

Community College Calls Out for Student Engagement and Success

Algonquin College is getting connected with its students, in more ways than one. With a new solution developed by local firm Vocantas, the school is reaching out in a proactive, meaningful way through a medium very familiar to students, the phone. During the third week of each semester, first-years are contacted and asked a series of questions. From the responses, school administrators can quickly identify and address issues that students are having in time to positively impact their academic future.

Algonquin College of Applied Arts & Technology

On average, 10-15% of students in colleges and universities are lost to student attrition each year. Algonquin College has instituted a variety of programs over the years to promote the success of its students.

"We recognized the importance of a retention plan several years ago and have been building upon it each semester," said the school's Special Advisor on Academic Initiatives. "Now the challenge is to measure how well our retention programs are working."

Research has found that student drop-out rates can be reduced significantly in cases where outreach and intervention are initiated in the first three weeks of the semester. However, given that it takes an average of five call attempts to reach each student, there simply weren't enough resources available at Algonquin to make it happen.

Automated Outreach for Student Engagement

That's where Vocantas stepped in to offer its Scaller service, which automatically calls students by telephone to collect and deliver essential information in support of their academic success. School administrators can deliver personalized messages and collect valuable feedback that make for better-informed students and faculty.

Over a five-day period in late September 2008, automated calls were made to hundreds of students at both of the school's campuses. Students were asked a series of questions to identify challenges they were facing in the third week of classes, and to measure their awareness of the many programs and services available to help them.

Immediate Results, In Time to Make a Difference

Of the students who were contacted, 95% completed the entire survey. Over 80% of those students completing the survey identified they needed help in at least one area. An unanticipated benefit of the initiative was that Algonquin was able to confirm student contact information and update their records. This helps to ensure that the college is able to effectively contact students in the event of any emergencies.

"This proactive approach provides confirmation that our retention programs are working," said the school's Special Advisor on Academic Initiatives. "The Vocantas system lets us reach out to more students faster than we ever could before. It is a great compliment to the variety of other programs we already have in place."

Customer Profile

The fourth largest college in Ontario, Algonquin College of Applied Arts & Technology is a leader in integrating technology into learning. Algonquin College is committed to the success of its diverse population of nearly 16,000 fulltime and over 39,000 part-time students in more than 140 programs.

Business Situation

Algonquin was looking for an effective way to proactively reach out and engage new students during the crucial first 3 weeks of the semester.

Solution

Using the Scaller service provided by Vocantas, the college efficiently delivered information and captured the support requirements of individual students.

Business Benefits

Scaller makes student engagement achievable, so limited skilled resources can be put to best use. With no need for additional staff or specialized equipment, Scaller starts making calls right away and clients begin to realize a return on their investment almost immediately.