Later this autumn, universities will increase tuition fees resulting in more pressure to deliver on education investment. This fundamental shift means universities will need to develop a strategy to improve student experience across the institution from initial contact to alumni relations. In order to better recruit and retain students, institutions should be devising customer relationship management (CRM) strategies that go beyond technology. CRM success is primarily a function of people, process and clear business goals and only secondarily about enabling technology. The potential of CRM lies not in technology itself, but in the process of using technology along with an in-depth understanding of your desired students to drive unique, valuable interactions and respond at the right time to students needs.

At the same time, CRM in higher education has historically been viewed as technology alone, often times delivering capabilities not found in institutional legacy information systems. There is confusion around the link between enrolment management and CRM. Enrolment management may be thought of as an inside-out view of the potential education marketplace. An institution desires to provide its educational programs and services to target groups of students. Thus, universities must employ plans and policies to acquire, enroll and retain these populations.

It would be difficult at best for institutions to meet enrolment goals without effectively supporting interactions with students, or to realise value from CRM without developing a strategy for managing recruitment and retention.

A successful CRM strategy begins by changing your vantage point from internal to external concerns. Think about this— if you could change the enrolment experience for your students, removing any internal or external barriers and process inefficiencies, what would that look like for students? The question is how to move from a vision of new enrolment experience to reality. Creating a value-based CRM plan definition begins by identifying clear enrolment or other university goals and supporting objectives. From these goals and objectives, it should be possible to drill down to a set of performance indicators and specific initiatives and prioritise them into phased implementation plans encompassing all of the planning people, process and technology enablers to support the strategy.

The guiding principle of a value-based CRM strategy is ultimately to improve the student experience – across the institution through the identification and implementation of methods.

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