Campus Visit Audit
Executive Summary

Presented to University of Nevada, Reno

August 2011
The experience *is* the marketing.
Toward a more engaging campus visit experience at University of Nevada, Reno

Background

Trent Gilbert, TargetX’s Chief eXperience Officer, and Jeff Kallay, Vice President of Consulting, visited University of Nevada, Reno on August 10 and 11, 2011 to conduct an external admissions audit of their campus visit experience.

While at University of Nevada, Reno, they toured campus, met with the enrollment/admissions staff, reviewed enrollment/admissions processes, toured the admissions office, and debriefed with the enrollment/admissions team.

This Executive Summary is a companion to the detailed, invitation-only forum discussion located online at: [http://consultingclients.targetx.com/group/university-of-nevada-reno](http://consultingclients.targetx.com/group/university-of-nevada-reno)

I. Campus Visit Goals and Objectives:

Research points to the campus visit as the top influencer in the application/yield process. However, most campus visits include passive “look at our buildings” tours. Most are, tragically, a one-way monologue where the institution “talks at” the guests. Most schools only reveal their best buildings or parts of campus on the tour, effectively creating a “bait-and-switch” for students and parents. Thus, families often report, “All campuses start to look and sound alike.”

University of Nevada, Reno is, in part, guilty of some of these campus visit mistakes. However, committing to an engagement with the TargetX Experience Team and implementing the following recommendations should allow University of Nevada, Reno to better stage a campus visit.

**Goals:**
- Stage a campus visit that is authentic to University of Nevada, Reno and the true student experience.
- Stage a campus visit that sets University of Nevada, Reno apart from its competitors.
- Stage a campus visit that engages the best-fit or right-fit student.
- Stage a campus visit that generates more applications.
- Stage a campus visit that encourages guests to stay on campus longer.
- Stage a campus visit that reveals the value of the cost of a University of Nevada, Reno education.

**Objectives:**
- Create a more engaging campus visit that:
  - Is active;
  - Targets both the co-purchasing Millennial and their parents;
  - Engages more of the senses than just sight and sound;
  - Allows for customization based upon prospective families’ wants;
  - Eliminates negative cues or turns perceived negative cues into positive ones;
  - Empowers tour guides to have more fun and tell stories; and
  - Educates and empowers the entire campus community to engage with tours.

- Increase yield by confirming that irrational “It just felt right!” reason for choosing to attend (and stay).
II. Executive Summary

Besides touring campus, while at UNR we met with a host of Development/Alumni, Marketing and Admissions leaders, managers and staff as well as student ambassador leaders.

For the most part, we were impressed with the people we met and the processes we reviewed. But we don’t think UNR has an enrollment process issue. It has a vision issue.

Here’s what we gleaned: UNR is at a crossroads and we heard conflicting insights, information, and vision.

With the tragic death of President Glick, economic downturns, and budget cuts, it seems that the people who make up the place are committed to it. But UNR has multiple personalities. Is it a school for top achievers or to serve all types of students? Is it just for students of Nevada, regardless of qualifications and merits, or is it for brighter out-of-state students?

Many of our other public institution clients such as Ohio State University, West Virginia University, the University of Delaware, and the University of Vermont all seem to be very happy recruiting students from outside of their state. That is a confusing point at UNR.

When it came to articulating a five-year vision for UNR, we heard that it would be a larger school, or a smaller school with brighter students. You need to decide; it’s confusing to us and the marketplace. Leadership needs to define a clear vision and promote it internally and externally. To be cliche, it appears that all the right people are on the bus, but the bus doesn’t know where it is going.

UNR also seems to have a little engine that could syndrome. It seems that all messages and marketing are filled with bragging points about the university, instead of profiling best-fit students and their personalities. The messages and the marketing lack a level of humanity.

Your name is just as confusing. We’re convinced that great (and flagship) brands, be they in higher education, such as Harvard, Texas, Michigan, Florida, Washington or corporate, such as Apple, Southwest, Target, In-N-Out use the shortest portion of their name (or acronym) in a stand-alone strength. It would seem that since UNR is the oldest and is a flagship school in the system, it should be what it was always: University of Nevada. The comma Reno or University of Nevada, Reno diminishes your power, history, and flagship status. There are 18 schools in the University of Texas system, but there is only one UT and that school is also known as “Texas” and it's in Austin. Leadership needs to fight the legislature to take back the flagship name and marketing needs to promote and own it. It makes you a lesser brand in the eye of consumers and stakeholders.

Brands are mirrors. We purchase based upon conforming to self image. Today’s savvy consumers are looking for niche and clarity from the brands to whom they give their loyalty and dollars, including higher education. Again, UNR is holding up a mirror similar to one at a carnival fun house. It’s distorted and doesn’t represent a true reflection of the student experience.

Lastly, we want to remind you that today’s prospective student has myriad choices to consume higher education and earn their degree. From online, to proprietary, public, private, 2-year or 4-year, it's a buffet. One can go to college or one can go away to college. UNR is attempting to provide the latter, becoming part of a community. This is intangible. But it seems like the university leads with and heavily sells the tangibles of bricks and mortar. It’s a parade of buildings and only the newest buildings featured in publications, website and on tour. Yet, over and over again we heard about the amazing community at UNR.

Basic recommendation: UNR has to agree on what it’s future will be, how it will get there, who its best-fit student is and where it is going. Then it needs to grow up and stop trying to impress
the school up the road and reveal more of the people that make the place unique, not the buildings or surrounding areas.

III. Campus Visit Audit - Registration

Since research shows that the campus visit is the most powerful influencer of applications and ranks as a top-five most effective recruitment practice, explaining and registering for the campus visit on the UNR website is a top priority.

We found the online registration to be relatively easy to find with just two clicks. And the options were explained with brevity and concise language.

The registration process asks the necessary information and is fast and easy to complete.

Confirmation and information was fast in reply and explained the visit and set the expectations, even the very complex parking situation.

Recommendations:
1. Keep the visit prominent on the admissions web pages.
2. Keep the visit information updated and seasonal, and consider headlining those upcoming events like a Nevada Bound.
3. Since parents are often driving the registration process, consider asking for both student and parent contact information in the registration process.

IV. Campus Visit Audit - Parking

When it comes to visitors, two P’s reign supreme and are critical in making the first impression: Parking and Plumbing (restrooms).

UNR doesn’t just have a parking garage, it has a parking complex. And that can be confusing. Let’s remember that many families haven’t visited campus (or Reno) before and they are stressed. They don’t want to get lost or be late. Most certainly nerves are raw on the approach to campus. This is why wayfinding signage and directions to prospective student parking must be paramount. You can’t have enough signage explaining where admissions or Welcome Center parking is.

Ideally, we’d like prospective families to be directed into campus via 13th Street and enter the Whalen on the first floor, with spaces designated there. But, If you’re going to keep directing guests to enter on the floor via N. Virginia then we should make sure that we remove barriers to getting them to their space and to the Welcome Center with The Joe.

Recommendations:
1. Paint the Visitor Center spaces in school colors.
2. Paint the wall in school colors.
3. If possible, add banners or flags in school colors/brands to the wall as a focal point for families to look for and to designate the spaces.
4. Rethink the means of the parking pass in case guests forget it. We don’t want them to have to trek all the way back to their car on the top floor of the Whelen Parking Complex.
   a. Position parking lot ambassadors and greeters to welcome and direct them and provide a pass should they have forgotten theirs.
   b. Have them “register their car” with the Welcome Center staff and email or phone that information to Campus Police so they won’t be ticketed.
   c. Have them call the office to get a code that they can use to print a pass from the pay kiosks on the top floor.
   d. Add more Welcome Center specific wayfinding directing to and within the elevators, out of the garage, and toward The Joe.
V. Campus Visit Audit - Welcome Center

While we know there was some controversy in placing the Welcome Center in the new Joe Crowley Student Union on prime, first-floor space, we like the space and its back office. It has a good collegiate energy. We like it so much we’re adding photos of it to our online album of outstanding admissions offices and visitor centers.

Still, we have a few suggestions and tweaks. With each new building, it can create more steps and time for the campus visit. The Joe is an amazing building, but unlike other student unions that have large atriums that allow tour guides to point to all that the building offers, yours does not. You have to see it to get all that it offers.

Recommendations:
1. Rethink the placement of the chairs. Not all chairs face the video wall. Perhaps the inner row should?
2. Consider decluttering the space. It’s a bit too visually overwhelming. Less can be more in developing a better reputation for academic quality.
3. Use one of the four monitors to include the names/hometowns of the prospective students visiting that day. TCU asks students to upload a photo when they register online and includes their photos as well.
4. Consider feeding the daily UNR student activities station on one of the other monitors as well.
5. Create a self-guided tour of The Joe, and encourage families to take it instead of just sitting there for 10-20 minutes.
   a. Have restaurant style paddle pager that gives self-guided directions. By using a pager and ensuring them that you will page them five minutes before the start of the tour, they won’t have to worry about missing it. See a photo example of a pager and a link to it in your private group at: http://consultingclients.targetx.com/group/university-of-nevada-reno
   b. Take the elevator to the fourth floor and walk the stair case down seeing student lounge spaces, offices, and services.

VI. Campus Visit Audit - Route

The current route has some serious holes in it. It doesn't have a thematic flow or intentional design to it. It appears to be meandering through campus in a way that is happenstance as it comes upon certain buildings and then enters into them.

Since you want to recruit brighter students, academics should make the first statement. Then residential life and athletics.

And the route should follow a bit more of a historical flow.

Recommendations:
1. Produce 11”x8.5” handouts (like the Birmingham-Southern College example we left with Steve Maples while on campus) that feature a map of UNR on one side and FAQ’s and statistics about the school on the other. This, and only this, handout should be given at the beginning of the tour. Tell families they can take literature with them at the end of their visit experience.
2. Produce a simple five-minute presentation about UNR stats and admissions and broadcast it on the four-screen monitor set-up in the Welcome Center at the very start. The presentation should be given by a Welcome Center professional staffer and it should end with the UNR campus map. Then the guide should come up, introduce themselves, and use the map to explain the route and what will happen. This sets the expectation.
3. Since we’re going to create a self-guided tour of The Joe, we recommend going first into Mattewson-IGT Knowledge Center. It and The Joe are your primary new buildings and in part work in tandem.

4. Then the group(s) should board a designated shuttle or ride an existing campus shuttle and be taken to the main entrance of campus and dropped off in front of Morrill Hall/Alumni Center. The goal is to recruit graduates. And this is the oldest building on campus. Walk through Morrill and out on the back entrance on the quad. Tell the story of becoming a graduate and alum of UNR and point out all other academic buildings. Walk to and through Davidson Mathematics and Science Center and then back along the North side of the quad and through Travis and Overlook. Then transition to Residential Life. Cross N. Virginia and tour housing and dining.

5. Board designated Shuttle and be taken to North part of campus transitioning to athletics. Drop off in an area that views Lawlor Events Center, Lombardi Recreation Center and walk into Mackay Stadium.

6. Then walk back down hill into The Joe for evaluations and closing part of campus visit.

This proposed route doesn’t concentrate on the center part of campus (Journalism, Physics), but if you wanted to, after housing, the tour could walk back to that part of campus and then board designated shuttle for ride up to athletics.

This route would reveal more of UNR and all parts of the student experience. It would also show the growth and history and start with a stronger academic statement, but then include athletics. We have recommended walking/riding hybrid campus tours to a number of clients. Recently, these have been both large (USF) and small (Alfred, Furman) schools. And while logistics and costs were initially an issue, the return on investment with more positive evaluations and increased applications or deposits (because all aspects of campus life are revealed) have been significant.

7. Don’t forget Reno. It seems like being located in Reno is a white elephant in the room. The campus tour should strategically embrace the university’s town.

8. Remember it’s about stories not stats, people not programs. Ambassadors should be master storytellers about relating their UNR experience, not scripted “Tourbots.”

**VII. Campus Visit Audit - Evaluations**

The current tour evaluations have the Ambassadors’ logo prominently on them. They are evaluating more than just the student guide, they should be evaluating the whole experience.

**Recommendations:**
1. Develop two sets of evaluations: one for parents and one for students.
2. Target questions specific to these audiences, parent and students.

Most evaluations are too long and don’t really provide data that most schools want or care to use. They tend to be boring and caught up in logistics. Keep it simple and to the point (so much so that you can print them on index cards). Ideas:

- **Parents**
  - Do you think UNR is a good value in higher education? Yes or No
  - Can you see your son or daughter choosing UNR and becoming part of the community? Yes or No and Why or Why Not?
  - What can we do to improve the campus visit?

- **Students**
  - Can you see yourself becoming a student at UNR? Yes or No and Why or Why Not?
  - What was your favorite part of the campus visit today?
  - What can we do to improve the campus visit?

3. Have ambassadors complete surveys of their tour:
   - What story did you tell that you haven’t told before?
   - What went well on this tour?
What didn’t go well on this tour?
What part of campus or part of the tour needs attention?

VIII. Campus Visit Audit - Moving Toward Customization

One size campus visit doesn’t fit all and in the near future UNR is going to have to partner with colleges and schools to offer program-specific visits beyond the undergraduate campus visit.

Enrollment services is going to have to become more focused on transfer campus visits. This audience has a completely different set of wants and needs, beginning with evaluation of transcripts. They should not have the same campus visit experience as high school students.

IX. Recruitment/Enrollment Audit - Recommendations

1. UNR is a great value. Why not take an example from another state school that is a great value, The College of New Jersey, and duplicate the “Value Estimator” they have on their website? This online tools allows families to compare TCNJ to a host of private and public peer and aspirant schools. [http://www.tcnj.edu/~admiss/value/index.html](http://www.tcnj.edu/~admiss/value/index.html)
2. Promote to the citizens of Nevada, via PR, not just UNR, but the worth of higher education and to change thinking beyond “What job can I get?” This is a training vs. education notion and which is UNR truly doing?
3. Ensure that all messaging and marketing repeats the four points that we heard over and over again:
   - Stronger academics than you realize
   - Opportunity for individuals
   - It’s a “real” university
   - People - there is a strong sense of humanity here
4. While word of mouth is crucial in building enrollment (happy students, parents and alumni recruit other like-minded best-fit students), we’re convinced that UNR is going to have to spend money in traditional advertising and marketing starting with TV, Radio and Outdoor/Out-of-Home.
5. Debunk myths and misperceptions about Reno head on and embrace all that is your location. (This leads us to our next recommendation.)

X. Recruitment/Enrollment Audit - What to build next

While we’ve said that UNR needs to be more focused on humanity and the culture of the place, you posed to us this question: “What should we build that will impact enrollment?”

Our answer: a gateway center right at the I-80 exit. The current facilities (Coed Motel and others) are sketchy and questionable.

Many campuses are investing in their local areas and creating private-public partnerships to improve blighted areas. This reaches out to the community and most often improves town-gown relations. One of the first was University Square at the University of Pennsylvania ([http://www.universitysquare.biz](http://www.universitysquare.biz)). With a flagship building that includes the official B&N University bookstore, Inn at Penn Hilton as well as shopping and retail, it has grown into a vibrant, multi-block area that was once a blight on the map.

Our client, Georgia Institute of Technology, took nine blocks of surface parking lot across the interstate from campus and built Technology Square. It connects the school to Atlanta’s dynamic Midtown neighborhood. Again, the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center and a B&N Bookstore anchor the location along with the School of Management and a research tower for graduate students. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology_Square](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology_Square)
Visit both ASU’s and UA’s “gateway” center complexes in Phoenix and Tucson. They include retail, hotels and other services that bridge both local residents and students and become a destination for both.

Imagine if the university procured the land at the interstate exit/entrance ramps and built a gateway center that bridged it to the community and made a more university-like statement to visitors.

1. Prospective families would have a better first impression.
2. The university would gain more awareness from the community and people driving by on I-80 (perhaps offering retail and services that encourage them to stop/visit).
3. Create joint spaces for the students, faculty and staff as well as the community that become a joint destination. Perhaps even a Welcome Center for UNR, Reno and surrounding area.
XI. Complete Audit with Photos, Comments and Recommendations

A complete and detailed audit is available online in the private, invitation only University of Nevada, Reno Campus Visit Group at: http://consultingclients.targetx.com/group/university-of-nevada-reno

Within this group, there is a photo album with comments located at: https://picasaweb.google.com/ExperienceEvangelist/Nevada?authuser=0&authkey=Gv1sRgCMHigdDl28bc1wE&feat=directlink

XII. Conclusion

UNR exceeded our expectations, but like many state schools, we got a taste of the politics and fiefdoms that permeate it. On the upside, the people we encountered are positive and committed to the success of the school.

We feel that the current enrollment process and campus visit are strong, but by implementing our recommendations it will improve the bottom line and the prospective student experience.

We can’t help you boost your institutional confidence, nor can we articulate your vision.

Other fixes really just involve semantics, like removing that Reno from your name.

XIII. Contact Information

Please contact us if you have questions about the audit, summary or online content.

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About TargetX

TargetX was started in 1998 by Brian Niles and Mike Crusi. As was often the case in the pre-bubble-bursting days, these two former college friends met at a bar one night ... one told the other of something he was trying to do at work, the second one grabbed a cocktail napkin and started making notes. A few months later a company was born. A common story, but with an uncommon track record.

The company was founded on the idea that colleges need to change the way they communicate and recruit students. Products and services are developed to be easy to use, yet packed with powerful features. But the real value comes from the skills and background of the TargetX team. Clients benefit from the wisdom of professionals who each have dozens of years of college marketing experience – including some who have been at the forefront of Internet and experiential recruiting. Today, TargetX is the leading provider of interactive recruiting solutions to higher education, helping over 450 colleges recognize and repair the disconnect between the way they market themselves and the way students seek information. The company offers communications planning, creative services and proprietary technology, including the most powerful email broadcasting and online chat tools in the industry. TargetX has also developed a reputation for objective and expert counsel, offering a popular series of workshops and seminars, presenting at dozens of conferences around the country each year, producing a weekly newsletter of tips and trends received by over 3,000 higher education professionals, and generating the only regular "blogcast" devoted to student recruiting.

While our accomplishments are measured by the success and satisfaction of our clients, we are recognized for our leadership and growth record. For the past four years, TargetX has been named to the Philadelphia 100 as one of the fastest growing, privately-held firms in the Philadelphia region. Our growth rate is based on superior customer service, high quality solutions, and one of the best teams you'll find in the industry.

About Jeff Kallay

Jeff Kallay is higher education's first Experience Evangelist, and there's no one more qualified to hold that title. He visits an average of three to four campuses a month, stressing the importance of finding and telling stories that differentiate a school from all others. And he has a great talent for helping people think creatively to stage memorable events.

Prior to joining TargetX, Jeff was Director of Breakthrough Thinking at the highly creative marketing firm Mindpower Inc. He is an extremely popular speaker at conferences and workshops around the country, and has become a nationally-recognized authority on the emerging "experience economy."

Along with his work in higher education, Jeff is associated with Strategic Horizons, the consultancy of James Gilmore and Joseph Pine, authors of the groundbreaking text The Experience Economy — Work is Theatre and Every Job a Stage, published by Harvard Business School Press. He researches, writes and lectures on the topic and also won Pine & Gilmore’s Experience Management Achievement award.

Jeff's innovative work was featured on the cover of the March 6th edition of The Chronicle of Higher Education.

He blogs about his campus visit travels and the experience economy and is currently collaborating on a book about the campus visit experience.

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About Trent Gilbert

Trent Gilbert is a graduate of Elon University. Upon graduation, he served as an Associate Director of Admissions at Elon. In this role Trent was actively involved in various aspects of the admissions process including supervising the “A-Team” a group of student tour guides used specifically for special admission events. Along with his involvement in Elon admissions, Trent served as a member of several admissions associations.

Trent understands the importance of the campus aesthetic and its affect on visiting families and current students. He is passionate about involving the entire campus in the admissions process; he believes that the “job description” of each member of campus should include recruiting students.

In addition to working for TargetX, Trent serves as a risk management facilitator for members of universities greek communities. His program focuses on simplifying risk management and encouraging student buy-in in the process.

Most recently, Trent served as a management consultant with RealFoundations, a Dallas based real estate consulting firm with an international client roster. Trent traveled extensively providing support and advice to clients on various topics impacting the industry.

When he isn’t living on the road, Trent lives in Atlanta, GA where he resides in a historic cotton mill that has been converted to lofts.

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