How the University of Michigan Maximizes its K-12 Outreach

An InfoReady Engagement Hub Business Case

Contact Info:
Amanda Xydis
axydis@inforeadycorp.com
517-285-8751

Contact Info:
Max Dynerman
mdynerman@inforeadycorp.com
202-306-5539

How the University of Michigan Maximizes its K-12 Outreach

An InfoReady Business Case

As many large public universities, the University of Michigan (UM) has an extraordinary breadth of offerings for K-12 students and their families. Not surprisingly, it has an equally formidable challenge in communicating that range and diversity of opportunities and engaging the audience it seeks.

It falls to the University's Center for Educational Outreach (CEO) to aggregate, manage, and promote the institution's K-12 outreach efforts and, every bit as importantly, instill a college-going culture among Michigan's youth. Serving as the hub of an enormous, and still growing, enterprise connecting parents, kids, K-12 educators throughout the state, and UM students, faculty, and staff interested and engaged in outreach, the Center, under the leadership of Kim Lijana, needed to find a way to make what's currently 60-some programs and opportunities, plus 24 summer athletic camps, accessible to all those audiences – many of whom had never considered the possibility of attending a UM program and were unfamiliar with navigating its extensive web presence.

Serving the Underserved

While the targeted external audiences of the Center – K-12 students, their parents or guardians, and educators – may appear a relatively homogeneous group, the reality is their needs and interests differ dramatically. That's because the University's outreach offerings range from a residential camp for severely disabled kids, to a learn-to-code program for middle school girls, boys and girls lacrosse summer camps, summer music and arts programs, summer programs for high schoolers interested in architecture, business, data science, debate, economics, and robotics, college introduction programs for first generation students and those in underserved communities, and literally scores of others.

Communicating that wealth of opportunities to families attuned to higher education whose kids would likely consider college would be challenge enough, but the Center also needed to focus on families and educators in Michigan's urban and rural underserved communities, where students have historically been least likely to pursue higher education – particularly at a flagship institution such as the University of Michigan. So whatever solution the Center for Educational Outreach selected to represent its opportunities and engage its constituents not only had to be accessible to very different and diverse audiences, but also had to make that engagement as user-friendly as possible, enable interested site visitors to immediately register or enroll in desired opportunities, ensure that visitors

would want to return to the site, and also make it possible for the Center to track and evaluate interactions so it could gauge success.

The Technology

With so many complex requirements, it's not surprising that the Center chose InfoReady Scale after an extensive review of solution options. Staff members knew that the InfoReady platform– cloud-based software that automates manual processes such as competitions, reviews, and approvals for research offices – had already been successfully implemented at UM and its reputation internally had grown far beyond UM's Office of Research. When they learned that InfoReady Scale not only automates and manages the backend workflows and processes the Center required for its K-12 offerings but would dramatically drive awareness of those opportunities through a graphic, Netflix-like presentation of tiles – each one dedicated to a single program and providing instant access to learn more and register or enroll links – the CEO staff was sold.

University of Michigan's Youth Hub, 2020
https://youthhub.umich.edu/

In partnership with InfoReady, UM's CEO staff began implementing Scale in early 2018 with 40 initial programs available on what became branded as the University of Michigan Youth Hub. And even in its debut, the Youth Hub garnered over-the-top praise:

- Community organizations described Youth Hub as "a game changer" for the youth, families, and schools they serve.
- Families shared their thanks—they no longer had to spend hours searching the web or digging through various university websites.
- By pointing to Youth Hub in their advertising campaigns, program managers could create effective cross-promotion of opportunities across campus.
- Even initially, some programs reported positive changes in the geographic diversity of participants and there were clear signs the Youth Hub had begun to expand the reach of the university.

Beyond its early Youth Hub success – including receiving a Staff Innovation Award from UM President Mark Schlissel – the Center continues to expand and improve the Hub as it advances from its 3-year pilot toward full implementation in year 5.

Three Important Goals

According to Marissa Rivas Taylor, Youth Hub Program Manager, full implementation means not only achieving greater awareness on the part of external audiences, but full recognition within the University. Operationally, Marissa's goals are as ambitious as the Youth Hub itself.

One major objective, already largely fulfilled, includes moving to a "Common App" approach for all enrollment and registration forms accessible via the Youth Hub. As a first-generation college grad herself, Marissa understands that vastly different and often complicated enrollment and registration forms are not only confusing to students and families but, especially in the case of underserved and first-generation populations, serve as a barrier to entry. Variations occur because programs at large institutions often have autonomy to create their own forms for capturing required data. Even in such common fields as race/ethnicity and gender, the available options to be checked and their order can differ substantively from program to program. By standardizing on a single and simple form for all programs and opportunities, the Youth Hub not only makes enrollment and registration simpler for students and parents but expedites the workflow processing.

A second goal of Marissa's is to establish the Youth Hub as the center of a cohesive dialogue both among internal UM offices and functions and between them and statewide K-12 audiences. The more successfully that goal is achieved, the more the Youth Hub can fulfill its joint functions of bringing external constituents to the University and, often literally, bringing the University to its

external audiences – done through programs such as Wolverine Express, which brings UM students, faculty, staff, and alumni to underserved schools and communities.

The third goal Marissa articulated is to make the Youth Hub the #1 link among its target audiences, and perhaps surprisingly, this isn't a goal she insists benefit the University of Michigan exclusively. Because the University's Center for Educational Outreach believes so passionately in making college attendance a more common experience for the state's underserved youth – a belief fully supported by the University's leadership – Marissa has been actively recruiting other state universities to participate in the Youth Hub and bringing representatives of those institutions with her and UM staff to outreach efforts statewide and to CEO conferences and initiatives on campus. Michigan State University and Grand Valley State University, along with Detroit's Wayne State, are already participating, and other institutions are expected to join in an even more inclusive and comprehensive statewide Youth Hub.

While all of the offerings on the Youth Hub provide valuable experiences and opportunities for K-12 youth, some produce significant revenue for the University – its many summer sports camps and other summer programs in the arts and sciences for example. Just as is true for virtually every college and university today, revenue is clearly important to the University of Michigan. But even more important is fulfilling the Center's mission of bringing more first generation and underserved community students to college and then a college degree, even if it's not UM. According to Marissa Taylor, "it's not only the right thing to do, but brings substantial benefits – innovation being just one – to the entire State."

Thanks to the contributions of Marissa, UM's Center of Educational Outreach, and InfoReady Scale, it's clear that the Youth Hub is already a prime and highly successful example of innovation in K-12 outreach.

To learn more about InfoReady, schedule a demo, or get in touch with current InfoReady platform users, contact Amanda or Max at the contact info below.

Contact Info:	Contact Info:
Amanda Xydis	Max Dynerman
axydis@inforeadycorp.com	mdynerman@inforeadycorp.com
517-285-8751	202-306-5539