The University of Texas at El Paso Grows Online Program Arm with Multi-Channel Digital Marketing Strategy

*Blackboard helps UTEP Connect strike the right balance of paid and organic marketing for predictable, long-term growth*

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is a public research university in El Paso, Texas. UTEP is among the largest and most successful Hispanic-serving universities in the US, with a student body of over 25,000, which is over 80% Hispanic, and prides itself on a strong record of advancing educational access and academic excellence.

**Connecting Nontraditional Learners with High-Quality Education**

In 2015, to help meet the needs of the growing number of nontraditional learners, UTEP launched UTEP Connect, a centralized hub for online programs designed for adult learners, those in the military and law enforcement, and students returning to finish their degrees. Today, UTEP Connect offers nearly 25 fully online programs from across the University: degrees at the bachelor’s and master’s levels and graduate certificates in a variety of areas.

**Partnering for Growth**

🌞 **Paid and Organic: Better Together**

Paid advertising, while an effective way to generate fast awareness and response in the market, needs to be supported by a strategic SEO-driven organic content for sustained success.

Together, these two marketing approaches generate continued awareness of UTEP Connect’s online programs, maintain a strong pipeline of prospective students, and engage and nurture leads until they are ready to enroll.
In 2016, University leaders enlisted Blackboard’s higher education marketing services to help expand awareness and enrollment for UTEP Connect across Texas and beyond with a research and data-backed digital marketing strategy.

In the four years since, the partnership has evolved to stay ahead of changing market dynamics; while early efforts centered around building awareness of UTEP Connect among its target demographics, strategy now also focuses on overcoming increased competition and standing out in a crowded online marketplace.

Today, Blackboard helps drive predictable and reliable enrollment growth for UTEP Connect’s online programs with a multi-channel digital marketing strategy backed by market research and audience insights:

**Organic marketing services** to engage, nurture, and enroll prospective students at various stages of the research and decision process:

- **Search engine optimization (SEO) for UTEP Connect’s website**: technical audits, keyword analyses, on-page optimizations, and UI/UX audits
- **Content marketing strategy and management**: SEO-driven blogging, infographics, eBooks, and animations
- **Social media strategy and management**: daily posting and creative assets for two platforms, boosting, and reporting

**Paid media plan** designed to reach prospective students where they are online when they’re ready to act:

- **Planning and execution** of a targeted digital advertising strategy for expanding the pool of qualified leads for UTEP Connect programs:
  - **Custom creative development** for text, social media, and display advertising, retargeting, and a microsite focused on lead generation
  - **Media placement and active media management**
  - **Regular testing and reporting**

Tracking is built into every piece of the enrollment funnel for transparency, reporting, and ongoing campaign optimization.

**2020 Results and Analysis**

Each year since 2016, UTEP Connect has seen incremental growth in key metrics such as leads, applications submitted, and enrollments directly attributable to the Blackboard partnership.
Overall results for 2020, including both paid media and organic marketing activities:

- **Leads** – 120% to goal, up 18.5% from 2019
- **Applications** – 90% to goal, up 21.5% from 2019
- **Enrollments** – 213% to goal, up 4% from 2019

**Data Point**

Organic marketing contributed to **5% of all leads** in 2020 and these leads **converted to enrollments at a faster pace** than inquiries generated through paid advertising.

In addition, Blackboard performed multiple SEO audits: a technical SEO audit, a UI/UX analysis, and a keyword exercise. The UTEP team implemented all recommendations, leading to a 150% year-over-year increase in organic users to the UTEP Connect website. Organic search is now the largest driver of traffic to the UTEP Connect website, contributing close to 81% of all traffic, up from 70% in 2019.

Based on total annual investment (including paid media and organic marketing budgets) and enrollments in 2020, Blackboard’s services yielded returns of 4.5x average tuition revenue for one academic year and 13x average tuition revenue for a completed degree.*

“One of the best things about working with Blackboard is that it is a true partnership. They bring us research, analysis, and insight, but they also listen to our ideas and help turn them into strong marketing initiatives and materials. They are immediately responsive to our requests and always enjoyable to work with. We could not have picked a better partner to help us market and grow our online programs at UTEP.”

– Beth Brunk-Chavez, Dean, Extended University at UTEP

*The return-on-investment calculations are based on UTEP’s 2020-2021 in-state tuition for online classes and assume an average of three (3) semesters per calendar year, with an average of 12-15 credits per enrolled student.
Summary

In a highly competitive and noisy digital environment, universities need comprehensive marketing strategies to be heard and seen favorably by prospective students.

Since 2016, UTEP and Blackboard have sustained continued growth for UTEP Connect online programs with a research-backed strategy that combines organic marketing and paid media advertising. In 2020 alone, this holistic approach resulted in higher-than-expected leads and enrollments and delivered a 13x return on UTEP’s investment.

Experience the Power of a Multi-Channel Digital Marketing Strategy in Student Recruitment

Build your institutional brand, increase lead generation, and improve enrollment yield. Blackboard’s integrated marketing strategies combine the pillars of modern search and digital marketing to attract and convert the right students in support of your overall growth strategy.

Learn more about comprehensive marketing strategies for student recruitment.

Learn More at Blackboard.com/Marketing-Services