

7Summits Transforms MSOE's Admissions Experience with an Integrated Social Community

Application platform drives increased conversion and record-setting retention rates for the university, with over 6,000 active members.

7SUMMITS CASE STUDY: MSOE BRIDGE
INDUSTRY: Higher Education

Situation

Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE) is a private, non-profit university located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with a curriculum focused on engineering, business, mathematics and nursing. With small class sizes and a commitment to faculty-led courses, MSOE has a long-standing reputation built around high standards of challenging academics, personalized attention and career practice.

The MSOE admissions team was struggling to engage prospective students – relying on traditional methods of phone calls, direct mail campaigns and emails. This wasn't enough. High school students are constantly on the go and using different technologies such as social media to communicate. "We wanted to reach these students in the venues in which they were most active, without invading their personal space," said Dana Grennier, Director of Digital Marketing for MSOE. "The average teenager checks their email once per week, so our deadline reminders for admission and other key communications were easily missed." The university wanted to engage the social media generation and create a dialogue that would help both sides determine whether MSOE was the right fit. With a competitive admissions process, prospects needed open access to resources through each stage.

In addition, the admissions portal on MSOE's website contained outdated and limited information. The university wanted to develop a branded site that was more engaging for prospects and their families and provided essential application materials. The site also needed to give insight into student life at MSOE, while opening up the lines of communication with staff to help streamline the admissions process.

AT A GLANCE

Challenges

- 1 Communication methods were ineffective in reaching prospective students
- 2 Admissions process left openings for missed deadlines and unanswered questions
- 3 MSOE sought to strengthen their reputation and create a strong competitive differentiator among other institutions

Results

- 1 Bridge has enabled MSOE to reach application goals 9 months ahead of schedule, while also tracking ahead on deposited students
- 2 Gamification features including checklists and badging boost member engagement, driving the highest application-to-matriculation rate in the university's history
- 3 The community has led to increased tour requests and higher attendance at campus events



Client Success:

"Our relationship with 7Summits has completely changed the way MSOE looks at the admissions process and the way we interact with prospective students. Bridge has given us so many tools to reach out and communicate."

DANA GRENNIER
DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MARKETING FOR MSOE



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— **JAMES DAVIDSON**, 7SUMMITS VICE PRESIDENT OF DIGITAL & COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Solution

The 7Summits team facilitated a series of strategy workshops at MSOE to learn about the organization's business objectives, technology and processes. "They really took the time to get to know who we are as an institution and all of the things that make us unique," said Grennier. 7Summits initiated an open discussion about MSOE's needs and pain points, during which they reviewed the admissions team's strategy and procedures along with the university's overall business objectives. After this session, the 7Summits team brainstormed project ideas that would address MSOE's top business objectives, casting a wide net and coming up with over 40 possible projects. "We anticipated getting basic advice like 'start a Twitter feed,' so we were blown away by the diverse and far-reaching ideas the team developed," said Grennier. "Based on 7Summits' recommendations, we recognized that simple social media campaigns weren't going to cut it, so we chose the most ambitious project – a social community – to make the biggest impact."

The Bridge community was designed to create a space where students, parents and advisors can share resources and engage in conversation. Bridge registration is required in order to submit an application to MSOE, which places prospective students directly into the community. This offers easy access to resources to help applicants improve their submission and helps them immediately see the benefits of participation. While the site was created with prospective students in mind, the site also gives parents and other family members an opportunity to engage with admissions counselors, current students, alumni and faculty. By adding gamification features including to-do lists and badging to the site, the admissions process has become a fun challenge rather than a chore. The setup drives engagement by encouraging prospective students to complete each stage of the process.

MSOE Bridge integrates directly with Jenzabar Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software, which streamlines the data collection process, provides real-time admissions analytics and eliminates duplicate effort. This integration also gives prospective students real-time insights into their application status and helps encourage them to complete key tasks to keep the process moving. Creating the functionality to transfer data to the ERP system added complexity to the development process and extended the implementation timeline, but was necessary to create the full feature set that would make Bridge a success. "Throughout the implementation, we embraced an agile development methodology to break down the project into smaller pieces. This helped both sides of the team collaborate more effectively, and ultimately complete the project more quickly," said James Davidson, 7Summits Vice President of Digital & Community Strategy.



Results

MSOE Bridge launched in October 2011 with a modest registration goal of 300 accounts by January 1, 2012. The site had 300 members within the first week-and-a-half, and had amassed over 2,000 members by the start of 2012. Today, over 6,000 members actively participate on the site. In its second year of existence, Bridge has helped MSOE surpass their admissions goals for the 2013-2014 academic year. The university hit their 2013-2014 application goals nine months early, and reached their acceptance goal four months ahead of schedule. MSOE is also trending ahead on the number of deposited students, which indicates a high number of incoming students for Fall 2013. Since the launch of Bridge, MSOE has achieved its highest application-to-matriculation rate in the university's history and has improved its conversion rate thanks to the social community's promotion of the university's higher admission standards. The community has also helped the admissions team become more efficient and effective by helping them identify and interact with prospective students who are more active on the site.

Bridge has also alleviated technical issues that were common with the previous admissions portal, which periodically broke down, leaving the university unable to accept applications for up to a week at a time. There have been no outages since Bridge went live in 2011.



Initial concerns around the time investment required to moderate the Bridge community were quickly allayed. In the two years the site has been live, only two comments have been removed from the site. The admissions team can rely on current students and alumni to help answer questions and engage in dialogue on the site. Overall, the communication that has taken place on the site has been overwhelmingly positive and reinforces MSOE's reputation as a vibrant and caring community – both on- and offline. Bridge's social features are particularly beneficial to out-of-state and international students, who can ask questions about dorm room layouts and gain insights into the university's culture from afar. "Our goal was to offer 24/7 access on the prospective student's terms, and Bridge has become a way for new students to feel connected to MSOE even before they arrive on campus," said Grennier.

The community has also led to increased tour requests and higher attendance at other campus events. Before Bridge, an open house for prospective students and families typically garnered 175 RSVPs, whereas a recent event drew 260 registered families. Bridge has also helped reduce the number of proactive calls the admissions staff makes and has allowed them to spend their time engaging with prospective students more productively through the site.

Bridge has helped MSOE realize the transformative value of a social community. The university has engaged 7Summits to expand the project to include a complete redesign of the MSOE website. Phase two will drive further engagement of current students, alumni, faculty and staff through a comprehensive user experience.

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