



Student Search

Choosing a Search Vendor:
What to Ask and Why

Fire Engine **RED**

Updated December 2019



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 most recent Search cycle?

Why it matters: Search providers 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 2018-2019 Search cycle, our Senior Search clients received a return of 7x to 80x their investment in net tuition revenue (including discount rate). That is, for every dollar they invested in Search, our clients saw a \$7 to \$80 return in net tuition revenue.

Clients

■ How many Search clients do you have?

Why it matters: You want to work with a Search provider 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.

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: Fire Engine RED is a privately held company. Shelly Spiegel, CEO and Chief Creative Officer, is the company's majority shareholder. Shelly has always put our clients first.

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 college admissions and enrollment.

Our answer: You'll consult and collaborate directly with our team of senior strategists throughout the course of your Search project. Their areas of expertise include enrollment, data, and creative.

Our team of strategists consists of these experienced professionals:

Mike Matthews

Executive Vice President of Search Services

[LinkedIn profile](#)

Jeff McLaughlin

Executive Vice President of Enrollment Data, Strategy & Analytics

[LinkedIn profile](#)

Jason Frost

Senior Enrollment Data Strategist

[LinkedIn profile](#)

Mandy Nagel

Creative Director

Elizabeth Bross

Enrollment Data Strategist

[LinkedIn profile](#)

Predictive Modeling

■ Does your company offer predictive modeling services?

Why it matters: Predictive modeling can help you get the most out of your Search investment.

Our answer: Yes, we offer predictive modeling.

■ Are your predictive 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: Yes, our models are focused on generating applications and enrollment.

■ Are your models customized?

Why it matters: Many providers take a one-size-fits-all approach to building models. You want to work with a provider that will create a custom model(s) for your school, because no two schools are alike.

Our answer: Yes, all of our models are customized.

■ Do you create a separate model for each strategic goal?

Why it matters: What's predictive for one goal (e.g., increasing enrollment) may not be for others (e.g., boosting revenue or entering new markets). Your provider should create a different model for each of your goals, to account for this.

Our answer: Yes, we'll build a custom model for each of your goals.

■ Does your company use an educationally relevant data source to build your models?

Why it matters: If your provider is using consumer-based data (e.g., PRIZM clusters), they are modeling on consumer behavior, not student behavior. Consumer-based sources are not as predictive as educationally relevant data sources.

Our answer: Yes. Fire Engine RED uses Segment Analysis Service™, the most educationally relevant data available, to build our models. As a result, our models are more predictive and informative than those of any other provider.

■ **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, so using them would lower your return on investment with regard to list purchasing and outreach.

Our answer: Yes. Our models (built on Segment Analysis Service) can be applied to ALL list sources, including your inquiry pool, ACT I NRCCUA, CBSS, College Board, and non-responders.

List-Purchase Strategy

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

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

Our answer: At Fire Engine RED, we take a deep dive into our clients' historical enrollment data and determine which students are most likely to engage, inquire, apply, and/or enroll at their school.

We use the information we find to develop a strategic and efficient list-purchase strategy – that is, to maximize (or minimize) the purchase of those segments more (or less) likely to apply, using student characteristics such as academic profile, demographic variables, geographic location, or socioeconomic status.

Once your strategy is in place, we'll build your list orders and facilitate your list purchases.

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

Why it matters: Year-round Search is a great way for schools to diversify their incoming classes and reach new markets. New student names become available all the time. Your Search provider must be able to react quickly and take advantage of new opportunities, whenever they arise.

Our answer: Yes. As new names become available, we will purchase those names for you and begin marketing your school to those students.

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

Why it matters: You should be able to access and download your raw list files so that you can 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, we make it easy to access and download your raw list files any time you wish.

New Inquiries

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

Why it matters: You are receiving new inquiries all the time. Your Search provider should be flexible enough to enable adding your inquiries to your electronic campaign, at any interval of your choosing, so you can receive the full benefit of your search efforts.

Our answer: Yes, we can add the names of your new inquiries to the electronic portion of your Senior Search campaign at any time.

Project Management

■ Do your project managers have admissions experience?

Why it matters: It takes more than great project-management skills to manage a Search project. Your project manager should also understand the complexities of the college admissions and Student Search processes – something they can only truly do if they have firsthand experience in admissions.

Our answer: Yes. All of our project managers have worked in admissions, so they understand admissions and Search processes, along with the related challenges you face.

Creative

■ Who leads your creative team?

Why it matters: Your Search provider should have a creative director leading its creative team. Having a highly experienced leader serves as an indicator of how committed they are 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: 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 providers (still) do not offer responsive design. Instead, they will “optimize” your electronic content for mobile, which is not as user-friendly or as effective. For example, mobile-optimized email messages and web forms do not render consistently across all devices. Even worse, on some devices, web forms may be difficult to complete.

Our answer: Yes – and to the best of our knowledge, we're the ONLY Search provider that uses responsive design. As a result, when you work with Fire Engine RED, all of your electronic content (email messages, web forms, and landing pages) will 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 providers can vary widely, from as few as three messages to more than 60, which could potentially overwhelm students and cause them to view your institution unfavorably!

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 electronic messages and print mailings have been sent?

Why it matters: Many Search providers don't send copies of electronic and print marketing materials to their clients at the same time these materials are sent to students. As a result, schools don't know exactly when students are receiving their campaign communications.

Our answer: We will send you an email message as soon as your campaign launches. In addition, you'll receive copies of your electronic messages and print materials at the same time they're sent to students.

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

Why it matters: Many Search providers create only a single HTML template, using the same header, layout, and visuals 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 by law 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 use code that describes images for students who use screen readers.

■ 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 can develop targeted messaging for different student populations, based on academic major, gender, geography, and other variables.

■ Do you offer pre-populated web forms?

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

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

Application

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

Why it matters: Not all Search providers 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 for students to view and complete it.

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

Why it matters: With some Search providers, it can take up to 24 hours to send confirmation email messages, which can result in students or parents contacting your office to ask if their application was received.

Our answer: We send confirmation messages to students immediately, so they'll know in seconds that their application has been received.

Print Campaign

■ Can you create a customized print piece for us?

Why it matters: Print still matters – especially to parents. We've seen print drive up response rates an average of 19%, and even higher for select cohorts, including students with higher test scores, and male students.

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

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 provider 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 any time 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 provider'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 that focuses 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 providers can take a month (or longer) to send fulfillment pieces to students. In addition, most providers 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 on a twice-monthly basis. After that, we'll have two additional mail drops.

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 you wish.

Real-time Data and Custom Exports

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

Why it matters: A Search provider 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 that makes it easy for you 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 provider should provide you with an easy-to-understand ROI report at the end of your 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.

Our answer: At Fire Engine RED, we'll provide you with an easy-to-understand ROI report at the end of your project, and meet with you to discuss it. In addition, we'll provide you with bi-weekly engagement reports, so you can see the degree to which each student interacted with your campaign.

Your engagement reports will include:

- 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.

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 81%!

■ 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 78%!

■ 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 that will enable students to deposit online using the payment method of their choice.

Additional Services

■ What additional data services do you offer to bolster our Search efforts?

Our answer: We provide a wide variety of customized data services.

Inquiry Scoring. We can build a predictive model at the point of inquiry to predict, tag, and rank an individual student's likelihood of applying to your school.

Alumni matching. We can identify your alumni's children pre-application to drive better application rates and yield.

Sibling matching. We can identify your current students' siblings to drive better application rates and yield.

Print modeling. We'll tell you if/how/when to use print ... and if you use it, how to do so in a way that most efficiently drives admissible students deeper into the funnel.

Digital modeling. We'll help you determine who to target to drive campus visits, completed applications, enrollment deposits, etc.

Enhanced segmentation. We can help you recruit more effectively by adding institution-specific, actionable data (such as income bands, legacy students, distance from campus, urban/rural location, and more) to your inquiry pool and/or Student Search records.

Travel modeling. We'll help you determine the best places to travel to (including new markets) so you're not just basing decisions on hunches or habits.

Phone number identification. We'll provide you with the phone numbers you're missing for your hottest prospects to help establish a person-to-person relationship.

■ Does your company offer consulting services?

Our answer: Yes. We offer a wide range of [enrollment, data, and financial aid consulting services](#). Our [all-star “bench” of renowned enrollment practitioners](#) can provide you with actionable strategies and recommendations and help you implement them.

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

Let's Talk →

Want to use our list of questions as a comparison tool in your search for the
right Student Search partner?

Scroll down to get the Search Provider Questions ONLY (without our answers).



Questions Only

Experience

- When did your company start offering Search services?

ROI

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

Clients

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- Do you create models for your each strategic goal?
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- Can your models, and the data sources on which they're built, be applied to ALL list sources?

List Purchase Strategy

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- Do you offer year-round Search services?
- Will we be able to access (and download) our raw list files?

New Inquiries

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Project Management

- Do your project managers have admissions experience?

Creative

- Who leads your creative team?
- Do you use Responsive Design to create your clients' Search campaigns?

Electronic Campaign

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Application

- Can you create a pre-populated Senior Search application for us?
- How quickly will students receive a confirmation message that their Senior Search application has been received?

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 Exports, and Reports

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