

Pixel Training Guide

Understanding Pixels and Retargeting Basics

Why This Matters

Many institutions using CAS (or other Liaison products and services) also invest in digital marketing to attract and convert prospective students. One of the **most effective ways to improve these efforts** is by enabling *pixel tracking* on the application portal. This guide will help you understand:

- What a pixel is (in plain terms)
- What it tracks and how it works
- Why tracking matters for recruitment
- What marketing platforms use pixel data
- How account teams can identify and refer opportunities

What Is a Pixel?

A **pixel** is a tiny, invisible piece of code that gets placed on a webpage. It collects anonymous data about how users interact with that page.

Think of it like a “sensor” that quietly observes and logs user actions—without capturing personally identifiable information.

Pixels are named after the early tracking methods where a single 1x1 image pixel would fire when a page loaded, triggering data collection. Today, they’re just snippets of JavaScript or HTML code.

What Exactly Does a Pixel Track?

While the data collected varies by platform, most pixels can detect the following types of user behavior on a page:

- Page loads
- Page clicks
- Button clicks/completion

These insights power **campaign optimization, audience targeting, and user journey tracking.**

Why Pixels Matter for Higher Ed Marketing

Higher education marketing often focuses on **moving prospects through a decision journey.** Pixels make that possible by giving digital teams the ability to:

1. Retarget Interested Prospects

Prospective students who visited the application but didn't finish can be shown ads that re-engage them—like reminders, success stories, or deadline-driven calls to action.

2. Segment Audiences

Pixels help distinguish between different behavior groups:

- Application starters vs. non-starters
- Returning visitors vs. first-time visitors
- Mobile vs. desktop traffic

This can make ad messaging more relevant and effective.

3. Measure Outcomes

By tracking who sees an ad, clicks, and completes an application, we can:

- See what messages and platforms are working
- Optimize budget and creative assets
- Report real outcomes

4. Build Lookalike Audiences

Some platforms allow us to take pixel data and build “lookalike” audiences—groups of people with similar behaviors or interests to those who visited the page.

Which Marketing Platforms Use Pixels?

Here’s how different platforms use pixel data to improve marketing:

Platform	Tracking Tool	Purpose
Meta (Facebook & Instagram)	Meta Pixel	Retargeting, conversion tracking, lookalike audience creation
LinkedIn	Insight Tag	Retargeting professionals, B2B marketing, field of study targeting
Google Ads (Search, Display, YouTube)	Google Tag / GA4	Retargeting, performance tracking, cross-device attribution
Programmatic Advertising	Third-party pixel or tag manager	Serve ads across thousands of websites and streaming services
Google Analytics 4 (GA4)	GA Tag	Understand application funnel behavior and session drop-off trends

How Does It Actually Work?

Here’s a sample flow of user activity on a CAS page, for example:

- 1. User visits the CAS application page**
→ Pixel fires in the background
- 2. User’s browser stores a “cookie” or ID**
→ The ad platform knows this user showed interest
- 3. Later, that same user browses social media or news sites**
→ Ads appear reminding them about the institution
- 4. User returns and finishes the application**
→ Success is recorded; they’re removed from the ad list

This is what powers the phrase you’ve probably heard:

“I looked at something once, and now I see ads for it everywhere.”