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WELCOME

Attending a UCAS event is the first step young people take when exploring future opportunities. They are at their most receptive and most open to new possibilities.

Our events give students a trusted environment in which to explore their future, presenting you with an unparalleled opportunity to engage with them. We have developed this guide, containing five strategies, to help you get the maximum value out of our events.

It has been created in collaboration with some of the best marketers, agencies, and event planners. It's a book of ideas and inspiration to help you think bigger and bolder about your events strategy, and to understand exactly what your market wants to hear from you about.

(And we've gone straight to the market to find that out, inside this book you'll also find what young people found best (and worst) at our events last year, so that you fine tune your approach.)

Over the next 12 months, we'll welcome over 160,000 prospective students, apprentices, and young employees into our unique events. This is your chance to make meaningful connections with them.

With the strength of our brand, the trust of pre-applicants, and our total nationwide coverage – there's no other way for you to speak directly to your audience at this scale.

Let's dive into the strategies of the experts, and let's start building yours.



Aimee Okafor,
Head of Events,
UCAS

UCAS DISCOVERY EVENTS: THE NUMBERS



155K
attendees



41
events



4,054+
schools

+11%
increase in flagship
event attendance
(vs 2022)

+18%
increase on **leads**
per event (vs 2022)

+12%
increase in **adviser**
rating (vs 2022)



Marketing to over
10K ADVISERS

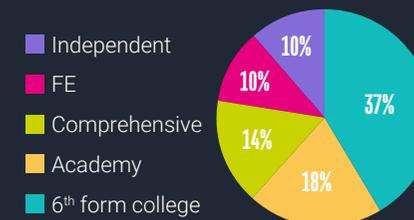


565K scans

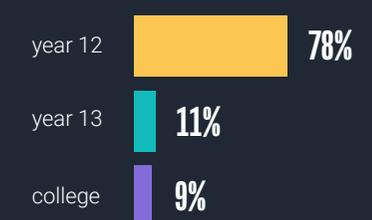


1/3 STUDENTS
come from schools located in **POLAR 1 or 2**

SCHOOL TYPE



YEAR GROUP



1. CREATE MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES



By **Aimee Kleinman**
& **John Pew** from
SMRS, a specialist
education creative
agency



You can break the mould without breaking the bank. When budget's your big obstacle, throw time at the problem instead. A bit of considered thought can go a long way in creating lasting impressions:

Creativity: Difference doesn't have to be expensive. Some good examples from the commercial sector: Klarna's event stands of bright pink will never go unnoticed, for its ostentatiousness, and The North Face's all black stand with nothing but a logo the same, for the opposite reason. Don't sit in the middle.

Details matter: Standardisation devalues experience, it's the little details that can make a huge difference. Uplighting helps simple graphics to stand out and downlighting helps showcase different zones on your stand. Even changing the mood through a branded flooring will give a sense of stepping into your brand experience. When you're selling a high value product like a three-year degree, don't devalue the expectation of the exciting experience.



Create intrigue: Careers events are sometimes top-of-the-funnel focussed, the aim being to speak to as many people as possible. But in other sectors, they create demand and intrigue (and a little bit of FOMO.) Look at The North Face's stand at buyer events where you needed an appointment to enter, so everybody was standing on their phones outside trying to book one. Or at the recent Guardian event where they showcased VR journalism and had a long, excited line of people waiting. Perceptions like these create aspiration and tug on the FOMO heartstrings.

Time: And time really is the primary challenge, because getting something physically made is tough, which means expensive. The longer your lead time, the more you can shop around for the right materials and the right manufacturer. Especially if you want to use specialist materials that need to be tested by a supplier, which often come from overseas, otherwise you're gambling on finding UK stock at the right time. Suppliers can push you towards what they know and have in stock, and you may end up with materials which are more expensive, less environmentally friendly, difficult to store, or less long lasting. Giving yourself months to find the right stuff can often mean you pay less for a better outcome. In events, time is quite literally money.





WHAT STUDENTS THINK

Look outside of your main market, these events change minds.

“ It opened my eyes to more universities that I did not consider before which look more appealing now. ”

“ I got to talk to many universities that I had not before considered going to, but now I believe there are some I would really like to attend. I would have not had a look at these universities had I not come. ”

“ It has certainly changed my mind about the universities I would shortlist. ”

At our events **95% of attendees** found a university/college/ employer they're interested in.

2. BUILD A COMMUNITY



By **Kyle Campbell**,
from **Education
Marketer**, one of
higher ed's leading
newsletters.

**EDUCATION
MARKETER**

There's plenty to learn from trade shows, but if we really want to make a difference then we can learn much more from much bigger entities – like ComicCon, SXSW, and Taylor Swift concerts.

Let me explain. These are events with built communities which are, by now, almost completely self-sufficient in terms of engagement – driven by identity, connection, and passion. They have their own digital bubbles, they're early adopters of new tech, they move with social media trends, they inspire passion, excitement, and fandom, and they know their target audience completely. Now that reads like a wish list for your Gen Z marketing, doesn't it?

Look at what we know about young people applying for university. Most young people place **more emphasis on their digital lives** than their real lives (GWI), 89% of them expect to have a core group of friends **before** they arrived on campus (ZeeMee), and their favourite brands are almost exclusively ultra-focused **digital-first** brands (Beano Brain.)

More community: young people love talking to their friends about university and love travelling in groups. They visit stands with their friends. How are you tapping into this? How are you creating an experience that welcomes them in their comfort zones? How are you targeting the individual, as well as their circle of influence?

Look at what the Sheffield universities did last year with their immersive shared stand, which promoted group engagement.

More identity: young people are attached to their personal identities like no other generation. Taylor Swift's fans make friendship bracelets for strangers and exchange them at gigs, because of their shared connection, despite having never met. How can you connect people pre-event based on shared interests, so that they come to your stand to take those connections into the real world?

Look at how early University of Chichester starts its engagement on TikTok and starts building loyalty and community long before applications.

More digital: young people will often choose digital over real, even when in person. Look at self-service kiosks in supermarkets, or the ordering points in fast food restaurants. If Gen Z can get what they need without talking to a person, they will. How can you change the way your stand works so that you give them that option, rather than pouncing on them with a prospectus?

Look at what Nottingham Trent University's IRL door, which opened onto a digital screen of a student avatar.



WHAT STUDENTS THINK

Focus on human engagement over everything else.

“ What encourages me the most is when the people running the stands are happy and genuinely want to be there. ”

“ Give me opinions as well as facts. Opinions from ex-students, from current students, from teachers – I think that’s really important. ”

“ Staff were lovely, they confidently answered all of my questions and gave helpful recommendations. ”

71% of students that attended UCAS events in 2022 **went onto apply to higher education.**

3. BOOST ENGAGEMENT



By **Rich Hartley** & **Paul Tannahill** from **Waterfall**, an education marketing agency

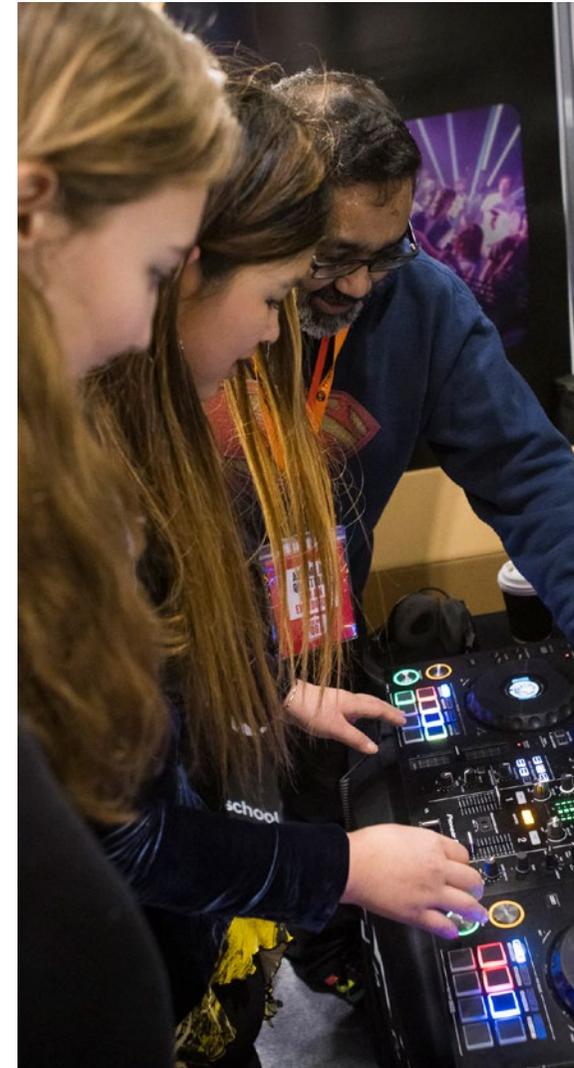


At UCAS events, you want your stand to be the one with a real buzz about it and lots of students talking and engaging with your team. But how do you grab the attention and connect with young people who will probably have never been to such an event before and could be feeling a bit nervous and overwhelmed?

Naturally good creativity plays its part, especially as you need to stand out in a very busy and highly competitive floor space. The stands that tend to be busier have strong messages, great images, a creative spark, and something to get people talking. At past events, we've seen interactive games, large touchscreens that print off course details, university racing cars, edible water pods, tiny prospectuses, selfie competitions, 360-degree video experiences, large digital screens with students talking live from campuses, and Harry Potter broomsticks. All very memorable and did a brilliant job of making sure those universities stood out on the day.

However, it's just as important to have a brilliant and well-briefed team on your stand that's friendly, welcoming, confident, and able to answer all kinds of different questions from students curious about the choice of pathways. After all, that's why the students are there. To explore their options and to talk to people about making the right choice for them.

Recently introduced, the Big Q&A at UCAS Discovery sparks conversations between young people and exhibitors by providing questions they should ask – whatever stage they are at in their decision-making journey. Some will be just starting out and looking at universities, apprenticeships and different routes. Some will have a subject or career in mind, but won't know where to study or work. Other students will be further down the line and want to know how to apply and learn more about the student experience. Everyone on your team should be able to answer these questions (or know where to find the answers) and have the confidence to talk to and open up conversations with young people.





WHAT STUDENTS THINK

Be hyper specific. (And never tell them to go to your website, they've already been there.)

“ All they said was go to our website to find out more. ”

“ When you asked them a question about your subject of interest, often they weren't able to give you much information. They would just direct you to the website, which you can easily do yourself. ”

“ Some unis I felt only just read out information that was on their website. ”

89% of students in the last full cycle went to apply for the subject they initially registered their interest in.

4. DON'T SHOEHORN FOR **TECH'S SAKE**



By **Rob Pryce**
from **OnePointFive**,
a brand experience
agency



What experiential means today versus when I started out is worlds apart – technologies have developed at lightning speed, so although it's important for brands to understand it, experiment with it and embrace it – I always advise clients not to shoehorn tech in if there isn't a need for it.

Tech comes with a cost, so make sure its relevant in terms of how you are trying to position yourself and you're confident that it will meet your objectives.

In terms of what captures interest, AI is a great example to kick off with. We've developed some really engaging AI-art based experiences over the past couple years and it's proven to be a massive talking point and buzz generator, leading to our stands being some of the busiest at events.

Thinking about the UCAS events in particular, the clever use of AR and VR would be great to showcase your product in full – especially if you have a small stand footprint. If you're hoping to position yourself as a future thinker, why not consider transparent screens? They have come on a lot in recent times and are now really impactful in the harsh event hall lighting – combined with some stand-out content and you'll be sure to draw a crowd.





WHAT STUDENTS THINK

Give them the confidence and tools to ask the right questions.

“ I’m hoping to get some information packs with the most frequently asked questions. A lot of students, especially my age, aren’t the most confident in asking questions. ”

“ I did feel kind of awkward on occasions when I didn’t know what to say and they didn’t introduce themselves to me. ”

“ ...the person I spoke with was very friendly, welcoming and insightful, and it was very easy to talk with and ask them questions. ”

50% of students were more likely to go over to a stand with interactivity.

5. EMBRACE SERIOUS SUSTAINABILITY



By **Rob Pryce**
from **OnePointFive**,
a brand experience
agency



Sustainability is always at the forefront of our minds. When we kick off a project, we consider many aspects such as the stand design and types/sizes of materials used – and where they can be reused – right down to the transport and catering. It might seem far-fetched to imagine, but Gen Z will notice this, and it will affect how they perceive you.

And it's not about greenwashing with some recyclable pens (which will inevitably end up in the bin). This year can you go digital with your swag/ giveaways? They have great marketing capabilities such as data capture and providing the basis for ongoing comms and engagement...

Going green at events isn't easy with so many moving parts, so make sure you check out *isla* (the non-profit, supporting organisers and exhibitors to create more sustainable events) for resources, training, and measurement tools. And *Event Cycle*, who can help you redistribute or repurpose any leftover materials and furniture to good causes.





WHAT STUDENTS THINK

Showcase every aspect of what you offer (course info is vital, but don't stop there).

“ They were able to deliver great information about the course, housing and funding. ”

“ I liked that they had photographs of the campus and maps so that I could get an idea of what life at uni could be like. ”

“ ...they were very informative about the other areas of university e.g the night life and accommodation which the other unis failed to talk about. ”

39% of students have cut down on the number of open days they attend - making an impact at UCAS events is vital.

EVENT EXCELLENCE IN THE WILD: SHEFFIELD JOINS FORCES IN A TRIPLE COLLAB

Successful and strategic experiences at UCAS Discovery.

At London ExCel last year, University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, and Marketing Sheffield teamed up on a joint stand to promote the city as a destination. Flipping the traditional blueprint for university rivalries, it was a fresh and future focussed take on the usual events approach.

Showcasing teamwork, place, and community – as well as bringing along the instantly recognisable sofa from the TV and DOOH ads – this brand new and exciting spectacle for the 10,000 prospective students at the event proved a real success:

“ Our stand was busier than it’s ever been. People spotted the yellow sofa that they’d seen in the Peak District in the TV ad, or in the city centre bars. We more than doubled the number of students we usually speak to, and the campaign landing page got 6x the usual traffic from London. ”

Richelle Quinn - Sheffield Hallam University Head of Strategic Marketing Services



EVENT EXCELLENCE IN THE WILD: GLOUCESTERSHIRE PUTS SUSTAINABILITY IN PRIDE OF PLACE

Successful and strategic experiences at UCAS Discovery.

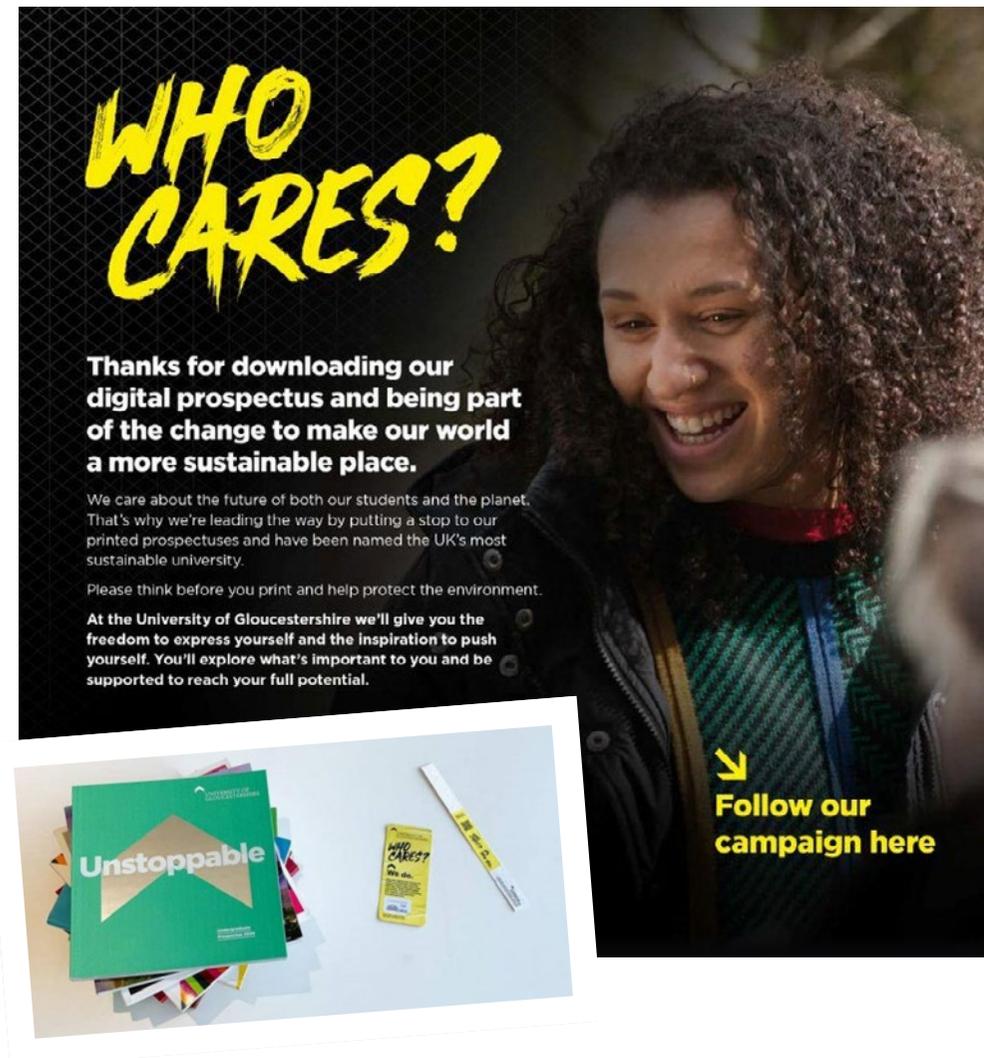
University of Gloucestershire, famous for its sustainability credentials, paved the way for a different approach to traditional prospectuses and promotion at events. By replacing print with an interactive digital prospectus (as well as Instagram stories answering key questions students asked), the university's marketing carbon impact fell dramatically.

Those stories were accessed via a QR code on a seeded wristband – given out at UCAS events – which could then be planted by students to grow wildflowers.

Alongside the wristbands, the University of Gloucestershire also gifted edible water pods from Notpla, which were made from seaweed. By shaking things up in the freebie department, these no-waste, eye-catching, and refreshing giveaways let students know just how important sustainability was to the university.

“ Our ‘Who Cares’ campaign had a positive impact on both the environment and our recruitment that year. This was our way of continually supporting our sustainability agenda and making a positive change in the sector – which other universities have since followed. ”

Beth Hayes
Formerly Head of Marketing, Campaign and Digital, University of Gloucestershire (now Education Marketing Lead, UCAS)



EVENT EXCELLENCE IN THE WILD: AUB'S DIGITAL-FIRST DELIVERY

Successful and strategic experiences at UCAS Discovery.

As a top UK specialist arts school, Arts University Bournemouth (AUB) needs to communicate in a way that drives aspiration and creativity. And a seamless brand experience between on-and-offline communications is paramount.

Chasing this dream strategically, AUB worked with Bond & Coyne to launch the world's first Instagram prospectus – and create a way for it to be enjoyed at UCAS Discovery events. Not simply a digital version of a printed prospectus, @aub_prospectus was a brand-new way of looking at how to reach audiences.

When the time came to take the online concept offline, at UCAS Discovery, AUB designed a simple space around QR codes, digital screens, and branded Instagram content. All roads led to the online brand experience, without missing out on the potential of in-person events, which created a consistent experience for students wherever they looked for Arts University Bournemouth.

“ We didn't build the world's first Instagram prospectus to be different, we did it because that's where AUB's audience is. But UCAS Discovery events are also an integral offline experience, so we didn't want to just print prospectuses for this part of the journey. Designing the space for these events, we doubled down on our digital-first approach and built it around the online offer. The stand was only part of the story, supporting all the work we'd put into the digital prospectus. ”

Mike Bond – Creative Director, Bond & Coyne



YOUR NEXT STEPS



By **Aimee Okafor**
Head of Events,
UCAS

The UCAS logo, consisting of the letters 'UCAS' in a bold, sans-serif font, centered within a white square.

- Checkout the ENet shop to see if you want to add any additional marketing packages or book data scanning services through the data scanning section.
- Start thinking about what experience you want to deliver on your stand. Take some time to review specifications of your stand and graphic sizes. These can be found in the **Exhibitor Zone**.
- Think about who is best to staff the stand (and how many) and organise any travel and accommodation requirements.
- Register your staff attending each event on Enet to get exhibitor passes.
- Order furniture, AV requirements and campus electrics via the shop in ENet. Order electrics and lighting via GES by logging into Expresso, additional furniture can also be ordered via GES.
- Organise logistics for delivery of your stand collateral, book any delivery and collection requirements.
- Log into ENet and ensure your exhibitor profile is up to date with course listings (Available from January 2024 for 2024 events)
- 8 weeks pre-event review Risk Assessment templates and helpful guides which are available in useful documents in ENet. Risk assessments must be completed for every event and your companies Public Liability Insurance certificate submitted 4 weeks prior to each event on ENet.
- Check your stand location uploaded to the exhibitor event page, navigated from the Exhibitor Zone 6 weeks before the event.
- View visitor lists by logging in to your ENet account and into the 'Useful documents' section. These are updated 5 weeks, 2 weeks, 1 week and 1 day before each event.
- Order your scanning licenses and download the Smartlead UCAS app to all devices to be used for scanning. Prepare the scanning devices, check your device is compatible and camera is working. Ensure all staff working on site read the manual for managing data scanning. Two weeks prior to each event download the scanning instructions with an individual event QR code to assign your device to each event. This can be found in the exhibitor zone then within the individual exhibitor event pages.
- Read the exhibitor manual to check build and breakdown times and event opening hours. This can be found on the exhibitor event page navigated from the Exhibitor Zone.
- Have a great event and any questions on site look for a member of the UCAS Events team who are always on hand to support you.

For more help with your events marketing strategy, contact your Account Manager or email eventssales@ucas.ac.uk.

UCAS

Rosehill
New Barn Lane
Cheltenham
GL52 3LZ

01242 544 808

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