



# Student Search

Choosing a Search Vendor:  
What to Ask and Why

Fire Engine **RED**

Updated March 2018



# The Questions and OUR Answers.

For the questions ONLY — without our answers — go to page 17.

# Experience

## ■ When did your company start offering Search services?

**Why it matters:** Quite simply, it's hard to do Search well! It takes years of experience to understand what works (and what doesn't).

**Our answer:** We've been providing Search services since 2007, so we know what works, and we have the results to prove it.

# ROI.

## ■ What results did you get for clients in the last Search cycle?

**Why it matters:** Search vendors should be able to show you results they've achieved for schools similar to yours, and from there, give you an idea of what results YOU can expect.

**Our answer:** In the 2016-2017 Search cycle, our Senior Search clients saw increases from 5x to 55x in Net Tuition Revenue (including discount rate). That is, for every dollar they invested in Search, our clients saw a \$5 to \$55 return in Net Tuition Revenue.

# Clients.

## ■ How many Search clients do you have?

**Why it matters:** You want to work with a Search vendor that's big enough to have had success with a variety of schools ... and small enough to develop a custom strategy to help you achieve your school's specific goals.

**Our answer:** Each year, we partner with approximately 65+ schools, which allows us to customize every aspect of our clients' projects. At Fire Engine RED, we treat no two Search projects the same!

## Ownership Structure.

### ■ What is the ownership structure of your company? Is it a privately held company or is it backed by private equity?

**Why it matters:** Companies backed by private equity firms prioritize the financial interests of their investors over those of their clients. Their primary goal is to invest in companies, make them more valuable – often by cutting budgets and people – and then sell the companies for a large profit after three to seven years.

**Our answer:** As a private company, Fire Engine RED is focused on meeting our clients' goals, building lasting relationships with them, and contributing to their long-term success. We believe that when our clients succeed, so do we.

## Strategy.

### ■ Who will we work with on the strategic aspects of our project?

**Why it matters:** Search is all about strategy. So, to do Search right, you need to work directly with a team that has deep expertise in the many aspects of admissions and enrollment.

**Our answer:** You'll consult and collaborate directly with our team of strategists (with expertise in enrollment, data, creative) at every stage of your Search project, from planning through execution to completion.

**Our team of strategists consists of these experienced professionals:**

#### **Jeff McLaughlin**

Executive Vice President of Enrollment Data, Strategy & Analytics

[LinkedIn profile](#)

#### **Bill Preble (Ed.D.)**

Vice President for Enrollment Strategies & Solutions

[LinkedIn profile](#)

#### **Jason Frost**

Senior Enrollment Data Strategist

[LinkedIn profile](#)

**Mandy Nagel**

Creative Director

[LinkedIn profile](#)**Alexa Poulin**

Executive Vice President of Marketing &amp; Digital Operations

Carnegie Dartlet, our strategic partner for digital marketing

[LinkedIn profile](#)**Emily Coleman**

Senior Vice President for Enrollment Management Services

Maguire Associates, our strategic partner for Financial Aid Optimization

[LinkedIn profile](#)

## Predictive Modeling.

### ■ Does your company offer Predictive Modeling services?

**Why it matters:** Predictive Modeling can help you be more strategic in your list purchasing and outreach, and help you get the most out of your Search investment.

**Our answer:** Yes, we offer pre-purchase and post-purchase modeling for Search, and Inquiry Scoring.

### ■ Are your pre-purchase and post-purchase models focused on generating applications and enrollment?

**Why it matters:** Many Search providers create models that are focused on generating inquiries, rather than finding the students who are most likely to apply and enroll.

**Our answer:** At Fire Engine RED, our models are focused on generating applications and enrollment.

### ■ Are your models customized?

**Why it matters:** You want to work with a Search vendor who can create custom models, because no two schools are alike.

**Our answer:** Yes. We'll create custom models for you.

## ■ Do you create multiple models for your clients?

**Why it matters:** What's predictive for one goal is not necessarily predictive for another. So for each Search goal you have, your provider should create a different model.

**Our answer:** Yes, we'll build a different model to focus on each of your specific goals.

## ■ What data sources do you use to build your models?

**Why it matters:** Your Search vendor should have access to the most educationally relevant, and predictive, data sources.

**Our answer:** We have EXCLUSIVE access to the College Board's Segment Analysis Service, which includes 150+ educationally relevant variables for each student. With Segment Analysis Service, we're able to reach beyond the usual commercial data and ZIP code trends to make our models more informative and predictive. Without this data, you're potentially missing out on students who'd be a great fit for your school.

**In addition to Segment Analysis Service, we also tap into:**

- Our clients' historical data.
- Our proprietary Search performance data, collected and analyzed over the course of a decade.
- Various other commercially available sources.

## ■ Can your models, and the data sources on which they're built, be applied to ALL list sources?

**Why it matters:** The "best" students for your school may appear on lists from different sources. Some models, and their data sources, can't be applied across all list sources, which lowers your return on investment with regard to list purchasing and outreach.

**Our answer:** Yes. Our models (built on Segment Analysis Service) can be applied across ALL list sources (ACT, College Board, NRCCUA, etc.) ... or even to your inquiry pool.

## List Purchasing.

### ■ If we aren't interested in Predictive Modeling, what strategic approach do you take with regard to list purchasing?

**Why it matters:** Most Search vendors build a list purchase strategy for their clients based on previous list orders and a surface-level look at recent entering classes.

**Our answer:** At Fire Engine RED, we take a deep dive into our clients' historical enrollment data,

including multiple years of inquiries, applicants, admits, enrolls, even students who persist. In addition, we'll analyze and leverage historical records to determine which students are most likely to apply and enroll at your school (or to identify pockets of students who will be most influenced by a targeted communications outreach).

We'll then develop personas, using specific student characteristics (such as academic profile, demographic, geographic, or socioeconomic status) and create a list strategy, segmentation, communications flow, and more.

### ■ Do you offer year-round Search services?

**Why it matters:** New student names become available all the time. So, your Search vendor needs to be able to react quickly and take advantage of whatever opportunities arise, at any time during the year. Also, as more sources of names become available – and as names become available more often – the ability to do year-round Search becomes even more important.

**Our answer:** Yes, we can launch a new Search campaign anytime fresh names become available. Year-round Search is a great way to help you diversify your class and reach new markets.

### ■ Will we be able to access (and download) our raw list files?

**Why it matters:** You should be able to access your raw files and download them anytime you wish. This way, you'll be able to supplement your Search outreach with additional marketing efforts (such as sending an open house invitation to students who have not interacted with your Search campaign).

**Our answer:** Yes. You'll be able to access (and download) your raw list files any time.

## New Inquiries.

### ■ Can we add the names of new inquiries to our Senior Search campaign as it progresses?

**Why it matters:** With new names hitting your pipeline at all times, your vendor should be flexible enough to add them to your electronic campaign, at any interval of your choosing.

**Our answer:** Yes, we can add the names of your new inquiries to the electronic portion of your Senior Search campaign ... at no extra cost.

## Project Management.

### ■ Do your project managers have admissions experience?

**Why it matters:** Your project manager needs to have worked in the admissions field to truly understand admissions and the complexity of the Student Search process.

**Our answer:** Yes, all of our project managers have worked in admissions, so they understand the admissions process and the challenges you face.

## Creative.

### ■ Do you outsource your campaign creative?

**Why it matters:** When a Search vendor outsources their creative work, the copywriters and designers they outsource it to aren't necessarily experts in Search, and what works in different industries doesn't necessarily work for Search.

In addition, when creative is outsourced, it's unlikely you'll have direct access to the people actually doing the creative work. (It's worth noting that, even when a Search vendor has an in-house team, you don't usually get access to the creative team; communication is funneled through the project manager.)

**Our answer:** No, we do NOT outsource creative! At Fire Engine RED, we have a complete in-house creative team of designers, copywriters, quality assurance specialists, and more ... all of whom are experts in delivering winning Search creative.

In addition, you'll collaborate directly with the creative experts assigned to your project; we believe this approach leads to the best results.

### ■ If you do creative in-house, who leads your creative team?

**Why it matters:** Your Search vendor should have a creative director leading its creative team. Having a highly experienced leader serves as an indicator of how committed the vendor is to providing top-level creative.

**Our answer:** Our creative team is headed by our creative director Mandy Nagel, who's an Apple Inc. alumna.



## ■ Do you use Responsive Design to create your clients' Search campaigns?

**Why it matters:** Today, approximately 65% of the students who view our clients' Search campaigns do so on a mobile device. Responsive Design is the only design methodology that ensures the electronic components of your Search campaign adapt dynamically to any screen size.

Unfortunately, most Search companies settle for “mobile optimization.” But that’s not the same (and not as effective) as producing responsively designed pieces. For example, mobile-optimized email messages and forms often use font sizes that are too small to read, and include images that are the wrong sizes.

**Our answer:** Yes, and to the best of our knowledge, we’re the ONLY Search provider that uses Responsive Design to create every aspect of our clients’ campaigns. This ensures email messages, web forms, and landing pages look good and work well on any device.

## Electronic Campaign.

### ■ Approximately how many email messages do you recommend we send to students?

**Why it matters:** The number of messages sent to students by Search vendors can vary widely from vendor to vendor, from as few as three to more than 60! Your vendor should provide you with clear strategic reasons for the number of messages they send.

**Our answer:** We recommend sending a series of 12 messages to Seniors, and 9 messages to Juniors and Sophomores. Our data shows, in most cases, that sending fewer than 9 messages lowers the impact of a campaign, while sending more than 12 messages results in diminishing returns.

### ■ How will we know when our messages and mailings have been sent?

**Why it matters:** Many Search vendors won’t send you a copy of your campaign at the same time it’s sent to students, even though it’s important to “experience” your campaign the same way students do.

**Our answer:** Our experienced project managers provide you with the launch schedule ahead of time, so you can plan around it. In addition:

- Your project manager will send you an email message as soon as your campaign launches.
- You’ll receive copies of your electronic messages and print materials at the same time students get them.

## ■ How many different HTML templates will you create for us?

**Why it matters:** Many Search vendors create only a single HTML template and use the same header, layout, visuals, etc., for every message. All that changes is the copy! This can result in students ignoring your messages as your campaign goes on.

**Our answer:** We'll create a unique template for each message – a total of 12 for Seniors, and 9 for Juniors and Sophomores.

## ■ Do your campaigns comply with accessibility guidelines?

**Why it matters:** Your campaigns should be (and, in many cases, are required to be) accessible to recipients who are visually impaired.

**Our answer:** Yes, all of our creative complies with Section 508 Color Contrast Guidelines. In our electronic materials, we also employ code that describes images for students who use screen readers.

At Fire Engine RED, we don't meet accessibility guidelines just because they're required; to us, it's simply the right thing to do.

## ■ Can you develop targeted messaging for different student populations?

**Why it matters:** Your campaigns won't be as effective if you use "one-size-fits-all" messaging and copy.

**Our answer:** Yes, we'll develop targeted messaging for different student populations, based on academic major, gender, geography and more.

## ■ Do you offer pre-populated web forms?

**Why it matters:** The better the student experience, the more likely the student will be to complete your web form, whether it's on a computer or mobile device.

**Our answer:** Yes, and to the best of our knowledge, Fire Engine RED is the ONLY Search provider that exclusively offers pre-populated, responsively designed forms. We create forms to dynamically adapt to all screen sizes – desktop, tablet, or smartphone – making them easier to view and complete.

## ■ Can we use conditional logic in our web forms?

**Why it matters:** Students are more likely to complete a web form if they're not required to view questions that don't apply to them.

**Our answer:** Yes. We can use conditional logic to streamline the web form experience.

## Application.

### ■ Can you create a pre-populated Senior Search application for us?

**Why it matters:** Not all Search vendors are able to create a customized, pre-populated application. This can be a problem if you don't wish to drive students to your current application(s).

**Our answer:** Yes, we can create a new, customized, pre-populated application for you, using Responsive Design. This means the application will dynamically adapt to all screen sizes – desktop, tablet, or smartphone – making it easier to view and complete.

### ■ How quickly will students receive a confirmation message that their Senior Search application has been received?

**Why it matters:** With some vendors, it can take up to 24 hours to send confirmation email messages, which can result in students/parents contacting your office to ask if their applications were received.

**Our answer:** Confirmation messages will be sent to students immediately, so they'll know in seconds if their applications have been received.

## Print Campaign.

### ■ Can you create a customized print piece for us?

**Why it matters:** Print still matters – especially to parents.

**Our answer:** Yes, we can create a modern, custom-designed, eye-catching print piece that reflects your brand. Our most popular print option for Junior and Sophomore Search is a self-mailer with business reply form; for Senior Search, it's a self-mailer.

# Fulfillment.

## ■ Can you process our business reply forms?

**Why it matters:** If you don't want your office inundated with incoming business reply forms, you'll need to find out if your Search vendor is equipped to process them.

**Our answer:** Yes, we can set up a special post office box so your business reply forms can be returned to us. As we receive your reply forms, we'll capture the data and make it available to you in real-time through a web interface. You'll be able to download this data anytime you wish.

## ■ Will our fulfillment pieces focus on our school specifically, or the admissions process in general?

**Why it matters:** If customization is important to you, find out if the vendor's fulfillment pieces will focus specifically on what's unique about your school, or if they'll be generic pieces with standard content about the admissions process (for example, how to get the most out of a campus visit, or what to expect in an interview).

**Our answer:** We'll create a customized fulfillment piece for you; it will focus on your school specifically, not on the admissions process in general. Our most popular fulfillment options include a mini-brochure, mini-poster, postcard or postcard series, self-mailer, and tri-fold brochure.

## ■ How often will our fulfillment pieces be sent, and how will we know they've been sent?

**Why it matters:** The best way to keep students engaged is to respond to them promptly. Some Search vendors can take a month (or longer) to send fulfillment pieces to students. In addition, most vendors don't have any way for you to track the dates fulfillment pieces are sent.

**Our answer:** During the first two months of your campaign, your fulfillment piece(s) will be sent to students on a weekly basis. For the next two months, your fulfillment piece(s) will be sent out on a twice-monthly basis. After that, we'll have two additional mail drops.

Best of all, each time we send a fulfillment piece, we'll post the send date to your web interface, so you'll be able to view and/or download this information anytime.

## Real-time Data and Custom Exports.

### ■ Will we have access to our campaign data in real-time?

**Why it matters:** A Search vendor needs to provide you with ongoing access to your results, so you can track your campaign's progress, and have the opportunity to make any necessary adjustments to the campaign.

**Our answer:** Yes, all of your data is available to you in real-time, 24/7/365, including application submissions, web form submissions, business reply form submissions, email opens, and click-thrus.

### ■ Can you create a custom export format for us?

**Why it matters:** You want to be able to easily move your campaign data into your CRM or other admissions system.

**Our answer:** Yes. We can create a custom export for you that makes it easy to import your campaign data into your CRM or other admissions system.

## Reports.

### ■ What types of reports do you provide and when do you provide them?

**Why it matters:** Your vendor should provide you with an easy-to-understand ROI report at the end of each Senior Search project, so you can see the return on your Search investment. You should also receive frequent engagement reports that track the progress of your campaign. Most importantly, the reports should be reviewed by a data specialist, who can (based on the results to date) recommend any necessary adjustments while the campaign is ongoing.

**Our answer:** At Fire Engine RED, we'll provide you with an easy-to-understand ROI report at the end of each Senior Search project, and meet with you to discuss it. In addition, our data specialists will review the results of your campaign, and provide you with custom, twice-monthly engagement reports, so you can see the degree to which each student interacted with your campaign. We'll also work with you to make any necessary adjustments to your campaign based on our findings.

**Your engagement reports will cover a variety of information, including:**

- Year-over-year comparison.
- Engagement level by list source.
- Engagement level by segmentation category, such as gender, region, ethnicity, etc.
- Email campaign statistics, such as opens, click-thrus, mobile usage, etc.

In addition, you'll receive an ROI report at the conclusion of your Senior Search project.

## Value-added Campaigns.

### ■ Can you create a special campaign for parents?

**Why it matters:** Many parents are highly influential and highly engaged in the college selection process.

**Our answer:** Yes. We can send personalized email messages (and/or a print campaign) to the parents of your Search responders. We've seen the engagement level on our parent campaigns reach as high as 72%!

### ■ Can you create a separate communications flow for students who respond to our Junior and Sophomore campaigns?

**Why it matters:** Your responders are your most highly engaged prospects, so it's crucial that you continue to communicate with them frequently after they've inquired.

**Our answer:** Yes. We can create a special communications flow (that will run for several weeks) for students who submit your web form or return a business reply form. Our responder campaigns are delivering fantastic value, with engagement levels as high as 75%!

### ■ Can you create a yield campaign for our accepted students?

**Why it matters:** A yield campaign can help you make the case to accepted students as to why they should accept your admissions offer.

**Our answer:** Yes. We can create a yield campaign for accepted students.

### ■ Can you create a campaign that drives our accepted students to a pre-populated enrollment deposit form?

**Why it matters:** You want to make it easy for accepted students to deposit.

**Our answer:** Yes. We can create a pre-populated enrollment deposit form for you, which will enable students to deposit online using the payment method of their choice.

## Digital Services.

### ■ Which digital strategies (if any) do you offer to bolster your Search efforts?

**Why it matters:** Digital marketing is a great way to boost Search results. Many Search vendors offer one or two digital methods, but ideally, you want to work with a company that offers a variety of services. For example, if you're looking to tap into a particular high school, Geofencing may be the most appropriate tool.

**Our answer:** We've partnered with [Carnegie Dartlet](#), the digital marketing leader in the higher education market, to offer a wide variety of digital strategies, including IP Targeting, Retargeting, Social Media Marketing, and Geofencing.

### ■ What is your list size for IP Targeting?

**Why it matters:** Most vendors require a minimum of 10,000 names per list, which can be a barrier to entry if you don't have lists that large, or the budget to support that reach.

**Our answer:** Our minimum list size is 3,000 names. This gives you the ability to reach smaller segments that are important to you, such as a small list of your best prospects or your accepted student list. It's also a great way to test a campaign before going all in on it.

### ■ What is your match rate for IP Targeting?

**Why it matters:** Most vendors only have a match rate of 40-50%, which means up to 50% of the audience you're messaging will be left behind and won't receive your digital ads.

**Our answer:** Our match rate is 90-95%. With such a high match rate, you can be sure your important calls to action – such as open house registration, application deadlines, and requests for information – are being delivered to nearly your entire list.

## Financial Aid Optimization.

### ■ Does your company offer Financial Aid Optimization services?

**Why it matters:** Financial Aid Optimization can help you meet your enrollment goals, boost the academic credentials of your class, increase net revenue, and support retention.

**Our answer:** Fire Engine RED provides our clients with Financial Aid Optimization through our partnership with [Maguire Associates](#), a research-based consulting firm that has served the education market for 30+ years.

**Our combined team will:**

- Provide you with modeling expertise that spans the entire enrollment lifecycle
- Build data models that reflect your enrollment patterns and goals
- Develop thoughtful and efficient list purchase strategies
- Leverage our powerful, proprietary data sets
- Provide you with useful, actionable reports

**■ Does your company provide individualized awarding?**

**Why it matters:** To build their models and dictate awards, many vendors settle for using a basic grid system, because it's easy to visualize and simple to implement. However, treating two students who present similar academic criteria as the "same" can result in significant inefficiencies and lost revenue.

Because each student is different, and responds to aid awards differently, individualized awarding predicts those responses and allows for tailored awards. And as additional response data is collected, models are updated to reflect current-year responses ... so your awarding is driven by data, not by best guesses.

**Our answer:** Maguire Associates is the only firm specializing in Financial Aid Optimization that determines optimal awards on a per-student basis.

Ready to learn more? Want to see some creative samples?  
Interested in Predictive Modeling?

SCROLL down to get the Search Vendor Questions ONLY (without our answers).

Let's Talk →





Questions Only.

## Experience.

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## ROI.

- What results did you get for clients in the last Search cycle?

## Clients.

- How many Search clients do you have?

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- What is the ownership structure of your company? Is it a privately held company or is it backed by private equity?

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- Are your models customized?
- Do you create multiple models for your clients?
- What data sources do you use to build your models?
- Can your models, and the data sources on which they're built, be applied to ALL list sources?

## List Purchasing.

- If we aren't interested in Predictive Modeling, what strategic approach do you take with regard to list purchasing?
- Do you offer year-round Search services?
- Will we be able to access (and download) our raw list files?

## New Inquiries.

- Can we add the names of new inquiries to our Senior Search campaign on a weekly basis?

## Project Management.

- Do your project managers have admissions experience?

## Creative.

- Do you outsource your campaign creative?
- If you do creative in-house, who leads your creative team?
- Do you use Responsive Design to create your clients' Search campaigns?

## Electronic Campaign.

- Approximately how many email messages do you recommend we send to students?
- How will we know when our messages and mailings have been sent?
- How many different HTML templates will you create for us?
- Do your campaigns comply with accessibility guidelines?
- Can you develop targeted messaging for different student populations?
- Do you offer pre-populated web forms?
- Can we use conditional logic in our web forms?

## Application.

- Can you create a pre-populated Senior Search application for us?
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## Print Campaign.

- Can you create a customized print piece for us?

## Fulfillment.

- Can you process our business reply forms?
- Will our fulfillment pieces focus on our school specifically, or the admissions process in general?
- How often will our fulfillment pieces be sent, and how will we know they've been sent?

## Real-time Data, Custom Export, and Reports.

- Will we have access to our campaign data in real-time?
- Can you create a custom export format for us?

## Reports.

- What types of reports do you provide and when do you provide them?

## Value-added Campaigns.

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- Can you create a separate communications flow for students who respond to our Junior and Sophomore campaigns?
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