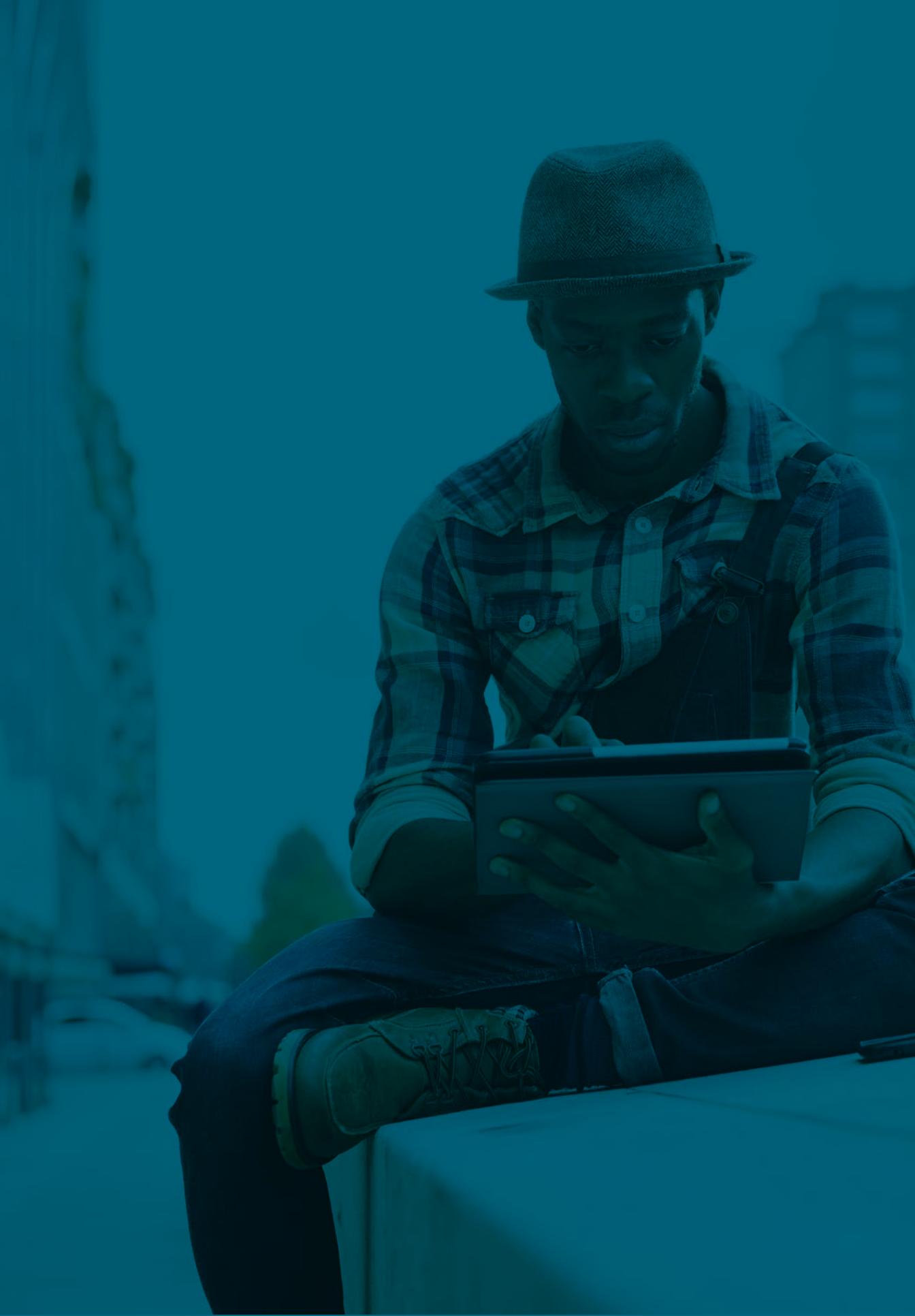




4 ELEMENTS OF A STANDOUT UNIVERSITY WEBSITE

A Thruline Marketing eBook





It's hard to keep up with all of the latest marketing tactics, sources and advertising trends. As schools try to stand out in this highly competitive field, it's easy to lose sight of the most important tool already at their disposal: the website.

A university's website is the hub of all higher education marketing efforts. Schools are often so focused on driving traffic that many have minimized energy to improving the site itself. At the end of the day, traffic to a site that doesn't tell a story or reflect your personality is just a missed opportunity. Incorporate these four elements to ensure your brand and purpose shine through to users and prospective students.



01

STORYTELLING.





Higher education institutions are struggling to clearly illustrate their differentiators. What's the best way to do this? Tell a story. Your prospective students are considering furthering their education to help them reach their goals. Produce outcomes-driven content that shows them what their experience at school will be like and who they can become after graduation.

“ WHETHER IT’S THROUGH VIDEOS, BLOG ARTICLES OR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, AUTHENTICITY GOES A LONG WAY. ”

Prospective students need to be able to envision themselves completing a program at your school, hear from alumni about their experiences and feel like they will be adequately prepared for the workforce. Whether it's through videos, blog articles or social media posts, authenticity goes a long way. This is where inbound marketing comes in.



02

INBOUND MARKETING.





This is all about authentic content. How are you earning your audience's attention in an authentic way? This can't just be canned content that is pulled from other sites. This must be content authentic to you and your position in the education space. Your content strategy, higher education SEO tactics, social media activity and email nurturing can bring you a higher ROI than the rest of your advertising efforts.

When creating content, look at it through the lens of the prospective student. Tell the story of a student who's a single parent working 40 hours a week or a first-generation learner trying to complete a degree. These are stories your prospective students can relate to. Crowdfund your content from students to create an accurate picture of what it's like to attend your school. Showcase student learning and accomplishments. Feature videos or interviews with employers who can vouch for your graduates.



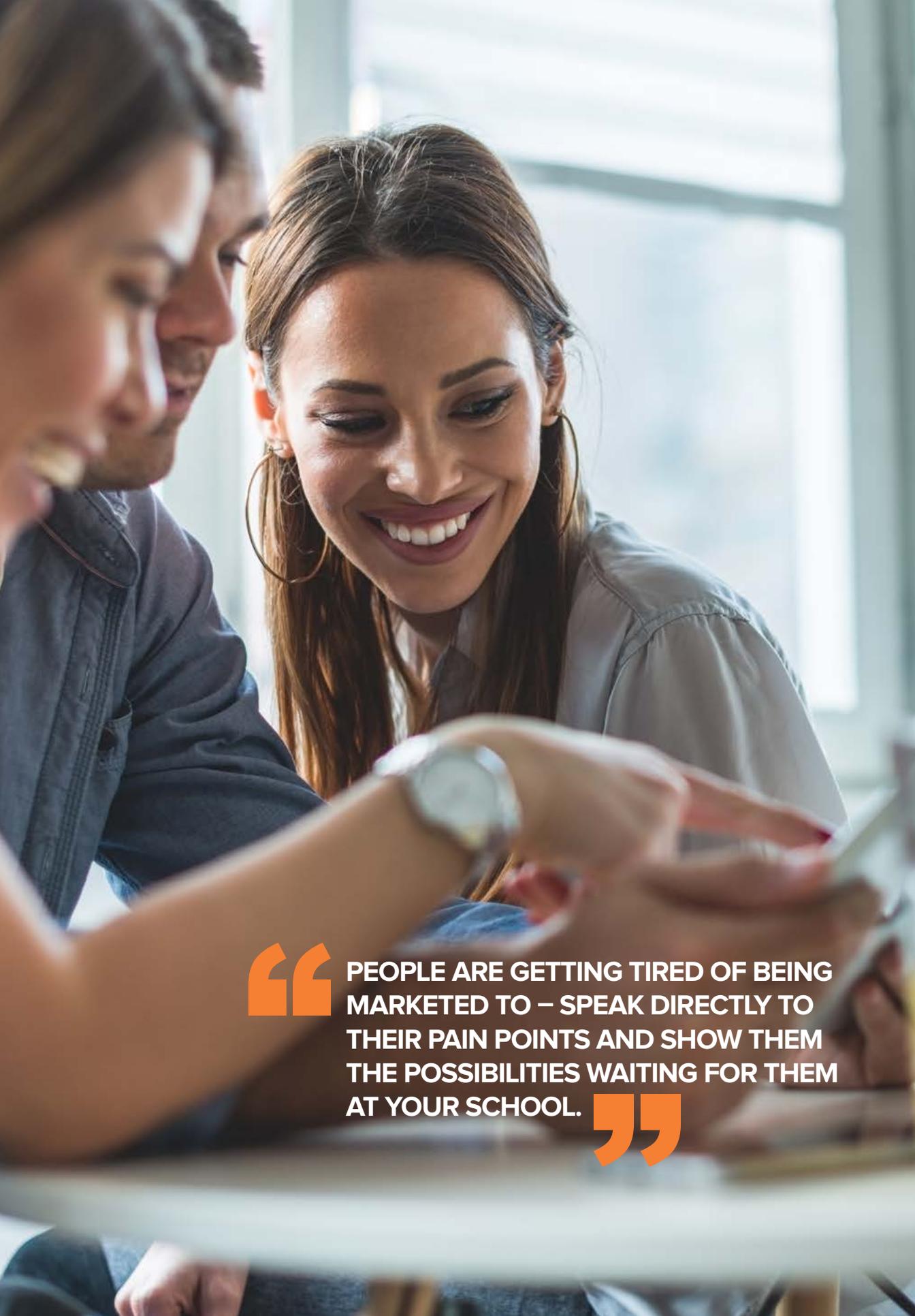
Your website does not need to be sales-focused. While a website can be a great way to generate prospects, if people feel that is the primary goal, it could turn them away. People are getting tired of being marketed to – speak directly to their pain points and show them the possibilities waiting for them at your school. Inbound marketing content helps build trust, which is important as prospective students are being bombarded with advertising messages. How will you address their needs and assuage their concerns?

As you're telling these stories, make sure someone is doing keyword research and integrating the terms into your content. Don't force it; just be aware of the language people are using so they may more easily find your information.

A number of tools are at your disposal to aid in this task, including:

- Google AdWords Keyword Planner
- SpyFu
- SEMrush
- Moz

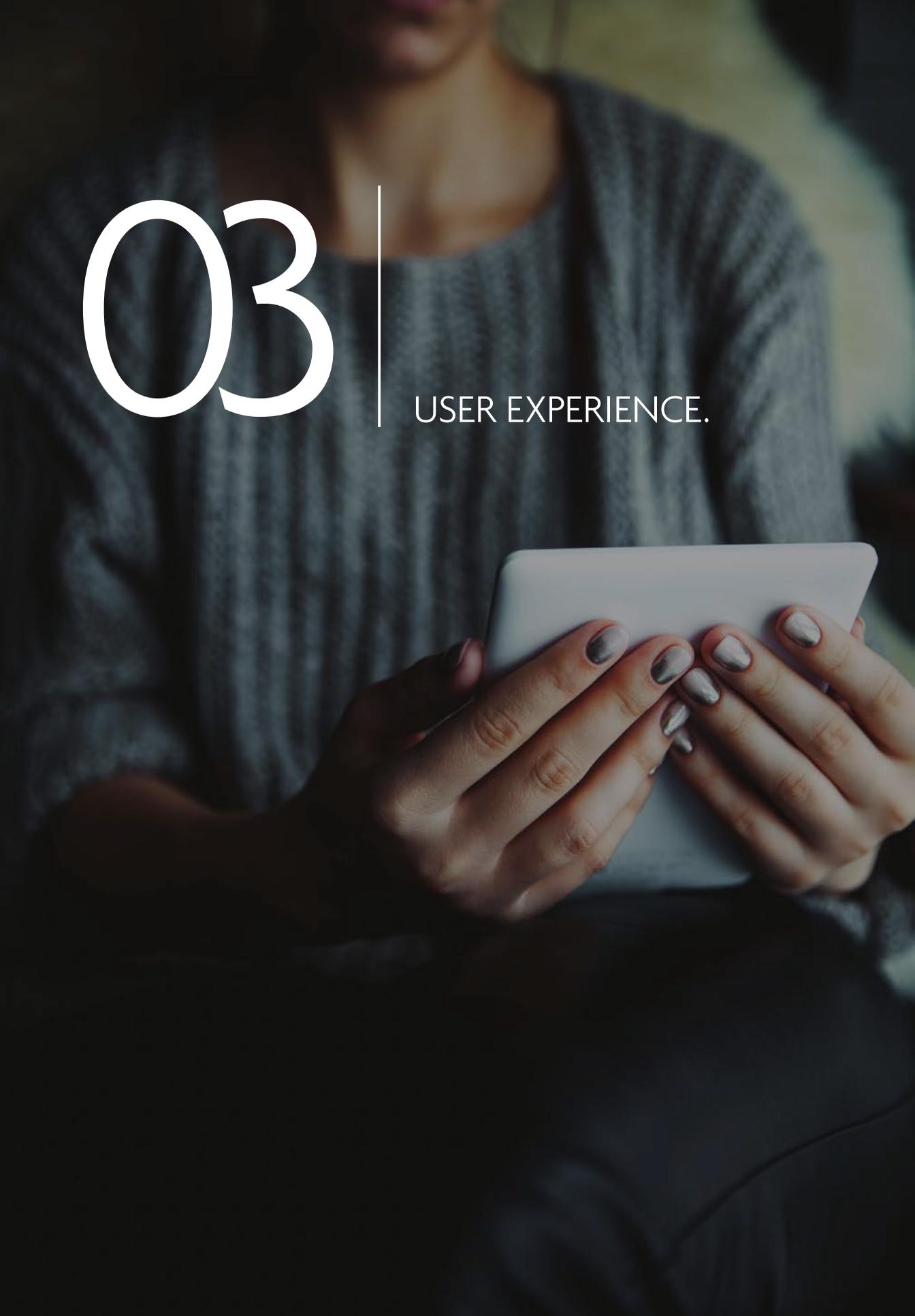
Each of these tools is capable of giving you the insight necessary to more appropriately title blog posts and webpages, as well as to clue you in on terms useful for meta descriptions.



“

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”

A person wearing a grey, textured sweater is holding a white tablet computer. The person's hands are visible, with silver nail polish. The background is dark and out of focus. Overlaid on the image is the number '03' in a large, white, serif font on the left, and the text 'USER EXPERIENCE.' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font on the right, separated by a vertical white line.

03

USER EXPERIENCE.



our audience will not stay on your site long enough to see all of your great content unless you focus on this. Prospective students need a clear path to find what they need. Make sure your navigation is user-friendly, clearly labeled and well-

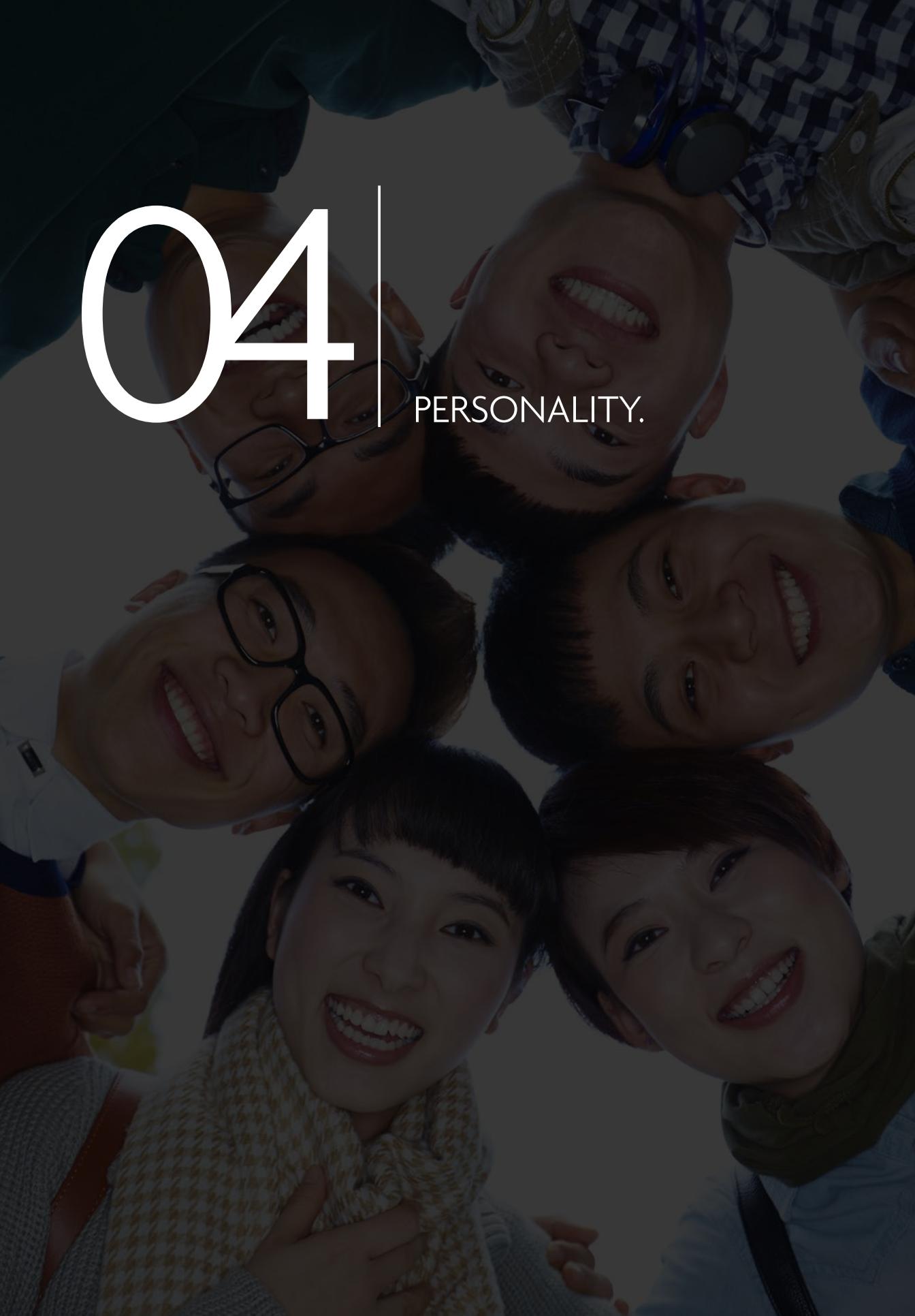
organized.

Forms should be front and center, above the fold, encouraging prospective students to provide their information. Be mindful of how many fields you require them to fill out — only ask for essential information, so you don't overwhelm them. This is especially important on program-specific, location, financial aid and admissions pages. These are key converting pages where forms are mutually beneficial. And remember that it's crucial to follow up on form submissions as soon as possible.



Site load time is also important, and the site needs to work on all platforms and devices with a solid responsive design. Remember to design for mobile first.





04

PERSONALITY.



our design, pictures and content should depict the personality and mission of your school. You want to attract students who match your personality. Whether faith-based or a state university, each school has a personality, and the prospective students should be able to see themselves at the institution.



When balancing your digital efforts — PPC, SEO, paid social, landing pages, etc. — remember to focus on what connects them: your website.





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