn’t work equally well for everyone. Other important points for a successful program include: developing relationships with prospects and applicants, directing a series of multiple publications toward individual audiences, sending those publications over a specific period of time, and interweaving publications with personal contact.

Reiterating the increasingly aggressive marketplace colleges and universities face, Larry Lauer (1998) suggests the challenge for educational institutions is to take on the increased competition while still maintaining integrity. To do it successfully, Lauer feels institutions must rethink the way they promote themselves and “do business.” The answer according to Lauer is in integrated marketing—a holistic approach to organizational communication. By combining the power of marketing, advertising and

public relations, it involves the entire organization in communicating a single message. Lauer stresses that integrated marketers don't create the message themselves, they seek out the needs of their audiences first, then tailor marketing plans to meet those needs. It turns the traditional concept of public relations on its head. But, who better on college campuses to coordinate and "pull off" such a concept than campus communicators. Lauer explains the "old" approach to marketing and communications and how integrated marketing improves the concept:

Old: Campus marketing functions were decentralized.

New: We coordinate all departments' efforts into one focused program.

Old: We sent audiences the information we wanted them to have.

New: We ask audiences to tell us what they want.

Old: Competitive advantages were temporary.

New: We create long-term competitive advantages.

Old: Marketing was a narrow function beneath the PR umbrella.

New: PR is the promotional part of marketing. (p. 12)

While it is a huge undertaking, Lauer lays out the steps to getting started, from forming an integrated marketing task force and conducting a communication audit, to including participants and visibility. The key to integrated marketing is interactivity. The author insists that the critical part of the integrated process is follow-through: tracking prospective students not only through admission and enrollment, but through matriculation, graduation and beyond. To be successful, everyone involved must commit to the long-term process.

Integrated marketing programs are based on knowledge—of the institution, the marketplace and the audience. According to Robert Sevier (1998b), the first frontier of a

successful IMC plan is research. Solid marketing plans that do not include research are almost always flawed. The author asserts that good research involves finding specific answers to specific questions, and using that information to refine goals and develop an overall marketing plan. Sevier explains the vocabulary of market research, the importance of gathering data and the steps to initiate and glean needed information. Most important in the Sevier view is the “big question,” what do you hope to learn? Anything that does not answer that question is unnecessary to the research. Finally, reporting the data is as important as the data itself. Sevier argues the way the research is presented is critical to the integrity of the study. The goal with integrated marketing is to provide information upon which to act. The information must be accessible and understandable.

In a case study of an institution making the jump to integrated marketing, Christopher Simpson (1998) shows how Indiana University moved from its traditional promotions-oriented PR mode to an integrated marketing approach. Simpson acknowledges how two years after closing IU’s traditional news bureau and opening an Office of Communications and Marketing, IU has incorporated integrated marketing into every part of IU’s eight campuses’ public relations efforts. Simpson also notes that by using qualitative and quantitative research as the foundation for the unified efforts, the University has been able to document how much more effective integrated marketing can be. IU’s initial hurdle was communicating to everyone from the president to the news bureau staff the difference between promotion and marketing, and demonstrating how marketing would help improve efforts to reach key constituents. The author notes through research it became clear that by promoting the university solely through the media, key constituents were not being reached. The bottom line became clear: Promotion is informing, a passive way to shape an image. Marketing takes an active approach, from

setting goals to conducting research to checking to see if the image is indeed enhanced. The conclusion was, integrated marketing was the more effective means of reaching key constituents and enhancing image. Simpson notes from that point on IU had top-level (president) support, and began the task of putting integrated marketing communications to work. Simpson mentions, while IU had its skeptics, few challenged the quantitative data showing the program effectiveness resulting in higher enrollment, stronger image and strength of programs.

While integrated marketing and communications may be the rage in higher education to combat competition, not everyone feels compelled to give up the old way of doing business. Larry Arbiter (1998) argues the best course may not be to give up the old ways—the news bureaus, the PR offices—but add some marketing methods to an already established set of procedures. Arbiter offers tips on ways to know an institution's audience, and look for opportunities to incorporate marketing-type ideas without investing in a high-profile revolution such as integrated marketing communications.

Integrated marketing concepts and integrated marketing communications seem to be a well-discussed topic as of late, yet little is known, or documented, regarding its success in practice in the field of higher education. This researcher will seek to determine to what degree IMC theories are currently put to practice in colleges and universities across the country.

Summary

Public and private colleges and universities across the country all face the realities of tougher competition for fewer and fewer students. Institutions of higher learning are beginning to accept the fact that they are businesses—in the business of educating. Many

institutions are beginning to operate as businesses, incorporating policies and procedures borrowed from the business world. To address declining images, dwindling enrollments and not-forthcoming endowments and donations, colleges and universities are adopting aggressive marketing practices, specifically, integrated marketing communications.

While this researcher uncovered a variety of theoretical viewpoints, many applauding the merits of IMC use in higher education, very little strong, scholarly literature has been written concerning actual application and success. Due to the vast amounts of illustrative marketing information available to higher education institutions, and the fierce competition for students, this study will endeavor to determine how many colleges and universities incorporate IMC strategies into their communication and enrollment practices, their success rate since using an integrated strategy, and what tools or techniques work best. Also, this research hopes to determine the degree of non-success among schools not using an integrated marketing approach.

Following in Chapter III is the methodology and approach to this study of integrated marketing communications use in college and university recruitment and enrollment practices.

Chapter III

Methodology

To test the hypotheses, this researcher analyzed medium-sized (U.S.) colleges and universities and their use of integrated marketing communications for admission recruiting and enrollment.

Data Sources

Initial background information needed for this research study included a working knowledge of the concept and practice of integrated marketing communications. This data was acquired from marketing theory and practice texts and professional journals. This study also required a knowledge of current academic marketing and recruitment practices as acquired through various periodicals and professional journals such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *CASE Currents*, *The Journal of Higher Education*, *The Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *The Journal of College Admissions*, *Admissions Marketing*, as well as various abstracting systems, the Internet and personal professional perspectives. This study also gathered current educational marketing practices through professional organizations such as the National Association of Collegiate Marketing Administrators, the American Marketing Association and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, as well as professional education-specific marketing consulting firms such as Stamats Communication, Inc., and Lipman Hearne, Inc.

Research Methods

This researcher employed two methods of research to answer several hypotheses: qualitative and quantitative research. By using both qualitative and quantitative survey research, the results described and explained current attitudes, opinions, thoughts and behaviors regarding college and university marketing, recruiting and admission practices. By using this method, needed data was gathered systematically and efficiently from a large number of people.

This researcher first conducted the qualitative research to enable development and construction the survey instrument. The qualitative research consisted of data collection through six in-depth telephone or face-to-face interviews. The six people interviewed were chosen based on their professional positions at institutions of higher learning and their relationship to marketing and admissions at their respective institutions. All of these professionals and their institutions participate in rigorous marketing and recruiting practices, as evident from secondary research. This researcher's focus was to glean as much information as possible from the interviews regarding integrated marketing communications practices used toward successful recruitment. During the interviews this researcher asked how these institutions started their IMC programs, techniques incorporated, barriers and difficulties encountered and signs of enrollment successes.

Instrument Design

All of the observations and different perspectives were documented and incorporated into the survey instrument. A questionnaire was developed containing familiarity and general institutional marketing questions, marketing activity questions, use of IMC, opinion inquiries and demographics. The items were shown to several experts to

evaluate clarity and redundancy.

The departmental and strategy activities on the questionnaire were designed so that respondents could answer “yes,” “no,” or “don’t know.” The tactical tools were a “check” in terms of whether they had implemented any of them. In addition, if they answered yes, the respondents were asked to rate the activity’s effectiveness in terms of recruitment and enrollment on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Respondents were also asked to review the marketing activities and rank order the most effective in recruiting and enrolling students by assigning a corresponding 1, 2, 3, etc., next to the activity. The end of the survey included a comment section so respondents could include suggestions, or any other relevant information. The finalized questionnaire was pretested among several institutional administrators. Revisions were made in terms of item clarity, ease of instructions and length. The resulting version was a two-page, 14-item, self-administered questionnaire that could be completed in approximately five to 10 minutes. Length and ease of instruction were of particular concern given the survey would be sent to time-constrained higher education administrators. (See Appendix A.)

Sample

In order to identify the population to be surveyed, this researcher used *Peterson’s 4 Year Colleges 1999* guide book to identify the medium-sized institutions in the continental United States. Names and addresses of admissions and enrollment executives from these institutions were obtained from the same *Peterson’s 4 Year Colleges 1999* guide. In a few instances (less than two percent) where neither name nor title were listed, a top management title was chosen as the contact person. From the population, a nonprobability quota sample was selected. This study assessed the

relationship between the use/non-use of certain marketing tools and techniques, and incorporation of integrated marketing communications. Therefore, generalization was not required. A quota sample was used to identify institutions with certain traits: medium-sized (by student population), public or private, non-program specific, four-year institutions. In order to achieve a sampling error rate of no more than $\pm 7\%$, with a 95 percent confidence level, this researcher needed to receive 120 valid, usable, completed surveys. Of the 276 institutions meeting those qualification, 276 surveys were attempted. Each completed survey received was coded for the researcher to acknowledge the source, yet still retain anonymity for the sake of the respondent.

Data Collection

Questionnaires were sent to the selected list of colleges and universities. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter introducing the researcher as a fellow professional in the field, explaining the purpose of the study, and encouraging participation (see Appendix B). A postage-paid return envelope was enclosed. The questionnaires included instructions to either mail back, fax, or e-mail responses by a deadline that was approximately two to three weeks after receipt. Respondents could request a summary of the research findings. The questionnaires were sent via first class mail in spring of 1999. A follow-up e-mail request was made three weeks after the initial mailing (see Appendix C). The direct mail method was chosen because this researcher felt more people would be comfortable answering questions on hard copy as opposed to strictly electronic devices (e-mail). Also, the mailed version retains anonymity of the respondent. In addition, this researcher had a reliable list of possible participants who were likely to respond accurately. The survey was sent to subjects who could benefit

from the results and were considered an interested audience. This researcher was confident survey participants would respond as a professional courtesy.

Reliability and Validity

By the cut-off date, 126 responses were received, a return rate of 46%. Twenty of those responses were discounted because of incomplete answers or lack of attention to the instructions resulting in incalculable responses. Therefore, 106 usable questionnaires from the total sample frame yielded a completion rate of 38%.

Appropriate statistical analysis was used to examine the data collected. During exploratory research, this researcher assessed mean scores through coded responses developed from a Likert-type scale, as well as data analysis produced in percentages. The survey was pretested and considered reliable.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of marketing practices in higher education, and give college and university enrollment personnel proven means of providing better quality, and appropriate numbers of students for their institutions using integrated marketing communications methods. This study was unique in that limited quantifiable research has addressed the realities of higher education marketing for recruitment and enrollment, what institutions employ what marketing tools, and to what success.

Chapter 4 discusses the results of this survey. The first results discussed involve respondents. The following results of the survey are broken down by hypothesis. Tables and graphs are included to help explain the data.

Chapter 5 discusses observations and the results. Survey results are interpreted, evaluated and conclusions met regarding the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 1, as well as study limitations and suggestions for further study.

Chapter IV

Research Findings

An exploratory study was conducted to examine the use of integrated marketing communications in college and university recruitment and enrollment practices.

Triangulation of research was incorporated using qualitative personal interviews and a quantitative survey instrument to fully understand the nature of the IMC process. While preliminary in nature, this study is not intended for significant decision making, only to incite awareness and encourage proactivity.

Interview Observations

The personal interviews with higher education executives generated some common conclusions. There was an overwhelming agreement that a strategic marketing plan was needed at colleges and universities. One mentioned the difficulties in getting all required departments to work together, reporting-wise and budget-wise. One participant described that while his institution is effectively moving toward full integration, the new process met with a great deal of resistance, that is, until results were seen. Another interviewee whose institutions has been successfully using IMC for a few years commented that in theory, IMC is excellent, but implementation of the theory is very difficult. This observation is consistent with those of educational marketing experts. One such expert reiterated how all campus personnel need to work together. Implementing IMC is approaching the whole marketing, recruiting and imaging process differently. Schools

should try for early, small victories rather than initial perfection.

Who Responded

Survey responses were received from college and university executives with titles ranging from vice president, dean and director of admissions, to vice president, dean and director of enrollment management, director of university marketing, director of public relations, coordinator of student recruitment and marketing specialist. The majority of respondents (59%) were considered middle management, with 24% listed as upper management/executive. The average age of respondents was 46.5 years. Of the respondents, the majority (51%) possessed a graduate degree, 22% possessed a post-graduate (doctoral) degree, and 26% possessed a bachelor's degree. None of the 106 qualified respondents had an educational level lower than a bachelor's degree.

The completed surveys represented 62% public colleges and universities, and 38% private schools.

The following reveals the remainder of the survey findings as pertaining to each hypothesis.

Hypothesis I

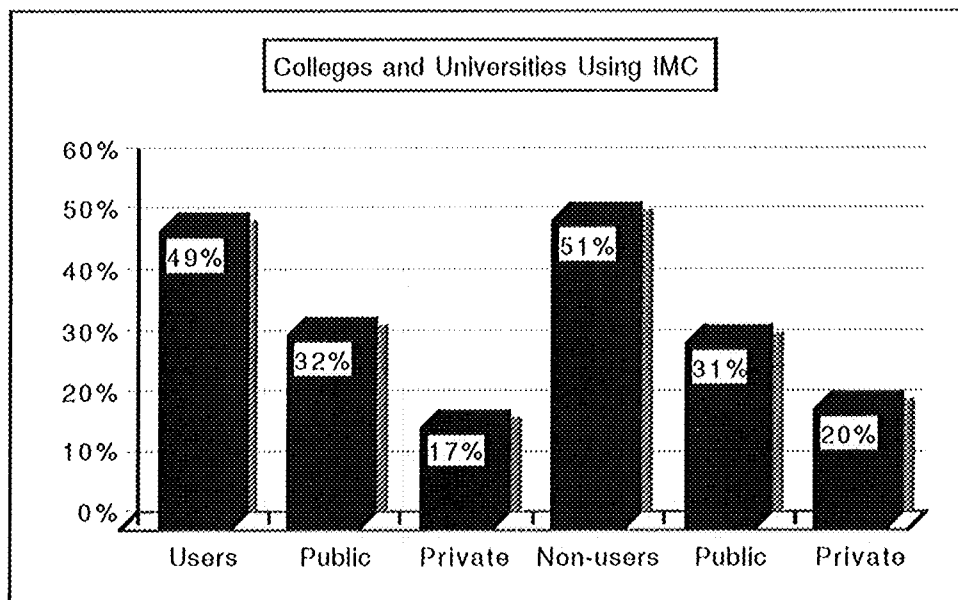
It is expected at the time of research that the number of institutions of higher learning using integrated marketing communications programs for marketing, recruitment and enrollment will be less than the number of institutions not utilizing such a program.

To determine how many and which higher education institutions use integrated

marketing communications approaches, this researcher first examined the respondents' familiarity with the concept. Of the 106 respondents, 68%, or 72 were familiar with IMC, only 32% were not familiar with IMC.

To determine how many and which colleges and universities incorporated IMC practices, this researcher examined the percentage of schools using IMC versus schools not using IMC. The "users" versus "non-users" (so named for this study) were also compared by public or private institution (Figure 1). It was discovered that 49% of responding institutions incorporate IMC approaches, 51% of the schools do not. The numbers of public users versus public non-users, and private users versus private non-users was also consistently close.

Figure 1



Therefore, the data collected from the survey does support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis II

It is expected that those colleges and universities using a comprehensive integrated marketing communications program plan will be more successful in achieving appropriate enrollment than other institutions not using an IMC strategy.

Executives from colleges and universities using IMC overwhelmingly believe (86%) that their institutions have better reached enrollment goals since using an IMC approach. The mean answer of user respondents based on a five-point Likert-type scale in which 1 indicates “strongly agree” and 5 indicates “strongly disagree,” was a strong 1.7. Not a single institution disagreed.

To determine the success of college and university marketing programs overall, respondents were asked to rate the success of their institution’s marketing program in terms of achieving student profile and enrollment goals. The mean answer for IMC user respondents based on a 5-point Likert-type scale in which 1 indicates “very successful” and 5 indicates “not successful” was 1.94. The mean answer for non-user respondents was 2.26. By percentages, 39% of user respondents felt their marketing efforts were very successful, as opposed to 16% of non-users who felt their marketing efforts were successful. Table 1 below shows the breakdown percentages of relative success of current marketing programs.

Table 1**Perceived Success of Institutional Marketing**

	IMC Users	Non-Users
Very successful	39%	16%
Moderately successful	46%	55%
Neutral	6%	7%
Somewhat successful	11%	16%
Not successful	—	2%

Therefore, the data collected from the survey does support Hypothesis II. Respondents using IMC report greater enrollment success than the numbers of non-users relying on traditional marketing methods.

Hypothesis III

It is expected that higher education institutions that do not use any type of collaborative marketing and communication campaign will be less successful in recruitment and enrollment efforts.

To establish if the colleges and universities not using IMC are less successful in recruitment and enrollment efforts, this researcher calculated success rate data from non-

user respondents (see Table 1, above). The data clearly shows that 25% of the non-users feel their recruitment efforts are unsuccessful, and 55% of non-users feel their efforts are only moderately successful.

Therefore, Hypothesis III was supported by this information.

Additionally, 66% of non-user respondents agree that their institution would better meet enrollment goals by adopting an integrated marketing communications approach to recruitment and enrollment.

Hypothesis IV

It is expected that certain tools, techniques and tactics through an integrated communication approach, will better persuade students to enroll in particular schools.

To determine what communication tools, techniques and tactics institutions successfully use, this researcher examined the percentages under each strategy IMC user institutions incorporate, the weighted average of each strategy, and the percentage of tools achieving the greatest response rate in attracting and enrolling select students.

It was discovered that all institutions using IMC incorporate a mix of communication tools in varying, yet closely mixed degrees. (See Table 2 below.)

Table 2**Use of IMC Strategies and Tools**

Function	% of Institutions	Count
Personal Communication	96%	50
Direct Marketing	92%	48
Public Relations	87%	45
Promotions	87%	45
Advertising	83%	43
Other (web marketing, CD-ROM)	10%	5

From that mix of tools it was discovered the degree or percentage that each tool represents in the overall marketing plan. The mean score of each communication tool across four dimensions is expressed through interpolating, with 0 indicating 0%, and 4 indicating 100%, see Table 3 below.

Table 3
Degree of Each Tool Devoted to IMC Plan

Function	Mean Proportion	Percentage
Direct Marketing	2.56	65%
Personal Communication	2.44	60%
Public Relations	1.52	38%
Promotions	1.23	31%
Advertising	1.15	29%
Other	.13	3%

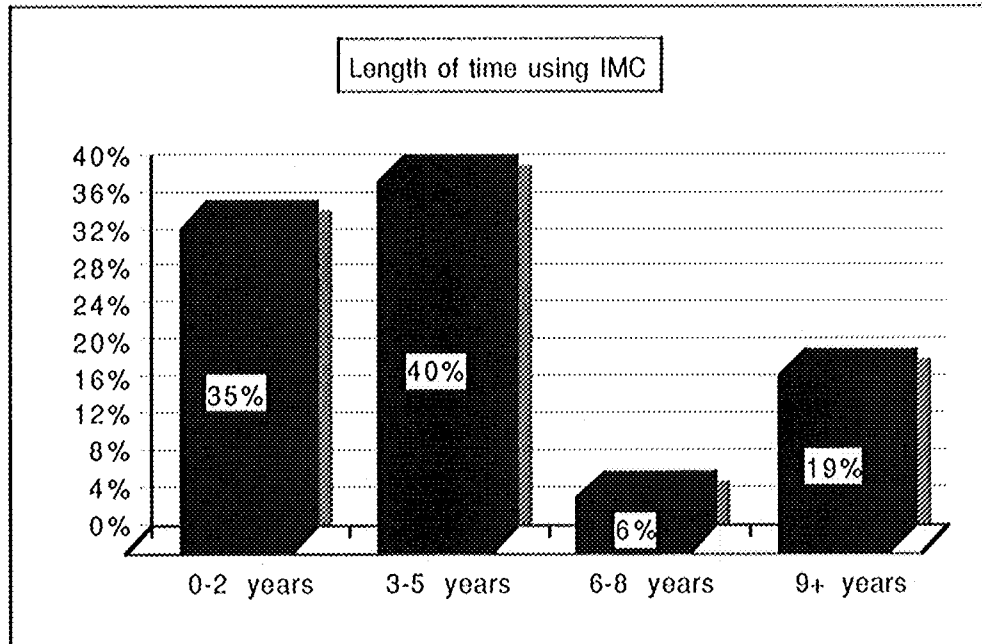
It was also discovered that of the five major communication tools, 57% of user respondents rank “Personal Communication” as the most important function in the marketing mix for attracting and enrolling students, with “Direct Marketing” a close second at 42%. The lowest ranked tool, yet not least important, is “Public Relations” at a 29% response rate.

Therefore, the data collected shows that while IMC-user institutions use a fairly even combination of tools, the two most heavily used and most successful response-generating tools are personal communication and direct marketing. This hypothesis was supported to the extent that all marketing mix tools are used, yet two particular tools prove to be the strongest in the recruitment and enrollment effort with quantifiable results.

In addition, analysis by length of time each responding institution has used IMC

may have bearing on success or lack of success. Figure 2 shows a wide range of utilization, with the largest percentage of users in the 3-5 year range.

Figure 2



Chapter V

Discussion

Summary and Implications

Integrated marketing communications is attracting significant attention at colleges and universities across the country. While most attention and review of available literature focuses on the why and how of IMC, information is mostly general. Little is known about the overall picture: how many and which higher education institutions are using integrated marketing communications approaches, how are they doing so, and what works. The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine if using a comprehensive integrated marketing communications approach to college and university recruitment and enrollment helps institutions better achieve their enrollment goals. This study desired to assess what marketing activities schools implement and their perceived degree of success.

Through interviews and a self-directed mail survey it was discovered that a great deal of time and attention is devoted to IMC and marketing in general by many institutions. It was considered a subject of major importance. Overall, the majority of respondents expressed that they had a strategic plan or were in the process of developing one. Institutional marketing is becoming a powerful and effective force on many campuses. The study also reveals that a campus-wide marketing effort can effectively boost applications and enrollment. This finding may be evidence for more colleges and universities using integrated marketing communications in their approach to recruitment and enrollment. This researcher believes that IMC and campus-wide marketing efforts are rapidly evolving at many institutions, and will have a greater role and impact in the near future.

Conclusions

The survey results were synthesized with information gleaned from the other sources to produce the following conclusions:

I. Based on generalization, most of management at colleges and universities across the country are familiar with the concept of IMC, but not all currently incorporate an integrated marketing approach. However, with an almost even split between institutions using IMC and those not using IMC, chances are the number of schools using IMC will continue to grow as more successes are uncovered. Integrating all communication processes takes time, effort and campus-wide coordination. It is difficult for an institution to cease the way they have traditionally approached marketing, recruitment and enrollment and begin a completely new process. According to successful respondents though, it is time well spent.

II. Colleges and universities using an integrated marketing approach to recruitment and enrollment firmly believe their student yield has improved significantly since fully incorporating IMC strategies into their marketing program. The numbers of applicants has increased, the number of students enrolling has increased, and the profile of the students enrolling has increased due to careful targeting of the desired population. Even schools with IMC programs in place for a short time have seen significant successes.

III. On the other hand, institutions not using an integrated approach to marketing communications, while still enrolling students, feel they are not successful at enrolling the number nor the type of students desired for their school. A full 25% of colleges and universities who still rely on traditional means of recruitment and enrollment feel their

recruitment/marketing efforts are unsuccessful. A large number of those institutions not using IMC—55%—feel their efforts are only moderately successful. Ironically, 66% of those same colleges and universities feel their efforts would greatly improve, and they would better meet enrollment goals, by adopting an integrated marketing communications approach.

IV. The five prime marketing tools used by successful IMC institutions—advertising, promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal communication—are well integrated into a marketing mix. Each tool serves a specific purpose in effecting differing stages of the communication process. IMC dictates that all tools and techniques work together for image, communication and persuasion. However, most agree that two specific tools, direct marketing and personal communication, have the most profound effect in persuading students to apply and enroll in their respective institutions.

Discussion, Recommendations and Limitations

While position, age and level of education were asked of respondents, personal demographic data was not a necessity of this study. The basis of this study was to gain information on the institution and its practices, not the person answering the questionnaire. Most requested data was informational, quantifiable fact, while two opinion-based questions were asked. This researcher assumed most respondents were answering honestly. However, the educational level and age of respondents may correlate to familiarity with IMC, and willingness to try a new concept. This researcher felt a more educated opinion might have been gained due to management level, educational level and

age. However, no specific correlation was found.

This study began as an espoused theory—the way things are supposed to be—according to IMC theories. It tried to find the theory in use. In that respect, the study accomplished its mission. This researcher was surprised to discover how well-entrenched IMC has become in higher education. The field of IMC in higher education institutional marketing is widespread. This study only touched on its magnitude and ramifications. However, this study does provide evidence that integrated marketing communications can be an effective tool in recruiting and enrolling students.

The results of this study suggest that budgets should be amended for marketing activity; enrollment can be increased through the effective use of marketing strategy. Based on research data, some recommendations can be made for institutions looking to follow the path of IMC:

1. Assert a long term marketing focus. IMC is not a quick fix. It is a long term investment for the future of the institution. It must have top level support, and become a campus-wide initiative.
2. Develop an integrated marketing communications plan. The institution's commitment to marketing requires a strong strategic plan of action.
3. Communicate. It is the key to making all plans work. Through research, determine how to communicate what the institution's constituents want and need to learn.

Keep in mind that the results of this study by themselves are only indications of what exists. A study provides information that says “this is what might be the case.” To

be relatively certain of the results, the study must be replicated and the number of respondents increased.

Although this study has revealed some interesting insights into the role and application of IMC in higher education marketing, it is not without limitations. The survey was conducted using a small sample of colleges and universities across the United States, limited by the size of their enrollment. This study did not include two-year community colleges, single sex colleges or program specific type schools. Also, non-response bias may also be of concern. This researcher expected stronger response rates, even though the survey was conducted during a busy time of year for admission and enrollment personnel. Although there may be some limitations in this study, solid information and useful activities have been revealed that can improve the effectiveness of higher education marketing.

Future Research

Following are suggestions for future research and further study.

From this study it is clear that IMC development in terms of execution and implementation at colleges and universities appears to be the key area for future research. It would be useful to:

- 1) Establish a benchmark for current IMC activities, then look at the measurement issue of IMC—quantifiable return on investment. While many in higher education believe IMC has value, measurement, which would justify these feelings, appears to be critical to the future development of this area.
- 2) Perform an examination of the barriers schools face in trying to establish an integrated

marketing communications approach, and how all departments can effectively work together campus-wide to develop and implement a strong IMC program.

3) Replicate this study using many colleges and universities, from large to small, and approach the coordination factor, or reporting relationship of all involved, as well as the impact on budgets and budgetary allowances for IMC.

Finally, it is acknowledged that this study is not an end, but a beginning. For a myriad of factors and reasons, colleges and universities will continue to face tough competition to enroll students. As the face of the next generation of college students emerges, so, too, must the manner in which schools attract these faces to apply, enroll, and eventually become alumni. Through studies like this one, further investigation into the manner in which IMC programs are constructed, coordinated, sourced and implemented by institutions of higher education can only benefit college and university personnel in improving their approach to recruitment and enrollment success.

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Appendixes

Appendix A	Survey
Appendix B	Cover Letter
Appendix C	Follow-up, plus survey

Appendix A – Survey

IMC in College/University Admissions Survey

Please check one box ☐ that best matches your response.

- 1) Are you familiar with the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication?

☐ Yes ☐ No

- 2) Does your institution hold individual departments of:

Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
Advertising	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
Public relations/college relations	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
Promotion	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
Admissions	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
Enrollment Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know

- 3) Does your institution incorporate an Integrated Marketing Communication approach to attracting, recruiting and enrolling students?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

*If **yes**, continue with question (4). If **no**, please go to question (9).*

- 4) What IMC strategies does your institution use? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Advertising (positional/promotional, environmental, print, electronic, multimedia)

☐ Promotion (special events, partnerships)

☐ Public Relations (media, community, high school)

☐ Direct Marketing (direct mail, search publications, viewbooks, brochures)

☐ Personal Communication (college fairs, high school visits, telemarketing)

☐ Other _____

- 5) To what degree do you use each tool as part of your overall marketing approach?

Advertising	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 26-50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-75%	<input type="checkbox"/> 76-100%
Promotion	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 26-50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-75%	<input type="checkbox"/> 76-100%
Public Relations	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 26-50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-75%	<input type="checkbox"/> 76-100%
Direct Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 26-50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-75%	<input type="checkbox"/> 76-100%
Personal Comm.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-25%	<input type="checkbox"/> 26-50%	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-75%	<input type="checkbox"/> 76-100%

Other ☐ 0-25% ☐ 26-50% ☐ 51-75% ☐ 76-100%

- 6) What tools have you found achieve the greatest response in attracting and enrolling the best students? Please create the “perfect” marketing mix by rank ordering the following tools from 1 to 5, with 1 being the **most** important and 5 (or 6 if you choose to use “other”) being the **least** important (refer to question 4. if necessary):

_____ Advertising _____ Promotion _____ Public Relations

_____ Direct Marketing _____ Personal Communication _____ Other

- 7) How long has your Integrated Marketing Communication program been in place?
☐ 0–2 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 6–8 years ☐ 9+ years

- 8) Since using an Integrated Marketing Communication approach your institution has better reached intended enrollment goals (as measured by enrollment numbers and student profiles).

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

- 9) In your opinion, how successful is your institution’s marketing program in terms of reaching your desired student profile and enrollment goals?

☐ Very successful ☐ Moderately successful ☐ Neutral
☐ Somewhat successful ☐ Not successful

**Please answer (9a) and (9b) ONLY if you answered NO to question (3), we do not use IMC.*

- a) What marketing tools does your institution use to attract and enroll prospective students? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Advertising (positional/promotional, environmental, print, electronic, multimedia)

☐ Promotion (special events, partnerships)

☐ Public Relations (media, community, high school)

☐ Direct Marketing (direct mail, search publications, viewbooks, brochures)

☐ Personal Communication (college fairs, high school visits, telemarketing)

- b) I feel my college/university would better meet enrollment goals by adopting an

integrated communication approach to recruiting and enrollment by using all aspects of marketing through a single institution-wide effort.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

10) Is your college/university:

☐ Public ☐ Private

11) Your title or position _____

☐ Upper management ☐ Middle management ☐ Other

12) Your age:

☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55 +

13) Highest level of education you completed:

☐ High school ☐ College ☐ Graduate school ☐ Post-Graduate school

14) Comments:

Thank you for completing this survey!

Appendix B – Cover Letter

Dear Admissions Colleague,

I need your help. How do you market your college or university to prospective students and achieve your desired class?

I am an admissions officer at Rowan University in New Jersey, as well as a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in public relations. For my thesis, I am conducting a study on the use of Integrated Marketing Communication at colleges and universities in admissions and enrollment.

The purpose of this study is to determine if schools using an integrated marketing mix of tools in unison—communicating in one comprehensive effort—are better able to attract and enroll the best possible students for their institutions.

The goal of this project is to offer a more concise and effective way of marketing to the students of tomorrow. Your input will prove invaluable.

Would you please take the time to answer the enclosed short survey? For your effort, I will forward the results of the most successfully used marketing strategies I find to you, at your request. Please mail your response in the enclosed envelope by April 15. If it is more convenient, you can fax or e-mail your response. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Alisa Hogan
Assistant Director of Admissions

Fax: (609) 256-4430
E-mail: hogana@rowan.edu
Phone: (609) 256-4364

Appendix C – Follow-up

Dear Admissions Colleague,

You may have recently received correspondence requesting your assistance with a short survey regarding **Integrated Marketing Communication** at your institution.

As a refresher, I am conducting a study on the use of IMC at colleges and universities in admissions and enrollment. The purpose is to determine if schools using an integrated marketing mix are more successful in attracting and enrolling the best possible students for their institution.

That survey may still be floating across your desk. If you have sent the survey back, I truly **thank you**. If you have not responded, it's not too late. This research would benefit from your input.

If you still have the paper survey in your possession, please drop it in the mail or fax your survey response. You can also phone me with a voice response to survey questions if that is more convenient.

I have included a copy of the survey with this correspondence. You can download this mailing and fax or mail your response, or simply **reply** to this e-mail, copy the survey and place an "X" beside your responses.

Regardless of your method, I greatly appreciate your time and effort in answering this survey. If you are interested in the results of the most successfully used marketing strategies, please note with your response and I will forward the results to you.

Thank you, again.

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(Plus copy of survey)