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Reddit Is More Influential in Higher Ed Than You Think

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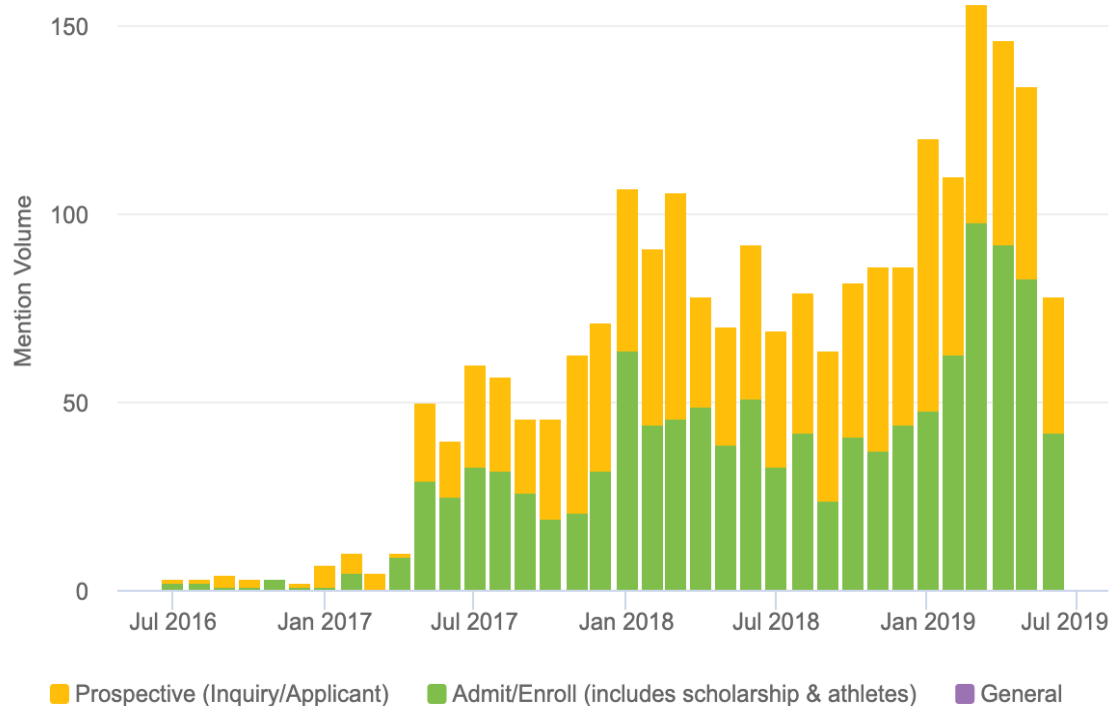
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Are you paying attention to Reddit yet? I've been beating the Reddit drum for most of 2019, ever since I discovered a post by an enrolled college student [asking strangers on the internet](#) [2] for advice regarding on-campus mental health resources.

Since that post, I've found prospective students [complaining about university websites](#) [3], asking questions about the [social atmosphere on campus](#) [4], soliciting opinions about [choosing between college options](#) [5] and [everything in between](#) [6].

Despite my best efforts, higher ed administrators are still generally surprised at the size and scope of Reddit. And to be clear, Reddit's numbers are impressive. There are currently more than [330 million monthly active users](#) [7] on Reddit, with more than 138,000 active communities and an average of 21 billion screen views per month. Those numbers make Reddit the sixth-most-trafficked website in the United States, [according to Alexa](#) [8], ranking directly behind Facebook and ahead of popular and well-known sites like Wikipedia, Netflix, Twitter and ESPN.

If you're new to the world of Reddit, here's a crash course: Reddit is an open community and discussion forum. Users can ask, answer and debate a wide variety of topics through focused communities called subreddits. Posts on Reddit aren't subjected to algorithms like many social platforms; rather, comments and posts are curated by peer users through the use of up or down votes. The more a community up votes a post or comment, the more visible it becomes to other users.



This type of open, anonymous, egalitarian community means Reddit's benefits and pitfalls are particularly steep. At its best, Reddit can be home to thoughtful and intelligent conversations, helping users solve complex problems or find emotional support. At its worst, it's a hotbed for inflammatory, distasteful and hurtful comments made by users empowered by the platform's foundation of anonymity.

Reddit may be intimidating to higher ed administrators, but it certainly isn't to prospective, accepted and enrolled college students, as well as young alumni.

In Campus Sonar's next research report, scheduled to release at year's end, we analyzed over 124,000 conversation mentions by prospective and admitted college students from 2016 to 2019 and saw a clear growth trend in conversation volume on forums generally, and Reddit specifically.

Because of the quantity and type of conversation taking place on Reddit, administrators from marketing, admissions and alumni relations can glean significant value simply by listening to the conversation. However, with so much

relevant conversation, it can be tempting to impulsively create an account and start posting.

Don't do that.

Reddit users are notoriously harsh on content that appears disingenuous. And they aren't shy about sharing those misgivings.

If you're ready to start engaging on Reddit, let's talk about the right way to do so. I like to call these tips my Reddit Rules of Engagement.

Tip No. 1: Be *you*, not a school or department.

Conversations about higher education admissions can be pretty personal. And if you try to inject yourself into a conversation masquerading as an institutional brand or even a department, you'll have a harder time generating meaningful conversations with prospects and admits than you would if they could associate a name and job title with your account. Reddit may be based on anonymity, but you'll build more trust in less time using a verified name.

↑ Posted by u/Davetyler **RIT Social Media Guy** 2 years ago 🇺🇸

99 ↓ **Please allow myself to introduce...myself**

Hi everyone, I'm Dave Tyler and I'm the new(ish) social media director at RIT. I'm responsible for social content creation for the top level university accounts and for working on social strategy for university offices and departments. I've been on the job for a little over 3 weeks now. The mods were kind enough to let me introduce myself and here I am...introducing myself. You all have quite the impressive subreddit here and I look forward to seeing where it goes. I promise not to be too much of a bother, but I'm happy to answer questions where I might be able to do so (remember: new guy is new. Still learning things). I know there have been a couple of AMA's done on here in the past and as I start to get my bearings I hope we can find some opportunities to do more things like that. Anyway, thanks for letting me hang out and Go Tigers!

🗨️ 13 Comments 🏆 Give Award ➦ Share 📌 Save 🙋 Hide 🚩 Report

93% Upvoted

Tip No. 2: Help, don't hype.

It may not be sexy, but one of the most valuable things you can bring to Reddit is clarity. Whether it's a question about deadlines, scholarships or admissions requirements, students have a lot of questions about the admissions process. For prospective students, in particular, fear is a common emotion. If you come across a post that signals stress or confusion, don't offer blind encouragement or try to sell your school. Rather, focus on solving problems and helping students move through the process. You'll be rewarded in the end.

One of the better examples of this comes from the University of Florida, where verified admissions officer [u/FloridaGuy83](#) [9] frequently answers prospective students' questions in a straightforward manner.

Posted by u/GoldenLinked **HS Grad** 7 months ago

45 **UF decisions come out at 6PM EST today!**

54 Comments Give Award Share Save Hide Report

This thread is archived
New comments cannot be posted and votes cannot be cast

SORT BY **BEST** Single comment thread. [View all comments](#) →

↑ **mmmkm** 6 points · 7 months ago
↓ Will it be on the normal site or will it be an email
Give Award Share Report Save

↑ **FloridaGuy83** **Verified Admissions Officer** 10 points · 7 months ago
↓ It'll be through your application status on the website.
Give Award Share Report Save

↑ **ajlearth** 3 points · 7 months ago
↓ Unrelated but does the music dept communicate with your office? I already got my scholarship letter for music!
Give Award Share Report Save

↑ **FloridaGuy83** **Verified Admissions Officer** 3 points · 7 months ago
↓ They do, depending on the situation. I know the College of the Arts sometimes sends out those scholarship notifications early, however I just want you to know that it is not equivalent to an admission offer. I believe the letter states somewhere that you can receive the scholarship *if* you are admitted.
Give Award Share Report Save

Tip No. 3: Invite conversation (but be ready to share).

Reddit posts are entirely public, but manually wading through looking for relevant conversations to engage with can be time intensive. Another option: bring the conversation to you.

One of the best ways to do this is through an AMA, or Ask Me Anything. It's a tactic that works exactly the way it sounds -- you introduce yourself on a particular subreddit, and users ask you questions about, well, anything.

A word of caution here. AMAs can go really well or terribly wrong, and it often depends on the subject's willingness to be transparent. Before you take on this tactic, take a moment to study previous AMAs, preferably within higher education. The good news is there are plenty of excellent examples of institutions using Reddit AMAs to engage prospective and admitted students [10], build brand

awareness within a strategic subject area [11], or drive website traffic and media inquiries around areas of research [12].

Another pro tip: “Prepare for the worst,” says Andrew Youngson, news and campaigns content manager at Imperial College London. “Consider the questions you would hate to have come up and plan how would you answer them.”

Youngson, who has helped several researchers on campus host Reddit AMAs around potentially emotional topics such as animal research, says preparing for difficult questions helps researchers and subject matter experts feel more at ease before the Q&A. “If a strange question comes up and gets tons of up votes, we need to address it because it’s going to stick at the top of the feed. It’s organic conversation, and the second you appear to be avoiding questions, the community will jump on it.”

Tip No. 4: Build a coalition of the willing.

When it comes to credible sources of information, “someone who looks like me” continues to be listed at or near the top of the list, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer [13], an annual report produced by Edelman PR.

What does this mean in relation to Reddit? Essentially, responses and opinions from fellow Redditors who are going through the same process or have done so recently are likely to carry significantly more weight than your post as an administrator.

That may seem like a problem, but you can use it to your advantage. Much like you would turn over control of your Instagram account to current students, identify student and alumni ambassadors with active Reddit accounts and put them to work. Not sure where to look? Talk with your campus tour guides or pay attention to the organic responses to existing Reddit posts about your institution, such as this thread that includes alumni from UNCSA [14].

With Reddit ambassadors, you’re not looking to control the message or deliver propaganda through a third-party account. Rather, send your students posts that warrant a response, and trust that they’ll answer questions honestly and effectively.

Tip No. 5: Work with the moderators.

Moderators, or mods, are almost entirely volunteers and hold their positions due to an affinity with a subject or Reddit as a platform. While they may be volunteers, moderators commonly hold significant power over the conversation within a subreddit, enforcing community standards and removing spam or unwarranted conversation.

Whether you're looking to contribute to the conversation in a topic-based subreddit, host an AMA or contribute to your own institution's subreddit, there are several advantages to introducing yourself to a mod before you contribute to a channel.

If you've identified a subreddit dedicated to your institution, there's a good chance that the moderators of that subreddit are alumni or current students. Introducing yourself to them can boost affinity and increase the likelihood that the community will welcome your posts and ideas.

If you've identified an admissions-based subreddit, like the popular subreddit [r/ApplyingToCollege](#) ^[15], moderators can help with labels, called Flair, that are attached to your account, such as Verified Admissions Officer, which lends added credibility to your answers and contributions.

Finally, if you're planning to host an AMA, collaborating with moderators can ensure your event doesn't conflict with another AMA or get marked as potential spam.

Reddit has long been a popular platform, but its emergence as a significant channel for higher education conversation is a more recent trend. And while the idea of joining an anonymous internet forum is likely to stir up feelings of timidity among higher ed administrators, remember that fortune favors the bold -- and more importantly, the authentic.

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