

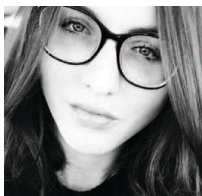
Preparing Your Campus for the Next Generation of Students



Adapting the institution to meet changing expectations

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Over the next decade, higher education will experience a significant shift as the millennial generation gives way to “Generation Z.” As a result of this multigenerational shift in student expectations, institutions will need to adapt how they do business across departments, from financial aid to business offices, and student services. This will include using social media effectively to communicate with students and their families—particularly in the financial aid and business offices. Communication, academic differentiation, and alumni relations should be important areas of improvement for any college or university over the next ten years. In this web seminar, two experts from Nelnet Campus Commerce discuss how to meet the needs and expectations of the next generation of students by focusing on social media strategy, emerging communication technologies, and the impact of unique online and mobile behavior.



Jaclyn Day

Marketing Manager,
Nelnet Campus Commerce

Jaclyn Day: I’m sure you’ve noticed that the expectations of the students, parents, and alumni you serve are changing noticeably and rapidly. What worked for your campus 10 or even five years ago may not work now. And what worked this year may not be effective in another five.

You are experiencing the last group of millennials coming through your campus. Within the next freshman-to-senior lifecycle, they will have graduated and joined the workforce. You will then need to shift the things you know about the millennial generation to other audiences—young alumni, grad students, and adult nontraditional students.

For the undergrad side, you want to be focused on Generation Z, or students born after 1995. It’s time to think about what they want, because they’re probably already on your campus. For millennials, everything was about the Internet of Things. Generation Z expects the Internet of Everything. You can be connected. You are the connection point. A Fitbit is a good example, because you are connecting your own health information to the internet. Social media is another example—it is providing an infrastructure for people to connect, versus just providing infrastructure. That’s what Gen Z students expect while they’re on your campus.

Issues of concern to Gen Z

There are a few main issues that complicate their worldview. The ability to find a job is absolutely at the forefront of their mind, even at a young age. They’re also extremely concerned with the cost of education. Personal financial health is also something that they’re considering. They saw their parents—maybe during the Great Recession—lose investments and struggle to pay bills. This is a generation that understands what a budget is, how to use it, and the importance of saving. They may not do it, but they have more information about personal financial health than the millennial generation did.

How do we address their financial concerns? This comes back to your campus in a lot of interesting ways. Consider their critical concerns about the cost and responsibility of student debt—which will be on their mind through the whole student lifecycle—to explore new pricing models that reduce debt load. Watch and learn from the results of colleges experimenting with new approaches. Are you offering tuition payment options that meet students where they are?

Student services providers on campus can do things to alleviate the concerns for millennial and Gen Z students. The first is virtual counseling tools. Instead of having people wait in line or go into an office to reach someone, think about doing instant-messaging customer service models, where students can reach someone from a laptop in their dorm room, or from their cell phone. Also include features such as interactive calculators, estimators, interactive forms, and electronic signatures. All of these can make a huge difference in how this generation views your institution.



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“If you have time to check out only one university’s social media strategy, I highly recommend the University of Michigan.”

- Caitlin Anderson, Marketing Manager, Nelnet Campus Commerce



Caitlin Anderson

Marketing Manager,
Nelnet Campus Commerce

Caitlin Anderson: The importance of social media

Social media isn't necessarily a new way to reach students, but it may be time to consider some new tactics you can initiate as Gen Z moves in on your campus. Social media is an easy way to meet your audience where they already are and monitor conversations around the university. By staying active and accessible to students, you provide valuable customer service within platforms they are active on each day,

Since 2006, all age groups have seen a steady increase in social media use. Among 18- to 29-year-olds, 90 percent are already active on social networking sites. Among Gen Z students (ages 13 to 17), 89 percent are already on social media. Based on these numbers, we can't deny that social media provides us with a lot of potential to reach our collegiate audience.

In addition to getting your message across, you'll reap additional benefits by staying active on social media:

- Staff could see a decrease in the number of phone calls to your office, which helps if you're understaffed.
- Your institution will establish credibility by staying active and engaged on social media.
- Your team will be able to better monitor students' concerns, as they may be more likely to provide feedback behind a computer screen rather than in person.
- Social media helps you improve click through rates on your website, teaching you more about what types of content your audiences are viewing.

If your team is short on resources and can only choose one social media platform, I recommend Facebook. Along with having the most overall users, it's where your campus will likely have the highest number of active student users. Use Facebook to create live or recorded videos, post photos, links, surveys, and events. When you're thinking about incoming generations, consider new and emerging platforms like Snapchat.

Once you have determined which platforms you want to be on, create a policy that clearly outlines the rules and regulations of your social pages. This is something that your team can easily reference when you're making a decision about what to post or how to respond to a comment. This is especially useful if you have a lot of turnover in your department, or if you have a student running your pages.

Then set some goals. What do you want to accomplish by using social media? Do you want to reduce phone calls to your office? Do you want to increase credibility with students? Do you want to teach them about financial literacy or how to pay for tuition? Is recruitment one of your goals? Do you want to monitor student concerns? Based on your needs, you can then create a content calendar that helps you reach your goals.

If you have time to check out only one university's social media strategy, I highly recommend the University of Michigan. They have an entire team dedicated to maintaining the strategic direction of their social presence. If you visit their social media website, <https://socialmedia.umich.edu/>, you will see loads of information, including useful strategies and best practices.