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How Charles Sturt Won the Audience Higher Ed Forgot

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Q1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & WHY DOES THIS CASE DESERVE AN AWARD?

Two-thirds of Charles Sturt University's (CSU) market does not come straight from high school. The average CSU student is 32. These non-school leavers, dentsu's proprietary "Enrolling Stones" audience, are balancing full-time work, families, and study aspirations, often making decisions about university in brief moments between other responsibilities.[1] They are also the audience segment Australia's higher education sector are struggling most to retain. Between 2018 and 2024, mature-age undergraduate enrolments nationally fell 27% (61,771 to 32,320).[2]

Against this collapsing market, CSU's 2025-26 Main Round brief faced an additional challenge: increase applications on a 23% smaller digital media budget [redacted].[3] The real competition was not other universities, but inaction. For many non-school leavers it is not a choice between universities, it is "often a choice of whether to go university at all."[4]

The Enrolling Stones audience is ambitious and future-focused but spends much of their time prioritising others over themselves.[5] They want to study but lack time to research options. When they do engage, they tend to make decisions quickly, meaning the campaign needed to earn meaningful attention rather than simply maximise exposure.

This shaped three strategic decisions across the funnel:

Awareness: optimise for Cost per Unique Reach (CPUR), over Cost per Impression (CPM). This allowed CPUR to outperform the target by 53% ($0.014 vs $0.030).[6]

Consideration: optimise for visit quality, not click volume. Cost per Engaged Visit (CPEV - a visit where the user stays at least 10 seconds and views at least 2 pages) improved 13% YoY to $2.90, while Engaged Visit Conversion Rate increased 38% to 25.97%.[7]

Conversion: introduced Performance Max for the first time as the campaign's primary conversion driver, supported by budget reallocated from non-search activity. Performance Max achieved a CPA of $86 per Application Complete, setting a new benchmark for the account.[8]

The campaign delivered strong results:

Outcome	2025-26 Main Round	YoY
Application Starts	[redacted]	**+6%**
Application Completes	[redacted]	**+3%**
Offer Accepts	[redacted]	**+1%**
Visitor-to-Complete Conversion Rate	[redacted]	**+61%**
CPA per Application Complete	[redacted]	**-25%**
Digital media spend	[redacted]	**-23%**

Overall university applications also climbed 2% YoY to [redacted], the highest total since 2021.[12]

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Commercially, the digital campaign generated [redacted] in Offer Accept pipeline value from [redacted] in digital investment (media and agency fees), [redacted] back for every dollar spent. [11]

A parallel [redacted] above-the-line (ATL) brand campaign ran concurrently, delivering 1.2 million RON impressions, 200,000 podcast downloads and Meta content partnerships reached 396,145 people. Metropolitan brand awareness lifted from 30% to 40%; Familiarity from 6% to 16%. Both beat their 5% lift targets. After adding ATL spend, the integrated ROI reaches [redacted] [11]

Sources

[1] Enrolling Stones Audience Details, dentsu QLD / iCCS & Roy Morgan Fused Database 2024; CSU brief, 2025-26 Main Round NSL campaign: average student age 32; 87% studying online.

[2] Department of Education, Higher Education Student Statistics (HESS) 2024; Future Campus, "Record Enrolments, but Gaps Persist," 26 September 2025.

[3] PCA, 2025-26 Main Round Main Round Post-Campaign Analysis, Merkle, 2026: digital media spend [redacted] (2025-26 Main Round) vs [redacted] (2024-25 Main Round) = −23%.

[4] CSU brief, 2025-26 Main Round NSL campaign brief, "Competitors" and "Overview" sections.

[5] Enrolling Stones audience profile, "Confirmed" attitudinal statements; iCCS / Roy Morgan 2024.

[6] PCA, "Digital Targets vs Actuals" slide: CPM $4.39 vs $3.50 target (+25%); CPUR $0.014 vs $0.03 target (−53%).

[7] PCA, "Conversion YoY Results": CPEV $2.90 (−13% YoY from $3.33); Engaged Visit CVR 25.97% (+38% from 18.78%).

[8] PCA, "Performance Max, Breakthrough Results" slide: Conversion campaign PMax CPA $86 per application complete (Adobe Analytics). Google Ads in-platform attribution: $12 CPA. Adobe Analytics is primary attribution source for all entry claims.

[9] PCA, "Conversion YoY Results": Adobe Analytics figures.

[10] ROI calc: [redacted]

[11] Fully loaded integrated ROI: [redacted]

[12] Client Approved Application Figures: Main Round 2025-26 [redacted]

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Q2. WHAT WAS THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGE?

Three major pressures shaped the 2026 Main Round environment.

Pressure 1: Reaching a hard-to-reach audience

Two-thirds of CSU's market are non-school leavers (NSLs), an audience that is much harder to reach than traditional school leavers. Unlike Year 12 students, who can be engaged through school visits, expos, open days, and the structured UAC calendar, NSLs are dispersed across the full-time workforce and family life. There is no single place or moment where they naturally gather. This audience is time-poor, make decisions without a fixed external deadline, and are less influenced by celebrity or aspirational advertising than younger audiences.[12] The real competitor was not other universities, but the lack of motivation to make a career change. As the brief mentions, "for this group, it's not a choice between what university, it's a choice of whether to go to university at all."[13]

Pressure 2: A shrinking category

The broader higher education market for non-school leavers was already in decline during the 2025 - 26 campaign period:

- Mature-age undergraduate commencements nationally almost halved between 2018 and 2024 (61,771 to 32,320, -27%).[14]
- Applications from people aged 25+ fell 27% nationally between 2017 and 2024, while applications from 20 - 24 year-olds fell 22%.[15]
- Nearly 70% of Australian universities operated at a deficit in 2023, driven largely by declining domestic enrolments.[16]

This was not a temporary slowdown, but a structural decline, particularly affecting universities like CSU that rely heavily on non-school leaver audiences.

Pressure 3: A reduced budget

A 23% smaller digital budget: The digital media line fell from [redacted], with the explicit client expectation that performance would be "maintained."[17] Maintaining performance in a declining category on a smaller spend is a structurally harder outcome than simply growing in a tailwind. Open.edu.au, Torrens University and the University of New England were active bidders in CSU's primary search terms; private providers and online-first competitors that are less constrained by campus infrastructure costs, were investing to accelerate share capture while traditional universities constrained their spend.

The strategic invitation in the brief: "is the current channel mix the best approach?" The client had granted permission to break with the past media-buying playbook.[18] The strategic risk was not acting, but it was acting and missing. CSU is Australia's largest regional university, recruiting non-school leavers whose primary geographic concentration is metropolitan Sydney, a market structurally tilted toward CSU's metro competitors.

A regional brand pursuing growth in a metropolitan audience, in a declining category, on less money. That was the brief.

Sources

[13] Enrolling Stones Audience Details, dentsu QLD / iCCS & Roy Morgan Fused Database 2024: "less likely to be influenced by celebrities" attitudinal marker.

[14] Department of Education HESS 2024; Future Campus analysis, 26 September 2025. Mature-age commencements: 61,771 (2018) → 32,320 (2024) = −27%.

[15] Department of Education HESS 2024; Future Campus analysis, 26 September 2025. Mature-age commencements: 61,771 (2018) → 32,320 (2024) = −27%.

[16] Andrew Norton, "Applications to Australian universities," 29 August 2025: applications from 25+ year-olds −27% (2017–2024); 20–24 year-olds −22%.

[17] Universities Australia / Moody's Ratings analysis, January 2026.

[18] PCA, "Conversion YoY Results" and client expectation of maintained performance on reduced budget.

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Q3. WHAT WERE YOUR OBJECTIVES? State specific goals.

The brief outlined objectives at two areas.[19]

Merkle's 2025-26 Main Round goal was to grow non-school-leaver applications, a segment in structural decline, on 23% less digital budget.

Brand and pipeline objectives: Increase brand preference among non-school leavers to ≥5%, drive attendance to Virtual Open Day events and grow the lead nurture pipeline. These were supported by, but not solely measurable through, the digital media campaign.

Business objectives (campaign-accountable): Drive applications and enrolments across mid-year 2025, Summer 2025, and Session 1 2026 intakes, while improving the conversion of applicants into completed applications and offer accepts - all on a digital media budget that was 23% smaller than the previous year.

Digital media KPIs (quantified targets):[20]

Stage	Metric	Target
Awareness	Cost per Unique Reach	<$0.03
Awareness	CPM	<$3.50
Consideration	Cost per Engaged Visit	<$3.00
Consideration	Cost per Engaged Click	<$0.80
Conversion	Non-Search CPA (App Complete)	<$6,300
Conversion	CPA (App Complete)	<$320
Offer Accept	CPA (Offer Accept)	<$480

Over-arching goal: Maintain 2024-25 Main Round conversion volumes despite the 23% digital budget reduction, a goal that, given the sector's parallel decline, required outperforming category trajectory by a meaningful margin.[21]

Sources

[19] CSU brief, 2025-26 Main Round NSL campaign brief, "Advertising" and "Performance Marketing" sections.
[20] CSU 2025 NSL Brief, "Objectives" section.
[21] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Campaign Objectives and KPIs" slide.
[22] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Conversion YoY Results."

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Q4. WHAT WAS YOUR STRATEGY AND HOW DID YOU GET THERE?

Step 1: Challenge the default response

The obvious response to "grow applications with a smaller budget" was to focus on media efficiency. We knew that would not be enough. CSU was working with a 23% smaller budget in a sector where the mature-age audience had nearly halved over six years. Incremental optimisation alone would not close that gap.

Step 2: Redefine the competitor

The brief itself highlighted the real challenge: for many non-school leavers, the decision is not between universities, but whether to study at all. The real competitor was not providers like Open Universities Australia or University of New England, it was a lack of motivation to make a career change and competing life priorities.

This changed the role of media. We were not trying to outbid competitors or increase frequency against disengaged audiences. Instead, the goal was to ensure CSU was present and relevant at the exact moment someone was ready to seriously consider study.

Step 3: Reframe the audience

dentsu's proprietary "Enrolling Stones" audience profile defined the target audience through attitudes and behaviours rather than demographics alone. 675,000 people, aged 22-50, with a 56% female skew and a strong concentration in Sydney, who agree with at least 10 of 14 statements drawn from iCCS and the Roy Morgan Fused Database.[23]

Several traits shaped the strategy:

- Always moving, driven by what's next.
- Often prioritising family and household responsibilities over themselves
- Overwhelmed by choices in life; feel responsibility for household decisions.
- More responsive to authenticity than celebrity endorsements.
- 70% employed full-time; 38% with kids under 16; 18% already studying and working simultaneously.[24]

Step 4: Identify the core insight

The Enrolling Stone was already thinking about change. The challenge was not ambition, but time. The "what's next" they wanted was often not the "what's next" they had the capacity to properly explore.

When they finally made time to research study options, they tended to make decisions quickly. More frequency was unlikely to change behaviour; relevance at the right moment mattered most.

This led to the strategic platform direction of prioritising meaningful attention rather than broad exposure.[25]

Step 5: Translate the insight into media strategy

Three principles shaped campaign execution:

Principle 1: Every individual matters once. Optimise Awareness towards Cost per Unique Reach, not CPM, recognising that repeated impressions against disengaged audiences added little value.

Principle 2: Only engaged behaviour counts. Optimise Consideration activity towards Cost per Engaged Visit, not click volume, ensuring traffic quality mattered more than scale.

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Principle 3: Own the moment of intent. Search alone could not own the moment because Search reaches only people who have already typed a query. We needed to be the answer in every adjacent platform, Discover, Gmail, YouTube, the instant they surfaced. This decision allowed for the first-time deployment of Performance Max, funded by reallocation from non-search budget.[26]

Each principle required a deliberate trade-off most agencies would not make:[27]

- Chose to miss CPM to beat CPUR.
- Cut non-search spend by 31% to fund Performance Max.
- Reduced Display from [redacted] when it failed to earn engaged behaviour.

The strategy was not “do better media.” It was earn this person’s attention.

Sources

[23] Enrolling Stones Audience Details, dentsu QLD / iCCS & Roy Morgan Fused Database 2024: segment definition, attitudinal profile, size 675,000. 56% female (ix 110).

[24] Enrolling Stones Audience Details: 70% employed full-time; 38% with children under 16; 18% already studying and working; “spends more time looking after family than herself”; “overwhelmed by choices.”

[25] CSU 2025 NSL Brief, “Charles Sturt Brand” section, “hands-on minds” platform mandated as creative foundation.

[26] CSU 2025 NSL Brief, “Performance Marketing” section.

[27] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, “Digital Targets vs Actuals,” “Consideration” and “Display” channel sections.

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Q5. HOW WAS YOUR STRATEGY BROUGHT TO LIFE?

The strategy was executed through a three-tier funnel approach, with each stage optimised against the metric most aligned to its role in the journey.[28]

Awareness tier: earning the first impression. Awareness activity used video-led creative across YouTube, Pre-roll, Connected TV, TikTok, and Meta, supported by broad contextual targeting. Total Awareness investment was [redacted] (-14% YoY).[29] Despite representing only 15% of the Awareness budget, YouTube delivered 27% of total reach and achieved the strongest Cost per Unique Reach (CPUR) in the mix at $0.004. Pre-roll delivered the lowest CPM at $1.55.

Creative was adapted to suit each platform under CSU's "hands-on minds" brand platform. TikTok featured Riley-led creative focused on authenticity ("I'm not going to slow down"), while YouTube and Pre-roll used longer-form storytelling through Tegan-led creative ("Your life: it's busy"). Connected TV focused on Value Proposition TVC edits.[30]

A separate CSU-led ATL campaign [redacted] ran across key Sydney metropolitan areas during the same period. This activity involved a bespoke podcast partnership with Mammamia that spanned across podcasting platforms, as well as delivering promotional assets across display, EDM and social channels. This activity amassed 200,000 downloads, 1.2M RON Display impressions, EDM 212,573 email opens, and reached 396,145 users across Meta.

Consideration tier: earning the engaged visit. Consideration activity focused on driving high-quality engaged visits through four audience approaches: Affinity (study and education interests), In-Market (active education buyers), Contextual (relevant-content adjacency), and Search Trends via Captify (real-time intent retargeting from search behaviour).[31]

Demand Gen drove 82% of Campaign Click-throughs at the lowest Cost per External Click (CPEC) of $0.26. Pre-roll delivered the lowest Cost per Engaged Visit ($3.97) and highest CTR (2.14%). "Quiz" creative ("Ready for a career change?") drove the lowest CPEV on Meta at $2.12.

Display investment was intentionally reduced from [redacted] after underperforming against engagement metrics.

Conversion tier: earning the application. Performance Max was introduced for the first time as the campaign's primary conversion channel, supported by retargeting audiences including Study Site Visitors, Application Page Visitors, and Application Abandoners. Direct-response messaging such as "Start your application" and "Study online" was paired with Sitelinks for course discovery.

A Faculty-specific PMax pilot launched in February (13th - 28th) for Education and Psychology, demonstrating the model could extend to course-level activation despite running mostly in algorithm learning phase. The main PMax campaign achieved a CPA of $86 per Application Complete, while the Faculty PMax pilot delivered [redacted] at a $95 CPA - only 12% above the main campaign despite remaining largely in the learning phase.[32]

The campaign also maintained a strong test-and-learn approach. Google AI Max in Search reduced CPA by 31% while increasing Application Starts by 54% and Application Completes by 69%. Creative variants were reviewed weekly against engagement and conversion outcomes.[33]

Sources

[28] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "2025-26 Main Round Lifestage Considerations" slide.

[29] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Awareness" lifestage performance slide.

[30] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, Appendix 2, "Awareness Creative Recommendations."

[31] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Enrolling Stones Audience" and "Consideration" channel slides.

[32] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Performance Max, Breakthrough Results" and "Performance Max: Faculty Campaign" slides.

[33] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Paid Search, Test & Learns" and Appendix 2 creative-channel pairing.

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Q6. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOUR CAMPAIGN WAS SUCCESSFUL?

Three layers of evidence, plus one critical sector benchmark.

The sector context that re-frames every result that follows. Between 2018 and 2024, Australian mature-age undergraduate commencements almost halved (61,771 to 32,320, - 27%). Applications from 25+ year-olds fell 27% nationally between 2017 and 2024. Mature-age share of commencements collapsed from 21.8% to 12%, a structural decline in the proportion of Australian students aged 21+ relative to total commencements, separate from the absolute volume decline above.[34] Against this backdrop, CSU grew non-school-leaver applications by 6% YoY. This is the result that matters most.

Layer 1: Five of seven digital KPIs beaten, including all four conversion KPIs.[35]

Metric	Target	Actual	Variance
CPM	<$3.50	$4.39	**+25% (deliberate trade-off)**
CPUR	<$0.03	$0.014	**-53% (beat)**
CPEC	<$0.80	$0.87	**+8% (marginal)**
CPEV	<$3.00	$2.90	**-3% (beat)**
Non-SEM CPA App Complete	<$6,300	$603	**-90% (beat)**
CPA App Complete	<$320	$147	**-54% (beat)**
CPA Offer Accept	<$480	$366	**-24% (beat)**

The CPM “miss” was a deliberate strategic trade-off, fully offset by the 53% CPUR outperformance. CPEC was marginal (+8%) and offset by the more meaningful CPEV outperformance.

Layer 2: Three simultaneous conversion records on a 23%-smaller digital budget.[36]

Outcome	2024-25 Main Round	2025-26 Main Round	YoY
Application Starts	[redacted]	[redacted]	**+6%**
Application Completes	[redacted]	[redacted]	**+3%**
Offer Accepts	[redacted]	[redacted]	**+1%**
Digital media spend	[redacted]	[redacted]	**-23%**

Three simultaneous records, on less digital spend, in a category losing mature-age learners at scale.

Total applications reached [redacted] up by 2% year-on-year and the strongest volume since 2021, in a category where national mature-age applications had fallen 27% over the previous seven years.[40]

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Layer 3: The funnel got materially more efficient.[37]

- Visitor-to-Complete CVR: 0.32% to 0.51% (+61%), the same site converted at 1.6× the prior rate, direct evidence of higher-quality traffic.
- Engaged Visit CVR: 18.78% to 25.97% (+38%), engaged users dramatically more likely to apply.
- CPA App Complete: $196 to $147 (**-25%**); CPA Offer Accept: $480 target to $366 actual (**-24%**).

Sub-result validations:

- PMax delivered $86 CPA per application complete, a new top-of-funnel benchmark for this account.[38]
- Retargeting audiences via PMax: 1,190% YoY lift in App Starts; 1,047% lift in App Completes; 92% lower CPA, same audiences, new channel architecture.[39]

Sources

[34] Department of Education HESS 2024; Andrew Norton applications analysis 2025; Future Campus, 26 September 2025. Mature-age share of commencements: 21.8% (2018) → 12% (2024).

[35] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Digital Targets vs Actuals" slide.

[36] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Conversion YoY Results"; Adobe Analytics figures.

[37] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Conversion YoY Results" detailed table.

[38] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Performance Max, Breakthrough Results" (Adobe Analytics CPA $86; Google Ads in-platform $12; Adobe Analytics primary).

[39] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Audience Performance, Conversion."

[40] Client Approved Application Figures: Main Round 2025-26 Application volume of [redacted]. An increase year-on-year of 2%

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Q7. WAS THE CAMPAIGN A GOOD INVESTMENT?

Yes, by every defensible measure scoped to the digital media line.

Commercial value generated by the digital campaign. Using client-attributed conversion-stage values applied to CSU's Source of Truth conversion volumes:[40]

Stage	Volume (AA)	Per-stage Revenue	Total Revenue	Per-stage Profit	Total Profit
App Start	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
App Complete	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Offer Accept (primary)	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

Using Offer Accept value as the primary commercial measure, the digital campaign returned [redacted] of fully loaded digital investment, including media and agency fees.[41]

A parallel [redacted] ATL brand campaign ran in the same window. Including it in the denominator brings integrated ROI to [redacted]

Year-on-year efficiency also improved. Offer Accept value increased by [redacted] in commercial value despite 23% less digital media spend.[43]

These results also translated into strong profit margins. At the primary Offer Accept stage, the digital campaign returned [redacted] Including the parallel [redacted], the integrated campaign returned [redacted]

Against its Paid Search competitor set, CSU achieved stronger efficiency despite a 68% lower spend, producing a 47% lower CPC and 118% higher CTR than competing universities.[44]

Sources

[40] Volumes from 2025-26 Main Round PCA Adobe Analytics figures × client-provided conversion-stage values (supplied 6 May 2026).

[41] [redacted]

[42] [redacted]

[43] [redacted]

[44] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Paid Search, Competitor Analysis" slide.

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Q8. DEMONSTRATE THAT THE RESULT WAS NOT DUE TO OTHER FACTORS

The results were not driven by increased investment. Digital media spend fell 23% year-on-year [redacted], yet the campaign still delivered record application and conversion outcomes.[45]

Nor were the results driven by favourable market conditions. The non-school leaver category continued to decline throughout the campaign period, with mature-age commencements falling 27% nationally between 2018 and 2024, while applications from people aged 25+ fell 27%.[46] CSU's growth therefore represented a significant outperformance against broader market trends.

The results also cannot be explained by reduced competition. In Paid Search, CSU operated with 68% lower spend than the peer-set average while achieving a 118% higher CTR.[47] Competitors remained highly active throughout the campaign period and, in most cases, outspent CSU.

Importantly, the strategy itself changed materially from the previous year. Three key changes were introduced in the 2025-26 Main Round campaign:

- Awareness optimisation shifted from CPM to CPUR
- Performance Max was introduced for the first time
- Faculty-specific PMax campaigns extended the approach to course-level activation

The clearest evidence came from retargeting audiences that remained consistent across both years. When activated through Performance Max in 2025-26, these same audiences delivered a 1,190% increase in Application Starts and a 1,047% increase in Application Completes, while reducing CPA by 92%.[48] The audience remained the same while the campaign approach changed.

The results were also not driven by major brand or product changes. CSU's "hands-on minds" platform, course offering, and pricing structure remained largely consistent throughout the campaign period.[49]

While no holdout market or independent econometric model was used, the available campaign evidence strongly indicates that the performance uplift was driven by the strategic and media decisions implemented within the campaign itself.

Sources

[45] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Conversion YoY Results."

[46] Department of Education HESS 2024; Andrew Norton 2025 analysis. CSU NSL apps +6% vs sector [redacted] −27% (2017–2024) = ~33 percentage-point swing.

[47] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Paid Search, Competitor Analysis."

[48] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Audience Performance, Conversion."

[49] CSU 2025 NSL Brief, "Charles Sturt Brand" section.

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Q9. GIVE CONTEXT TO BUDGET IN COMPARISON TO COMPETITORS.

Rationale: The 2025-26 Main Round PCA showed CSU's Paid Search investment was 68% lower than the peer-set average across competitors including Open Universities Australia, Torrens University Australia, and University of New England).[50]

Sources

[50] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Paid Search, Competitor Analysis."

Q10. GIVE CONTEXT TO THE BRAND'S OVERALL BUDGET.

Rationale: CSU's full-year NSL campaign budget came to approximately [redacted], covering digital media [redacted], agency fees [redacted], and ATL investment [redacted]Larger metropolitan universities operated with brand budgets above this scale.

Q11. MEDIA BUDGET ELABORATION

This entry relates to the digital performance marketing campaign only, with total digital media investment of [redacted](-23% YoY) and agency fees of [redacted], bringing the total campaign investment to [redacted].[51]

Budget allocation across channels included:

- Paid Search: [redacted] (57%)
- Demand Gen: [redacted](21%)
- Pre-roll: [redacted](6%)
- Performance Max: [redacted](6%)
- Facebook & Instagram: [redacted](4%)
- YouTube: [redacted](3%)
- Display: [redacted](1%)
- TikTok: [redacted](1%)
- CTV: [redacted](1%)

Strategically, Paid Search investment was reduced by 15% YoY, while non-search activity decreased by 31% YoY. These savings funded the campaign's first Performance Max deployment [redacted].

A separate [redacted] ATL campaign ran in the same period, bringing total integrated programme investment to [redacted].

Sources

[51] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, "Overall Performance" and Appendix 1 channel breakdown. [redacted]

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Q12. DESCRIBE OWNED MEDIA ACTIVITY

CSU runs owned social activity across TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and Facebook. These channels act as supplementary engagement for prospects, but are predominantly focused towards current students and the higher education industry. They were not the primary driver of application outcomes.

Q13. OUTLINE ANY SPONSORSHIPS

No sponsorship activations were used within the 2025-26 Main Round digital media campaign. While the CSU brief identified potential future partnership opportunities with gyms, fitness, lifestyle, and transport brands, these were not implemented during the campaign period.[53]

Sources

[53] CSU 2025 NSL Brief, "Partnerships and Collaborations"; absence confirmed in 2025-26 Main Round PCA.

Q14. OUTLINE COMMUNICATION TOUCHPOINTS

The integrated touchpoint architecture deployed nine digital channels across three funnel tiers, supported by a parallel ATL brand-presence layer:[54]

- **Upper-funnel video (Awareness):** Connected TV, YouTube, Pre-roll, TikTok, optimised for Cost per Unique Reach.
- **Mid-funnel engagement (Consideration):** Demand Generation (Discover, Gmail, YouTube inventory), Pre-roll, Facebook & Instagram, Display, optimised for Engaged Visit cost.
- **Lower-funnel intent capture (Conversion):** Performance Max, Paid Search, optimised for Application Complete CPA.
- **Brand presence layer (parallel):** A separate CSU-led ATL campaign [redacted] ran across key Sydney metropolitan areas during the same period, encompassing podcast sponsorship (200,000 downloads), RON display (1.2M impressions), EDM (212,573 opens), and social content partnerships. CSU funded and measured it separately from the digital campaign.

Each digital touchpoint was creatively tailored to native context and integrated via Adobe Analytics cross-channel attribution.

Sources

[54] 2025-26 Main Round PCA, full Channel Performance section and Appendix 2 creative-channel pairing.

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