



2022 STUDENT SURVEY

Communicating with **prospective students today.**

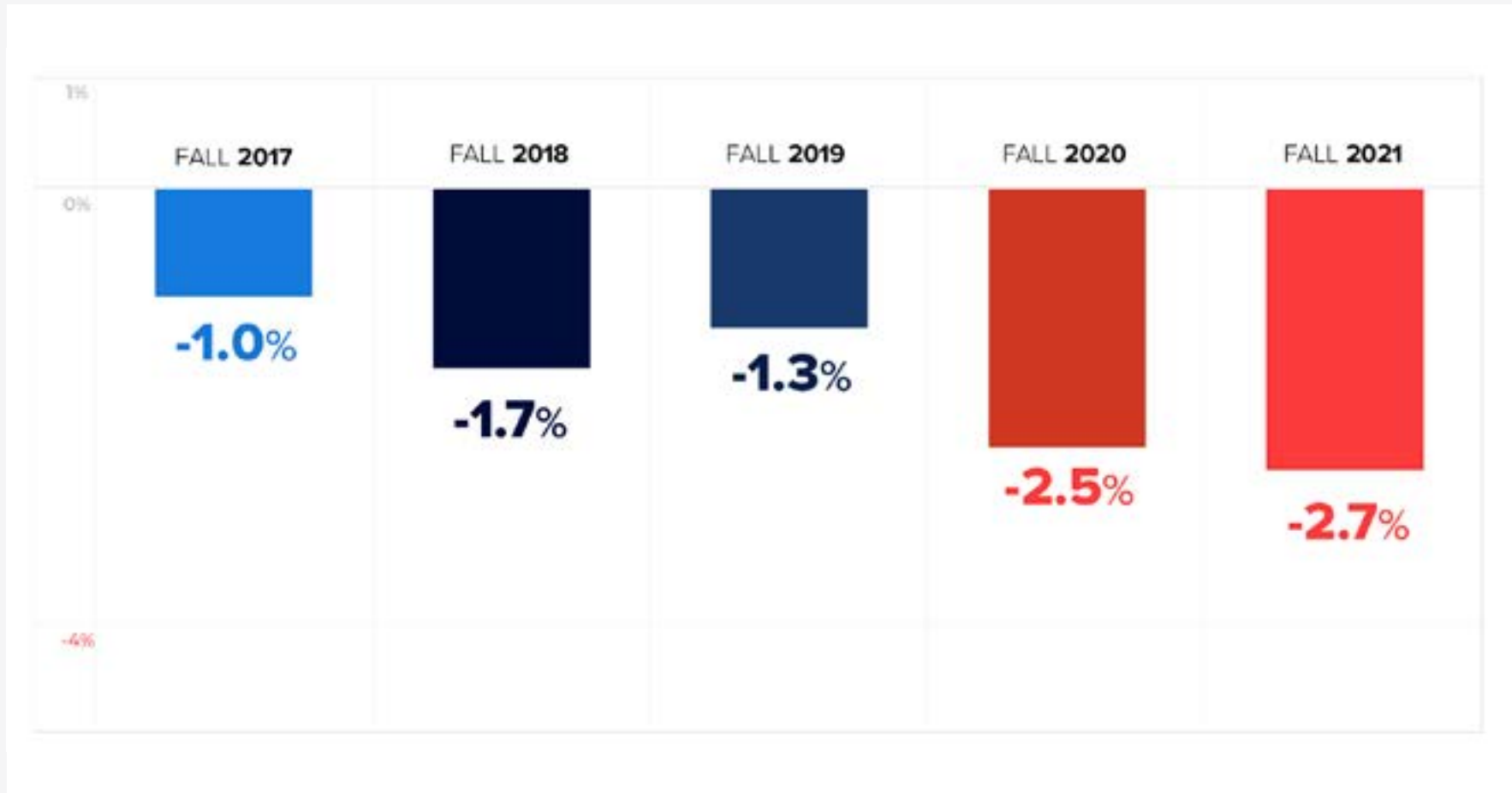
ADVANCE EDUCATION WHITEPAPER

Enrollment Trends.

Reaching high school students is more important than ever, as enrollments in higher education continues to decline.

With the stakes established, the following pages will help education leaders understand how prospective students prefer to interact with your brand and help you build connections with your future students.

SOURCE: [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#)



Percent Change in Total Enrollment from Previous Year by Institutional Sector (All Sectors): 2017 to 2021

Sometimes the best way to understand is to ask, so we did.

Marketing your higher education institution is always somewhat of a guessing game without response from your audience. Where should you invest your budget? Is social media marketing worth it? Where are the prospective students most likely to see your messages? And so on. Any data you add to your arsenal can help you target prospects who are most likely to be receptive to your advertising.

Alabama Media Group surveyed a **more than 1,000 high school students on how they gather information on colleges.** To better understand the perspective of high school students about communication from colleges, we surveyed students to get timely answers to questions most relevant to enrollment professionals in a changing media environment to support your campaigns and tell the story of your brand.

Let's get to the questions & answers from our survey.



When researching info about colleges, where do you (or did you) start?

What would be the **biggest motivator** for you to reach out to a college to learn more?

Where do you **pay attention** to college messages the most?

When choosing a college, **what's the most important** to you?

Rank your most used social channels from most to least used.

Do you read mail sent to your home from colleges?

Do you read email sent to you from colleges?

Which forms of **college communications would help you decide** which college is right for you?



QUESTION 1:

Ranking the Deciding Factors for College Choice

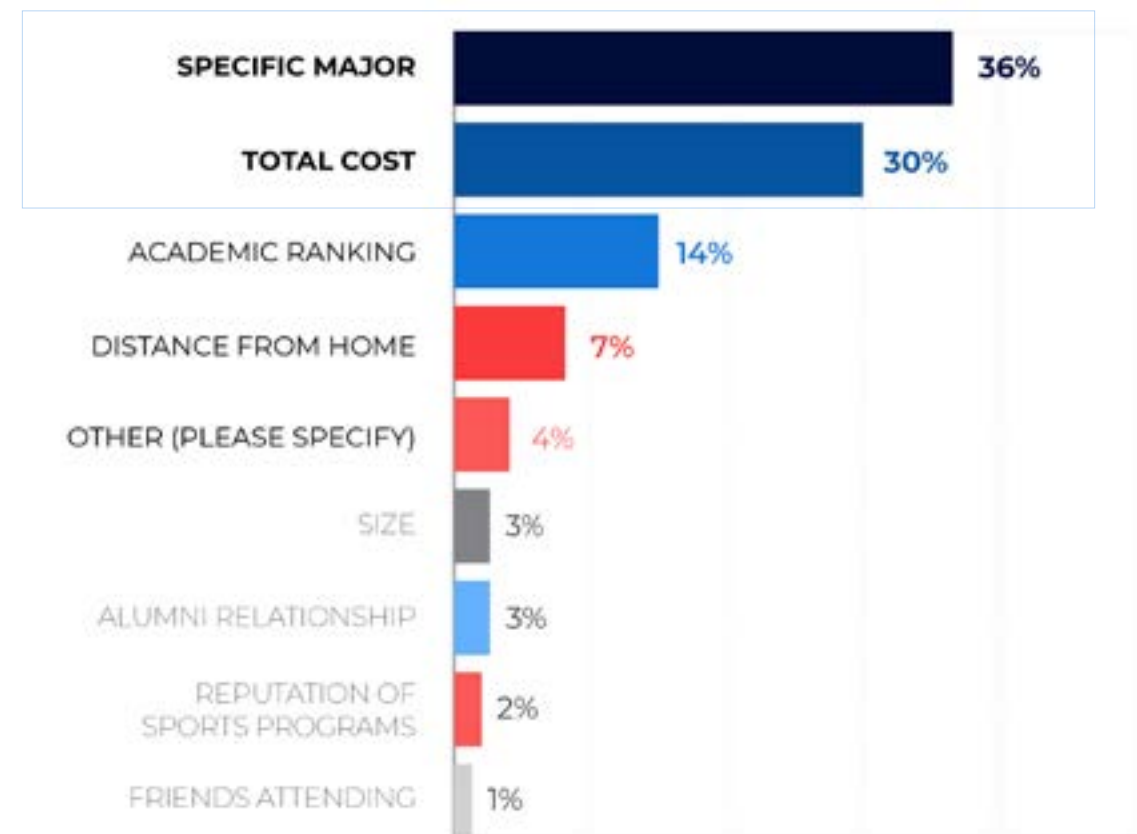
Responses show the #1 factor that influences a student to choose a college is **whether the college offers the major the student wishes to pursue**. This highlights the need for college marketers to align (and promote!) content highlighting the degree paths most popular with their school. Having an accurate, user-friendly website that is easy to navigate will keep students engaged.

Total cost is the second most important factor students consider when choosing a school, so make sure tuition rates and scholarship information are not hidden away. **This info needs to be front and center on your website. Cost is a close second to prospective students, so having transparency in cost, financing options, and prominently displayed scholarship information** can help students understand the financial investment.

While **academic ranking** held the number three spot, other factors like **distance from home** and **size of school** were not as important to students choosing a college.

Previous research had shown that the median distance of schools vary from eight miles for public two-year institutions to **18 miles for public 4-year schools** and **46 miles for private 4-year colleges**. The discrepancy could be that while students don't judge the distance as much of a factor, for practical reasons, the vast majority end up going to school reasonably close to their homes just to stay close to family.

When choosing a college, what's most important to you?



QUESTION 2

Where Do High School Students Begin Researching Colleges?

The primary way that students begin their college search are by visiting your official website (usually via a search engine), so **investing time and resources into website optimization, knowledge panels (brand and local), and search advertising are key.** In addition, analyzing where an interested student originally discovered your school may help you refine the early discovery phase of your brand's marketing strategy.

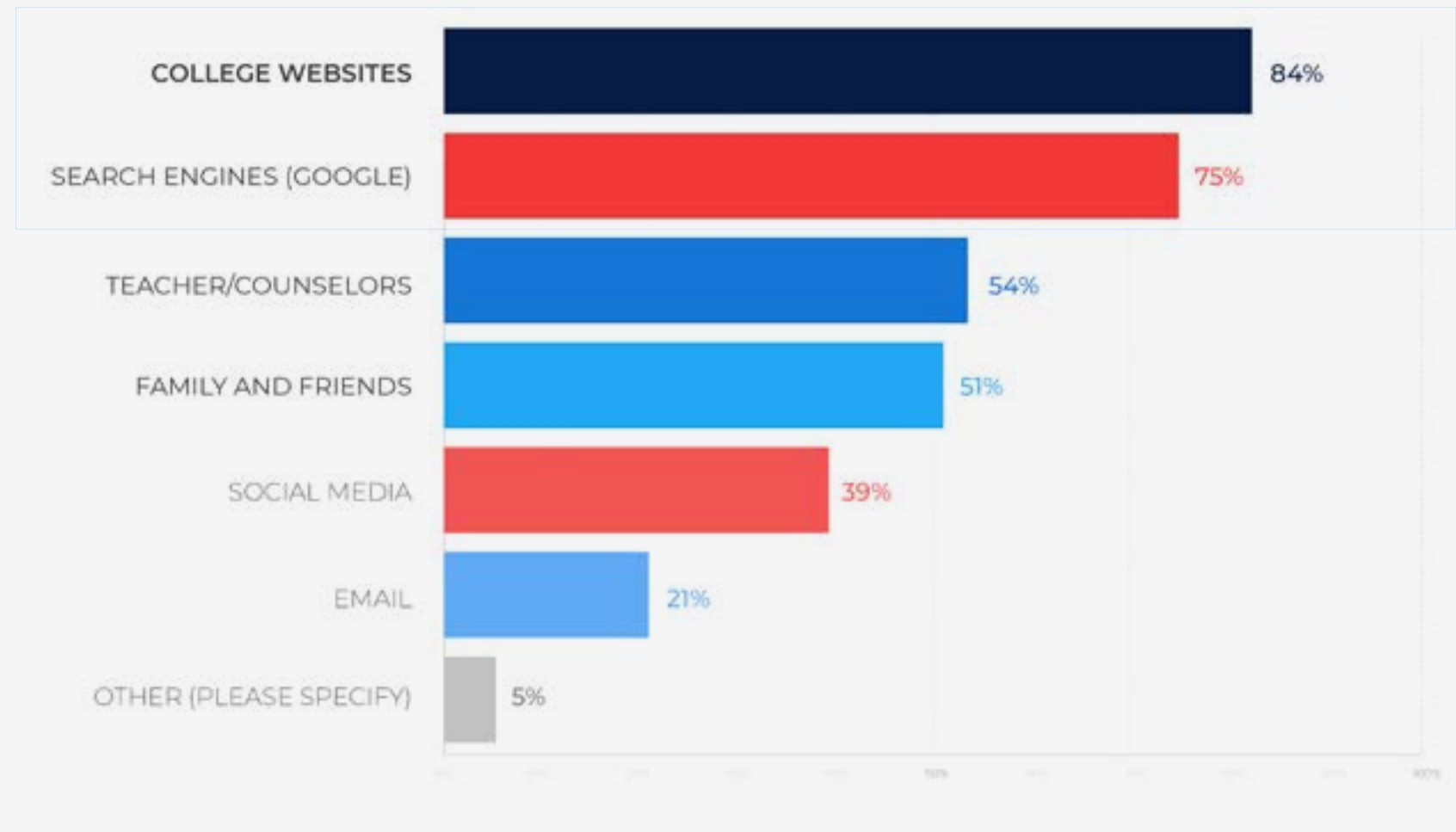
Students who know of your college may begin by going directly to your website to get more information about your school, but they will likely ask a teacher or parent for suggestions as well. Then, they may go to a search engine like Google or Bing. Therefore, you need to optimize your website for the search terms students will use so they can find you and confirm your knowledge panel is up to date.

The essential step of being "discovered" as students begin to think about college choice involves a complex blend of pathways, with some importance on the people who advise a teen on options for college. **To reach the counselors and parents who might suggest your school involves different channels than reaching the teens themselves.** Direct mail and email can be effective, but even parents get most of their information digitally now. Also consider adults frequent different social media sites than teens, so consider different creative messaging for the student and parents.



2

When researching info about colleges, where do you start?



QUESTION 3:

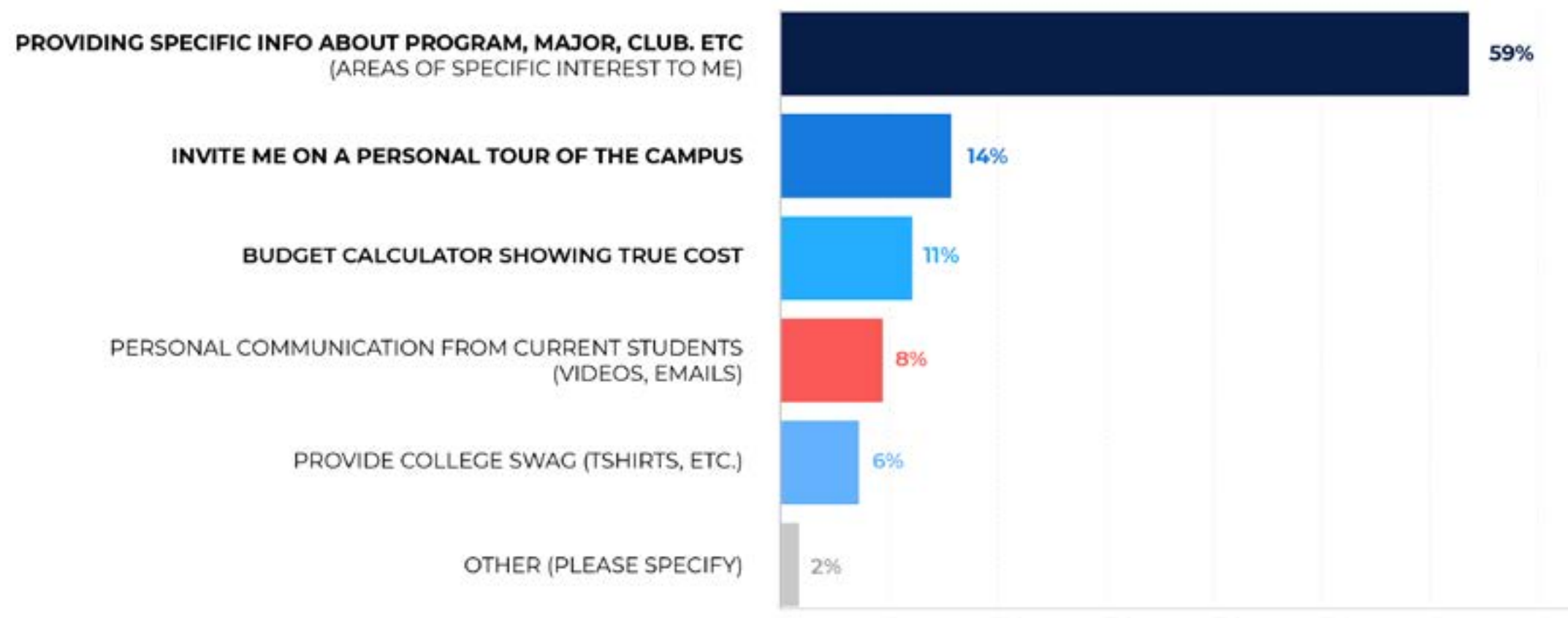
What Nudges Students to Reach Out for More Information?

The following survey results reinforce the importance of marketing your specific programs, activities, and features to prospects. Your website will be the first place to add comprehensive and distinctive content.



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What would be the biggest motivator for you to reach out to a college to learn more?



QUESTION 4:

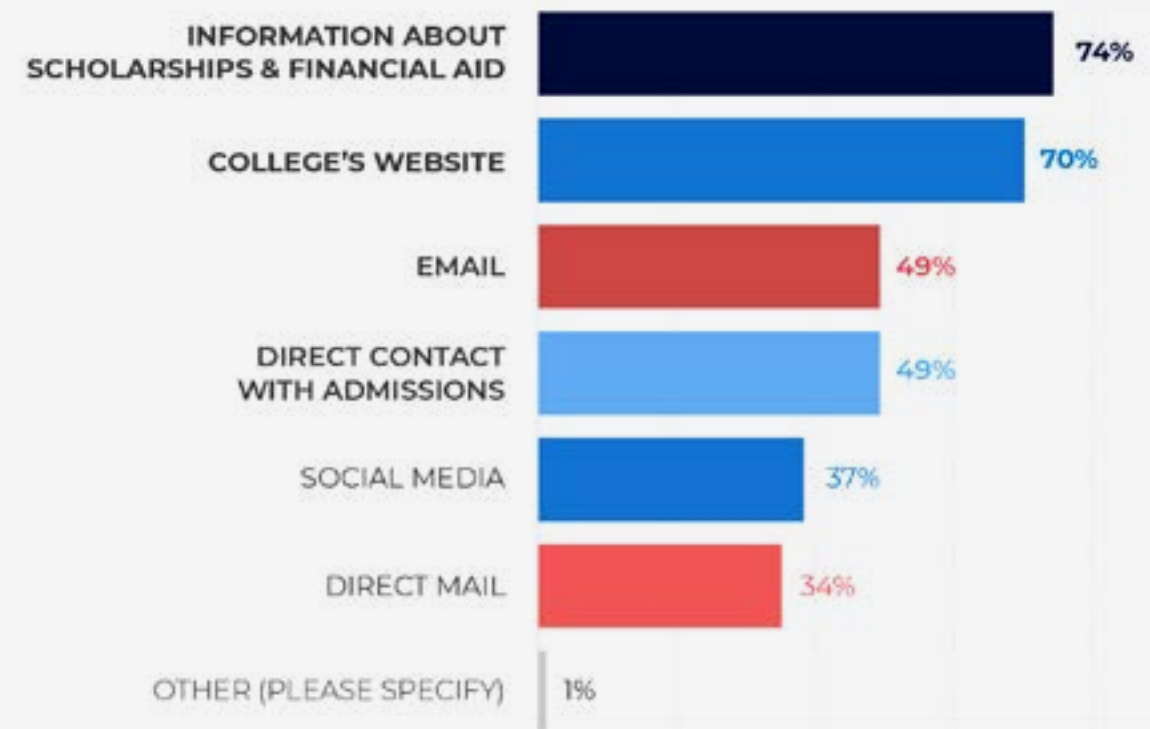
Best Communication Method for Prospective Students

Communication about financial aid and scholarships is the most cited factor in college choice for this group. Yet the college's website is almost tied with cost information to assist students' decision-making. This response continues to highlight the importance of website optimization for enrollment success. In addition, nearly 50 percent of students shared that **both email and direct contact with admissions staff is helpful**, so these are also important places to focus budget and staff time for admissions departments.



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Which forms of college communications would help you decide which college is right for you?

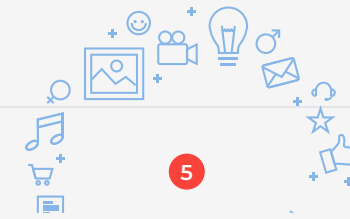


QUESTION 5:

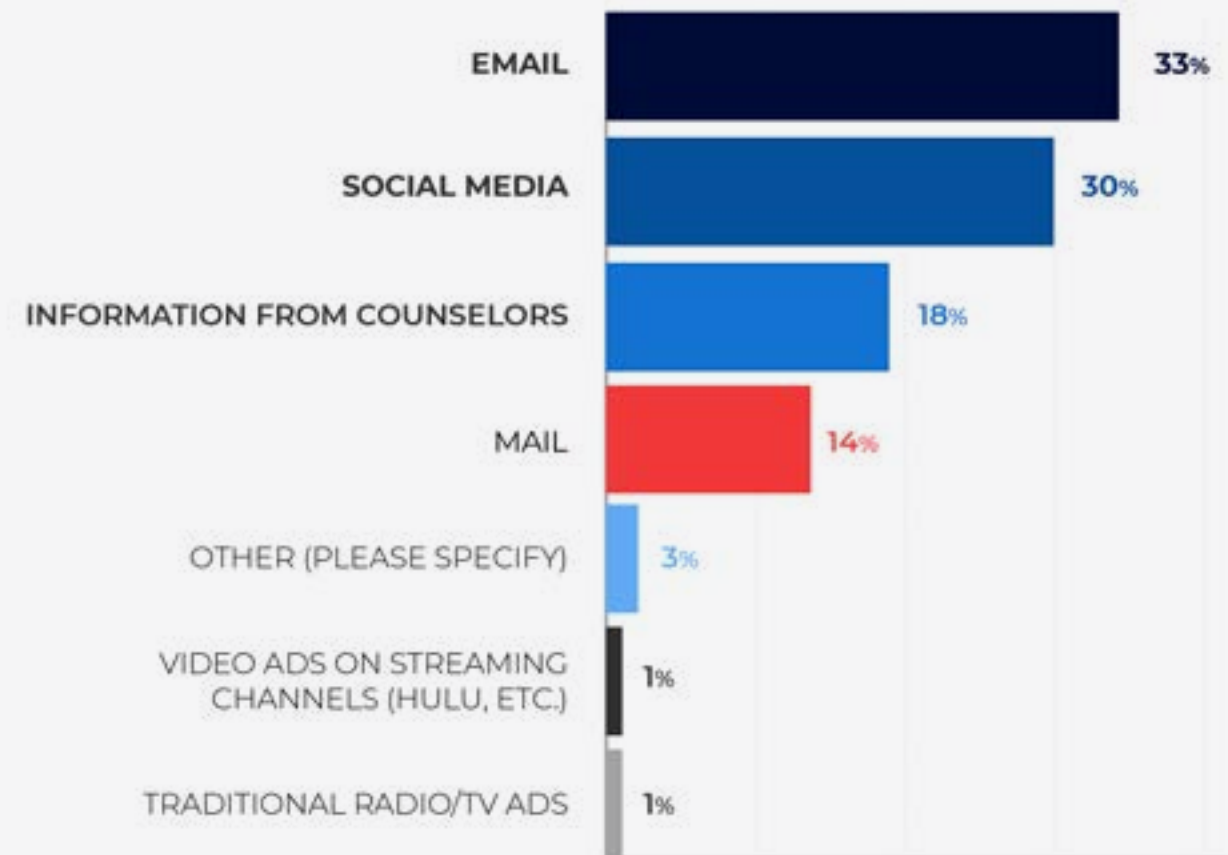
Students Give the Most Attention to these Channels

When it is time to focus attention on their potential school options, students shift to noticing email and ads on social media the most, while still considering advice from counselors. With email almost three times as likely to get a student's attention, it has more prominence, by far, than direct mail. Additionally, only 14% of students said they pay attention to snail mail, so making the shift to email is crucial for colleges to gain consideration by students.

Note that the regular mail attention is about half as important to students, so after the initial direct mail piece has been delivered, rotating in email along with geofencing will introduce powerful tactics (while as well as being easier on your total budget). Also, don't underestimate the importance and the art of a good subject line for emails, this element is the primary conversion point and will determine if a potential student opens the piece so be creative!



Where do you pay attention to college messages the most?



QUESTION 6:

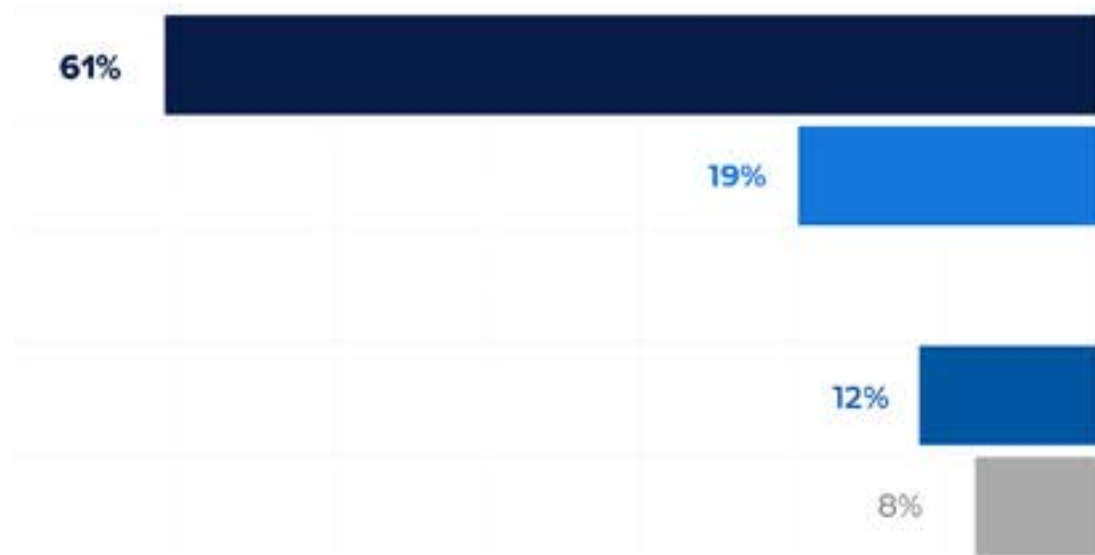
Do High School Students Read Physical Mail?

While 80 percent of students opening mail sent to their homes may seem substantial, if you combine those who don't engage with it or even throw it away unread, you see that more than 70 percent will not take action based on pieces sent to their homes. Fewer than 20 percent say they will sometimes respond to physical mail, and considering the expense involved, this tactic alone likely won't provide the best ROI for higher education marketers.



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Do you read **mail** sent to your home from colleges?



QUESTION 7:

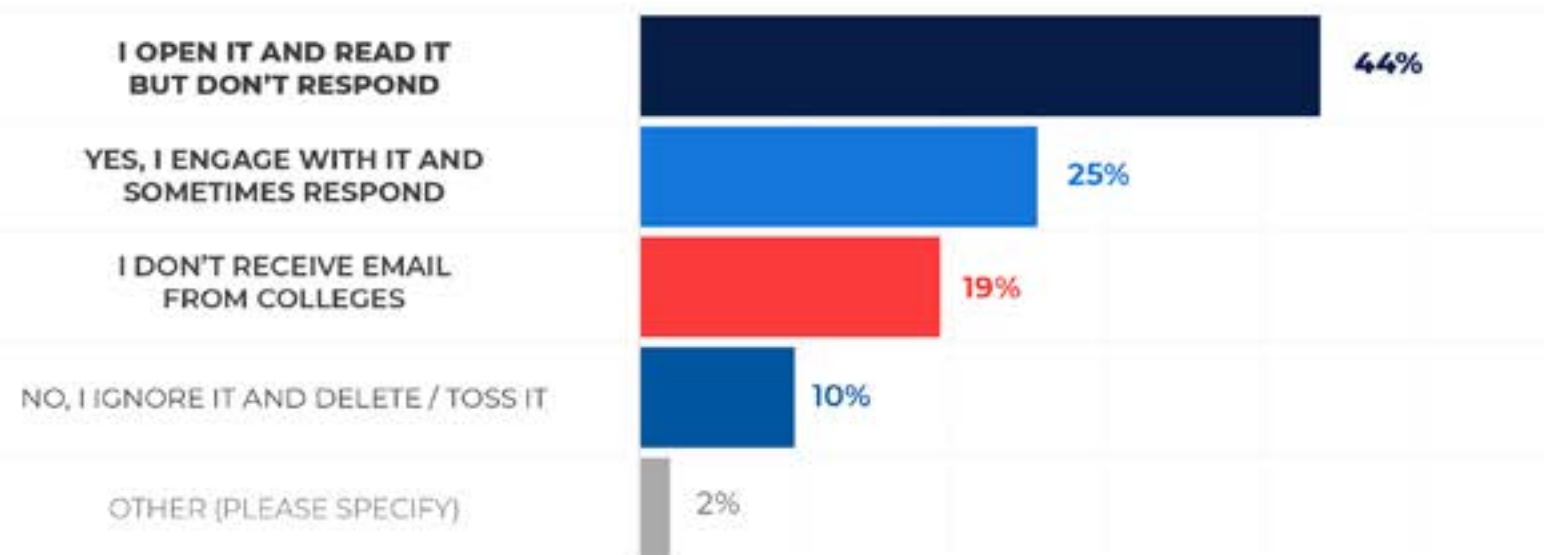
Percentages Who Read and Respond to Email

Almost 20 percent of high school students we surveyed reported not receiving emails from colleges, which is an opportunity lost for engaging with potential enrollees. However, the percentage of students who sometimes respond to email is higher than with postal mail. Since the investment for emails is less expensive per piece, the tactic offers an attractive ROI advantage over physical mail.



7

Do you read **email** sent to your home from colleges?



QUESTION 8:

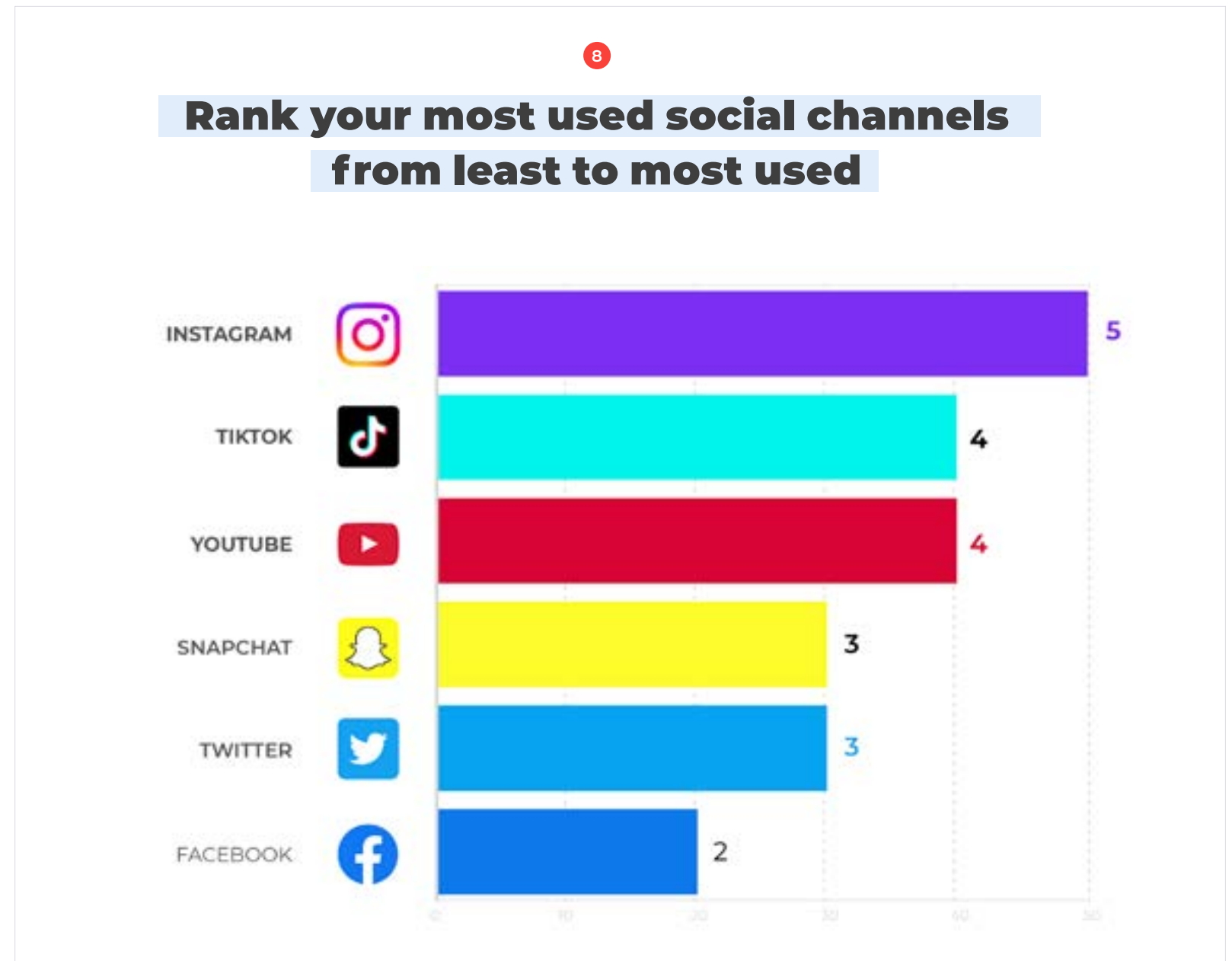
Social Media Platform Rankings

Experienced marketers know ads on social media platforms will be seen by prospective students.

Survey results show **Instagram leads the way as the social channel most used by prospective students with Tik Tok and YouTube tying for second and third place.**

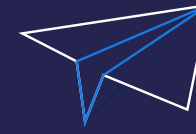
Presently, Instagram and TikTok are the best social media platforms for marketing to current high school students, with YouTube and Snap close behind.

When we look at social media usage for all adults, including parents and school counselors, the most used platform is YouTube, with Facebook coming in as a strong second. The age and other demographic features of target audiences who influence teens' college choices should also factor into your social media marketing strategy.



Key Takeaways.

- **Most students begin their college research by visiting your website.**
 - Put yourself in the shoes of a student and test the experience of finding your website. How does your brand appear in search engines?
 - Does the landing page on your website have a good experience and provide answers to what prospective students want to know?
- **Providing information about specific programs, majors, clubs, or other interests is the number one factor for motivating students to learn more about your institution.**
- **Specific majors / areas of study and cost** are the two most important deciding factors for students.
- Prospective college students pay attention to **email and social media ads.**
- Almost 70% of students open emails sent to them, however **20% don't get emails from colleges**, representing a missed opportunity.
- **Instagram and YouTube** are the most used social media channels for students, with TikTok, and Snapchat also prominent.



Conclusion

With enrollment trends constantly shifting, it's important to keep best practices top-of-mind to keep enrollment at optimal levels for the changing circumstances. Exploring and expanding methods of reaching potential students works simultaneously with the recruiting process, but it's important to consider coordination with school counselors and parents to influence students to choose your school. Students want to lead the research process, so it's imperative your school's website is up-to-date, easy to navigate and keeps students engaged.

Works Cited

1. AMG Higher Education Marketing, "2022 Student Survey," January 15, 2022 (check citation)
2. Mattern, Krista, and Wyatt, Jeffrey, "Student Choice of College: How Far Do Students Go for an Education," *Journal of College Admission*, Spring 2009
3. Auxier, Brooke, and Anderson, Monica, "Social Media Use in 2021," Pew Research Center, April 7, 2021
4. Darrah, Marjorie, et al., "Understanding Levels of First-Generationness," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 2, 2022
5. Auxier and Anderson, "Social Media Use"



Let's grow your student enrollment, **together.**

We believe any effective marketing campaign begins with thoughtful and powerful storytelling. Our first goal as a marketing partner is to understand your story and what makes you special.

Once we understand who you are, we can build a strategic marketing plan to tell your story in the best way on the best platforms to reach your ideal audience. Compelling stories paired with a strategic plan drive great results, and we have a track record of doing just that.

Partnerships with traditional four-year universities, community colleges, and technical and career schools, we help institutions level up marketing strategies for student recruitment as well as alumni outreach.

Like what you see? Want to know more? [Let's talk.](#)



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Thank You.

