Recommendations for Reception, Referral, Counselling & Support

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Introduction: The Adult Learner Psyche

Adult learners, are becoming an increasingly important demographic in the education landscape. With disruptions in the **economy**, combined with evolving career requirements, the adult learner audience is looking for **new ways to gain** specific workplace skills.
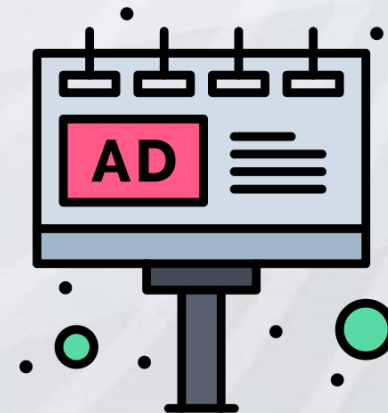
If you build it, they will come!

Adult students are different from the "**traditional**" student graduating high school and seeking an undergraduate degree.

Reaching them won't be as simple as creating a new **marketing** campaign or building an online program.

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What adult learners want.

- **Flexibility** for work and family,

- Ease of application,

- Cost

- Credits or time required to complete a program

- Career advancement possibilities

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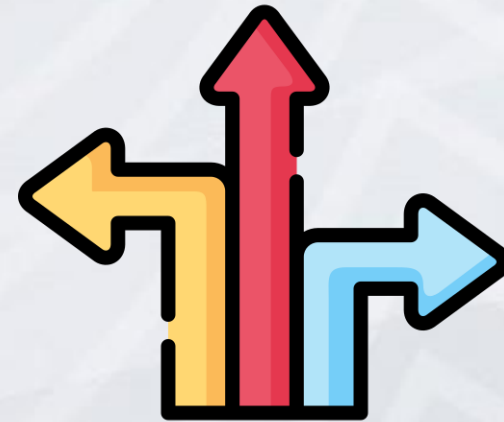
What the future holds

The future can be prosperous and this market is viable—but it won't come to fruition if boards are not **proactive**. Simply expecting an influx of adult learners to counterbalance a declining traditional student population will not be adequate.

We must understand the unique needs of this group, some of whom face significant **barriers** to returning to school, and show them how degree or credential attainment is possible.

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Keep in mind that learners pursuing continuing education programs are often asking themselves:

- What do I want to **achieve?**

- Is this a requirement for my profession, or am I looking to open new doors?

- **Can** I afford it?

- Do I have the time? Is it the right time? Will I have to sacrifice time with my family?

- Can I **stick with it** and finish?

- What's the **best** format for me?

- How do I find the right program?

- Will I be accepted?

- Will this degree be **respected?**

- Who can advise me on what my options are?

- Will I be more successful with this degree?

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Considering this, let's review **6** key areas to reach adult learners and how this relates to SARCA reception, referral, counselling and support services.

1. Reception: Make Your Website Findable, Navigable, and Personalized

**Online research** is one of the main ways adult learners will choose their continuing education program.
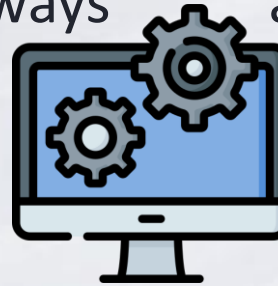
Dig into **analytics** to see what keywords and phrases visitors are using to find your site, and create a smart *SEO strategy. Reach out to industry-specific publications and forums to build a network of inbound links.

*Search Engine Optimization

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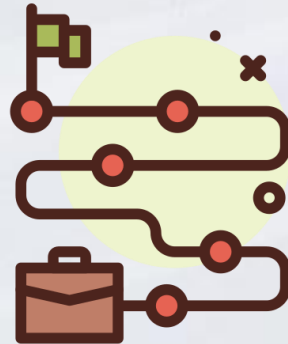**Reception: Make Your Website Findable, Navigable, and Personalized**

It's also important to remember that stock drone footage of the

campus, pictures of dorm life or images of sporting events

likely won't appeal to adult learners.

Instead, tailor images to reflect what they will experience

with your institution. Or even consider a distinct subdomain or

microsite for adult learners.

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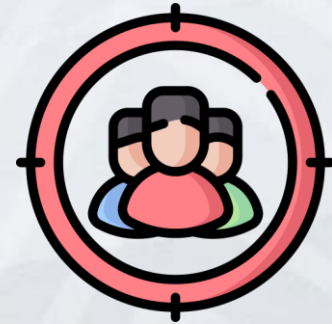
Reception: Make Your Website Findable, Navigable, and Personalized

When it comes to navigation, make a **clear path** to the things they care about—completion requirements, format, costs and SARCA support—to help this time-constrained audience quickly answer key questions.

Reception: Make Your Website Findable, Navigable, and Personalized

Finally, given their diversity of needs, personalizing to the adult learner

population is an excellent opportunity to experience quick **wins**. With so much

catering towards the traditional educational pathway, adult learners will appreciate

content that demonstrates an understanding of their unique circumstances and

needs.

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2. Reception: Focus on Conversations

With this audience, shouting from your marketing megaphone may not produce great results. Instead, **tell stories**, focus on outcomes, and explain work / learning integrations.

Share student success stories and explain how people integrated coursework with existing commitments and responsibilities. For adults **reluctant** to make the leap, these narratives can be quite motivational.

Reception: Focus on Conversations

Additionally, demonstrate a commitment to continuing education by **training** first line staff to respond quickly and with empathy. Given the high turn-over in staff, this commitment becomes more important.

Customer care at this stage is critical!

3. Reception & Referral: Be Smart With Digital Promotion and Organizational Relationships

Similar to building a network of inbound links, consider banner ads and native advertising with content providers. Utilize social media advertising to reach prospective students through the mediums they consume most often. Facebook is the most-used **social media** channel among *Millenials*, *Gen Xers*, and *Baby Boomers*, so maintain a dedicated presence there, both organic and paid.

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Reception & Referral: Be Smart With Digital Promotion and Organizational Relationships

Create landing pages for individual programs to deliver relevant content, enter individuals into **email** campaigns, and push leads into your content relationship management system (CRM).

Finally, take a keen look at employers in your area and figure out which are rewarding credentialing and corporate learning with career advancement. **Partnerships** with businesses and organizations in your area can be an excellent source of qualified leads and ways to increase enrolment.

4. Reception & Referral: Highlight Program Flexibility and Accelerated Options

Most **adult learners** are driven by promotions, raises, or career shifts. Adult learners, for the most part, are self-motivated, bring experience to the classroom, and prefer practical teachings.

For continuing educational institutions, this means programs must **deliver** skills and knowledge directly related to the workplace.

Reception & Referral: Highlight Program Flexibility and Accelerated Options

Make it **easy** to learn about accelerated formats, transfer credits, and how advanced placement works. Most adult learners want to finish quickly without depleting their bank accounts, so **highlight** how previous schooling and work experience translate into credit hours. Similarly, keep in mind that most learners are likely to prefer evening, weekend, and online programs.

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5. Reception & Referral: Make the Application Process Simple

Pathways to continuing education programs—and how they are financed—can vary significantly. Some students want open courses that require only a basic questionnaire and credit card to sign up. Some will submit to a more rigorous application process. Some will rely on employers to reimburse all or part of the tuition.

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Reception & Referral: Make the Application Process Simple

Be sure to provide **rich resources** and reduce friction when it comes to applying for both programs and financial aid. Is the application usable on mobile devices? Does it take hours to complete?

Are transcripts and letters of recommendation, which may be hard for adult learners to obtain, required?

Overall, convenience and time required to apply are critical!

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Reception, Counselling & Support: Make the Application and Support Process Simple

Understanding their pragmatic nature, desire for work / life balance, and their key questions will certainly help you pivot your strategy and recommendations. Asking crucial questions, by fist-line responders, becomes critical to help quickly assess students' needs. This usually falls into three main areas. One, the student has a plan, two, the student needs support with his or her plan, and three, the student is not ready to commit to either of the above.

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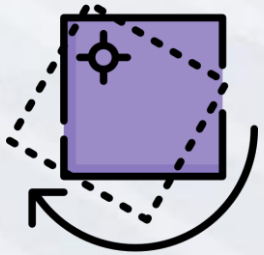
Reception, Counselling & Support: Make the Application and Support Process Simple

If support is needed, SARCA development officers need time to develop relationships with potential students so they may address their needs. To facilitate the process, prior information about students is important. This entails first line responders recording important information and then passing that information on.

To aid SARCA development officers in their ability to refer students to services outside the centres, they must have time to network and sit on committees and promote their services in the community.

6. Reception: Outreach & Initiatives From Within

To get a **better sense** of how students are learning about programs, using data collected via AdmissionFP and other registration systems is a must. Collected data would allow school boards to decide where to invest in outreach initiatives. For example, **open-houses,** career fairs, attending local organization and regional meetings or student for the day initiatives.

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Reception: Outreach & Initiatives From Within

It is critical that departments in school boards work collaboratively to promote adult education in high schools and track potential and actual student drop-outs who may benefit from attending adult education.

Successful committees should include senior management, complimentary services, adult sector reps, SARCA reps, guidance counselors and high school and elementary administrators. SARCA development officers should also be privy to students who are at risk and who have dropped out. Whenever possible, this information should be in real-time.

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In Conclusion

The era of high school, to college, to university, then to the workplace until you retire is over. Economic factors, combined with changing workplace requirements, have made continuing education desirable for many. But simply expecting a windfall in continuing education students to outweigh downward trends in traditional student applications will not render desired outcomes. This population is burgeoning and motivated, but appealing to them will require a change in marketing and communication techniques. All levels of management and support services must be aligned as well.

Thank you

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