



Teesside
University

Inspiring Success

This paper tells the story of how MediaCom helped Teesside University to increase their student admissions in the face of double digit declines across their competitive set. This undergraduate recruitment campaign was driven by tangible insights into target consumers which helped us create a strategic platform on which to base an integrated multi-media campaign.

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A simple objective in a challenging context

MediaCom won Teesside University as a new client mid-way through one of the toughest recruitment years UK Universities have ever faced. As we planned this campaign, there was much debate as to the potential impact of rising tuition fees on numbers participating in higher education. Back in 2011, Mintel reported that 49% of potential students said that the cost of tuition fees meant they wouldn't be able to go to university.

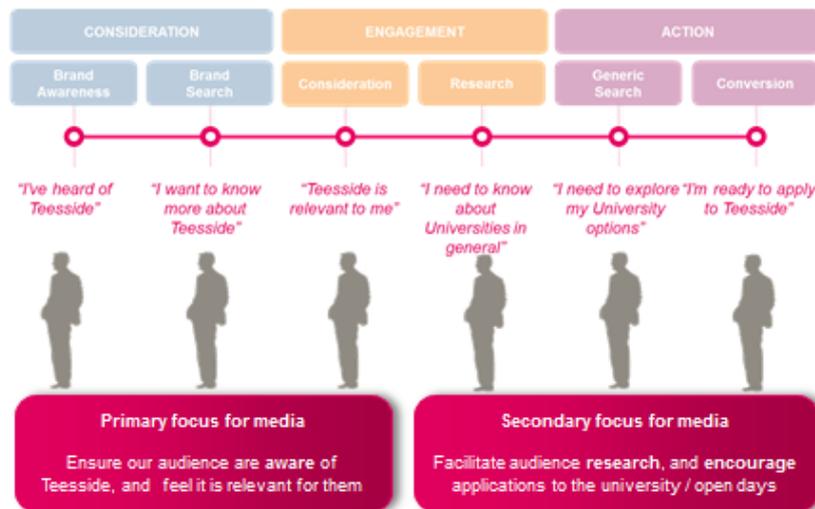
Teesside is a Post '92 University in a highly competitive sector, but this sector was expecting a reduction in student numbers. Teesside is also a regional institution in the North East of England, with a reputation for widening participation and has a significant proportion of applicants being the first generation of their family to attend a University. As a result, the university was expected to fare worse than the national average in terms of declining student numbers.

Our task was simple but ambitious: to create an Undergraduate recruitment campaign that would allow the university to buck the national trend in declining student numbers and increase their number of accepted places year on year. We would have no significant increase in budget and our competitors had bigger reputations and deeper pockets. We needed to deliver impressive added value if we were to punch above our weight and deliver growth in student admissions when all around us other Universities were in decline.

Identifying the levers of growth

Our first task was to review the wealth of information that Teesside already had available to help us understand what motivated our audience in choosing their University, from in depth e-mail surveys with last year's student intake to anecdotal feedback from staff at Open Days. This helped us determine the consumer journey and identify where media could make the most effective interventions.

There are a number of steps involved in the decision making process



During the course of this investigation we identified not one, but two crucial target audiences that we needed to convince of Teesside's credentials. With the changes to fee structures, attending University is now, more than ever, a huge financial commitment and one which required very careful consideration from both students and their parents. We needed to find a way to make Teesside stand out from the tough regional competition in a way that convinced both groups that it was a good option for their future career prospects if we were to ensure that we generated not just strong application rates, but an increase in the number of prospective students who would actually go on to accept their place at Teesside.

We needed to identify the specific drivers that would 'inspire success' for each audience so we turned to the suite of insight tools that we had at our own fingertips. We trawled Mintel trend reports & forecasts on University numbers, analysis of the regional intake allocations from 2011/12, coverage of the both group's reactions to fee changes as well as media specific tools such as TGI and Comscore to allow us to quantify and understand our audiences more fully.

The 'Marketplace'

- > Lots of competitors in the university marketplace in the region.
- > All offer a range of courses to potential undergraduates.
- > All promote the studying experience/career future to 'sell' university to potential students.



How is the audience defined?

Undergraduates:

17-24 year olds

298,000 live in the North East

614,000 live in Yorkshire/Humber

(44,000 people in the North East and 100,000 in Yorkshire/Humber expect to go to university in the next year)



Parents and Influencers:

22,000 people in the North East and 41,000 in Yorkshire/Humber have a child who is going to university in the next year

There are small pockets of applications from Merseyside and Cumbria, however we have focused on the North East and Yorkshire/Humber, with tactical online targeting of Merseyside and Cumbria

Defining our communication priorities

To achieve our goal we needed to do much more than simply set out Teesside's credentials in traditional broadcast media. We needed to get our audiences' excited about attending Teesside, excited about the career and job prospects a degree from Teesside would create, the life skills and university experience that it would deliver; and in doing all that, ensure that it stood out from the wealth of other options they were considering. But the specific communication priorities we set were very different for the prospective students and their parents/influencers, tailored to each target audience to ensure that we selected not just appropriate channels, but created effective communications which would enable us to fulfil their different motivations and address their concerns in the most engaging way.

What Messages Do We Need to Give to Our Audiences to Overcome the Barriers?



We also knew, from both our own and Teesside's research, how critically important Open Days are in convincing students and their influencers of the merits of prospective universities. However, while the previous year's campaign had

generated record Open Day bookings, it delivered a lower conversion to attendance. We needed to improve this significantly if we were to generate the level and quality of applications we knew we needed to meet to hit our Student Number Control. Being based in post-industrial Middlesbrough was identified as a major barrier but one that melted away once you were actually on campus. Having completed an immersion day on-site we had first-hand knowledge of how seeing the University's wealth of first class facilities and experiencing the compact feel of the campus changed perceptions and was key to getting prospective students excited about Teesside. Encouraging students to attend open days was going to be critical in delivering our goals.

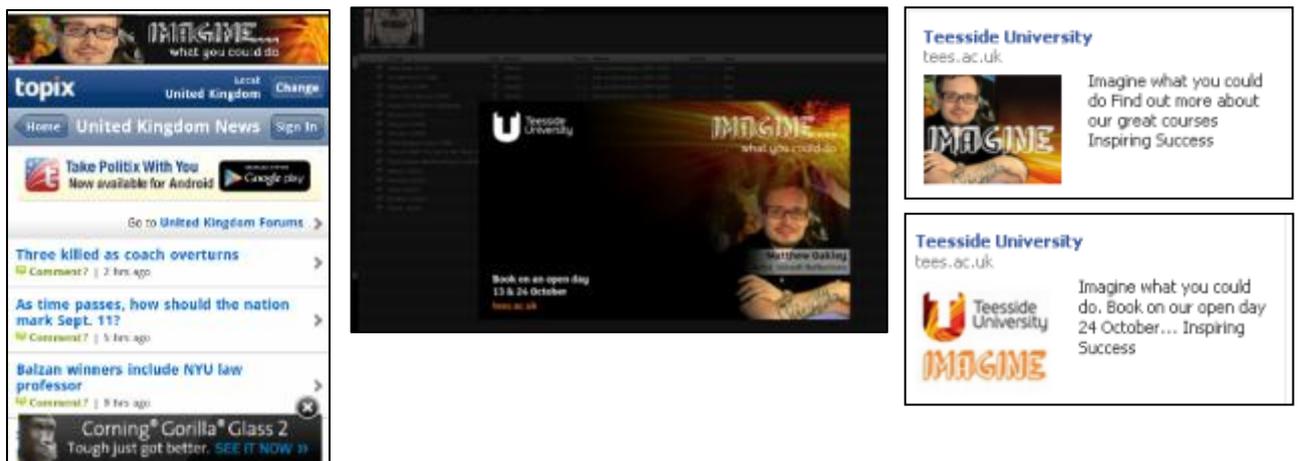


Choosing the right environments

These insights directly informed the criteria that we used to select our media recommendations for both groups; the key guidelines are summarised below showing how different the approach would be for our two audiences.



We needed to push innovation to Undergraduates and inspire them to find out more about Teesside. Online was the ideal environment to reach them in an innovative way. We knew that their key activities were gaming, listening to music, catching up with friends on Facebook & watching videos on Youtube so we used a mix of high impact online display formats targeted to 17-24 year olds in North East England, Yorkshire and Humberside to reach them in these environments. We used expandable banners on MSN messenger and directly targeted them within their favourite content on YouTube. Mobile allowed us to target them when they were using their ever present mobile phones via in-app advertising and we used dynamic lightboxes on Spotify alongside bespoke audio to maximise impact.



Cinema advertising gave the campaign increased visibility and put us directly in prospective students social life where they would discuss their university choice with friends. We advertised only in target appropriate films (such as Keith Lemon and the Bourne Legacy) via guaranteed admissions youth packs with DCM and Pearl & Dean. We also negotiated a specific strand guaranteeing us a presence in the final instalment of the Twilight Trilogy (THE film on our audience's hit list). Supplementing this with poster advertising within the cinema foyer added further impact as we knew our audience liked to gather there spending up to 18 minutes before a film chatting with their friends.

A mix of high impact outdoor formats were employed to target top feeder schools/colleges and city centre locations where they were spending time with their friends. From the 'Wall' at the Metro Centre in Newcastle to live video projections in key locations across key regional cities, reverse graffiti stencils, phone kiosks and floor media at key rail stations, all options were designed to ensure that this outdoor campaign couldn't be missed.



Whilst parents & other influencers would be exposed to some of this activity, we needed to find a way to address their concerns directly. So we negotiated a content partnership with Real Radio across Yorkshire & the North East which included programming and bespoke advertorial content produced by the station to discuss university choice, finance, getting the best out of university and career development. It included a range of on campus interviews by the Real Radio presenters, all of which were filmed & posted online in a bespoke content Hub and were used for advertorial content on-air. The station's street teams worked alongside specifically created co-promotions to drive people to the Open Days.



(<http://www.realradionortheast.co.uk/preview/46599>)

Finally, for both audiences, we needed to ensure that we had a continuous presence in search and across key education environments online to underpin the whole

research cycle. So we established a pay-per-click campaign that spanned brand, generic Undergraduate and course specific enquiries always pointing our audiences to the Teesside site. This campaign used a range of rich hybrid profiles, display and e-mail to ensure that we stood out from the competition within key education environments such as UCAS and Hotcourses.

The Results

Teesside outperformed the market by more than 10%, growing its number of accepted places year on year by 1.3%. Where overall admissions across the UK were down by 8% in total and by 10% for our peer group of Modern Universities, Teesside retained their share of University places nationally while Modern Universities' overall share of the market decreased by 3% year on year.

The quality of applicants was strong with 26% going on to accept a place (vs the regional average of 18%) and conversion rate from application to acceptance improving by over 15%.

We drove more than 40,000 clicks through to the Teesside site and by implementing comprehensive tracking we were able to optimise and adjust the user journey throughout the campaign. The online display element of the campaign achieved double the industry average click through rate at 0.42%; an achievement smashed by the mobile CTR of 1.12%.

More than 3,000 prospective students signed up for the Open Days and just over 2,000 attended. Weekend Open Day bookings were up 19% and attendances up 20% and the weekday sessions saw only a slight decline even in the face of schools losing travel subsidies.

We worked incredibly hard to ensure that all of the channels we had negotiated over-delivered against our plan – securing added value in excess of £58,000 for the University and ensuring that their budget delivered even more impact.

Last, but not least, the campaign looked fantastic generating great feedback from staff and prospective students alike and creating the stand-out and talkability we had sought.

'We were impressed with the innovative media solutions put forward for the last Undergraduate campaign and feel that as we are a university which inspires people by being as creative as we can be, this shines through in this campaign. Our campaign stacked up well against strong brands even outside of the education sector.'

Michelle Clarkson, Marketing Manager Teesside University.