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**NAFSA 2005 Notes, by Cheryl Darrup-Boychuck, cheryl@usjournal.com
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Welcome to the 2005 version of **eRecruitment Trends and Techniques**. I am Cheryl Darrup-Boychuck, owner and CEO of usjournal.com, an online international student recruitment service.

Our co-presenter this morning is Rachel Waldstein, Office of Global Educational Programs, U.S. Department of State.

Because of the volume of information we'd like to cover, and to reserve some time for Questions / Answers at the end, we've re-formatted this session into a "Top Five" structure. We'll identify the most critical trends in this dynamic field, and then we'll take it a step further; we'll dig a little deeper into the techniques -- What the leaders in the industry are actually doing about those trends.

So we're addressing two questions here: So what? (i.e. Why are these trends important?) And now what? (What are we doing about them?)

1. The soul of the Internet is up for grabs. I think the *Christian Science Monitor* said it best: The wide open free internet has become a haven for spam artists. But blocking the spam may result in a closed, proprietary secure and trusted Internet that stifles free expression and open content as much as it does spam and viruses. We need to find a happy medium -- and that's what's up for grabs.

By some counts, 73 percent of all e-mail is spam. I know it is for me. And I know I can enable more aggressive spam blockers, but in a way, I'm like my two-year-old: I don't want to miss anything.

Spam presents an interesting dilemma. The U.S. government recognizes the problem, but they're not quite sure how to deal with it. Last month, a man convicted in the nation's first felony prosecution for illegal spamming was sentenced to nine years in prison, but the judge postponed the sentence while the case is appealed -- because the law targeting bulk e-mail distribution is new and raises constitutional questions.

Another interesting element was raised in a recent Pew Report: Six percent of Americans admitted to buying something proposed by an unsolicited e-mail message. **Six percent!** That's two or three times better than most traditional direct mail campaigns via the U.S. Postal Service, which can expect a 1-1/2 or two percent rate of return! So, there is a particular segment of the population that is actually encouraging spam behavior.

So what? We'll see even more sophisticated software dedicated to spam blocking and ad blocking, though many Americans see spam as a fact of Internet life. How do other cultures view spam? That's a question we'll study in the coming months. If anyone knows of credible studies about global perceptions of spam, send them along to me.

A few solutions have been proposed: By creating "safe lists" with our address books, we can screen for likely good e-mail. Personally, I don't have an address book, for fear of spreading malicious viruses if my system was ever hacked. As always, for every action, there is a re-action.

Here's another interesting proposal: Put a cost on e-mail by charging "virtual postage" that is paid by the sender to the receiver, so regular two-way communication is effectively free. Spammers, on the other hand, have to pay for the privilege of having you receive their message. Junk spammers would just give up.

Who knows what'll happen next? But here's what we're doing now: Spam issues are closely related to privacy concerns. Some people might think it's overkill, but we include our simple, four-sentence Privacy Policy at the bottom of every page within our site.

We also remind students about spam filters immediately after they complete an inquiry form on our site, on our Exit / Thank You Page, and we offer other options for students to get our information, via our RSS / XML feeds, or audio recordings.

So, it's important to develop alternative ways to disseminate your information. In some cases, good old-fashioned telephone calls are very effective. But you may opt for something more techie, like MP3 audio files which can spread like wildfire from iPod to iPod around the world. Which leads us to Trend Number Two:

2. Creativity makes a comeback. Lack of creativity is modern marketing's greatest failure. Now that the Internet has become part of the fabric of our lives, it's time to have fun with all this technology.

The most successful marketing campaigns are certainly not always the most polished ones. While professional ad agencies provide valuable statistical insight and general direction, I think we'll see more promotional creations coming from those closest to all these emerging technologies. Students themselves -- in classes as diverse as digital media arts, global communications or eCommerce -- will collaborate with international student counselors and recruiters to promote their programs worldwide, via MP3 audio, blogs, RSS / XML feeds, short films, and who knows what else.

Here are some examples of successful, integrated marketing campaigns -- not all from the world of education, but we can learn something from each:

- Mass transit ads: In the U.S., costs start at less than \$20 per month for an 11 x 17-inch placard. Outside the U.S., of course, policies and pricing varies widely. But I'll bet you can learn more about those options online.
- Creative take-aways: Leave free stickers with your URL in shops or events catering to your market; supply URL-branded beverage sleeves in coffee shops on or near campuses overseas; or brand pizza boxes with pull-off stickers with your URL attached. These take-aways work best in practically any place that's not a chain store.
- Business-card-sized promotional pieces: Think outside the box. I saw one style that featured a rotating wheel. Another style folds so users feel compelled to stand them up on their desks.
- Never lose site of your end user. Here's a classic case of customer-oriented sensitivity: After September 11th, Southwest Airlines swiftly agreed to grant refunds to all customers who asked for them, putting hundreds of millions of dollars on the line. A potential flood of refund requests never came. Southwest's risky but brilliant gesture is one reason why it has remained profitable in every quarter since the twin towers fell. Most other carriers fussed about adding leg room and in-flight services. Meanwhile, Southwest gave customers what they really wanted: cheap seats and a hug. (*HBR pg 72, Nov 2004*) Reimbursing the SEVIS fee, for example, is equally brilliant.

Today, the ultimately successful marketers find ways to blend creative, right-brain functions with analytical, left-brain functions. One of the many beauties of the Internet lies in the wealth of data that is so easily accessible. In this day and age, there's no reason to market blindly.

Which brings us to Trend Number Three:

3. Statistics (from trusted sources) don't lie. Before committing to thousands of dollars from your recruitment budget, take a look at a few population pyramids. I think Turkey has enormous potential in the near term, simply due to its demographic structure. For example, let's take a look at two of IIE's (Open Doors) top ten sending countries from last year: Korea (#3) and Turkey (#8). In the 15- to 24-year old sector, Turkey has nearly twice as many prospective students: 13 million compared to 7.7 million. (*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Database 2000*)

Be sure to study the right statistics. Beware of selection bias. This concept is best explained with an example, from the April edition of *Harvard Business Review* (pg 118): During World War II, the statistician Abraham Wald was assessing the vulnerability of airplanes to enemy fire. All the available data showed that some parts of planes were hit disproportionately more often than other parts. Military personnel concluded, naturally enough, that these parts should be reinforced. Wald, however, arrived at the opposite conclusion: The parts hit least often should be protected. His recommendation reflected his insight into the selection bias inherent in the data, which represented only those planes that returned. Wald reasoned that a plane would be less likely to return if it were hit in a critical area and, conversely, that a plane that did return even when hit had probably not been hit in a critical location. Thus, he argued, reinforcing those parts of the returned planes that sustained many hits would be unlikely to pay off.

So, what does this mean for us? It means that we're not seeing the whole picture if we study only the data from students who complete our online forms. What about the students who view our site, but never complete a form? In the case of usjournal.com, we need to study more than just the data from our Excel Reports.

We felt rumblings of this phenomenon a few years ago, when we cross-referenced statistics from our database, with statistics from our log files. There were inconsistencies, for a number of reasons. For example, we know we get a lot of page views from Taiwan, but not so many forms completed in Traditional Chinese. When we asked our "man on the street" in Taipei, he wasn't surprised -- b/c at the time, there was a major hack of private (bank) information in that region.

This international admissions business is not a perfect science. The challenge lies in convincing our superiors that it's "messier than you think." We need to analyze statistics from different, credible sources.

Another set of data that is particularly relevant for our purposes: Global Internet usage rates. According to *Global Reach*, only about 12 percent of the world's population has regular Internet access. Those users tend to be more affluent than those without Internet access, so that factor in and of itself poses somewhat of a filter.

Increases in non-English-speaking populations online have been widely documented. Native English speakers account for only about 35 percent of all Internet users today. Not surprisingly, native Chinese speakers comprise about 14 percent of the pie; Spanish speakers, about nine percent; and Japanese speakers are at about 8.5 percent. Some experts predict that native Chinese speakers will eventually outnumber native English speakers online, as the rate of growth online catches up to China's population figures.

So, it's getting even more critical to communicate with non-native speakers of English -- whether you are targeting students for your ESL classes, or perhaps you're targeting parents of students who are not necessarily proficient in English.

And as many of you know, the level of expectation is getting higher every day. More U.S. campuses are translating portions of their sites to target specific language populations, or they're outsourcing that task. Demands are high; that's not to say you should jump on every bandwagon, but it's harsh out there. Sites aren't pegged as "user-friendly" or "un-friendly" any more; now the term for a poorly constructed site or inaccessible site (for whatever reason) is "user-hostile".

The Internet has accelerated the shift -- in practically every industry -- from mass markets to precision markets. Dell represents the emerging new era of precision markets. This company carefully selects its customers, and individualizes every transaction to "sell what it has," often changing its product features and pricing literally minute by minute.

Which brings us to Trend Number Four:

4. Welcome to the Era of Precision Marketing. In Search Engine Marketing, the race is on to see which of the two big players can produce more relevant results in their users' own neighborhoods. Last month, both Google and *Yahoo!* offered free local registrations of organizations, as they need to populate their databases to enhance their geomarketing capabilities in the U.S.

AOL recently introduced pay-per-call advertising: Rather than presenting a sponsored link to click through to an advertiser's web site in response to a query, pay-per-call ads display a toll-free telephone number. It's especially effective for the local pizza shop, who doesn't really need a website; they need calls for take-out orders.

Geography-based technology is driving more sophisticated pay-per-click or pay-for-performance campaigns. For example, you can literally enter specific key words or key phrases (in any major language), and request that your advertisements appear only to Internet users within a certain radius of specific points of latitude and longitude, anywhere in the world. No kidding.

Geomarketing software automatically detects the IP address of the visitor, and matches it against a database of corresponding locations. Get this: Alcohol maker Absolut uses this kind of software to automatically identify the country of origin of visitors to its home page. They instantaneously cross-reference that data with local laws about minimum drinking ages; under-age viewers may not access the site. Absolut then presents custom content for each country, including day or night images depending on the current time in that location. I'm not kidding.

So, what do we do with this technology?

Well, for example, English Language Programs can target non-native speakers of English in their own backyards, within 20 miles or so of their campuses. Or, if you're planning to host an alumni / recruitment event in Tokyo, for example, launch a very focused campaign for two or three months prior to the event, with links leading to an online invitation.

A note of caution about pay-per-click campaigns: It's generally accepted that "click fraud" claims about 30 percent of pay-per-click advertising expenditures -- a figure estimated to reach three billion dollars this year. So, keep your campaigns very targeted, and monitor them like a hawk. Consider investing in inexpensive software programs such as ClickSentinel.com to help monitor any abuse.

Search engine marketing is still a viable source for fresh, new prospective student inquiries. It's still a challenge to achieve top results near the top of the results page for free, as algorithms are constantly changing at Google, *Yahoo!*, and some of the other important country-specific and language-specific search engines. One thing has not changed in search engine optimization since the very beginning: good, continually-updated content performs well in search results. Google, for example, seems to be dropping some sites that have not been updated or acquired any new inbound links for a year or more.

Inbound links from like-minded sites certainly help a domain's ranking in search results. One prime example is the EducationUSA website, which has been encouraging U.S. campus sites to link to them; the result for EducationUSA is better placement in the major search engine result rankings. Which brings us to Trend Number Five:

5. Collaborative Efforts Abound (out of both necessity and smart marketing): More collaboration among the private sector that supports international student recruitment. For example, it's getting pretty crowded in the recruitment fair market: <http://www.usjournal.com/en/students/info/fairs.html> In several cases, there are very similar events scheduled in the same city, within just a few days of each other. The more experienced tour organizers have recognized this trend, and have started to join forces with former competitors.

It's interesting to note that *online* promotions are not subject to time and space constraints, in the same way that events are. That's probably the biggest reason why Internet campaigns are often far less expensive than other means of recruitment.

Still, budgets are tight -- which is why we're seeing other forms of collaboration among like-minded campuses, and within individual campuses. As budgets shrink, campus-based colleagues are getting more creative in sharing resources toward the ultimate goal of promoting the institution as a whole.

Shared resources often lead to gray areas: Calculating ROI (Return on Investment) is still not as clear as most enrollment managers would like, even though there are more automated tracking mechanisms than ever. It may seem counter-intuitive, but online marketing -- on the user end -- is fueling the messiness... because the Internet was not designed to be contained or restricted.

For example: usjournal.com is distinctly designed to appeal to non-U.S. students exploring U.S. academic options. We don't invest heavily in domestic promotions, but often, students find advertiser Profile Pages with us before they find the campus' own .edu domain. Prospective students who live within about 50 miles of an advertiser's campus consistently represent between 15 and 20 percent of all prospective inquiries generated by usjournal.com. Some of those students are U.S. citizens, while others are not. Regardless, I see those results as quite positive, because those inquiries are certainly targeted, and it's far easier to enroll a student in close proximity. (We will continue to cater to the 80 to 85 percent of our traffic that lives outside of the United States.)

Fortunately, we're seeing more cooperation (i.e., sharing budgets) among domestic and international recruiters on the same campus. This trend will likely gain momentum, as Education = Shopping (IIE's Atlas of Student Mobility, p. 57), whether today's tech-savvy students are in Tampa or Taipei.

Today's style of successful Internet marketing extends well beyond spick-and-span, black-and-white strategies. usjournal.com has implemented a number of initiatives that boost student user friendliness -- which outweigh our need to track our efforts precisely. As you know, students gravitate toward the path of least resistance; if you don't keep it simple, students will simply click away.

For instance, we've been including direct telephone numbers, fax numbers and other contact information on advertisers' Profile Pages with us, so students can contact the campus directly. Those students do not show up on our advertiser's Excel Reports, and we do not clandestinely capture information that the students don't volunteer. Also, in our Automated Responses, we encourage students to forward our advertiser's information to friends who would also like to learn more about studying in the States. Those forwarded messages do not show up on our Excel Reports, either.

This trend really represents a departure from our philosophy just a few years ago, when we tried with all our might to get the student to complete our forms online, which would feed the data into our system and initiate our communications plan with messages triggered by future student actions or certain dates. But some students simply prefer not to complete online forms, and I think it's important to give them alternatives to contact you at will. Some campuses use the "form-only approach" as a sort of filter, speculating that the students who DO complete it are more qualified.

So, what? Where do we go from here?

Last month I read an interesting quote in my alumni publication from Kurt Thiede, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Communications at Bucknell. "There's good reason to believe we will recruit students on a more personal level, utilizing to a greater extent our alumni and friends. Admissions officers will become relationship managers. Technology will support communications and these relationships. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to think that the Class of 2054 might be shaped more by the individual outreached hand of a Bucknellian than a psychometric analysis of large numbers of prospects."

I agree with that prediction to a limited extent -- to the extent that it will happen only when campuses achieve that perfect balance in the diversity of student enrollments: We have such and such a percentage of Indian students, such and such a percentage of Spanish-speakers, such and such a percentage of African students, and so on. Because the reality of word-of-mouth promotions is that you really tend to perpetuate your current mix (or lack thereof) of students. I think there will be a need for fresh, new inquiries for a very long time to come. And that's why we hope to be here next year, brainstorming about all the latest eRecruitment Trends and Techniques.

Keep in mind that online marketing is in its mere infancy; we have a lot of growing to do. And we promise to keep our finger on the pulse of it for you. I'll leave you with one thought, from Jonathan Byrnes of Harvard Business School: Like all paradigm shifts, the old will not simply go away; rather, it will be subsumed, enriched, and extended by the new.

Other Notes:

On personal privacy: ZabaSearch.com finds a wealth of info sometimes dating back more than 10 years: residential addresses, phone numbers both listed and unlisted, birth year, even satellite photos of people's homes.

Consumers are creating an **organizational structure** for online content. Tagging is like a Dewey Decimal System for the Internet. Here's how tagging works. Using sites such as del.icio.us - a bookmark sharing site - and Flickr - a photo sharing site - consumers are collaboratively categorizing online content under certain keywords, or tags. For example, an individual can post photographs of their iPod on Flickr and file it under the tag "iPod." These images are now not only visible under the individual user's iPod tag but

also under the broader community iPod tag that displays all images consumers are generating and filing under the keyword. As of this writing, Flickr has more than 3,500 photos that are labeled iPod.

Tagging is catching on because it is a natural complement to search. Type the word "blogs" into Google and it can't tell if you are searching for information about how to launch a blog, how to read blogs, et cetera. But using del.icio.us you can bookmark this page or subscribe to its RSS feed. Then, everyday you will find the latest interesting links consumers are finding and sharing about blog marketing. Now imagine you run a blog marketing consultancy and you want to advertise to users who follow these tags. This is what's we'll see this year as tagvertising takes hold.

"You're not being disloyal to progress by picking and choosing the kind of technology that best fits your needs." The premise is that campus computing is contributing to information overload, and that the solution is to turn off the computer once in a while. Seasoned internet veterans know that this just makes information overload worse, because the information doesn't stop piling up just because you've logged off. The key (in my mind) is to stop treating information like a thing, stop treating it as though it were a pile of required reading, but to sample and filter and redirect, to taste and digest and manipulate as needed. Information management is a skill, like kayaking, and needs to be practiced. By Jeffrey R. Young, Chronicle of Higher Education, April 22, 2005
<http://chronicle.com/free/v51/i33/33a03401.htm>

Attention Deficit Trait: ADT: Caused by brain overload, ADT is no epidemic in organizations. The core symptoms are distractibility, inner frenzy, and impatience. People with ADT have difficulty staying organized, setting priorities, and managing time. These symptoms can undermine the work of an otherwise gifted executive.

Similar to ADD, or Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder, except that ADT springs entirely from the environment.

David Neeleman, CEO of JetBlue Airways, has ADD. He invented the electronic ticket. Seems fitting that someone with ADD would invent a way around having to remember to bring a paper ticket. HBR, January 2005: *Why Smart People Underperform*, by Edward M. Hallowell.

Last year, the Defense Department was targeted by hackers nearly 75,000 times, which led to the military forming the Joint Functional Component Command for Network Warfare.

"IT dependence in the US is evolving into a strategic center of gravity." ... Because of outsourcing to China, Philippines, India, Pakistan, to name a few, there are more people in scattered places with access to commercial systems and vast amounts of information. The more these capabilities are outsourced, the more vulnerable they become to a large-scale cyber attack.