



MARKETING 101 PLAYBOOK

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

If your NAU unit has dedicated marketing and communications support (e.g., a Communications Manager), please collaborate directly with them on any marketing or communications campaigns. This ensures consistency, efficiency, and alignment with institutional and college standards. Thank you!

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

This playbook serves as a foundational resource for anyone involved in marketing at Northern Arizona University (NAU)—including professional staff, faculty, student employees, and ambassadors. It provides a clear, approachable introduction to core marketing concepts and illustrates how they can be applied in a higher education setting.

Think of it as both an **orientation** and a **reference guide**:

- **Orientation**—Use it to become familiar with core marketing principles and language so you can engage confidently in conversations about strategy, planning, and branding.
- **Reference**—Revisit it when you need quick reminders, definitions, or examples of key concepts, frameworks, and best practices.

Use this playbook to better understand the *why* and *what* of marketing before diving into the *how*.

- Learn the building blocks of an effective marketing strategy, including **audience definition** and **content strategy**.
- Understand how different marketing **channels, platforms, and tactics** work together to achieve your goals.
- Recognize the importance of **brand alignment** and **consistent messaging** across the institution and individual units.

Playbook goals

- **Demystify marketing**: Translate complex ideas into clear, practical language that is easy to apply.
- **Build confidence**: Equip faculty and staff to engage in marketing conversations and collaborations with assurance.
- **Foster collaboration**: Provide shared vocabulary and frameworks that strengthen connections across colleges, departments, and central marketing units.
- **Lay the groundwork for advanced practice**: Establish a strong foundation for developing campaigns, applying strategy, and leveraging tools and platforms to promote programs effectively.

WHY MARKETING MATTERS

At its core, **marketing is about reaching the right people, at the right time, using the right message.** In higher education, this means communicating the unique value of your academic programs in ways that resonate with prospective and current students, their families and influencers, alumni and donors, as well as community and industry partners.

Marketing is more than advertising, promotional items, and print collateral—it's a **strategic process** that helps you:

- Define who you want to reach and when they are most receptive (target audience and timing)
- Craft messages that highlight the strengths and outcomes of your unit/offering (content strategy)
- Use the most effective pathways—such as social media, email, web, or events—to reach those audiences (channels)
- Measure results so you can see what's working and adjust for greater impact (analysis and optimization)

In higher education, effective marketing can:

- **Increase awareness and visibility** among prospective students and influencers.
- **Communicate the return on investment (ROI)** of a degree or other offering—career outcomes, experiences, and opportunities.
- **Showcase institutional and unit strengths**—faculty expertise, student success stories, and distinctive features that attract students.
- **Strengthen connections** with alumni, donors, and community partners.
- **Enhance retention** by reinforcing belonging, resources, and pathways to success.

In short, **marketing helps turn information about your offerings into inspiration to take the next step**—whether that's attending an info session, applying, enrolling, or getting involved. By approaching program promotion through a structured marketing lens, you can make your efforts more intentional, efficient, and impactful.

THE 4 P'S OF MARKETING

The **4 P's—product, price, place, and promotion**—are the building blocks of any marketing strategy. In higher education, they help us clearly define what we are offering, how it is delivered, and how we communicate its value. Understanding these elements ensures that marketing efforts are focused, student-centered, and aligned with NAU's strengths.

1. Product

Product refers to the actual offering—**what you're presenting or selling to your audience**. In higher education, this could be an academic program or degree, course, certificate, study abroad experience, internship, research opportunity, or any element that enhances the student experience.

Your product represents the unique value your unit delivers—how it enriches learning, supports growth, and distinguishes NAU within the higher education landscape. It encompasses everything from the curriculum, faculty expertise, and learning format to the experiential opportunities, student support, and career outcomes.

In short, your product is more than a program or degree—it's the total educational experience you create for students.

Consider:

- What makes this offering distinctive within your college, university, and/or field?
- What knowledge, skills, or credentials does it provide that prepare learners for meaningful careers or continued study?
- What experiences—such as research, internships, service learning, mentoring, advising, or community engagement—add depth and value to the educational journey?
- How does this offering support student success, belonging, and growth—both inside and outside the classroom?
- In what ways does it align with institutional priorities or respond to workforce and societal needs?

Examples:

- A master's program that blends data analytics with public policy, taught by faculty who are active practitioners in the field.
- A fully online bachelor's degree in business that emphasizes entrepreneurship, adaptability, and flexibility for working professionals.
- A study abroad initiative that immerses students in global problem-solving and cross-cultural collaboration.
- A campuswide mentoring program that connects undergraduates with alumni mentors to strengthen career readiness and community ties.
- A research center that partners students and faculty on applied projects addressing regional challenges and innovation.

2. Price

In higher education, price most often refers to tuition and fees—the factors that weigh heavily in the decision-making process for students and families. While affordability is a leading consideration, it's only one part of the overall **value of a degree or academic offering**. Value also reflects the quality of the academic experience, the support students receive, and the long-term opportunities that come from earning an NAU degree or certificate.

Communicating price effectively means balancing transparency about costs with a clear articulation of the return on investment: how an NAU education equips students for meaningful careers, personal growth, and lifelong success.

Consider:

- How do you demonstrate return on investment (ROI)?
 - **ROI** measures the value of an academic offering and experience relative to the resources invested. This includes career outcomes, skill development, personal growth, study abroad, and the connections students gain, including professional networking.
- How does the cost compare to similar offerings?
- Are scholarships, grants, or assistantships available?
- How does the offering lead to career advancement or higher earning potential?

Examples:

- Complete your fully online degree in 18 months with in-state tuition rates so you can launch your healthcare career sooner.
- Earn your BSN in just 12 months with NAU's accelerated program for post-baccalaureate students, making you eligible for the national licensing exam and a career as a registered nurse.
- Begin your education at one of NAU's statewide campuses or online to save on housing costs while earning the same respected NAU degree.
- Apply for the International Excellence Award, a merit-based tuition waiver for high-achieving, first-time, full-time international students. This renewable award provides up to \$11,000 per year.
- Take advantage of NAU's 2+2 transfer pathways to complete your bachelor's degree in four years—saving time and tuition while building on your community college credits.

3. Place

Place refers to **how and where an offering is delivered**—whether online, hybrid, or in person on the Flagstaff Mountain Campus or at a branch campus. Accessibility and flexibility are often key factors influencing student and family decisions.

Consider:

- How do traditional, working adults and non-traditional learners access our offerings?
- How flexible is the format (asynchronous, evening, part-time)?
- Are student support services available regardless of location?

Examples:

- A fully online certificate program designed for working professionals, supported by virtual advising and career coaching.
- A hybrid Master of Forestry program where students attend weekend courses in Flagstaff while completing the remainder online.
- A cohort-based doctoral program offered in a low-residency format, combining intensive on-campus sessions with online collaboration.
- NAU–Yuma and statewide campuses offering flexible scheduling options to meet the needs of commuting and part-time students.

- Study abroad programs that extend the learning environment beyond the classroom and immerse students in global experiences.
- A community-based nursing program where students complete clinical rotations in their home regions to reduce travel costs.
- Online lab simulations and virtual research projects that replicate hands-on experiences for distance learners.
- A summer bridge program held on campus to help first-generation and transfer students acclimate to university life before the semester begins.
- Tutoring, writing, and advising services available virtually to support student success across all delivery formats.

4. Promotion

Promotion is **how you share the value of your offering with the audiences who matter most**. It's the communication bridge between what you provide and how people experience and perceive it. In higher education, effective promotion goes beyond simply informing—it inspires action, builds trust, and strengthens connection to the institution's mission and brand.

Consider:

- Who is your target audience, and what motivates them to act or engage?
- What messages, stories, or outcomes will resonate most deeply with them?
- Which channels—email, social media, web, print, events, or partnerships—will most effectively reach and engage them?
- How will you sustain engagement and guide your audience toward the next step once you've captured their attention?
- How can your promotional efforts reflect NAU's brand voice and reinforce the university's promise of student-centered, transformative education?

Examples:

- A social media campaign on LinkedIn and Instagram showcasing student success stories and alumni job placements to boost engagement with career services.
- An email series in the *Lumberjack Family Hub Newsletter* highlighting the value of accelerated programs to student parents and families.
- A digital signage and QR-code campaign across campus linking students to advising, tutoring, and academic success centers that enhance their academic journey.
- A cross-channel marketing effort that integrates print, web, and event promotion for a new interdisciplinary research initiative.

BUILDING A MARKETING CAMPAIGN

What is a marketing campaign?

A marketing campaign is a **coordinated, time-bound set of activities designed to achieve a specific goal**—such as generating inquiries, increasing applications, or promoting an event. Campaigns typically use a mix of marketing channels and tactics (e.g., email, social media, web content, print, events, etc.) to deliver a consistent message to a defined audience.

Effective campaigns don't happen by chance—they are **intentional, measurable, and guided by a clear strategy**. A structured approach ensures your marketing efforts are efficient, student-centered, and aligned with NAU's brand as well as institutional goals for student recruitment, retention, and success.

Key steps in campaign planning

1. Defining the campaign

Every campaign starts with a clear purpose. Defining your campaign objective helps focus your resources and provides a benchmark for success.

Start with the call to action

Before you craft any messaging, identify the campaign's call to action (CTA): What do you want your audience to *do, know, or feel*? Everything else—messaging, channels, and design—should flow from this central goal. Thinking about the CTA first keeps your campaign focused and ensures every piece of content serves a clear purpose.

Develop a campaign summary

A campaign summary is a short statement that outlines the **purpose, audience, timing, and desired outcomes** of a marketing campaign. It serves as a roadmap for your efforts, helping everyone involved stay aligned on the campaign's goals and scope.

In higher education, a campaign summary should clearly answer:

- **Who** is the primary audience? (e.g., prospective undergraduates, graduate students, parents, transfer students, alumni, donors, community members, industry partners)
- **What** is the campaign promoting? (e.g., new/existing program, info session, event, application deadline)
- **What** outcomes are expected? (e.g., increase inquiries, generate applications, boost event sign-ups)
- **Why** is the campaign happening now? (e.g., tied to admissions cycle, launch of a new program, support enrollment/retention goals)

Example:

Promote the [offering name] to [target audience] by generating [#] new inquiries, [#] info session registrations, and/or [#] completed applications for [specific term] enrollment.

- Promote the Master of Public Health program to working professionals in Arizona, with the goal of generating 100 new inquiries and 20 completed applications for Fall 2026 enrollment.

Set goals and outcomes

Setting measurable goals is essential to ensure your time and resources are used effectively, align with your objectives, and demonstrate the impact of your marketing efforts. Clear, measurable goals define what you want to achieve and allow you to track progress with data. By establishing these outcomes upfront, you can focus on strategies that drive results and make informed decisions for future campaigns.

Even if you're not completely certain of your specific goals, it's worth setting initial, attainable targets—such as increasing enrollment, engagement, or retention by just one student—to establish baseline data for future campaigns.

What makes a goal measurable?

A measurable goal is **specific**, **quantifiable**, and **time-bound**, meaning you can clearly determine whether it was achieved.

Instead of broad objectives like, "Increase awareness of the BS in Mechatronics and Robotics Engineering," measurable goals focus on concrete outcomes that can be tracked using marketing analytics, such as: "Generate 75 new landing page visits and 15 information session sign-ups for the BS in Mechatronics and Robotics within six weeks."

SMART goals framework

SMART goals provide a helpful framework for creating strong, measurable objectives:

- **Specific:** Clearly state what you want to achieve.
- **Measurable:** Include a number or metric.
- **Achievable:** Make sure it is realistic.*
- **Relevant:** Connect it to your goals.
- **Time-bound:** Set a timeframe.

*Set achievable goals by grounding them in industry benchmarks, historical performance, and current data.

Sample measurable goals:

- Increase program inquiries by 5% by the end of this semester.
- Generate 50 info session registrations within four weeks.
- Achieve an email open rate of 20% and a click-through rate (CTR) of 2.5%.
- Drive 1,000 unique visits to the program landing page during campaign.
- Increase completed applications by 10% by year end.
- Grow social media engagement (likes, shares, comments) by 5%.

Identify campaign resources

What resources are readily available to support this campaign? Typical examples include:

- **People:** Will you plan alone, with a team, and/or with institutional marketing support?
- **Budget:** What funds are available, and are there any restrictions or requirements?
- **Timeline:** Are you beginning to plan **at least six months ahead—ideally one year** before your target deadline or enrollment cycle?
 - For example, to make an impact on fall enrollment, it is ideal to begin planning and implementation of your marketing campaign one year in advance. Even 'emergency' enrollment campaigns require significant time—2–3 months to secure access to resources, plan, and develop creative/content—prior to executing the campaign.

- **Tools/platforms:** Do you have access to the tools and platforms needed to support the campaign? These may include:
 - Email marketing platforms (e.g. Mailchimp, Emma, Marketing Cloud)
 - Social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram)
 - Website platforms (nau.edu, in.nau.edu, legacy.nau.edu, uConnect)
 - Print collateral
 - Promotional items
 - Marketing analytics platforms
- **Sponsor(s):** Who is your unit sponsor? This is the staff member who champions the campaign for their academic unit. Responsibilities include:
 - Providing campaign goals and key messages
 - Coordinating approvals within the unit
 - Supplying program updates and subject expertise
 - Partnering with marketing staff to align with unit voice
 - Sharing outcomes with unit leadership

Engage key stakeholders

Stakeholders are campus partners who need to be informed, involved, or provide approval. Early collaboration with the right stakeholders ensures your campaign:

- Reflects the offering accurately
- Follows university policies and brand standards
- Gains necessary approvals efficiently
- Leverages existing expertise and resources (design, analytics, paid media)
- Builds trust and collaboration across units

Define roles and responsibilities

Clear roles and responsibilities help campaigns run smoothly and prevent confusion about who is doing what. When multiple people or units are involved, it can be helpful to create a RACI chart to document roles for planning, approvals, and execution.

A RACI chart outlines four key roles:

- **Responsible:** Completes the work or task
- **Accountable:** Holds decision-making authority and final ownership of the outcome
- **Consulted:** Provides input, subject matter expertise, or feedback
- **Informed:** Receives updates on progress or results

Using a RACI chart ensures that:

- Everyone understands their role in the campaign
- Decisions and approvals are clearly assigned
- Communication flows efficiently across units and stakeholders

In a higher education context, RACI roles might include:

- **Responsible:** The unit sponsor drafts campaign content and works with unit-specific marketing staff (e.g., student employees, communications manager, etc.) to complete the campaign deliverables.
- **Accountable:** Unit leadership (e.g., Dean or program director) signs off on finalized campaign materials.
- **Consulted:** Cross-campus stakeholders and partners (e.g., Academic Affairs Marketing (AAM) and Brand & Strategic Communications (BSC) teams) are consulted for content refinement and brand alignment.
- **Informed:** Unit leadership is updated on campaign outcomes.

Sample RACI chart: academic program promotion campaign

Stakeholder	Unit sponsor	Unit leadership	Marketing staff	Campus partners	Example
Define campaign goals and summary	R	A	I	C	Sponsor drafts goals/summary with partner input; leadership provides approval.
Draft campaign content	I	C	A/R	C	Marketing staff support drafting content with sponsor oversight.
Approve final content	I	A	I	C/R	Leadership approves; partners review for content refinement and brand alignment.
Build campaign assets	A	I	R	C	Staff create assets with sponsor oversight; partners provide technical/brand input.
Coordinate print ads/media pitching	C	I	R	A	Campus partners manage media pitching; sponsor consults.
Distribute email campaign	A	I	R	C	Sponsor manages send via approved platforms with partner support as needed.
Track analytics and report results	A	I	R	C	Staff pull analytics; sponsor interprets and reports with assistance from partners as needed.
Share outcomes with leadership	R	A	C	I	Sponsor delivers results and future recommendations to leadership.

2. Audience definition

Effective marketing starts with **understanding who you are trying to reach**. Whether it's prospective undergraduate students, working professionals, families, alumni, or industry partners, defining your audience ensures your messaging is relevant, resonates with their goals, and drives results. A clearly defined audience allows you to craft tailored messages, select the most effective channels, and connect meaningfully with the people who matter most.

Why define your audience?

A well-defined audience improves campaign performance across three key dimensions:

- **Effectiveness:** Messaging speaks directly to the motivations, needs, and goals of your audience.
- **Efficiency:** Resources are focused on the most relevant channels and tactics, reducing wasted time and budget.
- **Outcomes:** Campaigns are more likely to generate meaningful results—such as inquiries, applications, and engagement—by reaching the right people at the right time.

A clearly identified audience also enhances measurement and reporting, providing context for analyzing results and informing future campaigns.

Target audience(s)

Defining your target audience early in campaign planning ensures all elements—from messaging to creative execution to channel selection—align with the people you want to reach. Without a clear audience, content can fall flat, and resources may be misapplied.

Key dimensions to consider:

- **Demographics:** Age, life stage (e.g., high school student, working professional), income, and employment status.
- **Geographics:** Urban vs. rural, in-state vs. out-of-state, time zones, and language.
- **Psychographics:** Career motivations, media consumption habits, and lifestyle values (e.g., sustainability, flexibility, convenience).
- **Behavioral:** Application habits, preferred communication channels, and device usage.

Pro tip: Don't overlook influencers and supporters—such as parents and families—especially for undergraduate audiences. They value program quality, affordability, and post-graduation outcomes.

Sample target audiences:

- Student type: Prospective undergraduates, graduate students, current students, transfer students, and international students.
- Demographics: First-generation students, underrepresented minority (URM) students, military-connected learners, and regional populations.
- Psychographics: Career-focused professionals, socially engaged undergraduates, and students seeking experiential opportunities.
- Influencers and supporters: Parents, guardians, faculty, and advisors.

Audience personas

An audience persona is a fictional, research-based profile representing your ideal audience member. It captures key characteristics, motivations, and behaviors to guide messaging, content, and channel decisions.

Why create audience personas?

Developing personas ensures your team:

- **Understands the audience:** Identifies goals, concerns, and decision-making factors.
- **Improves messaging and content:** Crafts relevant, targeted communications.
- **Enhances channel selection and efficiency:** Focuses efforts on platforms the audience uses most.
- **Drives measurable outcomes:** Leads to higher engagement, inquiries, and applications.

For instance, rather than sending a single email to all prospective students, persona-based messaging could include one email for working professionals seeking career advancement and another for first-time college students.

Sample audience personas

Undergraduate student persona: “First-gen future Fiona”

- **Demographics:** 17–18, first-generation college student who lives in Arizona (rural/small town) with a household income <\$60k.
- **Goals and motivations:** Be the first in family to earn a degree, join a supportive campus community, access affordable tuition and financial aid, and gain hands-on experience.
- **Concerns:** Application and financial aid navigation, academic and social preparedness, and college expenses.
- **Preferred channels:** Instagram/TikTok for campus life, text/email for reminders, and web for step-by-step guidance.
- **Messaging:** “Join a supportive community with mentors who help you succeed.”

Graduate student persona – “Career-advancer Carlos”

- **Demographics:** 28–35, full-time professional who lives in the Phoenix metro area and holds a bachelor’s degree.
- **Goals and motivations:** To advance their career, access flexible online/hybrid programs, and gain practical skills and strong return on investment.
- **Concerns:** Balancing work, life, and school; tuition cost; and career relevance.
- **Preferred channels:** Email, LinkedIn, and web pages with clear program outcomes.
- **Messaging:** “Earn your degree on your schedule and advance your career with practical skills.”

Parent persona – “Practical parent Patricia”

- **Demographics:** 45–55, married with 1-2 college-aged children who lives in suburban Arizona with a household income \$75k-125k.
- **Goals and motivations:** Safe, reputable, affordable university with strong career outcomes for child and flexible program options.
- **Concerns:** Tuition, job placement rates, and campus safety.
- **Preferred channels:** Email newsletters, program pages, and social media for updates.
- **Messaging:** “Our graduates are career-ready, supported, and prepared for success.”

3. Marketing strategy (*why + who*)

Once you've defined your campaign objective and target audience, you've established your marketing strategy. A marketing strategy explains *why* you're marketing and *who* you're trying to reach. It clarifies your goals, your audience, and what success looks like—helping ensure marketing efforts are focused, intentional, and aligned rather than scattered or reactive.

With your strategy in place, the next step is choosing how you'll bring it to life—through the types of marketing you use. Your marketing strategy sets the direction; marketing types determine how best to reach your audience and support your goals.

Marketing types (*the approach to your strategy*)

Marketing strategies often use one or more of these approaches:

- **Digital (online) marketing:** Uses online channels such as websites, social media, email, and digital advertising.
- **Traditional (offline) marketing:** Uses offline channels such as print, TV/radio, direct mail, and outdoor advertising.
- **Experiential marketing:** Creates immersive, interactive experience—such as events or activities—that help audiences connect with a brand.

Integrated marketing brings these approaches together so messages are consistent and work toward the same goal across all channels.

Channels, platforms, and tactics

Once you've chosen your marketing approach, the next step is deciding where and how you'll reach your audience—through channels, platforms, and tactics.

Marketing channels (*where*)

Marketing channels are the broad pathways you use to reach your target audience. Channels are the **mediums or venues you use to communicate**, focusing on reaching and influencing target audiences to build awareness, generate leads, and drive sales. Choose your channels based on where your audience spends time and how they prefer to consume content.

Sample channels:

- **Digital**—content marketing, email marketing, social media marketing, website optimization
- **Traditional**—broadcast advertising, community and network promotion, print marketing and advertising
- **Experiential**—brand activation, event marketing, field marketing, live marketing, guerilla marketing

Marketing platforms (*specific where*)

Marketing platforms are **the specific tools, services, or environments within a marketing channel** where campaigns are executed and audiences are reached. Platforms provide the space or technology that enables you to deliver, manage, and measure your marketing activities.

Sample platforms:

- **Channel:** Social media marketing (digital)
→ **Platforms:** Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram
- **Channel:** Print marketing and advertising (traditional)
→ **Platforms:** *Pine* alumni magazine, *The Arizona Daily Sun*, campus bulletin boards, mailboxes
- **Channel:** Field marketing (experiential)
→ **Platforms:** Tabling, street team activations, mobile tours

Marketing tactics (*how*)

Marketing tactics are the **specific methods or actions executed within a platform** (e.g., posting, sending, placing ads, tabling, distributing print materials, hosting an event) to engage your audience and achieve a particular objective.

Sample tactics:

- **Channel:** Social media marketing (digital)
 - **Platforms:** Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram
 - **Tactics:** Posting organic content, hosting a live Instagram Q&A, collaborating with influencers
- **Channel:** Print marketing and advertising (traditional)
 - **Platforms:** *Pine* alumni magazine, *The Arizona Daily Sun*, campus bulletin boards, mailboxes
 - **Tactics:** Featuring stories in alumni publications, placing newspaper advertisements, distributing handouts at events, posting flyers across campus, sending direct mail campaigns
- **Channel:** Field marketing (experiential)
 - **Platforms:** Tabling, street team activations, mobile tours
 - **Tactics:** distributing printed materials, raffling off promotional items, running a hands-on demonstration

How they fit together: strategy, campaign, channel, platform, and tactic

Marketing works as an interconnected journey, where each element serves a distinct role in moving audiences toward a shared destination.

- **Strategy** defines the purpose and direction of the journey—why you’re traveling and who you’re trying to reach.
 - *Strategy = the map and destination.* It shows where you’re headed, why it matters, and who you’re trying to reach.
- **Campaigns** are coordinated, time-bound efforts that bring your strategy to life by combining multiple tactics across one or more channels and platforms to achieve a specific goal.
 - *Campaign = the road trip.* A planned journey that follows your map toward a defined destination that may involve multiple highways, vehicles, and maneuvers along the way.
- **Channels** are the broad pathways or mediums you use to reach your audience (e.g., social media, print, field marketing).
 - *Channel = the highway.* The main route you take, chosen based on where your audience travels most often.
- **Platforms** are the specific tools, services, or environments within a channel where your content appears (e.g., Instagram, *The Arizona Daily Sun*, tabling).
 - *Platform = the vehicle.* The specific car, bus, bike or other vehicle you use to travel on that highway, selected based on how and where you’ll connect with your audience.
- **Tactics** are the concrete actions you take on a platform to engage your audience (e.g., posting Instagram content, publishing a print ad, distributing promotional items).
 - *Tactic = driving maneuver.* The actions—turning, passing, or stopping—that help you make progress toward your destination.

4. Content strategy + brand alignment

Content is the heart of any campaign. What stories, images, or outcomes will resonate with your audience? How can you present your program in a way that feels authentic, inclusive, and aligned with NAU’s brand? Strong content tells your program’s story while maintaining consistency with institutional messaging and visual identity.

What is content strategy?

A content strategy is the blueprint for successful marketing campaigns. It's a documented, intentional plan that outlines how content will be planned, created, distributed, and measured to achieve campaign objectives.

Unlike ad-hoc or reactive posting, a well-developed content strategy ensures your efforts are:

- **Purposeful:** Every piece of content supports a specific goal.
- **Consistent:** Messaging, tone, and visuals align with your brand and campaign objectives.
- **Audience-focused:** Content addresses the needs, motivations, and questions of your target audience.
- **Measurable:** Success is tracked against defined outcomes (outlined in your campaign summary), such as engagement, inquiries, or conversions.

Content development process

A strong content strategy is supported by a clear process:

1. **Ideation:** Brainstorm content topics, formats, and storytelling approaches that align with campaign goals, timeline, and audience needs.
2. **Drafting:** Develop copy, visuals, and multimedia assets guided by your strategy and brand standards.
3. **Review:** Refine for clarity, accuracy, accessibility, and alignment with content goals.
4. **Approval:** Obtain sign-off from stakeholders or leadership when required.
5. **Distribution:** Publish across selected marketing channels, optimize for each platform, and track performance against content goals.

Brand alignment

Institutional brand

Northern Arizona University's brand is the foundation of the entire NAU brand system. It is the consistent promise we make to our most important audiences. A message that conveys NAU's unique strengths and benefits to the public with the intent to raise awareness and build a strong and consistent reputation.

Our brand is more than logos or collateral—it's the foundation that guides our work, shapes the way we communicate, influences the stories we tell, and helps others recognize and connect with our institution. It ensures our messaging feels authentic today while staying aligned with our long-term vision.

Brand promise

Our brand promise is the core idea behind what the university stands for and is embodied in the entire experience it provides.

We welcome and support students who bring diverse experiences, perspectives, and ambitions—empowering them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

This promise is strengthened by supporting pillars, personality traits, and tone of voice. Together, they shape how we communicate consistently and authentically across every touchpoint.

Brand pillars

Our brand pillars set the NAU experience apart in the marketplace—in the lives of faculty, staff, students, and community. NAU's brand pillars give depth and substance to our promise and guide all brand marketing and communications.

Each brand pillar is made up of a core ideal and experience driver. The core ideals are what NAU aims to achieve alongside its students, faculty, and staff. The experience drivers then expand on those ideals and contain multiple concepts we're striving to bring to life.

NAU brand pillars

- Accessible, affordable education that creates lifelong value, opportunities, and connections (valuable opportunity).
- A welcoming environment that celebrates diversity and empowers every student (inclusive community).
- High-quality academic programs led by dedicated mentors invested in student success (supportive faculty).
- Transforming ambition into action through knowledge, skills, and confidence that shape lives and communities (bold impact).

By organizing content around these ideas—rather than categories like “events” or “academics”—we ensure our storytelling highlights what truly matters to students, families, alumni, and partners.

Brand personality

Our brand personality is the character of the institution—how its experience feels, and how it presents that outwardly.

NAU’s brand personality is a set of characteristics that help connect the brand with key audiences on an emotional level. They capture NAU’s unique and authentic voice as expressed by our campus community. Personality defines the tone and character that should come through across our brand, as well as in every communication and interaction. Use this personality set to guide what you create. A brand’s personality doesn’t have to be seen or heard to be understood—it should be felt.

NAU brand personality traits

- Welcoming
- Supportive
- Collaborative
- Determined
- Respectful

Brand tone and voice

Whether written or spoken, establishing a unique voice that is consistent in tone and language across all institutional and college-level communications is key to connecting with our audiences and distinguishing ourselves from competitors.

NAU brand voice and tone

- We offer an intimate, tailored experience based on one-on-one contact and interaction. Therefore, our language should be **personal, rather than institutional**. For example, “We’re here to help you adjust to college life,” rather than “The university has a wealth of resources available to help a student get adjusted to college life.”
- **Active, rather than passive tense.** For example, use “You’ll have a wealth of opportunities for outside recreation,” not “A wealth of opportunities for outside recreation will be available to you.” Active tense demonstrates a direct relationship between us and the students we are communicating with.
- **Concrete language.** Metaphors and similes are great for creative writing, but for talking to prospective students, it’s best to be concrete rather than abstract. For example, “The President’s Excellence Award covers \$11,000 in tuition annually,” not “The President’s Excellence Award makes paying for college a breeze!”
- **Short sentences, spare words.** Omit needless words and phrases. Avoid complex sentences. Avoid run-on sentences or excess commas. Long sentences with lots of comments or added-on clauses are more likely to lose readers’ attention.

College brands

Each NAU college has a brand that is part of, and strengthened by, the overall NAU institutional brand. The college brands are what the college believes in. They are meant to embody who each college is on their best day—who the college is today, and who it aspires to be in the future.

While the university's institutional brand establishes a shared identity and reputation, college brands allow for distinct voices and identities that highlight what makes each college unique. The college brands:

- **Align with the NAU institutional brand** by using shared values, tone, and visual identity. This consistency ensures that every communication reinforces NAU's reputation and recognition.
- **Differentiate each college** by showcasing unique strengths—such as areas of academic excellence, research expertise, student experiences, and career pathways. This helps colleges stand out to prospective students, faculty, donors, and partners.
- **Build emotional connections** with their audiences through stories and experiences that feel personal and relevant, while still contributing to NAU's unified brand promise.

In practice, this means that while all colleges use NAU's logos, colors, and brand voice, they also have flexibility to:

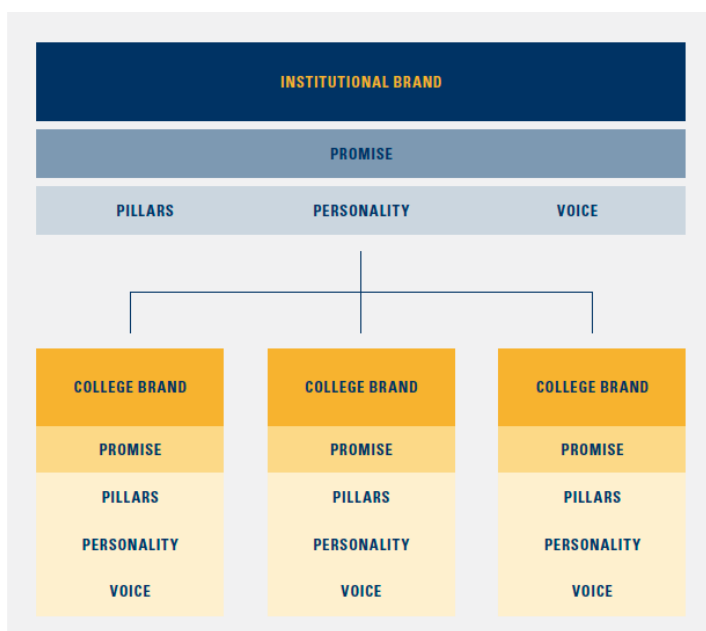
- Highlight their signature programs and faculty expertise.
- Emphasize their student communities and learning experiences.
- Share success stories and outcomes specific to their disciplines.
- Develop messaging that resonates with their target audiences (e.g., prospective students, alumni, industry partners).

When each college brand is expressed clearly and consistently, it not only strengthens that college's visibility but also contributes to the overall reputation of NAU. Together, college brands extend the university's reach, deepen audience trust, and ensure that NAU's story is told in ways that are both unified and diverse.

Brand guidelines

Both the institutional brand and college-level brands have a set of brand guidelines that provide guidance on the brand promise, pillars, personality, and voice, along with logo and visual usage, fonts, colors, and graphic assets.

How our brands work together



5. Analysis + optimization

Tracking performance is essential to understanding whether your campaign is achieving its goals. Analytics provide insight into what resonates with your audience and where adjustments may be needed. Every campaign is an opportunity to **learn and improve**. Reviewing results helps you identify strengths and gaps, refine your strategy, and make future campaigns more effective. By documenting lessons learned and applying data-driven adjustments, each campaign builds on the success of the last.

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

What are you measuring, and what is your baseline?

A key performance indicator (KPI) is a measurable value that shows how effectively a campaign or tactic is achieving its objectives. Common KPIs include email open rates, website traffic, social media engagement, and application conversions. KPIs help you understand which campaigns, materials, and tactics are delivering results—and which may need adjustment—so you can focus your efforts where they matter most.

Sample KPI tracker

Metric	Platform/tool	Target
Email unique open rate	Emma/Mailchimp	40% UOR
Website page views	Google Analytics	500 views
Social media engagement	Instagram/Facebook	1,000 impressions (total number of times a piece of content is displayed or loaded onto a user's screen, regardless of whether they interact with it)
QR code scans	Printed flyer/poster	100 scans
Event attendance	Career fair	10 attendees
Contact cards completed	Tabling session	20 cards
Application conversions	Marketing Cloud campaign	25 conversions

Analytics and reporting in marketing

Analytics

Marketing analytics refers to the process of collecting, measuring, and analyzing data from your marketing activities to understand their performance and impact. This includes tracking metrics such as website visits, email open rates, social media engagement, conversion rates, and sales. It helps answer questions like:

- How many people saw or interacted with our campaign?
- Which channels or tactics generated the most leads or sales?
- What behaviors did customers exhibit after engaging with our marketing?

Reporting

Marketing reporting is the organized presentation of the analytics data, typically summarized in dashboards, charts, or reports. It communicates insights and KPIs to stakeholders such as campus partners, leadership, or clients.

Reporting often includes:

- Visual summaries of performance data.
- Comparisons against goals or benchmarks.
- Recommendations based on data insights.

Reporting cadence and distribution

A well-planned reporting cadence ensures that campaign performance is tracked consistently and at the right intervals. By establishing a rhythm for reporting, teams can make timely adjustments, avoid surprises, and provide stakeholders with the level of visibility they need.

A thoughtful cadence keeps campaigns on track, allows for real-time adjustments, and ensures stakeholders stay informed without being overwhelmed. Inconsistent or ad-hoc reporting often leads to missed opportunities, while a steady rhythm improves effectiveness, efficiency, and overall outcomes.

Key considerations for cadence:

- **Frequency of updates**—Decide how often to report results. Options might include:
 - **Weekly:** For fast-moving or high-profile campaigns that need close monitoring.
 - **Monthly:** For most medium- to long-term campaigns where trends are more important than daily changes.
 - **End-of-campaign:** For short, one-time campaigns where ongoing tracking isn't necessary.
- **Milestone reporting**—In addition to regular intervals, consider reporting at major milestones—such as after a recruitment fair, mid-semester, or when applications open/close—to capture insights tied to key campaign events.
- **Consistency matters**—Whatever cadence you set, keep it consistent. Predictable reporting builds trust and ensures stakeholders know when to expect updates.

Distribution considerations:

Once cadence is set, determine how results will be shared and with whom. Short tactical updates may be shared internally, while high-level summaries should be distributed to unit sponsors, college leadership, or campus partners. Tailor the level of detail to each group to make reporting both efficient and actionable.

The importance of analytics and reporting in a marketing campaign

Analytics and reporting are essential tools that provide insight into how your marketing campaign is performing, enabling you to measure success, improve effectiveness, and make smarter decisions that maximize impact and budget efficiency. These tools allow you to:

1. Measure success against goals

- Analytics lets you see if your campaign is meeting its objectives (e.g., awareness, leads, sales).
- Reporting communicates this success clearly to decision-makers.

2. Optimize performance

- By understanding which tactics or channels work best, you can adjust your campaign in real time or in future efforts to improve ROI.
- For example, if Facebook ads drive more conversions than email, you can allocate budget accordingly.

3. Understand your audience

- Analytics reveals customer behavior and preferences, helping tailor messaging and offers more effectively.
- It can highlight which segments respond best, allowing for better targeting.

4. Justify marketing spend

- Data-backed reporting shows the value and impact of marketing investments, helping secure budgets and support from leadership.

5. Identify challenges and opportunities

- Analytics can uncover issues (e.g., high bounce rates, low engagement) so you can troubleshoot quickly.
- It also highlights new opportunities, like untapped channels or content formats.

6. Support data-driven decision making

- Instead of relying on guesswork or assumptions, analytics provide concrete evidence to guide strategy and tactics.

Pro tip: If you would like step-by-step guidance for setting and measuring campaign outcomes, the Academic Affairs Marketing team is available for one-on-one training and consultations. For more information, email AAMarketing@nau.edu.

MARKETING 101 APPENDICES

Appendix A: NAU marketing best practices

Effective marketing in higher education is most successful when it is both strategic and student-focused. While every campaign may look different, certain best practices apply across all contexts. Keeping these principles in mind will help ensure your efforts are impactful, inclusive, and aligned with NAU's mission.

1. Use inclusive, student-centered messaging

- Highlight the student experience and outcomes—why your program matters to *them*.
- Reflect NAU's inclusive community in language and visuals.
- Avoid jargon; keep messages clear, welcoming, and accessible.

2. Track and measure effectiveness

- Monitor key metrics such as open rates, click-throughs, web traffic, and inquiries.
- Compare results to past performance and industry benchmarks.
- Use data to refine your approach and strengthen future campaigns.

3. Leverage “program” ambassadors

- Leverage the subject matter expertise and credibility of faculty and advisors.
- Offer authentic, peer-to-peer perspectives with student ambassadors.
- Incorporate multiple voices to ensure campaigns feel authentic and relatable.

4. Align with decision-making timelines

- Plan campaigns around the admissions cycle (e.g., deadlines, FAFSA priority dates, registration).
- Begin planning **at least six months in advance—ideally one year** for major initiatives.
- Even short-term campaigns require 2–3 months for approvals, planning, and content development.

5. Maintain brand alignment and consistency

- Follow NAU brand guidelines to build trust and recognition.
- Use approved templates and resources to save time and ensure quality.
- Maintain consistency across units to reinforce NAU as a unified institution.

6. Prioritize accessibility and equity

- Ensure all materials meet ADA standards (alt text, captions, accessible fonts).
- Offer content in multiple formats (e.g., print, digital, audio, video).
- Reduce barriers for first-generation, transfer, international, and adult learners.

7. Collaborate across units

- Collaborate with units across campus for specialized expertise, funding, and approvals—and to expand your campaign reach, visibility, and credibility.
- Partner with colleagues across campus to improve efficiency and outcomes.
- Engage faculty chairs, department heads, advisors, and student clubs and organizations so they can share campaign content with their networks.

Appendix B: Marketing 101 worksheet

Use this worksheet to apply the four foundational elements of marketing—product, price, place, and promotion—to your college, department, program, or initiative. This exercise helps you define what you offer, how it's delivered, and how you communicate its value in alignment with NAU's brand and mission.

1. Product: what are you offering?

What is the offering (program, course, initiative, or experience)?

What makes it distinctive or valuable?

What knowledge, skills, or credentials do participants gain?

What experiences (research, internships, mentoring) enhance it?

How does it align with NAU's priorities or address workforce/societal needs?

2. Price: what is the perceived value?

What is the total investment (time, tuition, effort)?

What financial aid, scholarships, or assistantships are available?

What career or personal outcomes justify this investment?

How can you demonstrate return on investment (ROI)?

3. Place: where and how is it experienced?

What delivery format(s) apply (in-person, online, hybrid)?

Where is it available (Flagstaff, statewide, online, abroad)?

How do you ensure flexibility and access for all learners?

4. Promotion: how will you share it?

Who is your target audience?

Which stories or outcomes will resonate most?

Which channels (email, social media, web, print, events) will you use?

What is your call to action (CTA)?

How will you measure engagement and success?

5. Reflection and next steps

What are your key takeaways from this exercise?

What resources or collaborations will you need to move forward?

Pro tip: The Academic Affairs Marketing team is available to collaborate on strategy, design, and implementation of program-specific campaigns. For more information, email AAMarketing@nau.edu.

Appendix C: Campaign brief–DIY template

Use this NAU campaign brief template to align stakeholders on campaign purpose, audience, strategy, and measurement. Keep it to 1–2 pages; link out to supporting docs (content calendar, KPI tracker, assets).

1. Campaign summary

A short statement that outlines the purpose, audience, timing, and desired outcomes. For example: *Promote the [offering] to [target audience] by generating [#] KPI in/by [specific timeframe].*

Offering/program/initiative:

Timeline (e.g., start-end dates; milestones):

Primary CTA (what should audience do/know/feel?):

SMART goal(s):

For example—increase X program inquiries by X% by the end of fall XXXX semester.

2. Audience

Primary audience (who are you trying to reach):

Secondary/influencers (e.g., families, advisors):

Key insights (e.g., motivations, barriers):

Personas to target (your ideal audience member):

3. Messaging and content

Value proposition (why NAU/why now):

Core messages (3 bullets):

Proof points (e.g., outcomes, statistics, stories):

Tone/voice considerations:

Accessibility notes (e.g., alternative text, captions, reading level):

Brand alignment (institutional/college elements to emphasize):

4. Channels, platforms and tactics

Channel mix (e.g., email, social, web, print, events):

Platform details (e.g., Mailchimp, Instagram, WordPress):

Tactics (what exactly will you do):

Journey/flow (how users move to CTA/next step):

5. Roles, budget, and timeline

RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed):

Budget (allocations by channel/tactic):

Timeline (key milestones and approvals):

6. KPIs and reporting

Primary KPIs (e.g., inquiries, applications, sign-ups):

Channel metrics (e.g., open rate, click-through-rate, visits, engagement):

Cadence (e.g., weekly/monthly/end-of-campaign):

Distribution (who receives which reports):

Appendix D: Glossary of marketing terms

4 P's of marketing: A foundational framework for understanding marketing, focusing on four key elements: product, price, place, and promotion. In higher education, the product is typically an academic program, course, or other offering, while the other P's address affordability, accessibility, and how programs are communicated to target audiences.

Audience: The group of people you are trying to reach with your marketing (e.g., prospective students, parents, alumni, community partners).

Brand: The overall perception of NAU and its programs, shaped by consistent messaging, visuals, tone, and experiences.

Campaign: A coordinated series of marketing tactics across one or more channels and platforms designed to achieve a specific goal.

Channel: The broad medium or pathway used to deliver a marketing message (e.g., email, social media, print, events).

Earned media: Publicity gained when external parties share your story or achievements, such as local news features, rankings, or alumni testimonials.

Engagement: Audience interaction with marketing content, such as likes, shares, comments, event participation, or email clicks.

Impressions: In the context of digital marketing, an impression is the total number of times a piece of content, such as an ad or a social media post, is displayed or loaded onto a user's screen, regardless of whether they interact with it.

Key performance indicator (KPI): A measurable value used to evaluate campaign performance (e.g., number of applications, click-through rates, social shares).

Owned media: Marketing channels controlled by NAU or its units, such as program webpages, newsletters, brochures, or digital signage.

Paid media: Advertising purchased to reach wider or more targeted audiences, including digital ads, sponsored social media posts, and radio/TV spots.

PESO model: A framework that categorizes media into four types: Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned—often used together in integrated campaigns.

Platform: The specific tool, service, or environment within a channel where campaigns are executed (e.g., Instagram, Mailchimp, YouTube).

Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed (RACI): A framework for clarifying roles and responsibilities in a project.

- Responsible: Doing the work.
- Accountable: Final ownership of the deliverable or decision.
- Consulted: Provides input or expertise.
- Informed: Kept up to date on progress or results.

Return on investment (ROI): A way to measure the value or benefit you gain from something compared to the resources (e.g., time, money, or effort) you put into it. It helps determine whether the outcome was worth the investment.

Segmentation: The practice of dividing a larger audience into smaller groups based on shared characteristics (e.g., transfer students, parents, alumni).

Shared media: Content that spreads through audience participation and amplification, such as social media shares, parent referrals, or word-of-mouth.

SMART goals: A framework for setting strong objectives: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. SMART goals help ensure marketing outcomes are clear and trackable.

Stakeholders: Individuals or groups who need to be informed, consulted, or provide approval for a marketing campaign. Examples include program directors, deans, or central marketing units.

Strategy: The overarching plan that connects your goals to your tactics and channels. Strategy answers the “how” behind achieving your objectives.

Tactic: A specific activity within a channel and platform that helps achieve campaign goals (e.g., Instagram Q&A, segmented email newsletter, campus flyers).

Target audience: The primary group of people a campaign seeks to influence (e.g., prospective undergraduates, graduate students, or parents).

Tracking/analytics: The process of collecting and analyzing data on campaign performance to measure impact and guide improvements.

Unit sponsor: The staff member within an academic unit who champions and oversees a marketing campaign. They act as the main point of contact, ensuring the program’s goals, messaging, and timelines align with unit priorities.