

PREMIER COLLEGE GUIDANCE

BRAND DIGITAL STRATEGY



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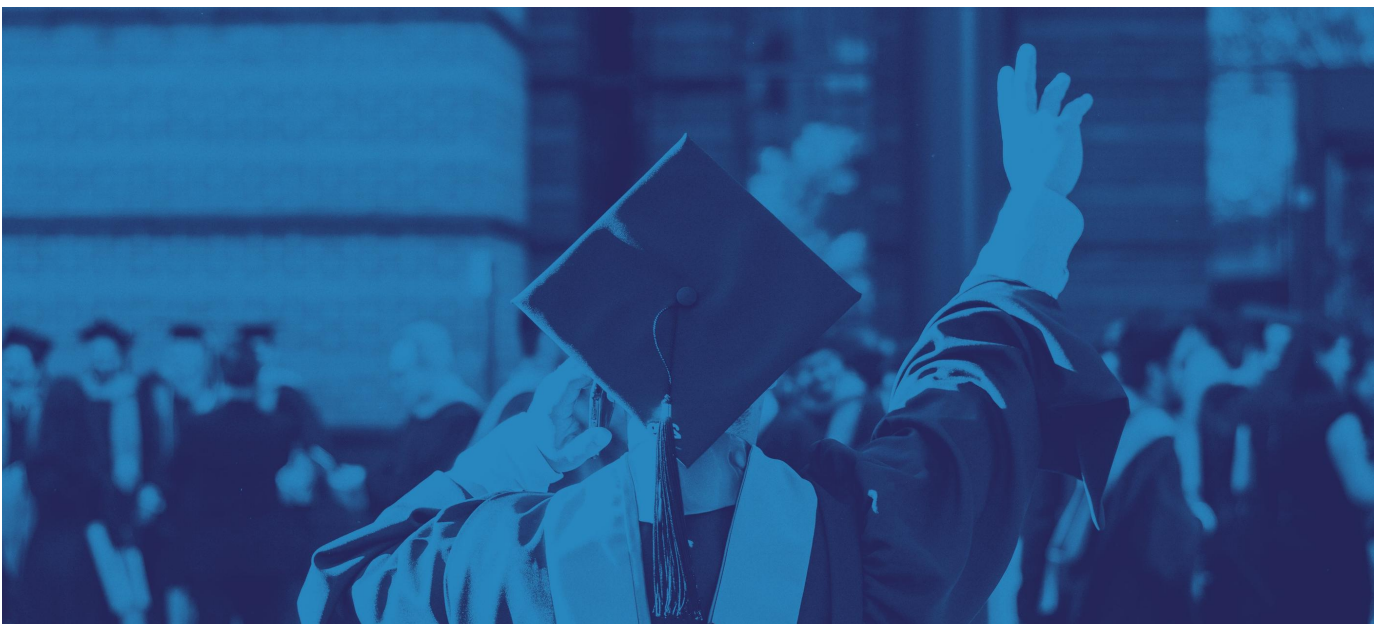
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Premier College Guidance is a boutique consulting firm that believes in the ideal that “college should be accessible and affordable for all” (Premier College Guidance, n.d.). The company works closely with students in Ventura and Los Angeles counties to perfect their applications, get admitted into colleges and receive financial aid. Specifically, the company aims to remove the barriers many families face when applying for college through webinars, mentorship, counseling and support.

Premier College Guidance hopes to be the preferred brand in the industry due to its commitment to ethical college counseling and its proven track record with local school districts. However, increased competition in the area as well as changing opinions of higher education will make it difficult for Premier College Guidance to stand out in the marketplace without a strong digital strategy. The following plan aims to create a cohesive communications strategy and strong digital presence to connect Premier College Guidance with Conejo Valley families and, especially, teachers.



BACKGROUND

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic caused several universities to transition to test-optional admissions where scores from the SAT and ACT would not count for against students during the admissions process (Bauer-Wolf, 2020). These decisions from colleges remove a major revenue stream—test prep—for education consultants. The pandemic also inspired many students to re-evaluate higher education and consider enrolling in community college or trade school or take a gap year from college (Dickler, 2020). The worldwide event has begun to impact the American ideal that higher education leads to a better career with increased wealth, thus removing the need for education consultants like Premier College Guidance (Marek, 2019).

INDUSTRY

Over the past decade-and-a-half there has been a 400% increase in the number of college consultants domestically and a 1,000% increase internationally due to rising competition and enrollment at universities (Sklarow, 2018). The industry also expanded at a time when household income and disposal income increased, allowing more families to pay for "nonessential services" for their children like college consulting (Le, 2020).

CLIENT

Based in Westlake Village, Calif., Premier College Guidance is a boutique consulting firm that helps families prepare for and get into college, and receive financial aid to pay for it (Premier College Guidance, n.d.). Since its founding more than a decade ago, the business has helped hundreds of families navigate the college application and admissions process (Premier College Guidance, n.d.). The firm primarily works with families in the Conejo Valley Unified School District, where students are striving for academic and personal success.

PRODUCT AND SERVICE

Premier College Guidance gives students and parents access to college selection advising, standardized test tutoring, resume support, financial aid assistance and career counseling. These offerings range from basic services with a few meetings to full-fledged consulting with curriculum advising, test prep and job shadowing. The costs for these services can range from \$160 to \$12,400 (Premier College Guidance, n.d.). Although it is expensive, the company has positioned itself as an essential service for families trying to turn their children's higher education dreams into a reality.

DIGITAL PRESENCE

Premier College Guidance has several digital platforms and social networks, but it only actively uses a few of its resources. Existing digital platforms available to the company include a website, an online blog, Yelp, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The greatest success is on the company's website and YouTube account, which provides the largest amount of information about the organization. The brand, though, is not using its digital presences to its full potential. Premier College Guidance struggles to create consistent messaging and strong engagement across its branded platforms. By looking solely at social media posts, users would not know what services Premier College Guidance offers or what communities they serve.

COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

The brand's key competitors are other local, boutique firms that cater to similar students local school districts such as College Endeavors LLC in Agoura Hills, Admit You to College in Westlake Village and National College Planning Solutions in Simi Valley. More prominent competitors are industry leaders, such as IvyWise and Top Tier Admissions, market themselves as the "gold standard" to get into elite universities. Beyond their prestigious reputations, these competitors have a greater reach on social media sites as they diversify their content across platforms while creating consistent messaging through colors, photos or tags.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

As a boutique consulting firm, Premier College Guidance relies on its strong relationship with local school districts and with California universities to draw in new clientele. These methods work to the brand's advantage as it has a strong track record of success in the community for not only helping students get into the schools of their choice, but also for allowing students to develop their career interests on their own. By emphasizing the "whole child" and not just their grades or test scores, Premier College Guidance stands out from the large players in the industry like IvyWise and Top Tier Admissions.

But, Premier College Guidance is not without its weaknesses. The company's consumer base is small with only a select number of students preparing for college each year and choosing between dozens of local and national consulting firms. Premier College Guidance, and the industry as a whole, also isolates itself to a certain socioeconomic demographic that has the monetary resources to pay for tutoring sessions or admissions boot camps. There is also little that diversifies Premier College Guidance from its key local competitors besides its leadership team and location. Its digital presence is minimal and does not work in the company's favor. Posts on digital platforms are sporadic and have little to no engagement with Premier College Guidance's key audiences. Views toward higher education are also changing among Americans, as many now believe that a university degree is not necessary for future success. Many consulting firms will have to fight against that notion to succeed.



CORE

PROBLEM

Although Premier College Guidance has a strong footing in Ventura County, the company's reliance on word-of-mouth communications will be its downfall as the world turns increasingly digital. If Premier College Guidance does not create a cohesive presence across various digital platforms and with key community leaders, the company will disconnect with its core audience and will lose its place in the local industry.

GOAL

Position Premier College Guidance as a leader in the local college consulting industry by enhancing the company's ability to communicate and connect with Conejo Valley families and, especially, teachers.

FOUR

OBJECTIVES

- 1 Grow social media engagement by 30 percent by July 2021.
 - 2 Develop partnerships with four teacher influencers on Instagram and/or YouTube by May 2021.
 - 3 Increase awareness among the Conejo Valley teacher demographic about Premier College Guidance's proven track record with students by August 2021.
 - 4 Highlight Premier College Guidance's work through paid digital media placements in 10 popular teacher resource websites like Edutopia and TeacherVision by July 2021.
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TARGET AUDIENCE

DEMOGRAPHICS

There are nearly 300 teachers employed at Conejo Valley Unified School District's four high school campuses. The diverse audience is made up of all ages and backgrounds ranging from recent college grads that are part of the Gen Z or Millennial generation, and older teachers who are part of the Gen X or Baby Boomer generation (CVUSD, n.d.). Many teachers were born and raised in the area and work at schools they once attended (CVUSD, n.d.). All have degrees in higher education and make, on average, \$85,615 a year, before benefits (Megli-Thuna, 2019). These teachers are identified by their common affiliation with their teachers' union, the Unified Association of Conejo Teachers (UACT, n.d.).



PSYCHOGRAPHICS

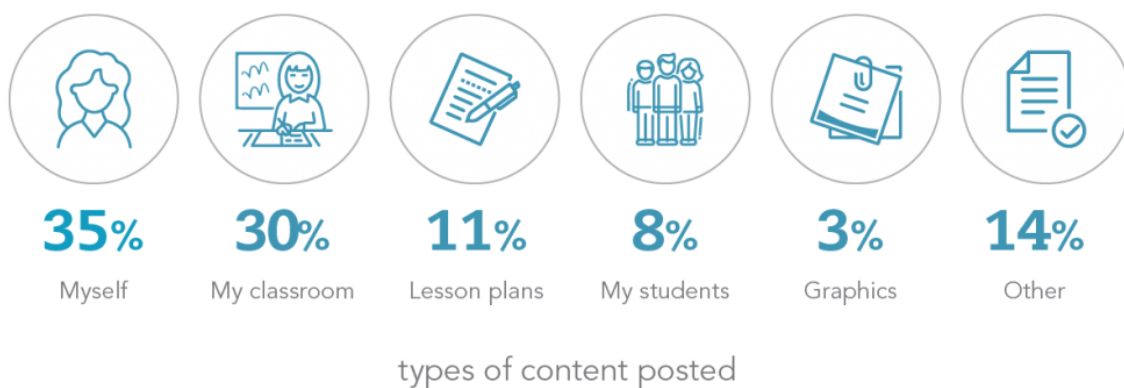
CVUSD teachers are known for their adaptability, dependability and creativity (Meador, 2019). They are able to handle sudden changes with ease as they think quickly on their feet to come up with organized, creative solutions to common problems (Meador, 2019). This audience is recognized as being “lifelong learners” that delve into their subject matter expertise in order to adapt to new requirements and hold students’ attentions (Goldberg, 2003). Many high school teachers are willing to invest time before or after school to prepare for class, talk to parents, attend school meetings or work one-on-one with students (Goldberg, 2003). They recognize that their success in the classroom determines the prestige of their campuses statewide (Le, 2019). This audience is also identified by their pride in their school communities and their unwavering dedication to their students. High school teachers believe in supporting their students in and out of the classroom by building trusted relationships with their students and by building personal connections outside of their subject matters (Meador, 2019).





INTERESTS

On digital and social platforms, teachers tend to prefer content that is easily digestible and that helps them succeed in their careers. This audience is willing to engage with photos, videos, blog posts, websites and short blurbs, as demonstrated by their diverse digital and social media use; however, the content must be relevant to them in either their personal or professional lives. A priority for this audience is the welfare and education of their students as they want to help them become happy and healthy adults (TeachThought Staff, 2019). Teachers understand that they take on additional roles as counselors and parental figures, so they are interested in topics that help them address students' unique needs in the classroom and encourage them to pursue their studies (TeachThought Staff, 2019).



PLATFORMS TO REACH

CVUSD high school teachers are drawn to various platforms such as: Pinterest for classroom ideas; Instagram to post their own content and follow their peers; YouTube to find classroom lessons for supplemental learning; Facebook to connect with colleagues and organizations; Twitter to have conversations about work; and professional websites to access material relevant to their work.

MESSAGES



PRIMARY Every student deserves equal access to higher education. Premier College Guidance wants to partner with schools and teachers to ensure every child is on the pathway to success.

SECONDARY *Premier College Guidance wants to educate teachers about the college admission and financial aid processes since it will encourage them to share that knowledge with students in the classroom (Neutuch, n.d.).*

SECONDARY *High school teachers believe in encouraging and guiding their students in and out of the classroom, but sometimes they need help to do so. Premier College Guidance can be that support system to help students navigate the application and admission process.*

PRIMARY Premier College Guidance believes in promoting the “whole child” instead of only test scores and grades when preparing students for college admissions.

SECONDARY *Each counselor works personally with students to get to know them on a personal level and put them on the pathway to success (Premier College Guidance, n.d.).*

SECONDARY *Research has found that standardized tests are a poor indicator of college success. We believe in promoting students’ personal interests and community involvement, instead of their academic performance (Hyman, 2019).*

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

STRATEGY 1:

Position Premier College Guidance as a partner with local high school teachers in order to help them direct students through the college admissions process.

TACTIC 1A:

Host monthly Instagram and Facebook Live videos with teachers or union leaders to inform CVUSD high school teachers of the resources available to them.

- Choose monthly participants based on their existing relationship with Premier College Guidance and/or their involvement in the college admissions process.
- Ask CEO Trevor Mizrahi to host the monthly livestreams.
- Prepare and ask questions about participants' own difficulties and solutions to helping their own students apply and get admitted to college.
- Encourage and take questions from users who tune in to the meetings and engage with the content.
- Have participants re-share or re-post the livestreams with the hashtag #TeacherTuesday to reach a wider audience.

TACTIC 1B:

Re-establish Premier College Guidance's online blog to detail the organization's success with students from local school districts.

- Craft blog posts that describe students' gratitude toward Premier College Guidance and their achievements since graduating from CVUSD's high schools.
 - Integrate information about teachers' support throughout admissions.
 - Include details about essays, test prep or applications that could be useful to high school teachers.
- Tag each post with "college help" or "teacher resources" so they are searchable.

TACTIC 1C:

Create a relevant and visually appealing Pinterest page that provides tips and tricks for classroom learning and for college admissions.

- Create boards with titles such as "AP and SAT Prep" and "Cracking College Essays."
 - Share content that is relevant to each board and that link to useful articles.
 - Integrate content from Premier College Guidance's own blog posts.
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TACTIC 1D:

Develop relationships with popular teacher influencers to emphasize their support for college counseling firms.

- Identify four influencers, two on Instagram and two on YouTube, which have an existing reach in the CVUSD area and who are willing to create sponsored content.
- Ask chosen partners to utilize Premier College Guidance's services and share their honest opinions of its offerings.
- Encourage influencers to tag Premier College Guidance in all relevant posts. Re-share posts on Premier College Guidance's own social media accounts.

STRATEGY 2:

Position Premier College Guidance as a thought leader in the Ventura County community on major issues and emerging changes in the education industry.

TACTIC 2A:

Cultivate relationships with local media outlets like the Thousand Oaks Acorn, which specifically covers CVUSD and has both print and online publications.

- Submit letters to the editor about emerging issues in the education industry such as the push for online education or in CVUSD such as requests for smaller class sizes.
 - Relate chosen subject matter back to Premier College Guidance's services and the impact the topics could have on college admissions.
- Offer to participate in stories about higher education and college admissions for local media outlets. The choice will legitimize the organization and its leaders as experts in their field.
- Pitch stories to local reporters that could influence admissions for CVUSD students or could impact the working conditions for CVUSD teachers.
- Share articles Premier College Guidance publishes or participates in on the organization's Twitter and Facebook pages, as well as on Instagram stories.

TACTIC 2B:

Develop monthly blog posts that detail Premier College Guidance's position on major topics in college consulting such as test-optional admissions.

- Tag each post with "education industry" so they are easy to find under one search.
- Utilize researched SEO keywords that will help Premier College Guidance's site visibility.
- Share published posts across the organization's social platforms, specifically on Twitter and Facebook. Encourage users to weigh-in with their own opinions.

TACTIC 2C:

Generate content for education-specific sites that are read by industry professionals.

- Develop a lesson on TED-Ed that gives a quick overview of the college application and admissions process.
 - Include the components typically found on lessons: an audio or video lecture, a short quiz, additional references and discussion questions.
 - Ask local teachers to use the lessons in their classrooms.
- Write opinion pieces for TeachThought and Education Week that detail Premier College Guidance's professional opinion on major topics.

STRATEGY 3:

Highlight the importance of promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of students in order for them to achieve personal and professional success.

TACTIC 3A:

Hold Zoom webinars with current and former students to discuss how Premier College Guidance helped them discover their personal interests.

- Allow up to 50 participants to join in on the webinars to ask their own questions or engage in a Q&A with webinar leaders.
- Encourage student representatives to discuss their personal academic journey and how a college consulting firm advised them on their pursuit of higher education.
- Publish completed video on YouTube so audiences can re-watch the webinars.

TACTIC 3B:

Develop an Instagram campaign that uplifts students' achievements out of the classroom.

- Ask students to share accomplishments such as volunteering for a decade or finding a new hobby, among others.
- Take photos of selected students and ask them to draft their own caption for each photo to personalize the posts.
- Add details about how long the students have worked with Premier College Guidance and how the organization will promote these successes in the admissions process.

TACTIC 3C:

Create a video series to demystify the application and admissions process and demonstrate how Premier College Guidance's approach is different from its competitors.

- Develop two to three minute videos that highlight the brand's approach with topics like job shadowing, time management, interview coaching, etc.
- Share content on other social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and create "teaser" videos from completed product.

PLAN CONCLUSION

With its proven success in the community, Premier College Guidance has the reputation necessary to continue attracting new clients and families from Ventura and Los Angeles counties. The brand's reach and longevity, though, is limited by the company's reliance on word-of-mouth references and its neglect of digital and social platforms. As the college consulting industry becomes even more competitive in the coming decade, Premier College Guidance will need to develop a unique digital presence to stand out in the crowded marketplace. This brand digital strategy aims to accomplish this goal by aligning Premier College Guidance's digital messages, strategies and tactics with its core mission to ethically help families through the admissions process and to see students as more than just test scores. The plan also aims to reach an untapped market in the local college consulting industry: high school teachers in the Conejo Valley Unified School District. This niche audience has developed trust with students and their families, and has the bargaining power to encourage teens to pursue higher education and seek out the support from firms like Premier College Guidance. By working alongside this audience and developing a partnership with them, Premier College Guidance can turn teachers into brand advocates while bolstering its ability to communicate with the wider community.



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