Northwestern Michigan College- Digital Marketing RFP Q & A

- By percentage, what is the distribution of current digital advertising across brand name/awareness, specific programs, and general enrollment? 3% to brand, 6% to specific programs, 42% each to traditional and adult learner campaigns.
- Comprehensive SEO assistance is specified. While this service is certainly available, the document doesn't put any scope on the request, which can make SEO an expensive deliverable. Are there specific pages or sections where SEO work is expected, or are we quoting for SEO services across the whole site? We are looking for a scalable SEO quote that would ideally start with the top 10 pages impacting enrollment.
- Remarketing is requested; ad platforms have audience size minimums before remarketing can be used. To help us understand potential for this tactic, are remarketing campaigns currently in use, serving ads, and earning applications or RFI forms? Remarketing campaigns are not currently in running but are in development.
- Separate from remarketing, how are 1st party marketing lists generated from Recruit? Is Recruit connected to Google Analytics with attribution back to session source? We do have some connection to Google Analytics so we can attribute some traffic to session sources, but the integration is incomplete and we'd like to strengthen it.
- Since ad platforms prohibit targeting ads to users under age 18, how is NMC currently marketing to this audience? Is there a robust email marketing plan supporting digital advertising? NMC is reaching this audience with email campaigns after they have entered our enrollment funnel, with recruiters in person, and digitally via their influencers like parents and teachers.

What does the make-up of your internal team look like?Our team is comprised of:
- Associate Vice President of Strategic Communications & Change Initiatives
- Communications Director
- Coordinator of Web Content & Online Strategies
- Creative Director
- Graphic Coordinator
- Marketing Director
- Marketing Office Manager

Are you currently outsourcing these services to an agency? Yes

What are your current pain points related to marketing and advertising? We have not been able to establish an API with Google Ads and our CRM. We do not have videos for all of our ad campaigns and need to wait until the next fiscal year to get them. Our Admissions team does not track campus visits in a way that we are able to incorporate into our reporting.

What platforms are you currently using for digital marketing? Google Ads, Bing, and Meta although we are not always running on all networks simultaneously.

For your digital marketing efforts are you seeking program specific, school level, or brand level campaigns? If program specific, approximately how many programs? Our efforts are at the brand level, by student type, as well as by program level. Currently we are running ads for four

programs but that can and will change and these campaigns make up a small portion of our ad spend.

Do you own and manage your advertising accounts directly, or are they managed through a third party?
We own our accounts but they are managed by a third party.

In the last year how much did you spend on agency fees? $85,284

Is there a maximum budget for this engagement (fees + media) We have budgeted $300,000 for ad spend fees.

What are your current enrollment goals? To grow YOY enrollment and achieve a $4.20 paid media ROAS.

Does your institution have a preferred compensation model for agency services (flat fee vs. percentage of media spend)? This can differ based on the agency but a flat fee is preferred.

Can you provide more information around your SEO needs and what is the budget for this work? We currently do not have an SEO strategy. We are looking to the RFP to assess the cost of this work for a site like ours.

For any SEO work, do you have a team that can implement a SEO strategy and recommendations or are you looking for the agency to do this work? We have a team that could implement the recommendations.

Both RFPs express a strong preference for a single vendor handling both digital marketing and website redesign. If a single vendor is selected for both, how does NMC envision the coordination between the two scopes—single contract, single point of contact, or separate workstreams? Separate workstreams.

Is there a preferred evaluation timeline for both RFPs? Early spring.

Will decisions on both be made simultaneously, or could one be awarded before the other? One could be awarded before the other.

Questions on Digital Marketing Support RFP Performance Baselines & KPIs
What is the current annual volume of completed applications generated through digital channels, and how does this break down by enrollment term (Fall, Spring, Summer)? 6-7k. Largely for Fall enrollment.

What is the current lead-to-application conversion rate? How does NMC define a "lead" versus a "qualified lead" in the context of the 10% conversion target? The current conversion rate is 3.43% Qualified leads are more likely to be traditional or adult students from our 5-county region.

Can NMC share historical performance benchmarks for current digital campaigns—specifically Cost per Lead, Cost per Completed Application, and ROAS—by channel (Search, Social, Display)? Our search ROAS goal is $4.20.

What is the current average Cost per Application across all digital channels? ~$3.00

Is the 10% Lead-to-Application conversion target based on a current measured baseline, or is it an aspirational goal? If based on data, what is the current rate? This is an aspirational goal based on our current data. The overall conversion rate is 3.4% and the current paid rate is 7.5%

Are there known enrollment bottlenecks after application submission (e.g., admissions review, financial aid, advising) that historically impact conversion from completed application to enrolled student? None that this project's success would hinge on.

Budget & Compensation Structure
Is the $300,000 annual budget strictly for media spend, or does it also include agency fees, platform costs, and/or creative production? The $300,000 is strictly for media spend.

Is NMC open to a hybrid compensation model (e.g., base retainer plus performance-based commission), or is the expectation strictly commission on media buys? Yes. We are open to that.

How has the approximately $300,000 budget been allocated across channels (Search, Social, Display) in prior years? Almost all has been allocated to search.

Attribution, Analytics & Tracking
What attribution model is currently in place for digital campaigns (last-click, first-click, multi-touch, etc.)? Last Click

Is cross-domain tracking currently configured between nmc.edu and the Ellucian Recruit application portal (nmc.elluciancrmrecruit.com)? Yes.

Are conversion events (lead form submission, account created, application started, application completed) currently configured and firing reliably in GA4 and Google Tag Manager? Most conversion events are firing reliably but could use finetuning.

Is there an existing reporting dashboard, and if so, what tool is it built in? What does it currently track? Yes. Created by our current partner. It tracks ad performance by campaign.

Operations, Access & Governance
Will the selected agency receive full admin access to existing Google Ads, Meta, and AdCenter accounts, or will new accounts need to be created? The selected agency will receive full admin access.

Who is the primary internal stakeholder responsible for enrollment performance metrics, and who has final approval authority on campaign strategy and budget changes? Kelly Yauk. Director of Marketing.

What level of access will the agency have to Ellucian Recruit data for closed-loop reporting (e.g., connecting ad clicks to completed applications)? We can give the agency access to Ellucian Recruit application and CRM data with personally identifiable information removed to comply with FERPA regulations.

Are there any enrollment marketing initiatives currently managed by other vendors or internal teams that the digital agency should be aware of and coordinate with? Yes, this information will be shared once a vendor is selected.

SEO, Landing Pages & Cascade CMS
For the landing page build requirement within Cascade CMS: will the agency have direct Cascade access to build and publish pages, or will pages need to go through NMC's web team for deployment? We can give the agency direct Cascade access as needed.

Can NMC share current organic search traffic volume and the top-performing landing pages related to enrollment and admissions?
nmc.edu
nmc.edu/library
nmc.edu/maritime
nmc.edu/landing/adult-students.html
nmc.edu/programs/academic-programs/nursing/index.html
nmc.edu/admissions
nmc.edu/student-focused

What is NMC's current approach to AI search optimization (e.g., structured data, FAQ schema, content optimization for LLM-generated results)? Success Definition & Timeline An organized approach is needed.

What would NMC consider a successful first six months for the digital marketing partner? I would expect to be hitting our CPA goals within the first six months of our contract start.

Are there specific enrollment term deadlines (e.g., Fall 2026 registration) that the agency should plan around for an immediate-impact campaign upon start? Fall 2026 classes begin August 24. Other important academic dates are available here: https://www.nmc.edu/news/calendars/academic.html

1. The RFP notes that NMC anticipates approximately $300,000 in annual digital media spend. Can you please confirm whether this amount is intended to represent media expenditures only, with agency professional services fees proposed separately, or whether respondents should assume that agency fees must be included within that

budget? This budget is for media expenditures only and agency fees should be proposed separately.

2. Can you clarify whether the estimated annual digital media spend is intended to support campaigns for all academic programs concurrently, or whether NMC anticipates prioritizing specific programs or initiatives during particular recruitment cycles? This budget is for general student type based campaigns and specific program campaigns.

3. By percentage, what is the distribution of current digital advertising across brand name/awareness, specific programs, and general enrollment? 3% to brand, 6% to specific programs, 42% each to traditional and adult learner campaigns.

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1. We saw you request one electronic version to be emailed to you as well as two copies to be mailed. I may have read it wrong, but can you confirm if we can email it VERSUS mailing two copies? Or do you prefer we do both? I'm thinking about the Q&A deadline you set to February 27 and the RFP being due March 6th.

Emailed proposals will be accepted in lieu of mailing two copies.

2. Which specific degree programs are the highest priority for this campaign? Or is it all of undergrad.

Program priorities may change throughout the year. Current priorities are Great Lakes Water Studies Institute, Great Lakes Culinary Institute, UAS program, Nursing program, Great Lakes Maritime Academy, and the Aviation program.

Note that the primary audience is prospective students and not current students, detailed information for current students lives on a separate student site.

3. Which digital channels have given you the most success thus far? Who is the incumbent agency, if there is one?

Branded search campaigns directed at Adult Students in Google AdWords have historically been the most successful with Nursing PMAX campaigns also performing above average. Our current agency is TrendyMinds.

4. I saw SEO is part of the RFP requirement. Is it optional or do you want us to scope that out as well?

Creating a search optimized website is part of the RFP. Creating an optimization strategy is optional.

5. We typically price our services as a percentage of media spend. Will that be accepted knowing the budget is $300,000/year?

Yes.

6. Will Propellant be expected to provide creative development, or will the marketing team handle all creative assets?

Propellant will be expected to provide creative guidance. The marketing will handle the creation of creative assets.

7. Are there existing audience personas or research that we can leverage for targeting?

Yes, existing audience personas, research, and Brand Guidelines were created for NMC and should be leveraged for targeting.

8. Will our team work directly with the central marketing/procurement teams?

If selected the team will work directly with the Public Relations, Marketing, and Communication team.