

Back to School

Student brand ambassadors are the new media moguls

Marketers often overlook college students. They associate these young consumers with out-of-control spring breaks, slim wallets and a lack of brand loyalty. Many marketers wait to reach out until students graduate and have jobs and families.

That may be a mistake.

College students are an attractive target market. There are 21 million in the U.S. with estimated discretionary spending power of \$163 billion. These young people are impressionable, looking for brands to trust and are forming opinions that could convert to long-term loyalty. Another plus? You have a captive audience. On average students spend 11 hours each weekday on campus and a little over 6 hours on weekends.

Nestlé gets it. It is out in front of the college market sampling its Coffee-mate creamers.

For the students at Ohio State University who were cramming for finals last December and pulling all-nighters to study, Coffee-mate had come to the rescue.

A 20-foot-high coffee cup loomed over the centrally located South Oval, inviting to students to fuel up. Alongside, two companion tents were set up to serve free hot coffee with a variety of Coffee-mate creamer flavors to choose from.

"It's a great opportunity for the brand to introduce Coffee-mate to students at a time when they are developing their own tastes around coffee, or maybe even trying coffee for the first time," says Lauren Parker, experiential marketing manager at Nestlé.

In addition to a cup of Joe, students visiting "The Café" were offered chair massages, could warm up by portable heaters, play games, listen to music or use the charging stations. The Café, produced by



Social played a vital role in the success of the Coffee-mate on-campus event.

campus agency marketing partner Fluent, also staged surprises, like the appearance of Brutus the Buckeye mascot and the OSC Cheerleaders. Prizes included branded sunglasses, travel mugs and Coffee-mate 2GO.

Paid ambassadors, who are also OSU students, were hired as baristas at the tents. Samples of 18 Coffee-mate flavors were offered, including seasonal flavors Peppermint Mocha, Gingerbread, Eggnog, and a real student favorite, Chocolate Chip Cookie.

"With college students we've seen that it's great to have students who are passionate about our brand and peer-to-peer messaging really goes a long way," Parker says. "It's authentic and authenticity is important. By having students serve the coffee to other students it's much more fun and memorable than otherwise."

The Café promoted itself simply by its presence in an area highly trafficked by students. The goal was to distribute about 2,500 Coffee-mate samples per day, but that goal doubled to about 5,000 samples per day.

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"We wanted to be somewhere highly visible and right in the center of a main thoroughfare of campus traffic where students naturally gravitate or walk through," says Matt Fasano, account director at Fluent. "We wanted to create a spectacle that differentiated the brand."

To add a real flair to the event, students could Tweet to @coffee_mate using #coffeemateatosu to have a fresh cup of coffee—and Coffee-mate creamers—delivered within five to 10 minutes all over campus by student ambassadors driving crimson-colored scooters with tow-behind sampling stations. The delivery service was marketed onsite via signage at The Café, through a team of student ambassadors who pre-promoted the service and earned media from students taking photographs of the signage and posting it to their social channels. Students took advantage of the offer and social media set fire around The Café. Just shy of 700 requests for coffee deliveries were recorded during finals week.

"It's a very genuine, interactive experience with students that yielded a lot of great social traction without a lot of prompting on our part," Fasano says. "We're not only having an exchange with students, but once the coffee has been delivered they typically create a tweet thanking us with a photo."

Yes, they did. More than 700 posts on "public" profiles on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook tagged #coffeemateatosu—although that drastically understates the amount of social engagement since most profiles are private, Fluent says.

Coffee-mate has been on the OSU campus for about a year now, but The Café is by far its largest and most extravagant event. Over the last three semesters, the brand and its student ambassadors have had a weekly presence at key locations—the study hall and the library to name two—to serve complimentary coffee and a variety of the creamer flavors.

"The goal is to build awareness with students and to enhance the programming we were already doing in a bigger way," Parker says. "We really wanted to come in and own finals week on campus. It's a mindset that this is really about introducing Coffee-mate to students in a way that is relevant to them. We want them to notice that we have a regular presence here and to keep us top of mind."

College students like sampling. A whopping 84% say they are more likely to purchase a product after receiving a free trial or sample, according to Barnes & Noble College. They also like sweepstakes with 66% participating, according to Barnes & Noble College.

Building strong relationships with onsite campus activity planners, agencies that have healthy rosters of campus contacts and other organizations that can help gain on-campus access to students play an important role. The old saying, "It's who you know, not what you know" applies here.

SWEEPSTAKES

Students love sweepstakes – in fact, our research shows that 66% of college students participate and we've got the numbers to prove it.

FACTS

600
Schools

47M
Impressions

99,207
of Entries
(Fall 2015 Back-to-School)

Source: Barnes & Noble College

Fluent has a relationship with the National Association of Campus Activities, including sharing office space at the NACA's Columbia, SC, headquarters. The partnership helps Fluent get their clients on campuses, says Darren Ross, executive vice president of solutions at Fluent.

College marketing programs are, of course, insights driven. Research is crunched not only on students, but also campus by campus. Student influencers, like those that participated in the Coffee-mate program—are playing a growing and important role in helping agencies and brands understand the rhythm of the campus, the best location for foot traffic and new technologies. They are often paid and also play a key role in marketing one-on-one to students, upping the authenticity and trust factors for brands. Those insights are then paired with unique characteristics of the brand that are identified to be the most attractive and beneficial to the students.

"You have to treat each campus as its own unique being," says Gabrey Means, creative director and co-founder of Grow Marketing. "Each campus has its own rhythm and flavor that you have to tap into. We identify the social influencers on campus to help us get the right intel—whether that's recent graduates or

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current students interested in marketing. We pull them in as program ambassadors and get them excited about the program. They help us define different student groups, where to locate the experience and, in general, what's happening on campus. They are the curators of pop culture with their social channels. They are the ones who serve as the new media moguls with the purchasing power. You have to respect that."

TAKEAWAY TRIAL

Google and Grow Marketing teamed up to drive awareness and purchase consideration for Chromebooks with a six-week national tour. In the fall of 2014, 12 campuses spread across the country were targeted including Pennsylvania State University, Texas A&M and the University of California, Los Angeles.

A sleek pop-up "Lending Library" featured Chromebook colors and eye-catching brand messaging. There, students could demo the Chromebooks or—in a unique twist—borrow the devices for up to four days. The trial came with a pamphlet introducing key features and a \$10 Google Play Card.



Folding bikes were parked at colorful bike racks and used by student crews to bike around campus and spread word of the "Lending Library."

WHO IS THE U.S. STUDENT?

- Monthly discretionary spending \$179, annual personal earnings \$5,568
- 48% get money from home averaging \$283 monthly
- 7% employed full-time, 42% employed part-time, 6% have a full or part-time internship
- Average age 20.8, average GPA 3.4, 31% have changed their major at least once
- 43% live on campus, 32% live off campus, 25% live at home
- 78% attend a school in the same state as their permanent home (average student lives 198 miles from their permanent home)
- 22% are the first in their family to attend college, 30% have one or more siblings attending a four-year school compared to 15% attending a two-year school
- Family household income averages \$106,193

Source: Student Monitor (Fall 2015)

To market the library, students pedaled around on bikes and handed out stickers and T-shirts with Chromebook messaging. At each campus stop 30 students were surprised with their very own Chromebook to keep—either at the Lending Library by finding a golden ticket in the Chromebook they checked out or during on-campus surprise and delight moments at popular student hangouts.

"The college market is ripe with opportunities," says Means. "So many brands still market the old fashion way setting up draped tables and handing out products, which is shocking. It's still cost effective, but can be harmful in front of this savvy audience. Students want to be engaged and want the opportunity to share what they learn with their friends. You have to take a more sophisticated approach to how you're going to campus."

By the end of the tour, millions of social and press impressions were recorded and thousands of Chromebooks had been checked out.

Social media plays a vital role in on-campus marketing as students quickly share information about events and promotions through their plethora of social channels. A study of 1,500 college students found

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that 82% of them take a friend's recommendation via social media into account when making a purchasing decision, according to MarketingCharts.

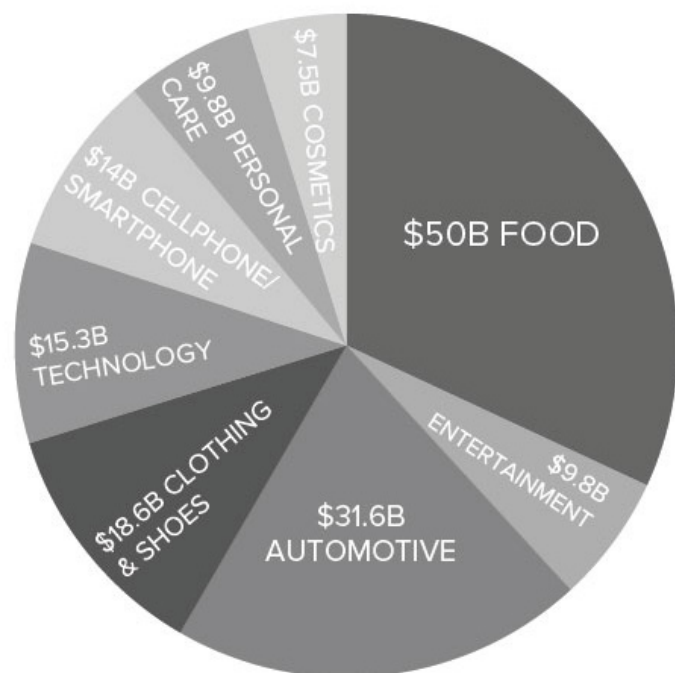
ALL ACCESS

Getting on-campus access, however, is not always easy. More colleges are saying no to marketers or becoming more restrictive than they have in the past.

"Schools are wanting on the one hand want to make sure, if there are revenues from brands that they're capturing that, but on the other hand the desire to keep the academic domain free and clear from commercial advertising," says Paul Tedeschi CEO at The Campus Agency. It's just easier sometimes for campuses to say no for no other reason than it's just easier to say no."

But as we know, marketers and agencies, including

\$163B ANNUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING



Source: Barnes & Noble College

The Campus Agency, don't take no for an answer.

When seeking a workaround to getting on campus, The Campus Agency taps fraternities and sororities housed on private property, which are not held to the same marketing restrictions as campuses. In return for helping get a brand on campus, the fraternity may receive a donation to a philanthropic charity of their choice. Other options include, nearby private parking lots—which provide an attractive blank slate for events—local bars or coffee shops. This strategy also works well when competitors are bumping up against each other. If, for example, Enterprise car rental is marketing on

campus, Zipcar can find a nearby location.

"Our job is to figure out how to access the students at those campuses where brands are locked out," he says.

Another avenue to get on campus is to partner with Barnes & Noble College. It is the official retail campus bookstore—both on- and offline—on 740 campuses, reaching more than 5 million college students, parents, alumni and faculty. Some in-store events and experiences are exclusive to freshman, others to graduating seniors, offering a captive, very targeted niche audience. Brands like Visa Checkout, Hunter, Cricket Wireless, DirecTV and others partner with Barnes & Noble College.

"We can interact with students at all the different milestones in a highly targeted way," says Marie Policastro, director brand partnerships and research at Barnes & Noble College. "Our access to new students is like the Holy Grail, if we can capture the freshman we can lock them in for the next four years and beyond."

Cosmopolitan magazine hosted a 20-foot by 20-foot experience in stores where students could get manicures, hair consultations, and of course, subscribe to Cosmo. Mars hosted live sampling events for its newest launch, goodnessknows snack squares. And because Barnes & Noble College is a retailer, it can also carry the products in its stores boosting ROI.

Among its other services, Barnes & Noble College has a 10,000-student influencer panel that it taps with quick polls to help provide insights and guide brand campaigns.

Most brands begin campus marketing with a managed frame of six to 10 campuses and then based on success grow that number year on year.

"You need to start with really getting the right systems in place and hiring the right people," says Erik McKinney, creative director at Mosaic. "There's so much learning you can gain that it makes sense to test and learn and get those best practices on a year-on-year basis."

During the back-to-school time frame, Mosaic takes the latest Dell technologies on campuses through one-to-one engagement. It developed "Dell University" as a hub for students and faculty to learn about Dell products and to be rewarded with exclusive customized deals.

"People are under the impression that this audience is not open to marketing, but this audience truly is interested in being engaged with brands, but how they want to be engaged is completely different," McKinney says. "They are willing to provide their contact information, but it comes with the expectation that they are going to get an immediate reward or experience, or exclusive content. Whether it's coupons, promotions or other offers in exchange of personal

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information. In our minds that can be a first step, but the key is building a community and a relationship.”

Mosaic hired 125 students to represent and be the voice of Dell and Windows. These students took on the role of technology expert and demonstrated how Dell products fit with a student’s college life.

“An experience provides a deeper more meaningful engagement,” McKinney says. “Ultimately if done correctly the experience become social content they can share through their networks. Everyone now is a network, which is really unique and interesting. There are college students with millions of followers who are more influential than some brands. Students are constantly looking for new experiences that can fuel the content they share on their channels and increase their followers. Brand experiences can play a great role if it’s a relevant meaningful experience that fits within their lifestyle.”

Dell also develops Facebook pages specific to various universities.

“You want to maintain that more locally relevant angle with a specific communication channel where you can do that,” he says. “If we engage them in September, the [purchase] need may not exist until farther down the year, McKinney says. “To build that community via social allows us to stay engaged for upcoming new technologies and allows students to engage with us when the need arises.”

Among the social channels favored by college students—Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram—Facebook still has the largest reach with 86% of students having a Facebook page, he says. For brands, Facebook makes a good foundation to build a lasting social connection

“You need to have that right [social] mix for basic brand information and engagement and Facebook works well for that, but you also need Twitter and Instagram to maintain an ongoing conversation,” McKinney says. “We’re starting to see Snapchat become more and more prevalent as well. Having that base on Facebook and then having that ongoing dialog on Twitter and Instagram is the crucial part.”

Another crucial part is being able to market on the fly. To be flexible and ready to adapt to what’s relevant to students at any given time and to make marketing communications personal.

“One of the biggest pitfalls in marketing to college students is to lump them all into one big bucket,” he says. “The solution is to develop overarching programs to the large audience, then break that audience into segments, like freshman and seniors, to personalize marketing within that larger audience. The same applies to the colleges themselves. There is still that ability to find that captive audience on and around campuses.



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The Authority on Measurable Marketing: Our mission is to seek out the best in measurable marketing intelligence—and then analyze, summarize and organize it for marketing and C-level executives.