

APPLYING THE POWER OF VIDEO PUBLISHING IN THE RECRUITMENT CYCLE

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ABSTRACT

New approaches for publishing research-based Internet Video On Demand (IVOD) magazines now enable institutions to communicate with prospective students by combining the benefits of targeted messages with the compelling power of IVOD. Why a new approach? Young people now spend approximately 15 hours each week on line doing everything from downloading music, booking travel, and purchasing books, to researching their college of choice. Digital video magazines – configured to match the evolving interests of prospective students at each stage of the recruitment cycle – build informed interest, motivate action to the next step in the admissions funnel, and increase yield. Mary Pat Nolan, Director of Admissions, at Saint Mary's College in Indiana has launched a video publishing initiative – based on “Vmag®” technology and research – to enhance recruitment. She will share the College's experience and outcomes of this innovative strategy that aligns the best interests of the institution with a medium young people prefer.

INTRODUCTION

Admissions officers are constantly looking for better ways to communicate with prospective students at all stages of the recruitment process – both in terms of message content and in the manner those messages are conveyed. Survey research focused on prospective students helps colleges and universities to understand the information needs of candidates as they progress through the enrollment cycle and to identify the institutional messages that resonate with their foremost priorities and particular interests. Research can also influence the timing and method of communication. Two years ago, the Admissions Staff at Saint Mary's College decided to apply research results along with innovative digital video publishing technology to increase the conversion of admitted students to matriculants. The research helped refine what their messaging should be, and Vmag® technology provided the mechanism to deliver tailored digital video magazines to their target audience – admitted students.

WHAT IS A Vmag®?

A Vmag® is a video magazine that combines timely messaging and visually rich content in a format that meets the communication needs of the institution and the information needs of the prospective student. Through a combination of Web links, text, and video vignettes, an internet-based video magazine can provide information on important dates and events on campus, links to currently enrolled students and student publications, and clips that introduce students to the people and places that make a campus interesting and unique. Through a proprietary Content Management System, content for each Vmag® issue can easily be changed to meet the evolving interests and concerns of students as they move through the enrollment cycle. Once students

have installed the proprietary Vmag® software on their computers (Vmag® requires only one simple installation), an institution-specific desktop icon announces the arrival of a new edition that has proactively been delivered without affecting anything else being used on the computer. Video segments are full-screen, TV-quality presentations that can be viewed and interacted with on PCs regardless of speed and internet access.

Vmag® is an innovative, safe broadcast platform that gives admissions officers a unique opportunity to:

- Deliver the most compelling on-line content available to targeted, opt-in audiences in a cost-effective way.
- Send existing or newly created broadcast-quality video content straight to the desktop in full screen.
- Avoid many of the current email delivery challenges by using a “clean” channel.
- Enhance the viewer’s experience through background caching and loading so that every Vmag® issue plays at optimum resolution that is superior to streaming technologies.
- Develop an ongoing, dedicated relationship with targeted audiences with the ability to broadcast a series of communications over time.

Vmag® extends, but does not compete with, an institution’s Web site. It is the only video caching technology to work effectively on all connection speeds including dial-up. And, because it is delivered through a “clean channel,” it does not get lost in a student’s cluttered email inbox. Program design, hosting, delivery, and advanced tracking and reporting are provided by NEWgame Communications, the developer of Vmag®; institutional clients provide messaging content.

SAINT MARY’S RESEARCH-BASED MESSAGING STRATEGY

Through market research, Saint Mary’s has consistently sought to understand what messages about the College resonate with prospective students as they move from inquirers to accepted applicants to matriculants. A survey of prospective students and their parents at the inquiry stage of the recruitment process was conducted by Maguire Associates in the winter of 1998, and this information provided the foundation for a set of messaging themes that would be employed consistently throughout the recruitment process. Updated and refined on a regular basis by ongoing surveys of admitted students, Saint Mary’s promotes seven messaging themes:

1. The value of a women’s college
2. The academic experience at Saint Mary’s
3. Practical orientation/future outcomes for Saint Mary’s students
4. The College’s campus atmosphere and social life
5. The Catholic tradition and its impact on values-based learning
6. Commitment of affordability
7. Advantages of the South Bend location

Each one of these is discussed in further detail below.

Value of a Women's College

Saint Mary's is widely acknowledged as a women's college. Most prospective students respond to the women's college feature as a negative yet a substantial percentage of the students indicate that they are at least willing to consider a single-sex school. The key is that this feature needs to be linked with other priorities and benefits, including:

- The advantages of the College's proximity to the University of Notre Dame for educational and social opportunities. The messaging challenge is to present Saint Mary's as a complete entity, while increasing awareness of the advantages of being in such close proximity to the large and vibrant campus of Notre Dame.
- Existing opportunities for a diverse social life on campus, i.e., examples of co-curricular, extracurricular, recreational, athletic, college tradition, and social opportunities.
- The power of the alumnae network as an example of how the College can help prospective students benefit from a committed cadre of graduates and the many ways alumnae help young graduates who are entering the world of work.

The Academic Experience at Saint Mary's

Saint Mary's has a solid reputation for academic quality in its prospective student pool, particularly because students imagine that they will have close contact with a strong faculty. But the College's academic reputation also is linked with its affiliation with Notre Dame and with a reasonable level of expectation that the College will help them find a path to successful future outcomes.

Like their peers in national samples of college bound students, prospective students in Saint Mary's market tend to be focused on their specific area of academic interest as they assess overall quality. The academic quality messaging theme contains the following components:

- Information about prospective students' specific academic interests as soon as they express them.
- Focus on the College's strong and student-centered teaching faculty.
- More classroom experiences (both in-person and virtual).
- Examples of the College's personalized approach to learning – e.g., interested faculty pay attention to students' overall well being as well as their academic progress.

Practical Orientation/Future Outcomes

How their education will serve them after graduation is very important to prospective students. They – and their parents – want to know if their investment would help them to land jobs and/or get into graduate school. Also, the research showed that as the College succeeds in increasing Saint Mary's perceived investment value, families' willingness to pay for its educational experience rises. Whenever possible this theme would contain the following dimensions:

- Summaries of graduate and professional school acceptances received by Saint Mary's students and how well their education prepared them for post-graduate study.
- Lists of internship, research, fieldwork, and community service opportunities enjoyed by current students and how these experiences rounded out their overall educational experience.
- Lists of first-job placements and career advancements of recent alumnae and how highly employers think of Saint Mary's graduates.
- Career planning services at Saint Mary's that help students define, develop, and execute their educational and career goals.
- Links between career opportunities and graduate/professional school placements to specific majors at the College.

Campus Atmosphere/Social Life

The non-academic dimensions of college life are important to Saint Mary's inquirers, and they become increasingly more important as students apply and consider enrollment at the College. Students integrate expectations for athletic, recreational/fitness, extracurricular, and social life opportunities. This messaging theme is designed to help increase appreciation for campus life at Saint Mary's, and it includes:

- The College's unique relationship with Notre Dame.
- The College's success in offering a comfortable/friendly community.
- Blurred lines between scholarly and social pursuits, a competitive advantage to Saint Mary's versus many of its larger competitors (Notre Dame, Boston College, Loyola Chicago, etc).
- The strong proof points that Saint Mary's students provide when they speak directly about their positive campus experiences, especially out of the classroom with faculty, staff, and other students.

Catholic Tradition and Values-based Learning

Saint Mary's religious reputation is second only to its identity as a women's college. Multivariate analysis showed that prospective students were/are most positively responsive to the notion of an integration of religious values and academics. This message theme was the best predictor of the decision to apply to the College, suggesting that Saint Mary's should not downplay its religious affiliation. These findings also pointed to the best way to communicate the College's Catholic tradition in the following ways:

- Promoting the universal meaning of the word "catholic" as a way to introduce prospective students to the inclusiveness of the Catholic tradition.
- Connecting Saint Mary's Catholic tradition to high expectations for: a) responsible behavior from students, b) service to community, and c) a spirit of generosity toward others in the Saint Mary's community and beyond.

- Communicating how these high expectations can be upheld without detracting from good fun and an active social life on campus. The development of social responsibility is a powerful message for parents and personal growth works for students.
- Illustrating how values are woven into the curriculum in meaningful and substantive ways. This linkage to academic quality gives Saint Mary's a distinctive edge versus public and non-sectarian competitors.

Affordability

The cost of a Saint Mary's education surfaced as a barrier to application for some prospective students. Once students – or more accurately, their parents – determine that an institution is academically sound, they want to know how they are going to pay for it. The research showed that they are very interested in a financial aid office that works closely with students and parents to help them work through their options. Parent expectations for receiving financial help are high for both need-based and merit aid. The findings suggested that the most effective messaging components of the value equation would include:

- Distinctive qualities of specific major(s) of interest.
- Employment opportunities for students in specific major(s) of interest.
- Success in graduate/professional school placements.
- Opportunities for internships/fieldwork while enrolled at Saint Mary's.
- The credentials of a high-quality faculty.
- External (third-party) evidence of the College's recognition as a high-quality institution.
- Challenge of the coursework backed by a caring, connected, supportive faculty.

The research also suggested that the College's messaging in this area should:

- Emphasize the concept of net cost from the beginning of the communications campaign. Families will tend to eliminate choices on the basis of their total cost unless financial aid opportunities are promoted early and often.
- Talk about the level of financial services and counseling offered to prospective families.

South Bend

The value of South Bend is much more closely linked with its reputation as the home of Notre Dame than with its own merits. To add to prospective students' sense of place, they will benefit from knowing that Notre Dame is literally across the street from Saint Mary's and that Saint Mary's is located in a safe section of a safe city.

THE Vmag® INITIATIVE AT SAINT MARY'S

The Saint Mary's admissions team, led by Mary Pat Nolan, was particularly interested in finding more effective ways to communicate with accepted candidates and to influence their decision to enroll at the College. Saint Mary's took a significant step toward packaging message and

content to better appeal to students. For the 2003 application cycle, Saint Mary's employed Vmag® technology from NEWgame Communications that enabled the College to deliver a series of six Vmag®s with approximately 5 to 6 minutes of video each. These Vmag® issues were produced in-house, and content was guided by the previously outlined messaging strategy with a focus on students' foremost priorities at this advanced stage of the admission process. The series highlighted successful alumnae of the College, financial aid and affordability, the nature and benefits of a Catholic women's college, and the relationship between Notre Dame and Saint Mary's. An inventory of the appearance of messaging themes in each of the six Vmag® issues was developed for this audience.

The Vmag®s were delivered to accepted students through the Internet beginning with their offer of admission; subsequent issues continued through to a student's submission of an enrollment deposit. Students received Vmag®s that contained a calendar of events, a way to "get connected" with students and campus resources, as well as an opportunity to view video presentations that included a specially tailored message from the president, a student-guided tour of campus, and other sessions with alumni and key members of the campus community. Each edition contained updated or totally new information about the College. Students could access a Vmag® issue any time and view it multiple times, because it was stored on the hard drive of their computer and available both on- and off-line.



Welcome to Saint Mary's College!
We invite you to explore the Saint Mary's experience through the unique perspectives of our current students, faculty, staff and alumnae offered in the Saint Mary's Vmag, a unique video magazine delivered directly to your personal computer.

Each Vmag issue delivers approximately five minutes of full-screen, TV quality video directly to your PC. Connection speed is not an issue. Whenever you are connected to the Internet, the Vmag software politely downloads to your PC in the background while you are checking e-mail, instant messaging or visiting Web sites.

Simply click the Install button, follow the instructions, and the first issue of the Saint Mary's Vmag will be delivered to your PC. Once you install the Vmag software on your computer, you will automatically receive two more issues over the next few weeks.

We hope you will enjoy the Saint Mary's Vmag and share it with your family and friends!

Vmag®
by NEWgame Communications

Click "Install" to download Vmag® Connection software and receive the Saint Mary's Vmag series.

While you remain connected to the Internet, the Vmag software politely downloads to your PC, in the background.

The install process checks for the following:

- * Internet Connection
- * Security Verification
- * PC System Requirements
- * Software Download
- * Profile Survey

Install

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- For students who have not yet applied for admission, we encourage you to complete the FAFSA and COMPROFILE applications as we may evaluate your eligibility. If additional information (such as tax returns) is requested, the priority deadline for submission is April 30.
- Accepted Student Day on Campus: March 28, 2004
- National Candidate Reply Date (deposit due): May 1, 2004
- SRT II: Subject Tests in Writing, Foreign Language and Math (to be required for placement purposes by June)
- Summer Orientation Day: June 24, 25, 26 or 28, 2004
- New Student Orientation: August 18-21, 2004
- Any admission or financial aid questions? Please contact us at (800) 591-7921

GET CONNECTED

- For Accepted Students
- Saint Mary's Student Page
- Meet a Saint Mary's Student
- Academics
- Financial Aid
- The Observer (Student Newspaper)

Saint Mary's College
NOTRE DAME - INDIANA

The Nation's Premier Catholic Women's College

mag®

Congratulations and Welcome
Carol Ann Mooney, member of the class of 1992 and the incoming president of Saint Mary's, welcomes you and shares her insight into the benefits of becoming a Saint Mary's woman.

[play video](#)

Let Us Show You...
Saint Mary's students start you on a virtual tour of student life at the nation's premier Catholic women's college.

[play video](#)

160 Years Of Excellence...And Counting
Your student hosts share an overview of the things that make Saint Mary's special and they give a preview of what you'll see in your next Vmag issue.

[play video](#)

Librally Educated Go A Step Further
A Saint Mary's alumna and former Arthur Andersen employee reflects on how her liberal arts education is helping her go "a step further."

[show article](#)

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FRUIT OFF | HELP | EXIT

During the 2003 application cycle, Saint Mary's received 1,014 applications and offered admission to 828 candidates, all of whom were invited to install the Vmag® software on their home computers. Nearly half (47%; 391 students) installed Vmag®. In addition to the appealing nature of the communications to prospective enrollees, Vmag® proprietary technology also offers the added benefit of tracking students' engagement with the magazines. Saint Mary's was able to identify which admitted students reviewed the magazine and which did not – offering a hint about likely and unlikely deposit intentions in advance of Candidates' Reply Date – as well as which sections of the magazine experienced the lightest and heaviest traffic and attention.

Admitted students were surveyed after receiving the third edition in the series to determine the impact that the video magazine had on their interest in Saint Mary's; over 90% of the students reported that the magazine had a positive influence on their interest in the College (52% of respondents recorded a "strong positive" response and 42% recorded a "somewhat positive" response). When respondents were asked "To what degree have the Vmag@s distinguished Saint Mary's from other institutions, 81% said "very much."

Saint Mary's College attributes a 7% increase in the size of this entering class cohort to the combined application of market research and video magazine publishing. The College is currently using the Vmag® earlier in the admissions funnel with search respondents to increase the number of applications for the upcoming cycle.

CONCLUSION

In the crowded, noisy, and competitive marketplace of college admissions, new approaches can be employed to communicate more successfully with prospective students. Saint Mary's College applied research results along with an innovative digital video publishing technology, Vmag®, to increase the conversion of admitted students to matriculants with great success. A similar initiative targeting Vmag® to search respondents at the inquiry stage of the process is underway at the current time.

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