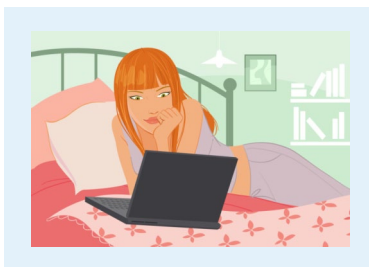


6 Trends in Digital and Mobile Communications for College Admissions in 2011

Alyson, 17, arrives home after school and immediately heads upstairs to her bedroom. She flips open her laptop and checks her email before updating her Facebook status. She pulls her school books and cell phone from her backpack, and after sending a quick text to her best friend she pulls up Google on the computer to begin research for an upcoming history paper. During a study break, she watches a YouTube video her classmates had been laughing about during lunch, and downloads the new Lady Gaga single to her iPod. After dinner that night, she settles in to watch television with her family, all the while scrolling through her Facebook news feed and continuing her ongoing text conversation with her friend about plans for the weekend.



Alyson represents today's typical high school student – a teenager who, according to 2010 data from the Kaiser Family Foundation, spends more than seven hours a day using entertainment media and electronic devices such as computers, cell phones, televisions, and iPods. This “plugged-in” generation has access to more information than any other before, creating both challenges and exciting opportunities for college admissions professionals

trying to find the best way to communicate with these young Americans. And while digital communications for college admissions is still evolving, students and admissions professionals are jumping in with both feet. As digital outlets become more prevalent and, in some cases, become accepted as mainstream communication forums in college searches, new trends are quickly emerging for how students and admissions professionals are using these tools.

In order to identify and understand these trends, Cappex.com surveyed more than 2,000 class of 2011 and 2012 high school students and 82 college admissions professionals for its January 2011 study, “Digital, Mobile, and Social Media Trends in College Admissions.”

The study revealed that while today's high school students are certainly using a variety of mobile and online tools to connect and socialize with each other, they have strong preferences about how they want to use those same channels when it comes to their college search. Here are six key trends Cappex identified in its study.



1.

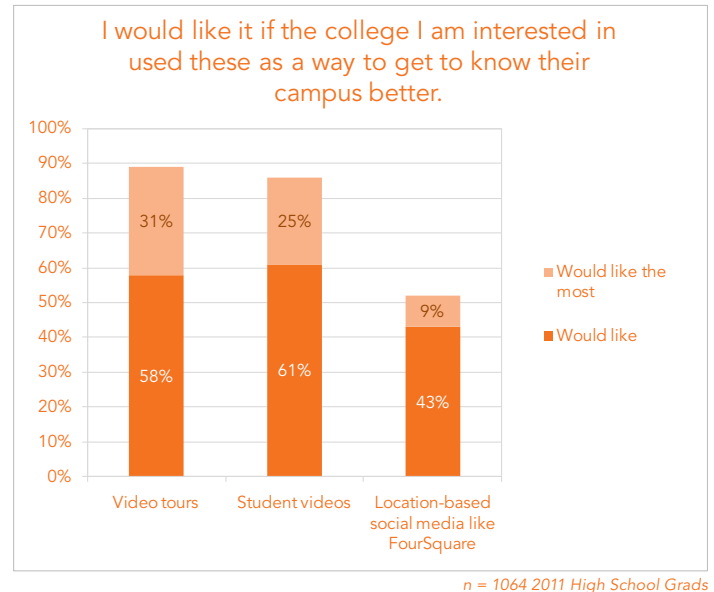
High school students (the YouTube generation) have a strong interest in using student videos and virtual tours to get to know a school and its campus.

In the age of YouTube and online video, today's high school students have embraced video as a resource to help them get to know the colleges they are considering. The next best thing to a college visit, video lets prospects learn about a school from multiple perspectives and get a feel for its culture from actual students. Cappex data shows that college-bound students are particularly interested in virtual tours and student videos as a way to get to know a campus better.

Admissions professionals are recognizing the power of video in reaching prospective students, with 57 percent of study respondents saying they plan to devote more time and resources to student videos, and 46 percent specifically focusing more on YouTube, in the year ahead.

Jonathan Burdick, dean of admissions at the University of Rochester, noted his team already posts videos to YouTube regularly and is in the process of updating their video content. "We have a full-time videographer who's in charge of creating six to seven projects a year, and we loan out cameras to students who want to shoot their own activities and share them," he said. "The various modes of content provide a diversified point of view of the school that can really give prospective students an insider's understanding of the University of Rochester."

Colleges also appreciate that video is a diverse tool that can be repurposed across platforms. Versions of the same footage can be posted to YouTube, the school's website, and even its Facebook page. Schools can also bring their



culture to life by posting video on college search sites such as Cappex.com, which has recently expanded its capability to include video from colleges.

"We've gotten such positive feedback from both students and admissions professionals about how valuable video can be for getting a feel for a particular college," said Chris Long, president of Cappex.com. "With tightened family travel budgets, videos can be used really efficiently. They are simply one of the best ways for schools to share what the college experience is like on their campus."

2.

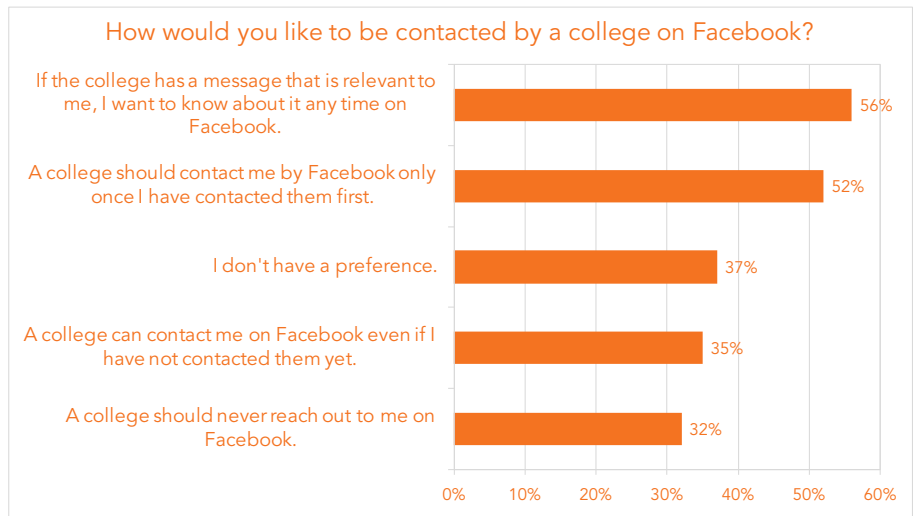
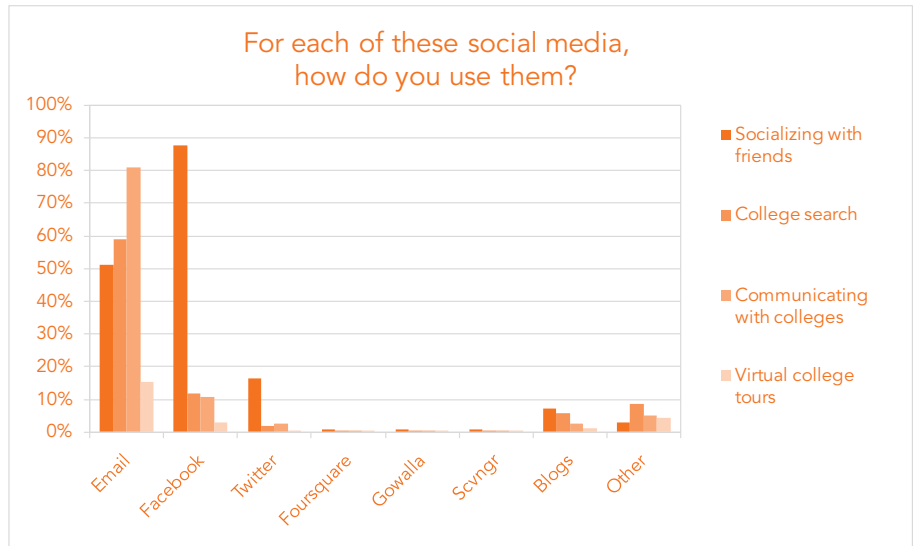
Facebook has quickly become a mainstream communications channel in the college search process, although high school students have strong opinions about how they want to use the site to directly interact with colleges.

With their friends, parents, and in some cases even their grandparents on Facebook, it's not surprising that today's college-bound high school students turn to the world's largest social network to learn more about the schools they are interested in. According to the Cappex study, Facebook is the top social media channel that students use in their college search, and the site is second only to email.

"Facebook definitely meets us at our level instead of having to go through extra hoops like visiting the school's website or waiting to get something through snail mail," said Josh E., a student from Wheeling, W. Va. Another respondent noted, "I am always on Facebook anyway, so it's convenient to get information from a school there."

However, students expressed strong opinions about when a college should contact them directly via Facebook. Just 35 percent are okay with colleges contacting them for the first time via Facebook. The majority of students prefer that colleges contact them directly on Facebook only after they have begun a dialogue with the school, or if the school has a message, such as an upcoming deadline, that is particularly relevant to them.

While some of these students noted they do not think Facebook is appropriately "professional" as a platform to communicate with prospective colleges, others said



they simply prefer to reserve Facebook as a medium for connecting with friends and family. Notably, student respondents from the class of 2012 were more open to contact from colleges on Facebook than those from the class of 2011. This suggests that as Facebook continues to become more mainstream in students' daily lives, the site may continue to become more acceptable as a platform

for communicating directly with colleges.

In the meantime, admissions professionals surveyed by Cappex.com said they plan to increase their presence on Facebook in the year ahead, but will also leverage other communication outlets that allow them to directly interact with students using social media more specifically dedicated to college search.

“High school students are very comfortable interacting in a social media environment, and many college search sites have a very similar feel,” said Scott Jones, associate director of admissions for the College of Wooster. “Connecting

with students on a college search site like Cappex.com lets us keep the dialogue direct, be very specific with the information we provide, and target the specific students we want to reach. By far, though, the best aspect of these tools is the follow up. If a student is interested in a Wooster campaign, we can connect with them and drive them to our different media.”

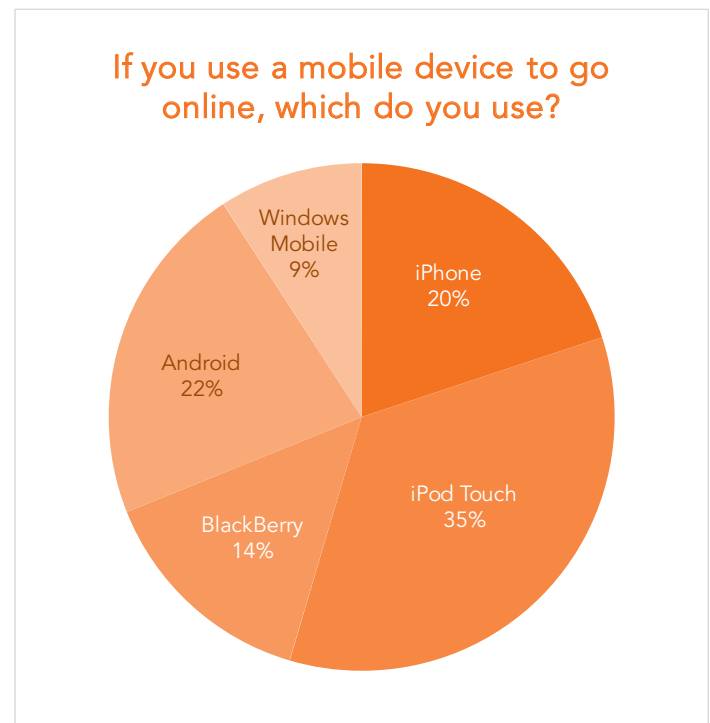
3. Developing a mobile strategy is already a key focus for admissions officers this year, but it is important to understand high school student preferences for using this technology in their college search.

Today, the majority of high school students have a cell phone or mobile device. In fact, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 66 percent of teens have a cell phone and 76 percent have an iPod or MP3 device that, in some cases, can provide access to the Internet and apps. Given this data, the question of how to use mobile technology in recruitment and admissions is becoming increasingly important for colleges.

Apps vs. Mobile-Friendly Sites

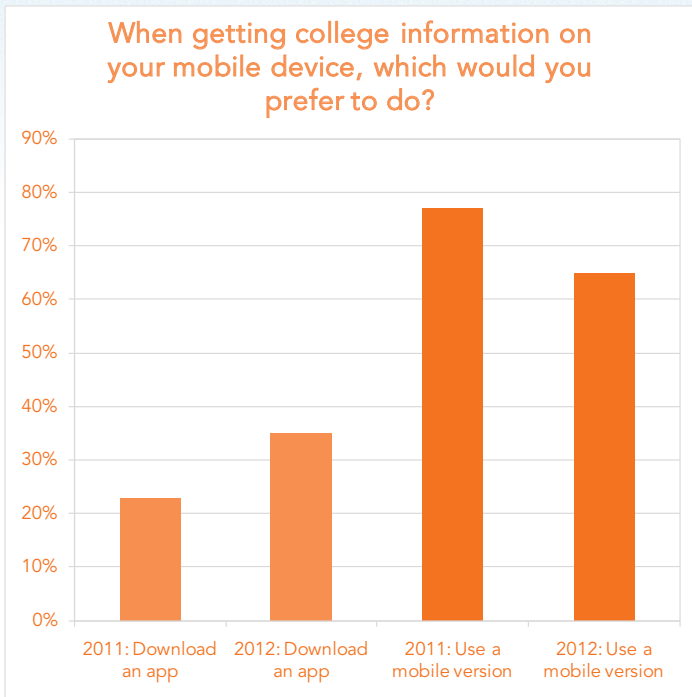
In its study, Cappex.com found nearly one-third of students use a mobile device for online interactions all or most of the time. The iPod Touch wins out as the most popular mobile device, with 35 percent of this group using one for online sessions. Coupled with the ever-growing prevalence of smartphones in general, these findings give colleges good reason to make sure they are providing online information in a mobile-friendly format, whether it be a downloadable app or a mobile version of their website.

Currently, most students say they are more likely to access a mobile version of a college’s website than download an app. Some students commented that with the number of schools they research in their college search, it would simply be impractical to download an app for each one.



n = 643 2011 High School Grads

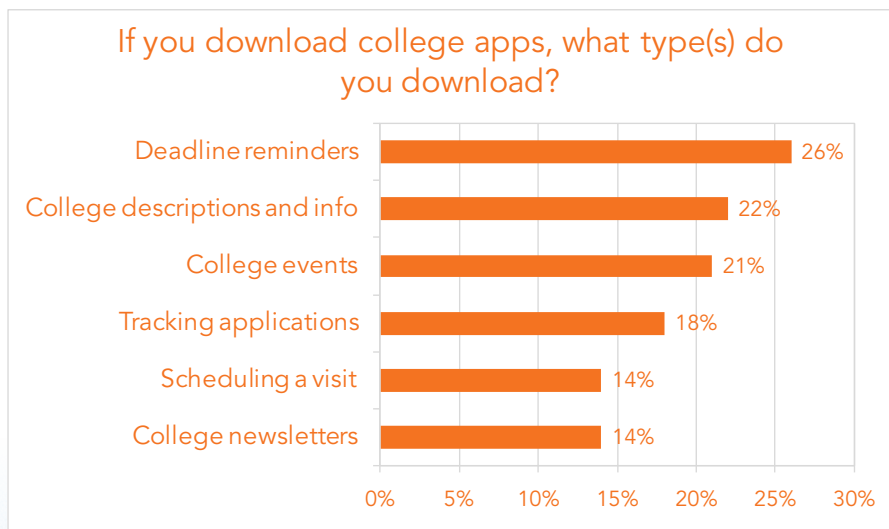
However, respondents from the Class of 2012 expressed a higher preference for downloading an app (35 percent) than respondents from the Class of 2011 (23 percent), suggesting the possibility of a gradual shift in student preference toward apps.



n = 728 2011 High School Grads

Students who said they would use an app from a college commented they would be most likely to download one that “had the features I needed, for a good price – preferably free.” So what are those features students want in a college-related app? In terms of general college search-related apps, students say they have primarily downloaded apps that offer deadline reminders, college descriptions, and information about college events.

“We’ve worked to make sure Cappex.com is mobile-



n = 593 2011 High School Grads

friendly, and we’ve found that students really appreciate resources like application deadlines and reminders that they can access on their mobile device,” Long said. “That’s the type of practical information colleges should be making available for students, whether it’s through an app, a mobile-friendly site, or both.”

Although virtual tours serve as a good alternative to visiting campuses, especially for those students in the initial stages of learning about a specific college, high school students still seem to prefer low-tech over high-tech when it comes to actual campus tours. Two-thirds of respondents said they would rather participate in a student-led campus tour than use a self-guided GPS-enabled mobile app on campus.

“When it comes down to it, there are simply parts of a college search that are best experienced as a person-to-person interaction,” said Jones. “That’s an important lesson to keep in mind as we explore how to adapt all these new technologies to college admissions. We need to make sure the process is still personal.”

Calling and Texting

According to the Cappex study, 65 percent of colleges are collecting cell phone numbers from students who inquire on the school’s website. However, colleges are still determining the best way to use these numbers. Most admissions professionals say they primarily use cell numbers to call students – either as a backup to a home number or as a preferred method of contact from recruiters when indicated by the student. Schools also use cell phone numbers to call students in situations such as reaching a student during a campus visit or following up with them on the status of their application. While few schools say they regularly use cell numbers to text prospects, some say they use cell numbers to both call and text students during the recruitment process.

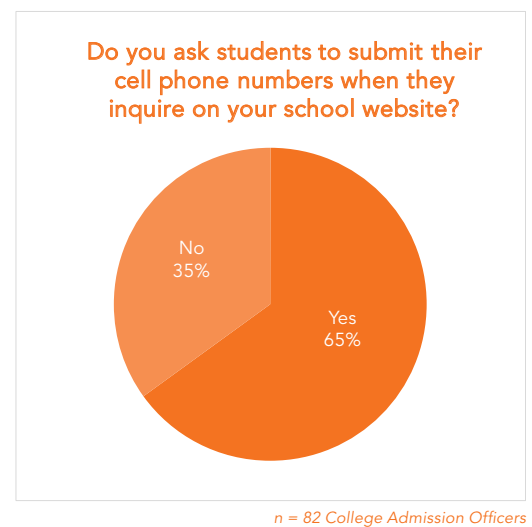
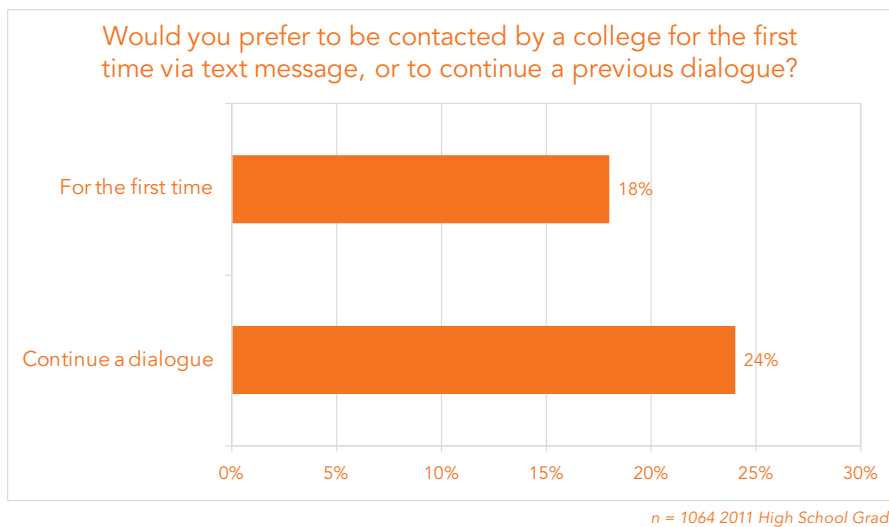
In general, students agree they are most open to colleges contacting them via cell

phone and text as a follow up, once they have already started a dialogue with the school on a more traditional platform, such as email or mail. In fact, when it comes to continuing a conversation with a college, 32 percent of students actually prefer contact by cell phone.

While a small percentage of high school students prefer text as a method of contact from prospective colleges, those who do would rather schools use the channel to continue a dialogue (24 percent) than initiate contact for the first time (18 percent). Students indicated they do not want to be overwhelmed by general text messages from a school; rather, they are most receptive to receiving

texts from a college if it conveys personalized, relevant information.

“A text would be helpful as a reminder for an upcoming application deadline, so I can stay on top of what I need to send in to each school,” said one student participant in the study. Another commented that if schools do opt to send texts, “they should also call or send an email in case you never got the message.”



4.

Even with the rise of social media, email is certainly not dead, and it continues to be the key communication tool between high school students and colleges.

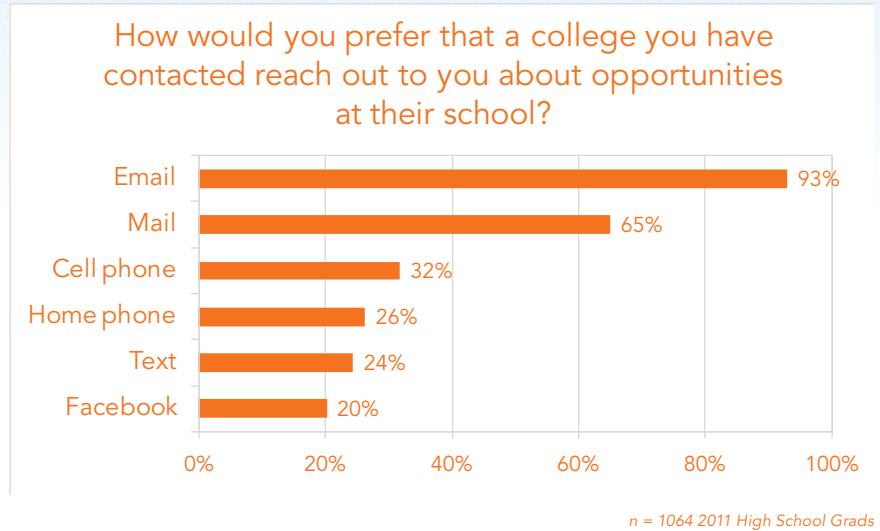
Email continues to be a tried-and-true, mainstream communication tool in the college search and admissions process. In fact, email beats out traditional mail (86 percent versus 67 percent) as students’ top preference for how schools contact them the first time.

“For today’s high school students, who spend a lot of time texting and instant messaging, email is actually a pretty

formal mode of communication,” said Burdick. “And when they are embarking on something they consider as serious and important as their college search, these students want their first contact with a school to come in the way of something more ‘official,’ like an introductory email.”

Students also prefer email when it comes to ongoing communication with a school. Email is again the top choice

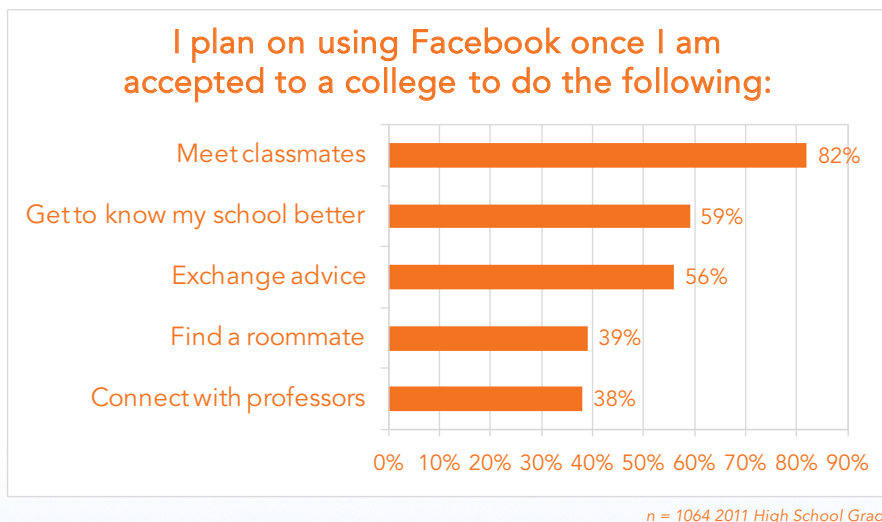
(93 percent) over traditional mail (65 percent) and other outlets. Students noted that email is simply less fleeting than a text, phone call or other online communication tools, in essence creating a paper trail that makes it easier to file and keep track of important information and deadlines.



5. Some admissions departments are using social networks for yield purposes. This includes incoming freshman class pages on Facebook and on private social networks.

Building on the popularity of social networking among students, a number of colleges are creating private social networks for admitted students. These sites serve as a forum for schools to communicate important dates, deadlines, and events to their incoming classes, and also give students an opportunity to get to know the school better and connect with other incoming students.

Likewise, a few colleges that do not have a private social network said they are instead setting up Facebook groups for admitted or deposited students. While these Facebook groups may not give colleges quite as much control or privacy as their own network, they match up well with data that shows how students intend to use Facebook after they have been accepted by a school: primarily to meet classmates (82 percent), but also to get to know their school better (59 percent), exchange advice (56 percent), find a roommate (39 percent) and connect with professors (38 percent).



“Students are not only looking for information, but also a place where they belong,” Burdick said. “That’s the extraordinary thing that social media tools provide. Offering this type of forum for students to connect with their school and future classmates gives them a great foundation for their college experience.”

6.

Several online tools remain flat or nascent in terms of popularity. Student interest in using blogs and Twitter for college research is flat. Interest in location-based tools for college search has not yet taken off.

While the use of tools such as Facebook and college search sites seems to be growing among college-bound students, interest in other online resources for college information is staying flat. Blogs, in particular, are one communication platform where college emphasis outpaces student interest. Perhaps because of the wealth of college information available online, student respondents said they simply don't have time to read long blog posts and responses about the multiple colleges they are interested in. Though, for colleges, there may be an SEO benefit to blogs.

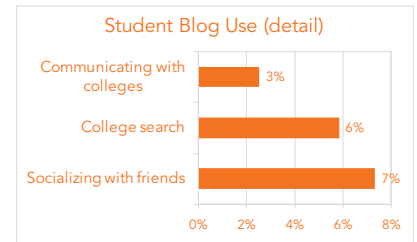
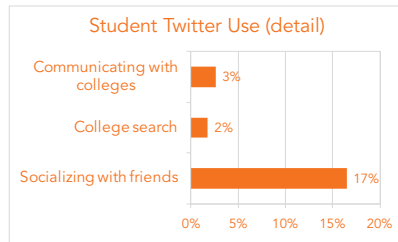
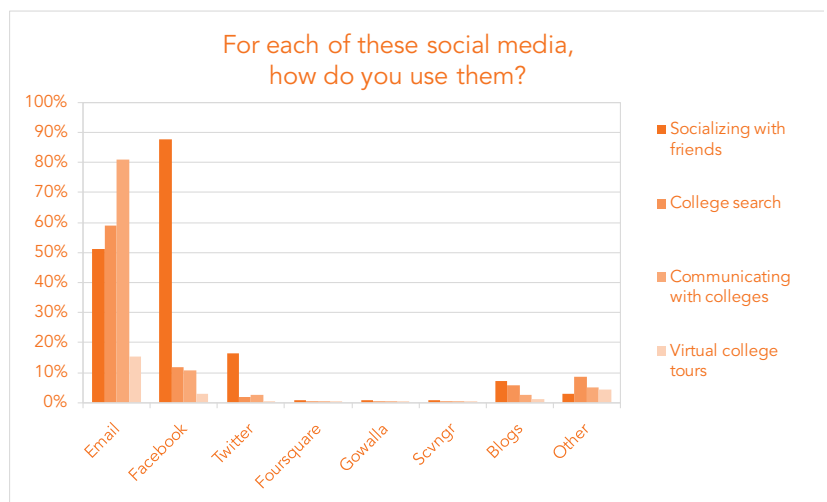
Some student respondents did note they are interested in reading short testimonials from students, and several admissions professionals commented they have had the most success with blogs when they give prospective students a dynamic snapshot of campus life.

"We've hired eight students who blog on our site regularly, and it's been an unforeseen success," said Burdick about the admissions team at University of Rochester. "It shows that prospective students want something to connect with more than just idle information sitting on our website."

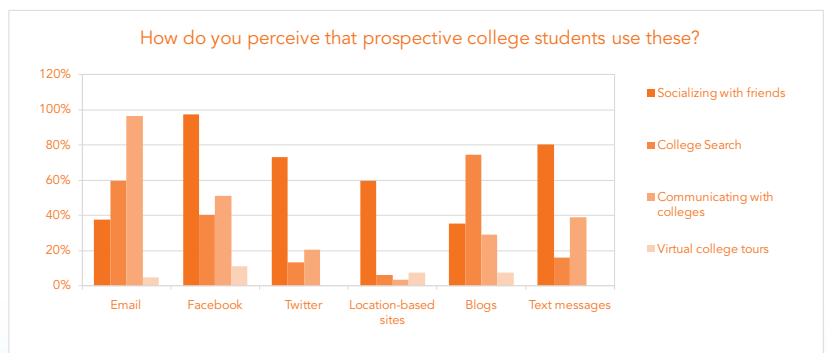
In terms of other social media outlets, high school students still don't appear to use Twitter; in fact, according to 2010 Pew Foundation research, just 8 percent use the site. Likewise, Cappex.com findings show that very few students use Twitter in their college search or to communicate with colleges they are considering.

Additionally, few students indicated they use location-based social media sites such as Foursquare and Gowalla in their college search.

Although nearly half of high school student respondents said they were not interested in using these tools as a way to get to know a college campus, there is room for student opinion to change if there is a rise in the general popularity of location-based sites among this cohort.



n = 1064 2011 High School Grads



n = 82 College Admission Officers

6 Quick Tips for Successfully Using Mobile, Digital, and Social Media in College Admissions

1. For helping prospects get a feel for your school's campus and culture, focus on video tours and student videos as opposed to traditional blogs or location-based social media.

2. Use Facebook to provide general information, start discussions, and create connections between prospects, current students, and alumni; limit direct contact with prospects via Facebook to truly relevant, personalized messages.

3. When creating a mobile strategy, the top priority should be making current online resources mobile-friendly; developing a mobile app should be a secondary strategy.

4. Keep communication via text and cell phone direct, relevant, and personalized. Avoid generic "blast" texts, and follow up on important messages with an email or even a phone call.

5. Consider email the cornerstone of your online communication efforts with prospective and newly admitted students.

6. To help with yield, create a social media forum – either on Facebook or a private network – where admitted students can connect with future classmates and get additional information regarding enrollment, important dates, and events at your school.

For Additional Information

We welcome your comments and feedback on this study. Please contact:

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About Cappex.com

With more than 3 million student users, Cappex.com is a highly cost-effective way to reach students as they are actively discovering and researching colleges online.

On Cappex.com, admission's officers can reach their enrollment goals by going beyond student search to generate qualified inquiries online. They can attract the students they want without needing to spend time identifying lists and writing campaigns. Colleges receive up-to-the-minute reports so they can consistently measure results to ensure their objectives are being met.

Colleges can also promote their websites, Facebook pages, and YouTube videos right on Cappex.com, driving students to their digital content.

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Founded in 2006, Cappex is based in Highland Park, Illinois.

