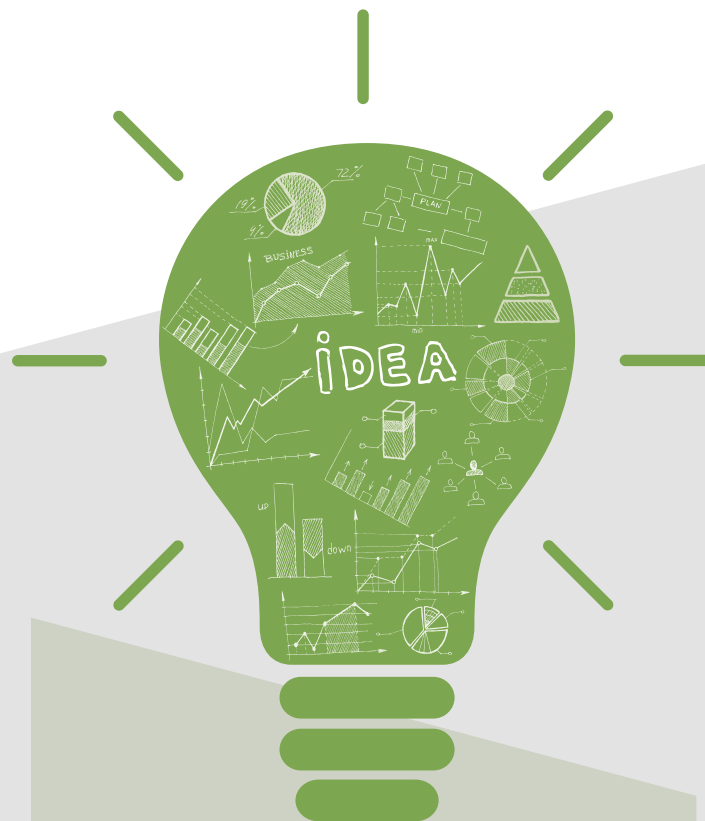**itelligence**

Fly Like an Eagle

How Institutions for Higher Education Can Reach New Heights in the Digital Age

➡ Future-proofing operating models with an omni-channel platform for higher education.

➡ Leveraging better insight to enhance marketing strategies and attract the brightest minds.

➡ Meeting the needs and expectations of empowered students in today's digital world.

About the Author

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Marc van den Berk is the Manager for Customer Engagement and Commerce for Western Europe at itelligence. After graduating with a degree in marketing, he held several different positions in marketing, commerce and sales, always at the cutting edge of end-user communication and interaction, commerce and IT. In 2008, he joined itelligence BV in the Netherlands, where he was involved in several higher-education projects, developing student portals and online strategies. Marc is one of the pioneers in multi-channel strategy at itelligence and is an evangelist on this topic. He leads several workshops on higher education and has inspired institutions to re-think their student-engagement strategies.

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Management Summary

Today, just like any business, institutes for higher education have to brand and market themselves in order to attract customers: students. In an increasingly competitive industry, with the number and variety of higher education providers rising fast, how can a university stay at the top of the rankings, attract and retain the brightest minds, and future-proof their operating model?

As the higher education sector changes and diversifies in today's digital age, universities can take a page out of the customer relationship management book of customer-focused companies. Students are demanding better service, more flexibility and more connectivity – around the clock. In order to deliver, universities need a digital platform that provides them with maximum analytical insight into the preferences and interests of their student clientele. Better insight leads to improved marketing strategies, reliably converting these preferences and interests into enrollment and subscriptions.

This white paper takes a close look at a cutting-edge strategy used by leading brands that will seamlessly help post-secondary institutions improve recruitment, engagement and sales, as well as internal agility and processes. An omni-channel platform for higher education puts post-secondary institutions in line with the needs and demands of their students – the majority of whom are digital natives – and helps them soar into the digital age.

1. Three Major Challenges for the Higher Education Market

As institutions deeply rooted in their communities, universities will always remain important for science, research, knowledge transfer, and more. They foster skills and innovation, drawing visitors, businesses and investment to their cities and regions. But as post-secondary institutions become more intertwined with the pressures of the business world and the new digital reality that comes with it, they will face unique sets of challenges.

Many universities and higher education providers have implemented software and IT solutions without an overarching strategy, mostly on an ad-hoc basis, leaving them siloed. These schools have yet to embark on a full digital transformation.

The students of today have also changed – the demographic is broader, more inter-national, and more empowered. They want a school that knows their name, not just their student number. And they want an experience that will prepare them for the future – a future that is tightly interwoven with digitization.

The following sections outline three of the many major challenges facing universities today:

- Growing global and digital competition
- More empowered students
- A lifelong student journey

Growing Global and Digital Competition

Digitization is the driving force behind today's fundamental shift in post-secondary education. It has enabled new models of learning, most notably distance learning, sparking competition on a global scale. It is no longer a given that students will study in their home country. And in light of the rise of global university rankings, institutions that have not yet digitally transformed will be left behind. They not only have to compete against other domestic universities with similar structures and processes, they now have to contend with institutions all around the world.

Technology Is Necessary to Keep Up with Globalization

Competition is emerging in all sorts of online forms. New learning models such as e-learning and distance education enable institutions to expand their reach across their respective countries' borders. Tech-savvy competitors, such as open universities or individual massive open online courses (MOOCs), are leveraging these technologies. They offer students flexibility and savings. In response, brick-and-mortar institutions need to both differentiate their value and offer equal convenience. In order to do this, they require strong global marketing, recruitment and engagement strategies with 24/7 online availability on all relevant channels.

New learning models enable institutions to expand their reach globally

So while the big, established universities are able to have a physical presence overseas, the smaller ones need to really stand out if they are to attract top talent worldwide – starting with the right technology and a high level of personalization.

> **Digital transformation enables schools to offer personalized services to each and every student.**

More Empowered Students

Today's students are digital natives, and they expect their education providers to be able to keep up with them. They go to university to expand their knowledge, after all – what kind of an image does it project if the students are more technologically savvy than the institute they are paying to learn from?

Their expectations for service, flexibility, and interactivity continue to rise. And as universities shift into the commercial realm, student satisfaction becomes as critical as customer satisfaction is to a business. So what does student satisfaction actually entail?

It Starts with Digital Technology

Universities often operate traditionally, i.e. many of their processes are not integrated and some tasks are still carried out manually. Between large campuses and their many departments, student records end up scattered in multiple databases with different access permissions. A student may have one file filed under his physical address and a different one under his email.

For example, when he emails the school with a query, this conversation history will be logged elsewhere from his phone call with a related question later on. Unintegrated student data renders processes like recruitment, segmentation, and selection very complex.

Schools Need to Be Where Their Students Are: Always Online

The current generation of students is accustomed to receiving information on demand, 24/7. This includes interacting with the university and their professors on the channels of their choice. They also expect a convenient way to select their courses, and want comprehensive overviews of any information they need available online, with real-time updates.

> **Satisfied students and alumni act as brand ambassadors for their universities – long after they've left and started their professional careers.**

The universities that meet this demand are ultimately the ones that will see a boost in enrollment in the years to come. And if the school can effectively use technology to improve the student experience, satisfied students and alumni will automatically act as brand ambassadors for the university. Alumni that return as guest speakers are a key incentive for many potential students who are looking for both the best possible education and excellent traineeship or career opportunities in local and international organizations.

Today's empowered young adults simultaneously use a wide array of online and social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter , blogs and email to share their thoughts, opinions and experiences. If a university wants to address its students and their peer groups on a personal level, it requires a presence on those channels as well. Shares, likes and page views are an integral part of marketing these days in any industry.

A Lifelong Student Journey Becomes Reality

Another growing trend is lifelong learning. The standard four-year bachelor degree is undergoing a time-frame transformation. While many young adults still follow the traditional educational path – graduate high school at 18, go to university for four years, and be out in the workforce by 22 – a growing number are eschewing this expectation. Semesters abroad, work experience, internships, time off, a change of major, etc. are all factors that contribute to prolonged studies. A career change may be in order. Or they simply want to learn something new once they're in retirement.

Figure 1: Each student takes their own journey, with many potential touchpoints

Yet another growing trend is for businesses to enroll their employees in individual college courses to continue their training. Graduate degrees are also more and more in demand amongst employers, meaning students will often study for 6-8 years in total, not necessarily all in one go. This market of older students is growing, and becoming particularly lucrative for universities – their target demographic is now not only 18–25, but 18–99.

For schools that are accustomed to typical 4-year journeys, managing and overseeing all these alternative courses of study can be extremely challenging and unorganized, and in the worst case, could lead to students not receiving proper credit for their courses.

Flexibility Is Crucial

If a student was once enrolled in a regular degree program and they have now returned for an individual course paid for by their employer, it's not always possible to simply re-open their old file to add a new module, as they now have a different status. This can cause incredible inconvenience and miscommunication, negatively impacting that student's journey.

A school that fails to offer students the flexibility to design their own studies could lose those students to schools that can. Universities must support students from enrollment through to graduation, any time off in between, and beyond.

2. How 'Eagles' Efficiently Tackle These Challenges

❚❚ Higher-education institutes can future-proof themselves by learning from brands like Nespresso, G-Star, Asics or Crocs. The 'eagles', or winners, are those who don't shy away from digitization.

Higher education is at a unique crossroads between the B2B and B2C worlds. While it's true that prospective students are potential customers, they definitely don't make their purchase (enrollment) decision as lightly as someone buying a pair of jeans. Extensive research, deliberation and campus visits contribute to their final decision – the student's future is at stake. So while a university's branding is important for that emotional, B2C-style connection to a student, the student will look beyond that.

When it comes to selecting courses, however, the process is again closer in nature to B2C. Degree requirements aside, students pick their classes based on professor reputation, the title and a quick overview of course content. All this information and more needs to be at their fingertips. Young adults, and increasingly all age groups, are used to the speed, convenience and personalization of online shopping. So why should course selection be any different?

Higher-education institutes can future-proof themselves by learning from B2C brands which have successfully increased customer engagement and retention with single-platform approaches.

Having all student data on one single platform can help universities streamline their processes and increase their speed and agility, in order to effectively react to changes and keep up with student demand. The 'eagles', or winners, are those who don't shy away from digitization, and instead seize the opportunities it provides. They stay active, innovative, and embrace new business and learning models.

Flexible Student Journeys

New, part-time models allow students to participate in shorter bursts. Each short-term course or training module results in either a certificate or credit, which are cumulative and transferable. It's often possible for these courses to be taken at multiple universities. These credits can eventually be redeemed for a diploma, the requirements for which are designed together with the student and academic advisors to suit the student's needs and goals.

> **❚❚** It's becoming more and more essential for institutes to engage with students and offer ease of use on every channel – from recruitment, to enrollment, to graduation, and beyond.

Enrollment by Shopping Cart?

As the student-university relationship becomes more and more like a retail relationship, the key is offering students what they want – the flexibility to easily "shop" for their own education. This holds especially true for individual courses bought for employees by companies. The University of Phoenix even lets students try courses before enrolling. The key is to provide this flexibility on a high-performance software platform where enrollment and attendance processes run seamlessly. Just like in the B2C world, a system has to be convenient and transparent, or else customers – or rather students in this case – will go elsewhere.

And as with B2C online shopping, shopping cart abandonment also occurs on these university online shops. Stronger communication strategies and targeted offers keep students engaged and encourage them to develop closer ties to their school's brand.

An Integrated Platform for Student Recruitment and Engagement

Universities need tools that allow them to monitor and support every student's individual path. A central platform should provide an overview of each student, so that the university can anticipate and meet each and every need. Processes like course selection should be transparent and obstacle-free. Instead of struggling to complete basic processes, they have a positive relationship with administration.

An e-commerce platform for higher education can make selecting courses as convenient as online shopping. Students are able to browse, compare, ask questions, receive recommendations, and enroll – seamlessly, at any time, from any device. By tracking interactions like those mentioned above and combining them with student-specific data, the university gains a comprehensive overview and a deep understanding of each individual student. They can use this to target them with personalized course recommendations and other content – and keep up with each student throughout their entire education life cycle.

In addition to retaining existing students, an effective, integrated software platform that unifies every student touchpoint helps attract new students – by showing a commitment to being at the cutting-edge of technology.

Company Spotlight

Case: Crocs

The casual footwear company Crocs was experiencing high rates of shopping cart abandonment on its online shop – i.e., a lot of lost potential. Today, a marketing conversion solution tracks each item a shopper views or puts in their cart. If the purchase is not completed, the system triggers personalized emails shortly thereafter, featuring customer-focused content and relevant offers. Crocs has seen the rate of customers returning to the site to complete a purchase rise dramatically.

Institutes of higher education can learn a lot from this scenario, and put a similar solution to work for their student engagement activities.

# 3. Universities Can Reinvent Themselves with Technology

Technology is the most important agent of change today. But in order to reap the greatest benefits from it, a total system overhaul is often required. In many higher education institutions, data, processes and channels are organized in silos – which lead to inefficiency and user frustration, and ultimately, user abandonment. Figure 2

illustrates a solution for extracting and integrating these siloed channels. It's time to change, and provide students, applicants and partners **with contextual, consistent and relevant experiences regardless of channel or device – throughout the entire student journey.**

For example, the Customer Engagement & Commerce (CEC) portfolio from SAP provides integrated functionality for sales, marketing, customer service and omni-channel e-commerce capabilities.

> ▮▮ Omni-channel platforms enable universities to market one-on-one to each student and prospect.
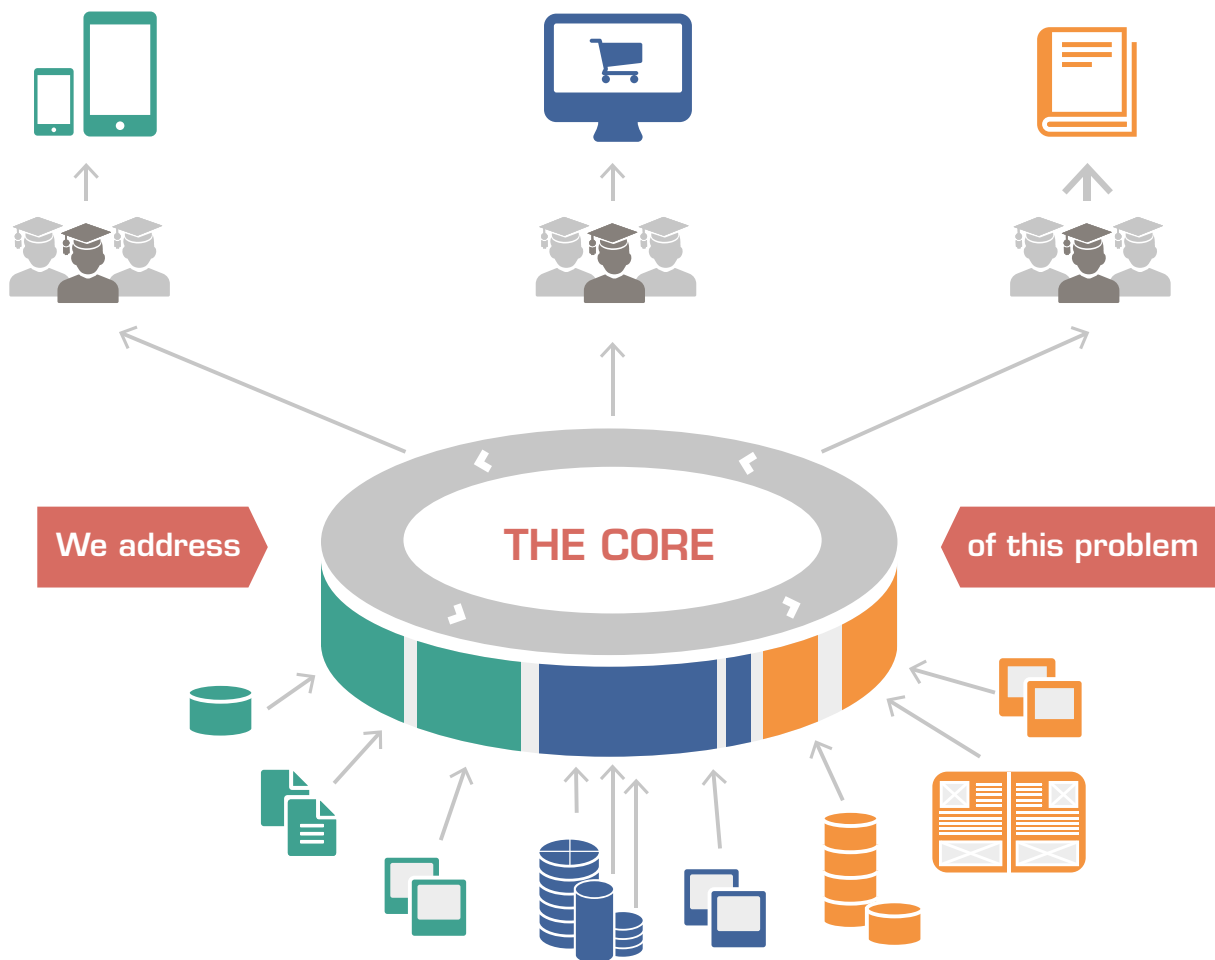
The portfolio offers a host of benefits based on real-time data analysis for every phase of the student journey, from the school selection process to alumni status, and everything in between (see Figure 3). But above all, it offers flexibility, as each functional module can be implemented separately. Universities can start small, and build a platform that perfectly fits their individual needs by adding additional modules at any time.
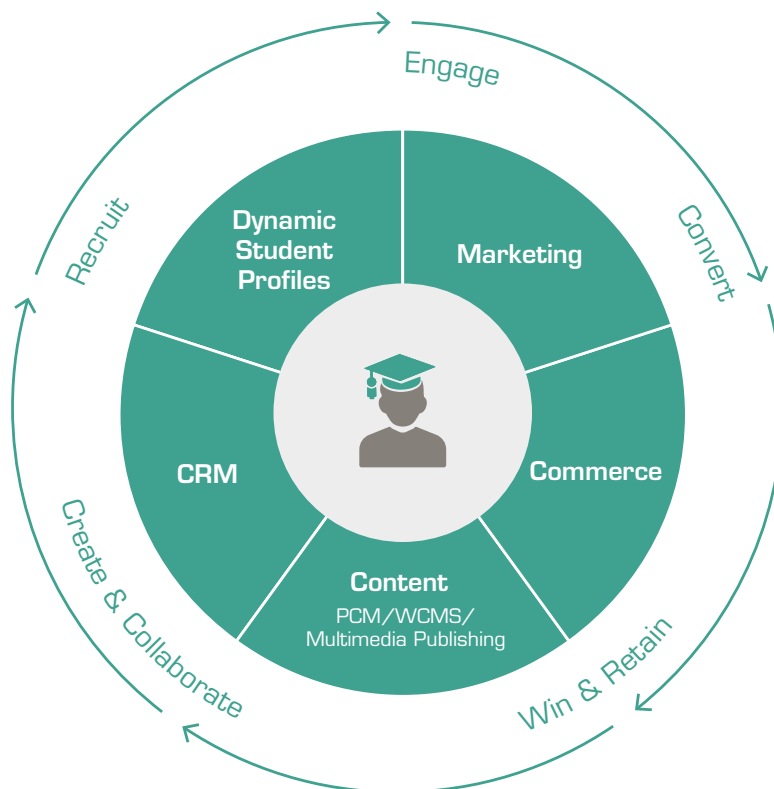
Figure 3: The Customer Engagement and Commerce portfolio covers all processes of the student lifecycle

Engagement and Commerce Portfolio						
Orientation	Recruitment	Admissions	Progress	Graduation	Alumni	Orientation

It can also be implemented on premises, in the cloud, or as a hybrid configuration, in order to best fit in with each institution's current IT landscape and leverage existing investments. An institution's existing web presence can be seamlessly integrated into SAP CEC, quickly empowering that institution to generate more demand and provide better information and services.

The SAP Customer Engagement and Commerce package contains five core elements, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: The five pillars of SAP's Customer Engagement & Commerce platform

CRM for Higher Education

The first pillar of the SAP Customer Engagement and Commerce package, SAP Cloud for Customer for Higher Education is a special extension designed to manage student relations and the recruitment process. It captures data on prospective students such as test scores, previous education history, social media profiles, which programs they're interested in and any relevant demographic data. And all of this data is fully searchable and filterable.

Marketing

SAP hybris Marketing is a robust platform for aggregating data from the ERP and CRM systems, social media and other channels. It uses the data in an intelligent way so universities can track and support campaigns in real time. It's able to analyze behavior on each channel based on that data, and segment students accordingly, as shown in Figure 5. This enables targeted recommendations and high conversion success rates.

Figure 5: Conversations tailored to each student's needs

(Prospective) student

What they may do

What they are doing now

What they have done

Real-time personalization

Presentation of relevant content

hybris Profile

This stand-alone pillar enables higher education institutions to build a dynamic profile of each student by capturing their activity on every single touchpoint. From first contact, the insight gained can be used to target offers in real time throughout the entire student-school relationship. Using analytics and learning algorithms, the system continuously enriches the profile, adding grades, complaints, queries, etc., even once the student becomes an alumnus. SAP hybris Profile is designed for maximum flexibility and massive scale, as shown in Figure 6.

Journey

Profile
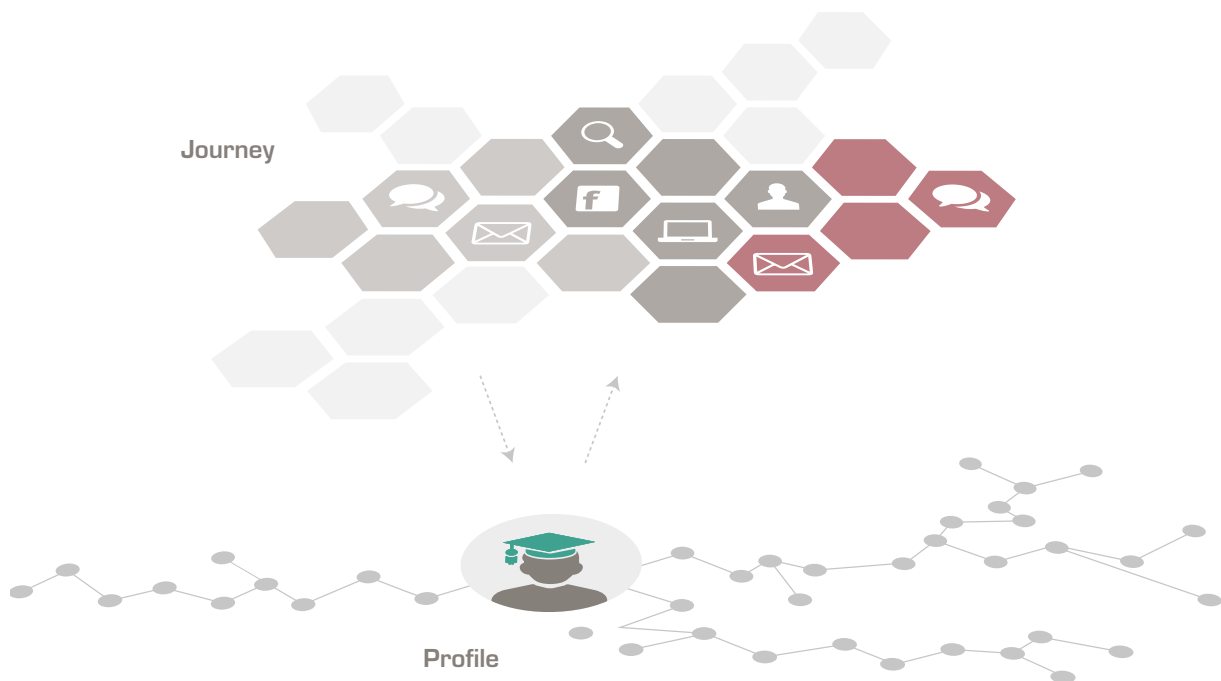
Commerce

A comprehensive online shopping platform, the SAP hybris Commerce Suite incorporates commerce best practices such as personalization, recommendations, comparison shopping and coupons, in a responsive and easy-to-use tool. It hosts multiple online shops in one application, including those for courses, textbooks and branded school merchandise like sweatshirts. Multiple payment methods are available, including internal student-card accounts. When it comes to course selection, students can browse, compare and enroll in courses from any device. The system can be individually configured and customized. Combined with the other elements of the CEC package, students get an overview of their entire education history.

Product Content Management (PCM)

hybris PCM is a central content management database that makes information available to students 24/7 on any device. Course modules, course catalogues, the curriculum, course material, merchandise, software, books, tickets, subscriptions, etc. are all accessible in a single portal. But even more important are the internal benefits for asset creation and collaboration. hybris PCM effectively supports the processes for building, managing and publishing valuable data like the above. Administration and the marketing department are able to provide students with a seamless omni-channel experience.

4. Embarking on a Digital Transformation

Higher education institutions have to react quickly and remain agile in order to keep up with student demand and the dynamic market. This includes delivering student experiences on every online, mobile or in-person channel. Unifying these channels on a high-performance omni-channel platform is one of the best ways for an institution to move up in the global rankings. And that technology must work intuitively in order to encourage adoption and not overwhelm users. But where to start?

A Transformation Based on Customer-Centricity

When going omni-channel, the most important thing you have to keep in mind is the customer – or in this case, the student. Every single channel you are integrating is a potential touchpoint for students, and the more digitally empowered these students become, they more channels they will use simultaneously.

As they use these channels, they generate a huge amount of data. When the channels are left unintegrated, data remains isolated and is not particularly helpful. But when data on an individual student from each touchpoint they've used can be aggregated and analyzed in one tool, valuable information can be gleaned from it. Having a student's grades, courses, applications, conflicts, contact history and purchase history available at a glance enables university staff to provide that student with improved service and targeted offers. This in turn improves the effectiveness of every single touchpoint and enables students and prospective students to interact with the school on the channels of their choice.

Have you ever considered inviting (prospective) students to one of your internal strategy sessions? You will be surprised how much you can learn from them!

Together with a trusted partner, go over how you can optimize your presence on each touchpoint. They will help you develop new applications, roles and processes or improve existing ones. The key is to offer a consistent experience on every single one of those channels, so that each student can explore their own student journey. This ensures they'll receive the same high quality of information, no matter which touchpoints they choose.

!

Current and prospective students can interact with schools on the channels of their choice.

5. Summary & Outlook

So what's next for universities? While traditional lectures and seminars will always be a mainstay, the sector is growing and diversifying at a rapid pace. To become eagles of the academic world, higher education institutions need to undergo a swift digital transformation to synchronize all student touchpoints, and leverage big data to gain a holistic overall picture of every current and prospective student.

Analyzing the customer journey and its channels is the perfect place to begin. Schools can start small by identifying areas to be improved. It's also worthwhile to evaluate their internal organization's ability and readiness for change. The environment should be optimized for innovators: the early birds. They need space and support to learn how to fly. Mistakes are all a part of the transformation process, and need not be feared.

Adapting customer retention and engagement best practices from leading brands like H&M and Nespresso ensures universities remain attractive for students and corporate clients alike. As students gain more control over designing their own education, schools are learning that they have to fly higher by taking a more active, interactive role – or risk losing them to the competition.

New technology is making inroads as well, and it's only a matter of time before wearables like the smart watch find uses in the classroom and become mainstays on campuses around the globe. Higher education institutions must ensure their current IT strategy is responsive and omni-channel if they want to embrace future technologies.

But no matter how much sophisticated software a post-secondary institution has in place, it cannot forget to address its people: students, prospective students, parents, alumni, professors and administration. The technology is there to enable and strengthen each and every one of those relationships. A school that embraces an omni-channel strategy empowers its students to make choices regarding how they want to learn at any stage of their study cycle. And the school itself will ultimately be more successful in recruiting and retaining the brightest minds of generations to come.

itelligence Knows Higher Education
Universities and colleges are complex institutions with tens of thousands of students enrolled in a vast array of degree programs and individual courses. Many of these schools have multiple campuses as well, meaning they have more than one IT department and different intranets and online portals. Integrating it all onto a single platform, while simultaneously adding more content on even more channels, is not a simple task.

itelligence already has over 30 higher-learning institutes across the globe as clients, giving us the experience required to cope with the unique challenges of higher education. As university operating models become more and more business-like, we can also draw on our years of experience helping corporate clients to make sure your school gets a leg up on the competition.

6. Want to Learn More?

Is your institution looking to break away from outdated models of student interaction, and soar to new heights? See more from itelligence's experts.

➡ Video

hybris video:
"Do Business Like a Local"
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uiqx8yIt4ug

➡ Blog Article

Marc van den Berk:
"Touchdown on touchpoints!"
www.linkedin.com/pulse/touchdown-identify-touchpoints-marc-van-den-berk

➡ Slideshare Webinar

Marc van den Berk:
Manager for Customer Engagement and Commerce for Western Europe
de.slideshare.net/marcvandenberkitelligence/webinar-on-engagement-in-higher-education-by-itelligence-okt15

If you want to know more about SAP CEC, hybris, and other solutions for higher education, please contact:

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About itelligence

You need to make the most of your investment in technology. And when you choose SAP, naturally you want to gain every benefit. So you deserve to work alongside an IT partner who is passionate about helping you succeed.

We live and breathe SAP and SAP only. We are the right partner if you want to get the most out of the incredible opportunities SAP can deliver. Our global expertise sets us apart from other partners, as does the relationship with our parent company NTT Data. That means financial stability, a commitment to innovation and access to a team of over 8,000 SAP consultants worldwide.

Across industries and in different regions, we will work closely with you every step of the way to deliver sustainable results. We will help you improve your operations, reach your goals and outperform your local and global competitors.

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