

Strategies to Adapt Your MBA Student Recruitment

in a post COVID-19 world



Introduction



SCOTT MILLER

VP Sales

Keystone Academic Solutions



FABIEN MIARD

VP Customer Success

Keystone Academic Solutions



Session Overview

TODAY'S DISCUSSION

- IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RECRUITMENT
- STUDENT POLL: EFFECT OF COVID-19
- MAKING YOUR MBA STAND OUT
- GETTING TO KNOW GENERATION Z
- MARKETING AUTOMATION FOR HIGHER ED

The Impact of COVID-19

MBA STUDENT RECRUITMENT



96% of college presidents are concerned about fall enrollment (USA)

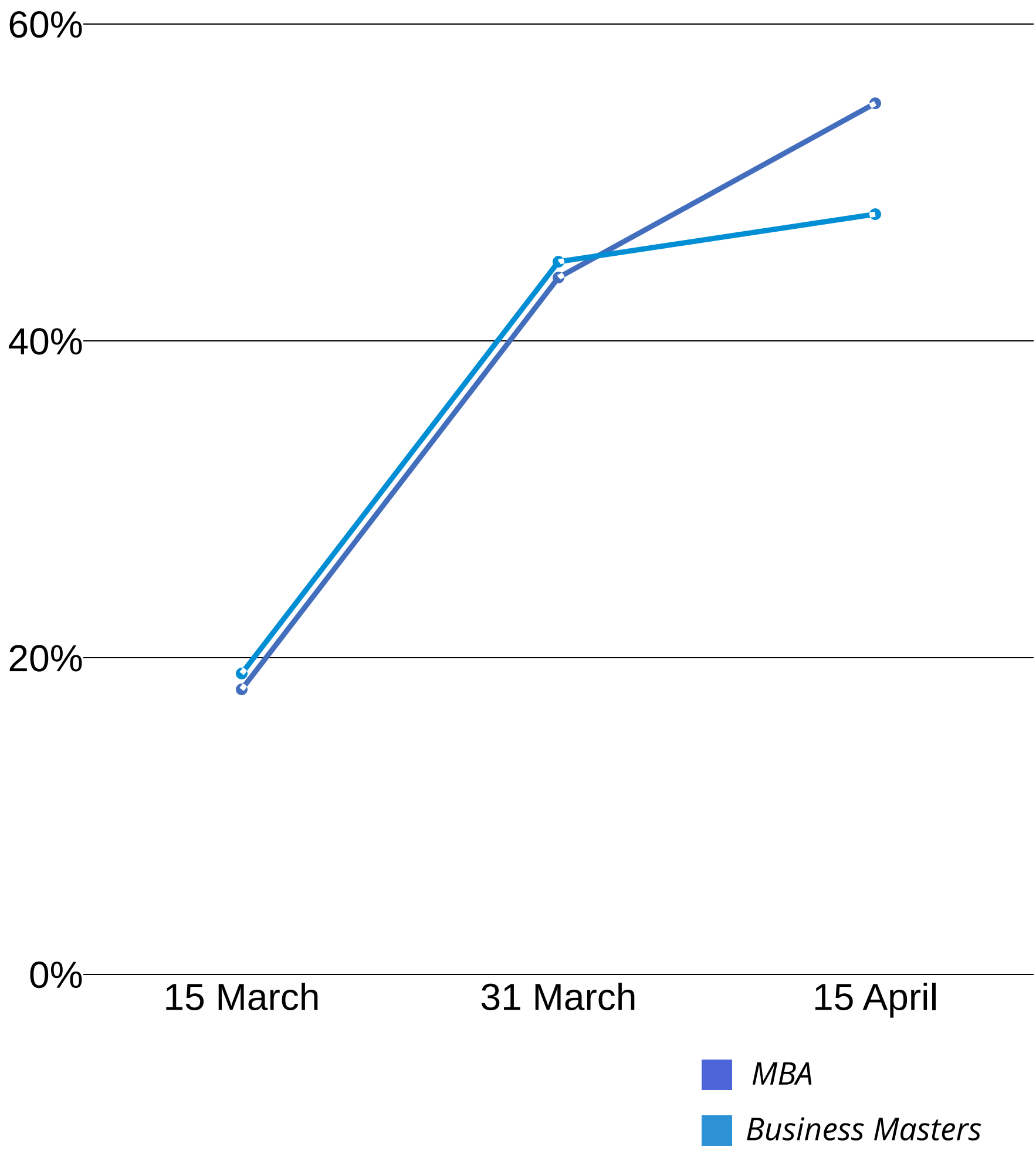
Source: Pulse Point Survey of College & University Presidents on COVID-19, American Council on Education, 2020.

Demands for tuition refunds from MBA students at Harvard, Yale, Stanford & more

Source: FinancialTimes

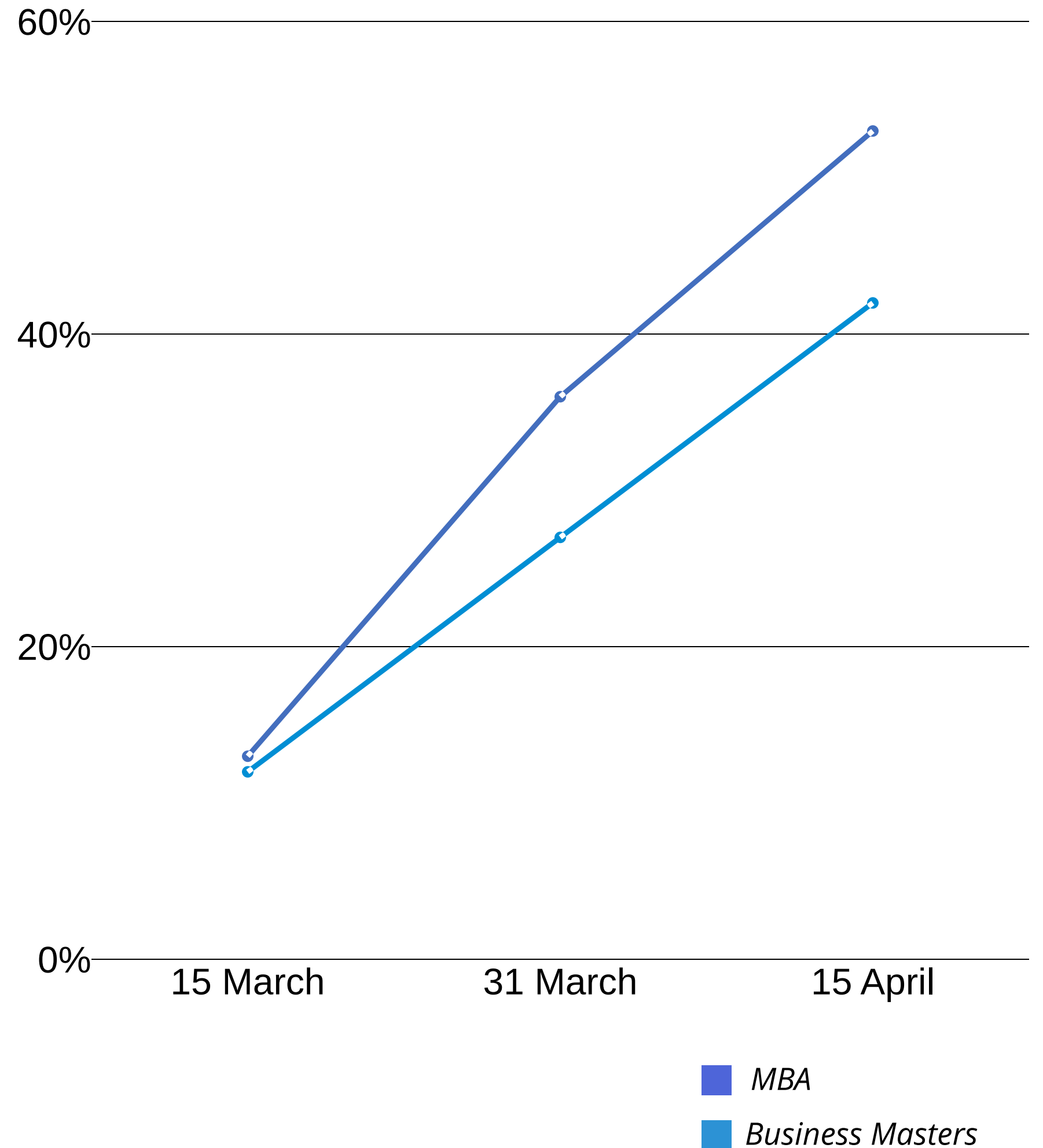
Students are considering delaying their studies in 2020

Source: GMAC "MBA.com Prospective Students Survey", April 2020.



Job market concern amongst prospective students

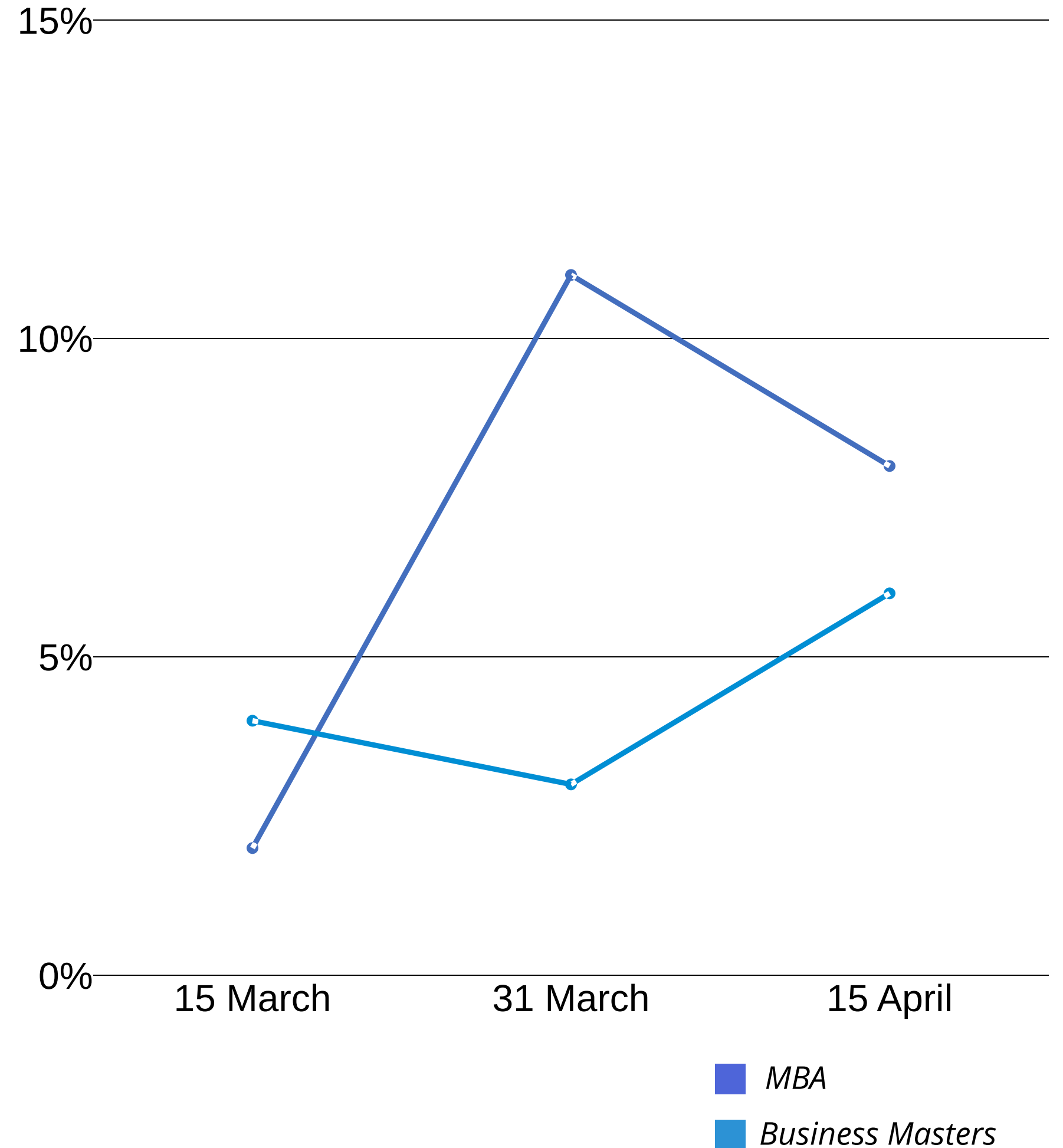
Source: GMAC "MBA.com Prospective Students Survey", April 2020.



Prospective students MBA aspirations remain intact

Source: GMAC "MBA.com Prospective Students Survey", April 2020.

"Students no longer consider graduate business education after COVID-19"



MBAStudies.com Student Poll

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19





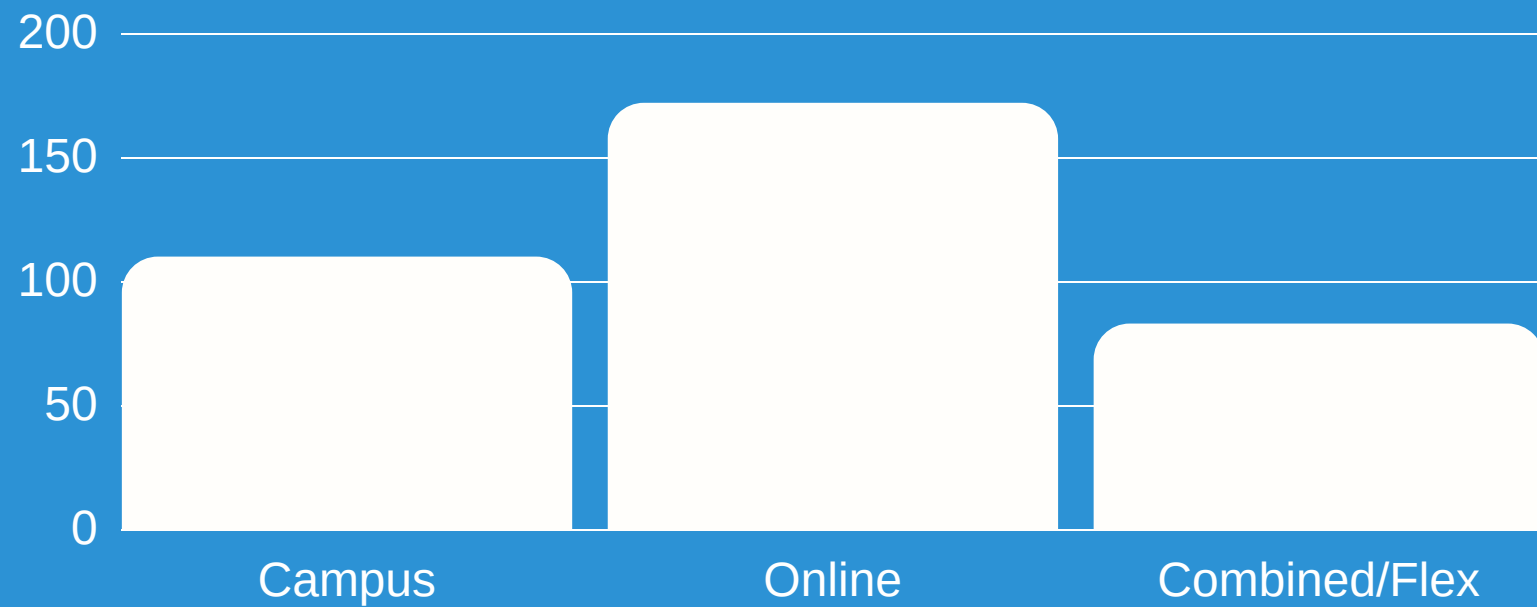
Yes
40%

No
60%

**40% ARE CONSIDERING DELAYING
MBA DUE TO COVID-19**



450 RESPONDENTS FROM 90 COUNTRIES



**HOW WOULD YOU PREFER TO
COMPLETE YOUR MBA?**



25-39 years

Age reported by 55% of
respondents

Top factors when considering MBA

Of All Prospective MBA Students Surveyed

#1 PERCEIVED QUALITY OF EDUCATION (31%)

#2 EARNING POTENTIAL/CAREER PROSPECTS (19%)

#3 PRICE OF MBA (18%)

#4 REPUTATION OF BUSINESS SCHOOL (15%)

#5 FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPTIONS (14%)

#6 LOCATION (3%)

SOURCE: MBASTUDIES.COM PROSPECTIVE STUDENT POLL



STUDENT POLL RESULT

23%

*OF STUDENTS STATED THAT
THEY STARTED CONSIDERING
AN MBA AFTER COVID-19*



STUDENT POLL RESULT

47%

CITED PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AS A KEY MOTIVATOR FOR THE PURSUIT OF AN MBA.



Motivation for MBA Since COVID-19

Students Who Were Not Considering an MBA Prior to COVID-19

#1 PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES (47%)

#2 TO DIFFERENTIATE SELF IN JOB MARKET (33%)

#3 LACK OF SECURITY IN JOB MARKET (14%)

#4 RECENT UNEMPLOYMENT (6%)

SOURCE: MBASTUDIES.COM PROSPECTIVE STUDENT POLL



Short-term initiatives



RECRUITMENT

- **Give extra attention to international students:** *prepare an additional layer of communications to keep up to date during the pandemic*
- **Offer flexibility to students:** *We recommend having options in place for students that will not get their visas on time (online studies, options to defer semester for international students...)*
- **Increase training for academic staff:** *Switching from classroom teaching to online delivery can be tricky, especially when full-time. By providing training opportunities, you can help to reduce the learning curve for your educators, allowing them to focus on teaching.*
- **Evaluate & improve infrastructure for digital learning:** *many digital solutions being used prior to COVID may not have the bandwidth for full-time online use, so now is the time to consider if your solutions are viable solution on a long-term basis.*

Short-term initiatives



IN THE CLASSROOM

- **Create virtual learning "experiences"** - *put the extra effort into creating opportunities for interaction & engagement from the class (e.g Kahoot! for live quizzes)*
- **Create online events for students**, especially in the beginning of semester. *Ensure mandatory attendance for key events to boost networking among new students. Start building bridges now!*
- **Bring the outside world in** - *invite prominent alumni and guest speakers to give talks and share business cases online.*
- **Include real-life business examples from the pandemic into curriculum** - *are there current examples which can be integrated into lectures/coursework*

Short-term initiatives



INITIATIVES

- *Nurture current applications*
- *Host webinars about upcoming intake*
- *Facilitate deferment to next semester/intake*
- *Setup help desk for visa related questions*
- *Assist students with visa procedure*

Making Your MBA Stand Out

STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS



Communicating with Millennials



SOURCE: HUBSPOT, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (2019)

- **Who Are They?:** Millennials were born approximately between 1981-1996, currently 24-39 years age. A large proportion of MBA students are Millennials currently.
- **Common Marketing Behaviours:** Millennials are known to respond to many promotional strategies including traditional advertising, digital and social media marketing.
- **Communications Preferences:** We polled prospective MBA students on our website, MBAstudies.com showing the diversity of age groups interested in MBA education to obtain insights on their current communication preferences.

PROSPECTIVE MBA STUDENTS

55%

AGED 25-39 YEARS

FOLLOWED BY:

- *40-60 YEARS (30%)*
- *18-24 YEARS (14%)*
- *60+ YEARS (1%)*



An illustration of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a white top and light green trousers, walking barefoot. She is pointing her right hand towards the right. The background is a solid blue color with some faint green plant-like shapes at the bottom left.

STUDENT POLL RESULT

60%

*PREFER EMAIL
COMMUNICATION WHEN BEING
CONTACTED BY A UNIVERSITY*

Preferred Communication Channels



#2

Messaging Applications (13%)
*including Facebook Messenger,
WhatsApp, SMS/Text*

#3

Social media channels (12%)

#4

Face to face meetings (8%)

#5

Telephone calls (7%)

An illustration of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a white top and light green trousers, walking barefoot. She is pointing her right hand towards the right. In the bottom left corner, there is a green planter with a spiky green plant. The background is a solid blue color.

STUDENT POLL RESULT

37%

*EXPECT TO HEAR BACK WITHIN
24 HOURS WHEN REQUESTING
INFORMATION FROM A
UNIVERSITY*

Meet Generation Z



GENERATION Z EXPLAINED

- *Born after the mid 90s, following millennials*
- *Currently between 5-25 years old*
- *Digital natives, born into a tech world*
- *The latter part of this group are beginning to enter the post-graduate business & MBA market*

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT "GEN Z"

- *Significantly different from other generations*
- *Average attention span 8 seconds, compared to 12 seconds for millennials*
- *Focused on "instant gratification", especially with communication from businesses.*
- *They prefer concise, bite-sized communication*
- *Social media and messaging are their preferred methods of communication*
- *Authenticity and "realness" are important to them*
- *Influencer marketing is highly useful for marketers.*

SOURCES: MCKINSEY, KEYSTONE ACADEMIC SOLUTIONS, FORBES, REDBRICK RESEARCH, OBERLO.

Top 3 Social Media Preferences

Generation Z



#1 INSTAGRAM (29%)



#2 YOUTUBE (26%)



#3 FACEBOOK (22%)

Millennials



#1 LINKEDIN (33%)



#2 FACEBOOK (32%)



#3 INSTAGRAM (17%)

Making Your MBA Stand Out

MULTI-GENERATIONAL MARKETING

- **Stay in touch with potential students:** *Focus on nurturing your previously received applications, also targeting previously engaged students.*
- **Communicate what makes you stand out:**
 - *focus on your student community, your professors, or perhaps a unique study program you offer?*
- **Incorporate video:** *Send short video messages from your admissions team or on campus.*
- **Be active on social media:** *Encourage your current students to share their experiences on social media – study experiences from home, virtual classes*
- **Online classes:** *If available, give prospective students the chance to join an online class.*
- **Foster the virtual student experience with online events:** *Create and promote experiences for students with online events. For example, create a virtual open day with a program of events, featuring information sessions.*
- **Experiment with new social media: consider new channels,** *have you tried TikTok yet? How regularly do you update your YouTube channel?*

Communication Plan



WHAT TO COMMUNICATE

- *Sell the experience of the MBA, not the MBA itself*
- *Create value-based stories to help inspire students*
- *Use prominent or interesting alumni in marketing campaigns to tell your story*

WHERE TO COMMUNICATE

- *Your website (the "window" into your university)*
- *Setup story hubs, landing pages specific to campaigns*
- *Social media (LinkedIn is useful)*
- *Host webinars on relevant topics*
- *Segmented direct email marketing*
- *Host events for prospective students "student for a day"*

HOW TO COMMUNICATE

- *Always answer prospective students in a timely manner*
- *Use Video content as much as you can*
- *Virtual campus tours when physical is not available*
- *Offer multilingual communication if resources are available*
- *Automate some of your communication to improve responsiveness*

AUTOMATED COMMUNICATION

- *Automation does not have to be tricky or difficult to use, even for small teams.*
- *Can save hours of admin work every week*
- *Ensures responsiveness without exhausting resources*

Simple Ways to Automate



AUTOMATIC EMAIL RESPONSES

- *Ensure information for students is provided within a reasonable time period, no matter the time zone of the student*
- *Meet the demands of younger demographics ("instant gratification")*

EMAIL NURTURING

- *Find commonalities in your audience and create email flows that can be used for each type.*
- *Drip campaigns can be easily automated at different points in time to ensure that students receive on-going communications, especially if your team may not have the resources to do so manually.*

PERSONALIZATION

- *Personalization tags are a simple marketing automation feature that can help promote student engagement*
- *Most commonly used for personal information such as names*
- *Compare the potential response when receiving an email that says "Dear Tom" vs "Hello"*
- *Our SmartHub PRO software includes automatic communication that is personalized using these type of tags.*

LEAD SCORING

- *Automation can also help you to quickly contact the most "engaged" student leads*
- *SmartHub Pro users can use our software to customize their own lead scoring system, based on factors such as experience, residence country, nationality and age.*

Summary

- Uncertainty is fading and MBA interest is stabilizing
- COVID-19 created a new target audience
- Increased demand for online delivery
- Shift in preferred communication channels
- Need to adapt marketing to both Millennials and Gen Z
- Automation key to adapt to Gen Z

Q&A

Open Conversation



Question

Younger generations are known to want more authentic content and communication. Can paid promotion count as authentic?

Answer

- A mixture of organic and paid promotion/communication is best.
- Both are useful for making an impact with your target audience
- Paid promotion goes beyond known network and is effective for reaching new target groups
- Use your current student network/alumni to communicate more effectively
- Consider your alumni network as potential influencers for marketing efforts.

Question

How can universities or schools bring more authenticity to automated emails in large mailing lists?

Answer

- Use automatic personalization to add authenticity your “mass” messages (*a common feature of many email and marketing automation systems*)
- Segment your mailing list and adapt your content accordingly
- Mailings lists and automated emails are frequently necessary for larger institutions.
- Break down the communication into smaller pieces or “snippets
- Younger generations prefer short, direct answers so adapt your communication accordingly.

Question

Do you have any advice on current and incoming students asking for fees back/reduced due to Covid-19?

Answer

- If you cannot offer this , consider using flexibility as an alternative offer.
- Consider delaying start dates and offering deferment options to help students.
- For students continuing study but concerned about making tuition payments, consider relaxing payment due dates and providing payment plans. Coordinate on what can be realistically offered with your Finance office.



Question

Do you have any intelligence on the challenges of recruiting from specific countries/groups due to travel restrictions and Covid-19?

Answer

- Many universities are planning to open in 2021 or even by this September.
- Most institutions are offering online solutions as an interim measure to help students physically restricted from returning to class.



Question

How can faculties with mostly older generation employees keep up with marketing-trends in social media such as TikTok and Insta?

Answer

- Mobilize your student community, get them involved in your social media by providing organic, curated content.
- Host student competitions to generate content
- “Takeovers” on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are increasingly popular (student takes over account for a period of time, answering questions and sharing their experiences)



Question

Do you have any information or data that shows if students are calling for more scholarships in the aftermath of Covid-19?

Answer

- We do not have any data yet, but it would be very interesting to investigate
- Participants wanting answers to this question can contact us later when we have collected more data on this topic at:
contact@keystoneacademic.com



Question

Due to Covid-19, Higher Ed institutions may see more older applicants that aren't on the usual platforms. How do we reach these?

Answer

- LinkedIn is a great tool to reach students, especially for MBA education.
- Use traditional business publications/news outlets for older audiences (online news outlets also)
- Use your alumni network to promote your MBA programs
- Test different messaging strategy on the different channels you find.



Question

Do you have examples of business schools who have done well on social media, for example a case study, or other general advice?

Answer

- Use more video: some of our partners are now using personalized video to communicate messages to prospective students.
- Focus on the student experience: incorporate lots of visuals and highlight exciting things about your business school on social media.
- Promote with the aid of your students & alumni: as mentioned in the earlier questions, students and alumni are a vital resource for promoting your business school.

Question

We know that there is an age-gap in social media, but are there regional differences too? What do we need to be aware of when marketing?

Answer

- Consider using external help to establish a social media presence in varying regional markets
- Some countries like China and Russia have their own channels (think Yandex for search, WeChat for social communication)
- Do research and find out where your potential students are and determine if new channels should be used.
- Many companies offer services to help universities establish their presence in difficult to reach foreign markets (Sinorbis in Australia is helping universities to create localized websites in the Chinese market)

Question

Do you think that Covid-19 will have any long-term impacts on business schools, and MBAs in particular?

Answer

- Some long-term impacts, but not necessarily negative
- More business schools will continue or expand their offerings of online programs
- Tech will have a more significant role in learning
- Our MBA student poll shows that 23% of students were not interested in MBA education prior to COVID-19 so interest is growing right now!
- Also, it is a common trend for pursuit of education to rise during periods of economic uncertainty as jobseekers work to protect themselves from the downturn with an academic qualification such as an MBA.

Question

What generation are most interested in webinars schools have to offer, and how do we reach these?

Answer

- The pandemic has demonstrated the popularity of webinars for all ages.
- Research shows creating a unique virtual experience or offering insightful information is crucial to engagement
- Look towards what parts of the “student-experience” may be missing in your webinar, and try to incorporate those (quiz, questions, graphs, video etc).
- We regularly publish articles with tips and advice on these topics (for example [Creating a Virtual Student Experience](#)), visit keystoneacademic.com/news for more

Question

Should schools focus more on promoting the institution itself rather than specific programs?

Answer

- Depends on the institution and the brand itself
- Many international students are unfamiliar with the schools available but knows what programs they want or perhaps the region.
- Many students are likely to start initially searching for a program and location, rather than a school. (With exceptions, of course)



Question

How can business schools uphold the networking part of an online environment?

Answer

- Host an online networking event on Zoom
- Continue with peer or buddy systems online (using Zoom, Microsoft Teams and email)
- Create or nurture your online community with peer to peer interactions and sharing of experiences.
- Focus on interactivity during your online events, Use quizzes like Kahoot
- Most institutions will continue on-campus after the pandemic is over
- The MBA is still widely considered by many as a program that should be taught in a physical classroom



Question

Do you have any advice regarding online learning, and how to communicate this to students?

Answer

- Many have switched from physical to online teaching, but a truly online program is significantly different and built from the ground up for online. Creators must look here when developing their new programs.
- Partner up with companies who know how online-solutions work (for example OPMs, online program management)
- We will be hosting webinars on online programs & OPMS in the coming months. Email us at marketing@keystoneacademic.com to register your interest!

Question

What is the biggest shift in communication between institutions and students over the last 3 years?

Answer

- Digitalisation and social media have exploded!
- Automation of marketing & communication has become commonplace
- Students expect “Quick replies” rather than “authentic replies-” as use of chatbots and other automated communication becomes the norm
- We have experienced an increase in student engagement with our partner schools since the launch of our automated and personalized student communication tool “Engage”. Students are interested in quick and short answers to their specific requests
- Shift from responsiveness to “real-time” communication

Useful Resources



VIRTUAL STUDENT FAIRS

- **Univer** (<https://vfair.univerin.com/>)
- **College Week Live** (Collegeweeklive.com)
- **FPPU EduMedia** (<https://www.fppedu.media/virtual-fairs>)
- **The Student World** (<https://virtual.thestudentworld.com/>)
- **Unibuddy** (Unibuddy.com)
- **Host your own webinar**
 - *Some of our customers are hosting their own webinar or virtual information sessions. Using Social Media and direct email marketing to promote these events.*

CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

- **Kahoot:** *interactive online quizzes* (www.kahoot.com)

Thank you for attending!

KEYSTONE ACADEMIC SOLUTIONS



Want to take your student recruitment to the next level?

Ways to reach Keystone



Email

marketing@keystoneacademic.com



Website

www.keystoneacademic.com



Social Media

[@keystoneas](#)

