



**NEW LIGHT
DIGITAL**™

BUILDING A WINNING SEO STRATEGY FOR SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

www.newlightdigital.com

Many students start their search for a school or university online. Here's how you can show up in top search results.

How new students find a school or university will vary. Their criteria for what they are looking for might also impact whether you're a good fit for them or not, but some factors that students use to evaluate a school include:

Location

Size

Majors

Extracurriculars, such as sororities/fraternities and clubs

Sports

Scholarships



There are **4,360 higher education institutions in the U.S.**, which means ample options for the average college student. So how will they find your school and what will make them want to attend there? Online searches are where **37 percent of students** begin their search for a school to attend.

You need a winning SEO strategy designed specifically for schools and universities because the industry is so nuanced. Learn how to master the art of showing up in search results when students and parents are seeking an educational institution.



SEO Strategy for Schools and Universities

Ranking for the search terms students and parents are using to seek out the best institutions means first taking time to understand your audience. What is it that they are looking for in a school? And what can drive their decision-making processes? Here's a look at how to build out your SEO strategy to beat out your competitors for the top spot on search engines.





Understand What Students Look for in a School



Selecting a school is both an emotional and rational decision. Students must weigh the expense with the expected return from their investment. So when students are researching schools, here's what they are looking for **according to research.**

- 74% of students think it is very important for a school to have a strong academic reputation. Another 23% believe that academic reputation is somewhat important while just 2% think it is unimportant.
- 74% of students believe that the school having their preferred major of study is a deciding factor.
- 73% of students believe that the job placement rate for higher education institutions is very important.

- 67% of students say that the total cost of attendance is a very important factor.
- 12% of students want to be far away from home and another 41% find it a somewhat important factor to be far away from home.
- Family legacy is one of the least important factors when selecting a higher education institution.

The final two points about the distance from home and family legacy surprises most schools. Many schools tout their benefits heavily in the city where they are located and do less outreach farther away from their physical location. And many schools tout family legacies, while students don't care all that much about that.

2

Create Content Pages Around What Matters Most to Students



Now that you know what interests prospective students, you can begin building out your content to match those interests.

Google rewards webpages with high page views and longer time spent on the page. So the more page views and time spent on the page you can get, the more likely you are to rank. But you must focus on useful pages.

When considering what pages to create, be sure the following information is clear:

- Degree programs
- Admissions requirements
- Campus location(s) and nearby cities
- Job placement rates
- Financial aid
- Tuition cost with a breakdown for housing, meal plans, etc.

When planning your pages, aim for 800 words per page. If you can't cover that much information on a page, consider whether combining several smaller pages might offer more visits and time on the page from website visitors.



3

Clean Up Your Website URLs



As institutions grow, the menus for their websites tend to balloon and with those ballooning menus comes the challenge of long, messy URLs. Too many words and long strings will make it more challenging for your pages to rank.

You want your URL to be short and specific to tell a reader (or search engine) at a glance what the page is about and what is important. For example, a page for admissions should be:

www.myuniversity.edu/admissions

What many schools end up with is something that looks more like this:

www.myuniversity.edu/prospective-students/becoming-a-student/accounting-program/admissions

The more complicated your URL is with all those extensions, the less likely it is for the search engine to recognize the most important keywords and reward you for them.

When creating URLs, your goal is to use the page keywords in the URL when possible. That doesn't mean you should keyword stuff your URLs and make them look like this:

www.myuniversity.edu/admissions-for-best-university-in-chicago

In this case, the search engine can recognize that the added words are just for the sake of getting keywords into the URL and you might get marked as spam.

4

Highlight Your Programs

Program pages are of utmost importance. That's because students place such an emphasis on a school having the field of study that interests them.

When you look through your program pages, does it feel like a high-level overview that any school that offers that academic major could list

on their website? Or does the page go deep into study methodology, courses, faculty, internship opportunities and job placement?

Optimize your pages for keywords only where they fit naturally. Your goal should be to lead with the information prospective students seek and then optimize the page for keywords where relevant.

While optimizing the page, consider how a student might seek out information. For example, your formal academic program might be a degree in business with a focus in accounting. But a student might not search for something quite so nuanced. They might be looking for a bachelor's degree in accounting or a four-year accounting degree. By considering all the ways your students might seek out information, you can prepare your pages for your student's needs.



5

Optimize for Local SEO

Because the location is a deciding factor for many students evaluating the best school based on their needs, optimizing your website for local SEO can have many benefits.



Older learners generally prefer to attend college close to home so they can maintain their job and way of life. High school seniors are looking to get away from home and experience a new area.

And while the interests and needs of older and younger learners vary, they are both looking for information about where a school is located. That's where local SEO comes in. Optimizing for location-specific keywords can aid your school in showing up in search results based on location-specific queries.

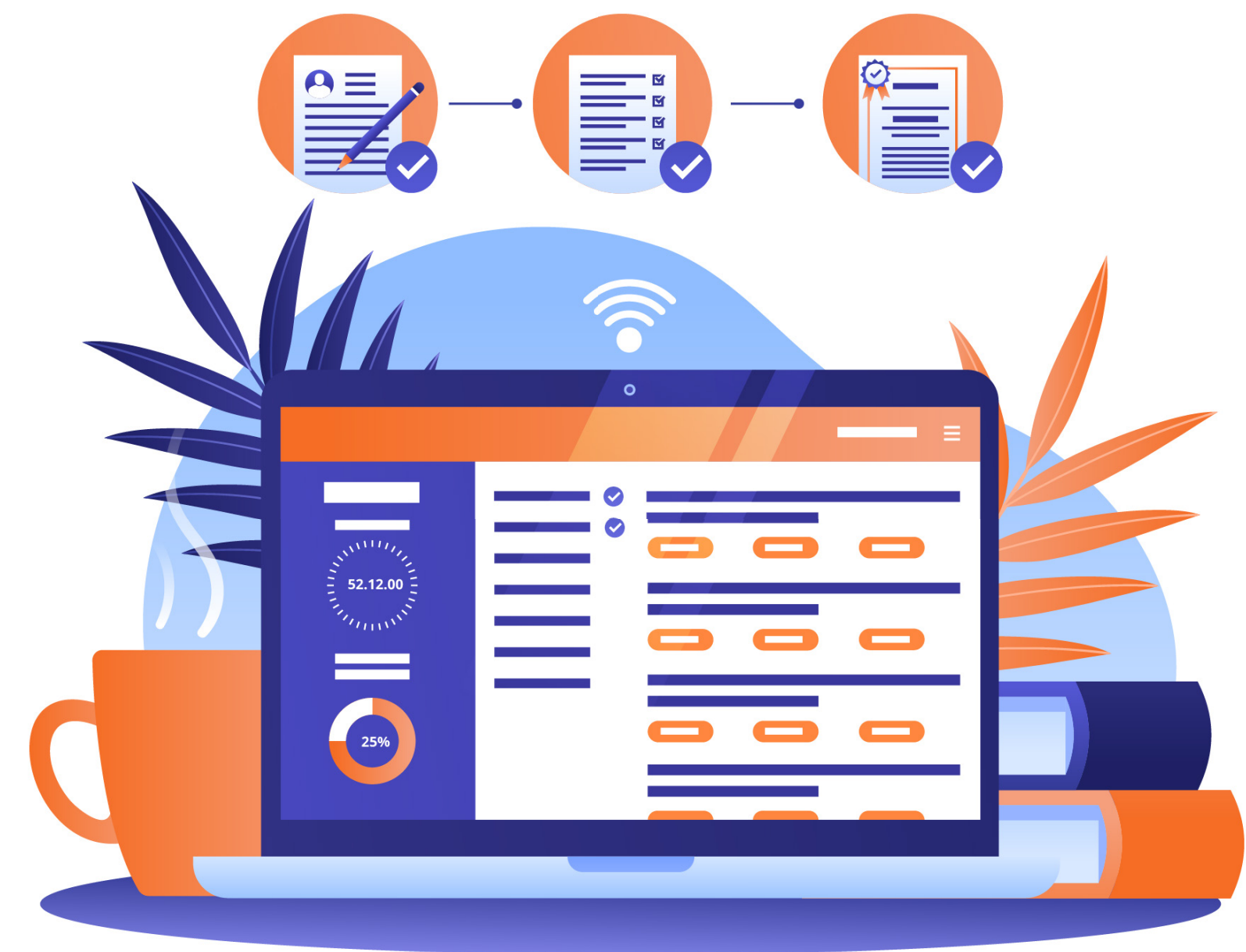
Schools located on the outskirts of a large city might target the large city name instead of the name of the smaller town where they are located. That way, you show up in more search queries that are relevant to your school.

6

Don't Forget Non-text Elements

Keyword optimization tends to get the most attention when it comes to SEO. But non-text elements also play a role. Your website's speed, format, use of tags, meta descriptions and image alt text will all factor into your search rankings.

While your website visitors won't see this information, search engines do and use that data to rank your website. And while you're reviewing the content on your various pages, consider the readability of the content. Google doesn't just want keyword-optimized text. It also wants to see that your content will be simple and enjoyable for your website visitors.



A Resource for Creating an SEO Strategy for Your School or University

New Light Digital is an experienced team of SEO experts ready to help you meet new prospective students through a winning SEO strategy. Our team has helped companies in various industries succeed by developing a strong online presence and supporting marketing to nurture leads and convert them into customers.

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