

Helping an Underdog Institution Own Their Niche and Break New Ground

A University of Maryland, Baltimore County Case Study

About UMBC

University of Maryland, Baltimore County is a school where rocket scientists rub elbows with rockstars, a study-first community of intellectuals with an artistic bent and a bohemian spirit.

Marketing Challenge:

UMBC was still facing chronic enrollment declines despite being a beloved university home for best-fit students. Following a historic NCAA run, UMBC saw an opportunity to own their identity as a challenger school to fuel growth.

Project Scope:

- Market Research and Analysis
- Audience Targeting Strategy
- Digital Media Planning and Placement
- Digital Marketing Campaign Execution
- Landing Page Development
- CRM Targeting Strategy
- Campaign Optimization
- Campaign Reporting

The Situation – Newfound Recognition

In 2018, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County's men's basketball team had a thrilling finale to their "Cinderella" season in the NCAA March Madness tournament, staging an improbable upset of the top-seeded team in the first round.

This was more than a sports victory. UMBC suddenly found themselves on the national stage, finally gaining the prestige they deserved. In this moment, UMBC saw an opportunity to own their identity as a challenger school poised to upset the top seed.

They are a school where rocket scientists rub elbows with rockstars, a study-first community of intellectuals with an artistic bent and a bohemian spirit. UMBC's president, a charismatic firebrand, traveled across the country to present and share UMBC's progressive approaches to raising student achievement, connecting minorities with STEM Careers and advancing undergraduate research. Beyond academics, UMBC was a routine contributor to social justice movements and achievement equity initiatives, setting a vocal precedent for higher ed institutions as beacons of upward social mobility.

However, UMBC was still facing chronic enrollment declines despite being a beloved university home for best-fit students. This was due in part to increased competition and demographic declines in their usual recruiting areas in the Baltimore and DC regions and a handful of reliable out-of-state markets like Long Island. To add to the challenge, UMBC had minimal experience in digital marketing, over-relying instead on local print advertising and in-person recruitment efforts to fuel growth.

VisionPoint’s Approach — Picking the Right Shots

In partnership with their central marketing team, we embarked on a first-of-its-kind initiative that leveraged the precision and cost-efficiency of a digital-forward marketing strategy powered by our **Smart Spends Media Calculator™**, a proprietary tool that helped us recommend what UMBC’s media mix and spend levels by channel should be based on targeted enrollment growth numbers. Through extensive market research, we gathered invaluable data that helped UMBC prioritize which audience segments and geographies to invest in from a marketing standpoint.

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Methodology

- Rationale
 - Outsiders provide the most realistic viewpoint of the competitive landscape and UMBC's position within the recruiting footprint.
 - Insiders know UMBC best and give authenticity to brand perceptions.

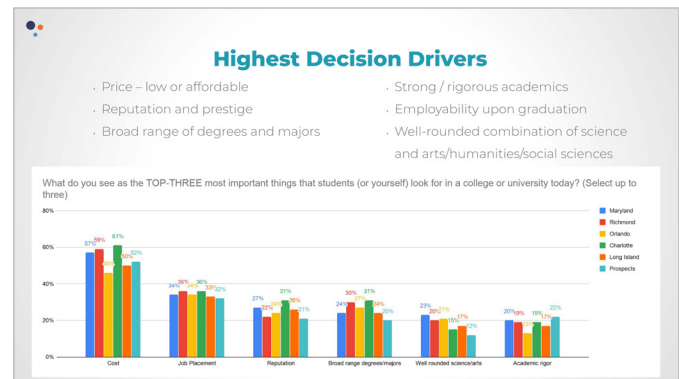
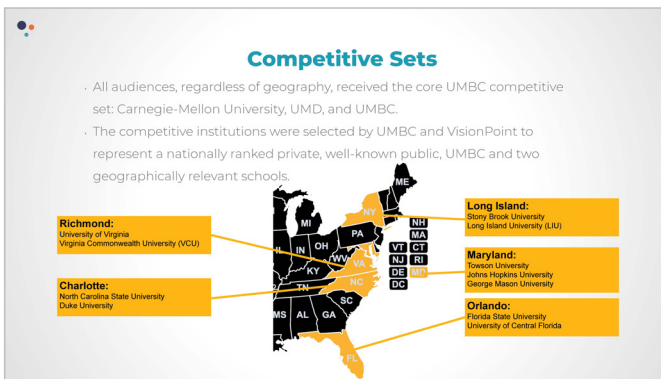
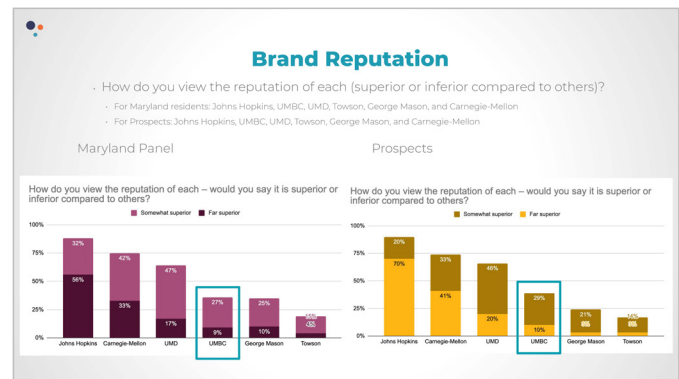
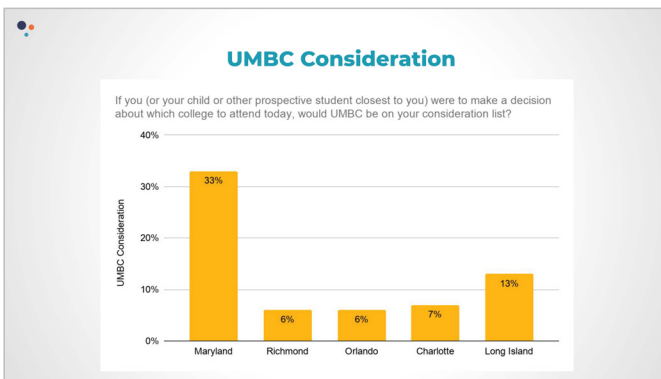
Geography defined as	Total Completed Collected
OUTSIDERS	
Maryland	202
Entire state with the primary focus being Howard and Montgomery counties	
Richmond	
Orlando	
Charlotte	
Long Island	
INSIDERS	
Prospective students	
UMBC Alumni	

24 METRO AREAS

AFTER PRELIMINARY WINNOWING, WE CONDUCTED A CLOSE ANALYSIS OF TWO DOZEN METRO AREAS.

Through this discovery work, we learned that UMBC was perceived in a more positive light than previously thought, dispelling much of the conventional wisdom about who their competitors really were. While UMBC was viewed in a class above many peer institutions that shared a heavy research emphasis and focus on academic rigor, they lacked the elite school aura that aspirants like Carnegie-Mellon enjoy.

Based on takeaways, we shaped a strategy for reaching those best-fit audiences in four high-demand metropolitan areas worth targeting: **Charlotte, Richmond, Orlando and Long Island**, each of which harbored communities where both UMBC’s best-fit prospects and/or proud alumni lived. Then, we launched UMBC’s first integrated marketing campaign through display, search, retargeting, email nurturing, print, programmatic, social media and other channels. To impact enrollment, we consistently updated their CRM list targeting to ensure their list active admits stayed current and engaged those applicants with a yield campaign that invited them to take the final step in their decision-making journey.



Market Identification & Survey Presentations

77%

savings despite being the first foray into digital marketing. Our campaigns drove qualified enrollment leads at an industry-beating \$17 cost per acquisition, well-under the \$75 average CPA.

The Results — A Runaway Success

Much like their NCAA performance, our campaigns exceeded expectations. This was UMBC’s first foray into integrated digital marketing, yet we drove qualified enrollment leads at an **industry-beating \$17 cost per acquisition** — proving a tremendous return on UMBC’s pilot investment in that these conversion rates were well-under the \$75 average CPA for universities in their category.

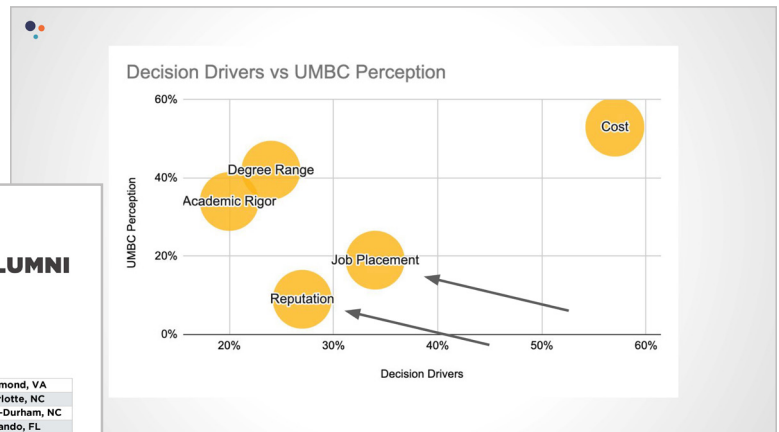
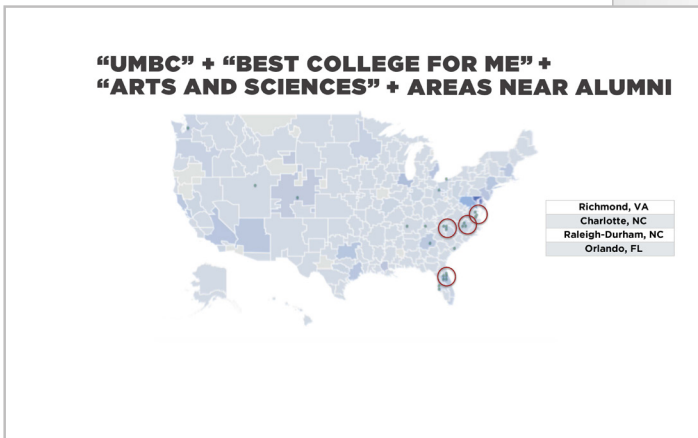
\$5.36

per event lead secured in event registration. This incredibly low Facebook CPA ended UMBC’s reliance on expensive postcards.

To sweeten the victory, we strengthened their in-person recruitment efforts by using direct response ads to secure event registrations at an incredibly low Facebook **CPA of \$5.36**, ending their reliance on postcards that yielded a dismal response rate while costing thousands of dollars to print. And through our consultative influence, UMBC underwent an institutional culture shift. Their leadership team and campus community — who stepped outside their comfort zone to embrace such a drastic change — now reached a consensus on digital marketing’s importance while actively implementing the strategies and recommendations we imparted as the new way forward.

Inspiring a Culture Shift

UMBC’s campus community reached a consensus on digital marketing’s importance while actively implementing our strategies and recommendations to fuel growth.



Market Identification & Survey Presentations