



THE EDUPRENEUR'S GUIDE TO HIGHER ED INNOVATION

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Introduction



When taking a look at the world's leading brands, companies, and entrepreneurs, you'd be hard pressed to find one who isn't delivering on three crucial items: building trust through relationships, offering solutions to problems, and making lives easier. Disney, LeBron James and (dare we say) Kylie Jenner, are champions at identifying customer desires and delivering solutions in an unexpected, yet satisfying way that leaves a lasting impression.

Taking lessons from the Disneys of the world and applying them to higher education may just be the jolt your campus needs to attract, enroll, and engage more students through graduation. Let's continue to [redesign the student experience](#) by thinking like an EDUpreneur (yes, you read that correctly — a higher ed entrepreneur) and implementing new, innovative strategies on your campus.



CREATING THE MOST MAGICAL PLACE ON EARTH: DISNEY'S 7-INGREDIENT RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

What Can Higher Ed Learn from Disney?

Anyone who has recently visited Disney World knows that it's an unforgettable experience — from beginning to end, top to bottom. There's magic in the air. But that magic didn't get there simply by association; it's the result of painstaking attention to detail, brand cohesion, consistent messaging, an emphasis on the customer experience, and the latest technology. What can higher education learn from Disney, other than the fact that it's a small world after all? Check out these 7 takeaways from the most magical place on Earth.

1. Build a consistent brand narrative on a simple, unifying mission.

For Disney, everything they do centers around a simple directive: “create happiness.”^[1] This is the unifying mission for all members of the Disney team, from the CEO to the person inside the Mickey suit, that doubles as an inspiration for all actions they carry out. Everything the company does, from the creation of design elements, to the placement of signage, to the way staff are trained to interact with customers, is quality tested against this directive. Will this decision create maximum happiness for customers and is it consistent with Disney's brand story? That story is told again and again, from the hotel resort, to the monorail, to the park — even the pancakes are shaped like Mickey Mouse. The Disney story is one of fail-proof consistency, and they deliver on that in every crevice and at every turn.

Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

Does your institution have a strong brand that is consistently applied across all marketing channels and the student experience? Is your brand telling a cohesive story built around an organizing directive that resonates with staff and ultimately, your current students and prospects? Are you reinforcing your branding at every turn, from the website to mailers to campus visits? Every touchpoint should successfully convey your institution's identity and the mission that inspired it.

“Know the guest well enough to be relevant to them ... every day, every time they interact with [the] brand.”

— Tom Boyles, former Senior Vice President, Global Customer Managed Relationships at Disney Parks and Resorts [2]

2. Use integrated technology for a seamless experience.

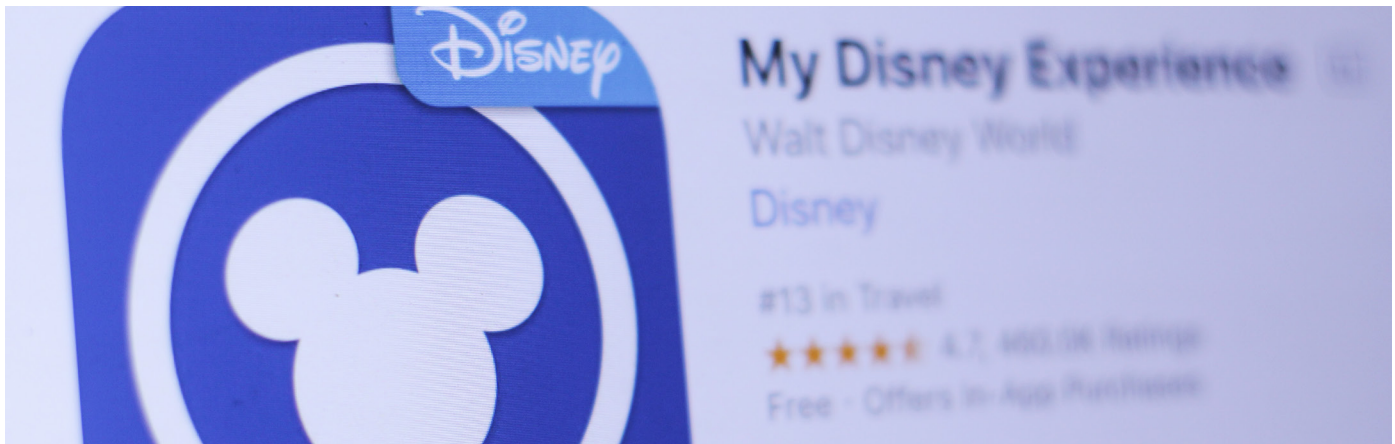
Disney uses state-of-the-art technology to connect every aspect of a customer's visit and create a flawless experience. A prime example of this is its MagicBand, a waterproof wristband with an embedded RFID chip that connects to scanners throughout the theme park. The MagicBand allows customers to easily unlock hotel doors, enter parks, access photos, and sign up for +FastPass (limited passes that move them to the front of lines). The band can even be used to purchase meals! All of that convenience integrates with a personalized vacation planning website, where guests can outline their itinerary, and the My Disney Experience app, where guests can see ride wait times or make restaurant reservations — all before even stepping foot on the park's grounds.

Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

You may not be passing out waterproof wristbands anytime soon, but Disney has some solid strategies to learn from here. The MagicBand delivers on consumers' desire to be engaged at every touchpoint in a way that's convenient, makes sense, brings enjoyment or solves a problem, and ultimately, leaves a lasting impression.

It's no secret that today's students are digital natives, and therefore, expect a high level of tech-savvy engagement. Not delivering on these expectations says that an institution is behind the times, and therefore, not equipped to provide the best educational experience for today's students.

Think about it. Is your website designed mobile-first or do you have to pinch and zoom to view content better? Do you have a [convenient chat widget](#) on your website to help answer students' immediate questions? Are your event registration forms and admissions applications easy to fill out on-the-go via smartphone? Is your communication plan telling a story or simply pushing out a jumble of different recruitment messages and quality levels? Does your yield strategy include a [mobile app to facilitate a sense of community](#) among accepted students before they even step foot on campus? Find your version of the MagicBand and wow students.



3. Engage in a personal and memorable way.

If you thought we told you everything about the MagicBand, think again! Not only does it centralize multiple services into one bright piece of plastic, it also triggers individualized surprises across parks. For example, a guest might see their name and home state flash on a screen at the end of the “it’s a small world” ride, or they might see a ghost named after them residing in the Haunted Mansion. Now, that’s what we call personalization! And if you thought everyone would get the same, tired band, you clearly don’t know Disney. When ordered in advance, MagicBands can be personalized with guest names and a color of choice.

Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

The facts are the facts. Multiple institutions are vying for the same prospects. You have to make a mark, and prospects must feel like they matter to you in their own unique way. When prospects visit campus for the first time, are they made to feel special and not like just another number? If you think students are dying to wear your school’s generic branded t-shirt from accepted students’ day, consider how many other boring t-shirts they’ve received throughout the recruitment process. Our friends at Render Experiences know this fact first-hand, and encourage institutions to think differently by finding a meaningful memento that really stands out from the crowd. When you see a MagicBand, or even the iconic Mickey Mouse ears headband, you immediately think of Disney without their brand being spelled out for you. What can you give students that will leave a powerful, lasting brand association for your campus?

Solving problems with a human-centered approach is the key element of a strategy called design-thinking. Take some time to review our [eBook: Redesigning the Student Experience](#) to get details on this approach to help you personalize the student experience.

As higher ed leaders and EDUpreneurs, we have to think about our vulnerabilities and how we can use them to cut through the clutter.

What comes to mind when I think about Disney is, oftentimes, when you ask someone about their Disney experience, they go back to a specific person. "Oh, we had this operator of the Small World ride that let us go on twice." Or, "We got a free turkey leg in Frontierland because my daughter was crying."

When we look at moments like that, the people are such key components of everyone's Disney brand experience. And I think it's important to remember in our recruitment process that people recruit people. We need to ask ourselves, how can we empower our employees to a point where they don't have to ask their supervisor, "Hey, can I walk this person over to this other office?" Instead, they just get up from their desk, do it, and go that extra mile to help someone.



Trent Gilbert

Vice President for Enrollment Management
Monmouth College

4. Listen closely to your constituents and implement their feedback for maximum delight.

Who are you serving? Is your prime demographic the freshly graduated senior from high school or the “new” traditional student (see the next page for a refresher) who has vastly different needs. Do you really know what your students want because you’ve heard it from their mouths to your ears? For example, when Disney surveyed its staff about how to improve the customer experience, they heard that customers were often asking about the location of characters. Disney listened and introduced the CHIP system (Character Hotline and Information Program), which allows visitors to quickly find out where every character is, at any time. That’s taking action on customer feedback!

Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

Have you recently done focus groups with prospective and current students or surveyed them on how to best meet their needs? Do you have fine-grained data on who is matriculating and who is falling through the cracks and why? You can’t serve your students well if you don’t know what they want and need. Listen and respond to the right directives based on data straight from their experiences, not on personal opinions.

5. Go the extra mile; be a one-stop shop for student needs.

Now that you’ve figured out exactly who your students are, you can serve their particular needs. If your students are new traditionals, that means they have a lot of responsibilities and outside stressors. Go the extra mile to deliver convenience and delight — and ensure everyone on your staff acts based on the same mindset. Think “create happiness.” For example, one family who visited Disney sent a letter of gratitude. [3] It tells the story of their autistic son who desperately wanted a clear balloon with a green Mickey Mouse in the middle. His parents told him to wait until the end of the day at the park, so they didn’t risk losing it. However, at the end of the day, all the special balloons appeared to be sold out. Disney staff could have let that child leave disappointed, but they went the extra mile and spent 30 minutes tracking down that balloon. A magical moment, indeed.

To take this point one step further, your campus should go the extra mile, internally, to reorganize and become a one-stop shop for student needs. At a Disney park, everything is conveniently located in one place: the rides, food, shopping, characters and shows. A customer never needs to leave the park to find what he or she is looking for, and a friendly staff member is never far away to help. Your campus and student support infrastructure should be the same.

A Review: The "New" Traditional Student

Gone are the days when the typical undergraduate was fresh out of high school with few responsibilities, bright-eyed and eager to study full-time to earn a degree in a linear fashion. In their place is the new traditional student.

Who are they? They are over the age of 24 and share one or more additional characteristic(s):

- wait after high school to enroll in post-secondary education
- attend college part-time while working full-time
- have dependents who are not their spouse or partner
- are financially independent from their parents for purposes of financial aid; and
- oftentimes, have completed their high school degree through a certificate or GED program.



Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

How can you provide your own kind of special balloons to students? Could you offer services like financial aid, advising, or tutoring during non-traditional hours, like after 5 p.m. or on the weekends? What about child care for students who are parents? Do you have enough parking to conveniently serve commuters? Are your classes offered during times that are convenient for working families? Are you offering the extras that could really make you stand out from the institution down the road? Think outside the box to deliver that extra something.

But, don't forget to make all services offered as convenient as possible for your students in order to improve their experience on campus. Think about it, are your prospects getting bounced around to multiple offices in search of answers or assistance? Does your campus provide the support that different types of students need? For example, are there food options available at all hours? Is your library open 24-hours a day? Make your campus a place that students don't need to leave, but more importantly, don't want to leave.

6. Sweat the small stuff.

For Disney, every detail matters. The “drive to optimize the mundane” [4] is what separates Disney from its competitors. One specific example of Disney's attention to the small stuff is the way the parks handle trash disposal. Disney parks have trash down to a science. In fact, it's said that Walt Disney toured multiple amusement parks and discovered that guests will typically hold on to their trash for 30 steps and no more. With this data, he ensured that his own parks have optimal trash can placement, in addition to staff who roam looking for stray pieces. [5] Because of its attention to the small stuff, Disney may also be the cleanest place on Earth.

“The most unexpected finding when evaluating Disney's ‘magic’ recipe for customer experience is the focus on process — the drive and ability to optimize the mundane.”

– Flavio Martins, VP of Operations and Customer Support at DigiCert, Inc. [6]



Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

How are you paying attention to the mundane details? When's the last time you typed your campus or more specifically, the admissions building, into Google Maps or Waze to experience the way prospects are driving in? What does that look like for them? Be aware of what they're passing to get onto campus and how 'helpful' your signage really is. Have you walked the tour route with your campus ambassadors recently? If not, join a campus tour and take note of your surroundings. Is there trash on the ground? Do you have enough trash bins in high-traffic areas? Is the tour route aesthetically pleasing for incoming parents and students? Sweat the small stuff so you don't need to sweat matriculation numbers.

7. Immerse prospects in your culture.

Memorable institutions have a certain "feel" to them — an ethos, a vibe. When you enter a Disney park or as another example, an [Apple store](#), you know where you are, with or without the sleek logos. Guest immersion in Disney World creates a lasting impression, which is evidenced by the park's more than 70% return rate. Everything is laid out to signal that this place is special and, more importantly, through the customer service, design, and quality, the customer is special.

Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

Does your campus culture and environment—physical and digital—manifest a desire within prospective students to be a part of your community? Are you building a consistent brand and culture that evokes a feeling in your customers? Does your brand "speak" when a student visits? For example, if your campus is known for technology, are there examples of state-of-the-art tech in every crevice? If you're a design school, do you look the part? Your culture should be clear and immersive. Once you get students on campus, either for a visit day or open house, captivate them with your culture.

Dreaming of a School that Supports the Whole Family:

How LeBron James 'Changed The Game' for Kids in His Hometown

On page 8, we reviewed the "new" traditional student. Almost 75% of students now share at least one of the characteristics that comprise the new traditional population. With more and more students who are full-time workers, parents, and caregivers, how can colleges and universities reimagine the support and services they provide? Perhaps, higher education institutions can look to LeBron James' new "I Promise" School—a public school for low income, underserved students in Akron, Ohio—for inspiration.

While many recognize LeBron James as an all-star NBA champion with an impressive net worth of nearly \$765 million [7], his influence and business interests span way beyond basketball. Off the court, James has an iconic sneaker line with Nike, a part-ownership in a production company, countless endorsement deals, and his own charity — The LeBron James Family Foundation. Recently, James has taken

his philanthropic endeavors to a whole new level by founding the "I Promise" School, one that's sure to revolutionize the notion of public schools in America.

The "I Promise" School provides wraparound services to its students, as well as their parents. For instance, the school offers a longer school day and year, free meals and bicycles, STEM summer camp programs, access to fitness trainers, and far more support staff than most public schools could ever dream of. The most salient aspect of LeBron's school is that it is designed to support the whole family at its core, offering GED and ESL (English as a Second Language) courses and job placement assistance to parents and caregivers, as well as counseling for the whole family. The aim is to create a bond between the school and the entire family, which in turn builds trust, a strong commitment to the school, and an undeniable capacity for success.



Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

Take a page from LeBron's playbook. What would it mean to provide more wraparound services on your campus? Can you afford another support staff member who will allow you to go the extra mile? Could you provide GED and ESL classes for the parents or family members of first-generation students? We mentioned this earlier, but what would it take to provide child care for students who are parents?

How could you incentivize more than one family member to attend your institution? Do you have family rates on classes? By creating a support structure for families, you can check all the boxes introduced at the start of this eBook: building trust through relationships, offering solutions to problems, and making lives easier — the pinnacle of what every customer wants.



USING INSTAGRAM TO BUILD AN EMPIRE OF ENGAGEMENT: THE INHERENT GENIUS BEHIND KYLIE COSMETICS' MARKETING

What Can Higher Ed Learn from Kylie Jenner?

It's no secret that Millennials and Generation Z love Instagram. In fact, 18 to 29-year-olds are the largest demographic using the social media platform with a 64% active rate. [8] Today, "Instagram Influencer" is a legitimate job title with brands paying celebrities, reality TV stars, and even regular folks who have made a name for themselves online, big money to endorse their products. A top-tier celebrity can make up to a million dollars a post, while an influencer—someone with a large following, usually upwards of 100,000—can expect to be paid anywhere from \$1,500 to \$33,000 per post. [9] According to Business Insider, influencer marketing is projected to be worth between \$5 billion and \$10 billion by 2020. [10]

The Kardashian sisters and their two younger Jenner sisters are the pinnacle of influencers. Their status as cultural juggernauts who—love them or hate them—captivate much of the world, make them incredibly influential with their combined millions of followers on social media.

The youngest of the clan, at only 20 years old, is Kylie Jenner and she sits at the top of the list, getting paid \$1 million per post from outside companies. [11] However, it's for her own beauty company, Kylie Cosmetics, that Jenner has really leveraged Instagram to its full potential.

You may have recently spotted Kylie Jenner on the cover of Forbes Magazine under the headline

"America's Women Billionaires." She is estimated to be worth \$900 million today — quickly closing in on billionaire status. Her fortune has largely been amassed in just the past three years through Kylie Cosmetics, which started with simple lip glosses and liners.

What kind of powerhouse marketing campaign did Jenner use to reach this level of brand fame? Posting on Instagram. With a personal Instagram following of 115 million, her reach is massive, and at the launch of her cosmetics line, her followers clamored to become her customers.

With a few posts and video stories, and some well-placed online flash sales, Jenner managed to sell out her whole stock multiple times. She

is now rumored to be worth three times as much as her sister Kim and is on track to become one of the youngest "self-made" billionaires, according to Forbes.

The power of social media marketing and brand influencers cannot be overstated. Instagram is a platform that builds a sense of community among followers, so much so that they feel a personal connection to the people behind the brands. Kylie Jenner has used young customers' craving for a relationship with their favorite celebrities and brands to build a business empire that just keeps growing.

So what can higher ed learn from Kylie Jenner? Turns out, more than you might think.

“Allowing students to take over Snapchat for the University is perfect; the students make up what the University is and represents, and there is no better way to truly and honestly show that than letting students ‘takeover’ the various social media accounts.

Really, if I touched the life of one student out there: to make them work harder, go explore Morgantown or get more involved, then I did my job during my 24 hour reign of the WVU Snapchat.”



Layne Veneri

Student Ambassador,
West Virginia University



Takeaways for EDUpreneurs:

You may not think you have much to learn from Kylie Jenner, but have you considered that the creative use of Instagram could increase visibility for your institution? For example, have you thought about leveraging the social media power of well-known alumni or enrolled students as brand ambassadors?

Invite your current students to help you in your online marketing efforts. Remember, this generation is more than willing to live on social media. If you have an institution-wide Instagram, allow one of your students to take over the account for a day. This will allow your target audience to see the college experience through the eyes of a current student. What would it mean to have a famous graduate do an Instagram post or story takeover

about how much they loved being a part of your community? If that graduate has a large following of people who admire him or her, it could mean a whole lot of new applications or, more simply, positive social PR. Guaranteed, there is someone on your campus who has more Instagram followers than you ever imagined because they give fashion advice or are a star athlete.

If social media collaborations with current students or well-established alumni isn't your marketing style, keep in mind that the possibilities here are endless. Pulling a key takeaway from Disney's success and "going the extra mile" can speak volumes when it comes to social media applications. Whether you like it or not, it has become an instagrammable world.

Are you participating in that world?

It's a light lift to stage an area on campus that's "insta-worthy," just like the iconic LOVE sign in Philadelphia or the wildly-popular Museum of Ice Cream in New York.

Just imagine the sheer amount social sharing and buzz that could result from a cleverly positioned, photo-worthy, branded area on your campus. Prospective students on campus tours would go wild for something like that, and tour guides could even facilitate group participation by offering to take the photos!

So, what would it take for your campus to leverage Instagram to its full potential? Probably not as much as you think.

Ready to be an EDUpreneur?



Taking what we've learned from some of the most iconic brands and entrepreneurs, we can begin to apply certain customer service-centric principles to the way we position our institutions as brands and interact with students on a daily basis.

An EDUpreneur is a proud disruptor of the status quo in higher education, full of new, innovative ideas and isn't afraid to take action on them. Recruiting and retaining today's students demands a new approach — we need to begin exploring our curiosities and questioning the way we've been doing things in order to innovate and better meet students' needs. And that means combining proven best practices from industries outside of higher ed

to help us further differentiate our institutions from one another and provide the best possible student experience.

At the end of the day, if you're only comparing your institution to your biggest competitor (which we like to call "the school down the street"), or drawing inspiration from their latest marketing campaigns and enrollment tactics, you'll never stand out. Look outside of higher education because it's not about what the school down the street is doing, it's about translating the positive brand experiences and interactions you have on a daily basis as a consumer to provide the best possible experience for students at your institution.

Citations and Sources

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About TargetX

Student-centric Solutions for Higher Ed

Enhance the admissions process, increase enrollment, and prioritize student success with TargetX's comprehensive suite of HEDA Core Compatible CRM solutions — powered by the Salesforce platform and trusted by over 400 institutions. Our Recruitment and Retention Suites are specifically designed for higher education and built mobile-first, empowering your campus to meet today's students where they are.

Support Students from Inquiry to Graduation

Enrollment Management | [TargetX Recruitment Suite](#)

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Student Success | [TargetX Retention Suite](#)

Aid in early intervention and move the needle on student retention rates with our comprehensive CRM solution. Speak to the unique needs and motivations of your students with personalized communications, an interactive mobile app, an accessible advisor appointment scheduling tool, and more.

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