From Vision to Reality: How LDE UTC is Revolutionising Student Enrolment

The Journey Begins

Sonya D'Arcy-Kilroy from London Design and Engineering UTC (LDE UTC) has an incredible story of vision, persistence, and innovation. What started as an idea to create a cutting-edge college in London has turned into a reality - one that continues to inspire and transform students' lives.

"I never thought I'd be here," Sonya admits. "School wasn't my thing. But I used to sit in class and think, 'If I ran my own school, I'd do things differently.' And now, here we are!"

Since opening its doors in 2015, LDE UTC has been on a mission to provide a forward-thinking, hands-on education focused on engineering, design, and architecture. However as any school leader knows, getting students through the door is just as crucial as providing an excellent learning experience.

Enrolment Challenges & The Power of Branding

When LDE UTC first launched, there was no fancy building to show off. Instead, Sonya and her team met prospective students in cafés, asking them to believe in a vision that hadn't yet materialised.

"We literally started in portable cabins before moving into our current state-of-the-art facility opposite London City Airport," she recalls. "Students had to trust us when we said, 'This will be something special.'"

Establishing a strong brand was crucial in standing out in the competitive London education landscape. Parents often question whether a new institution can truly deliver. To build credibility, LDE UTC worked on making their identity recognisable and their mission clear.

Engaging Future Students

Reaching prospective students requires more than just an open day. Sonya and her team take a proactive approach:

- **Community Outreach:** Visiting local libraries and schools with their interactive robot that waves, dances, and invites students to open days.
- **Hands-on Learning Experiences:** Hosting Lego-building events to spark creativity and problem-solving skills.
- **Social Media & Word of Mouth:** Encouraging students and parents to share experiences online, making recruitment efforts organic and widespread.

"Word of mouth is the best form of advertising," Sonya emphasises. "Nothing beats a student telling their friends, 'You have to check this place out.'"

The Role of Technology in Enrolment

Before using digital enrolment tools, Sonya and her team were drowning in paperwork.

"The amount of time spent processing applications was overwhelming," she says. "We had stacks of paper applications, then hours of manually inputting them into Excel before transferring data into SIMS. On enrolment day, we'd be stuck in the office late into the night."

Enter **Applicaa's Admissions+**, a game-changer for streamlining applications, automating personalised communication, and ensuring a seamless enrolment process.

"Now, we can personalise emails based on students' course interests," Sonya explains. "If a student wants to study psychology, we send them content relevant to that subject. It's not just a generic bulk email—it feels personal. That makes a huge difference."

Overcoming Resistance from Traditional Schools

One of the biggest challenges for any University Technical College (UTC) is gaining access to students. Traditional schools don't always welcome UTCs, as students transferring out means losing funding.

To work around this, LDE UTC leverages **local authority letters**—official notices informing students of their right to apply. While not always perfectly executed, these letters help spread awareness about alternative educational opportunities.

Virtual Engagement & Post-COVID Adaptations

Like many institutions, LDE UTC had to rethink student engagement during COVID-19. With open days cancelled, they invested in a **3D virtual tour**, allowing prospective students and parents to explore the college remotely.

"If someone says they can't attend an open day, I send them the link to our virtual tour," Sonya says. "They can 'walk' through the building, explore different floors, and see our facilities up close."

They also introduced **virtual open evenings**, featuring live interviews with staff and students to provide an authentic insight into life at LDE UTC.

Communication is Key

Engagement doesn't stop at recruitment—it continues throughout the enrolment journey.

"Students forget things instantly," Sonya laughs. "You have to keep them engaged through constant communication."

With **Admissions+**, LDE UTC can send automated follow-up emails, reminders, and personalised messages, ensuring prospective students feel valued and supported throughout the process.

Final Thoughts

LDE UTC's success in student recruitment isn't just about marketing—it's about building relationships, leveraging technology, and staying true to their mission.

"For us, education is about more than just teaching," Sonya says. "It's about guiding students, preparing them for the real world, and making them feel like they belong. When they walk through our doors, they're not just students—they're future engineers, architects, and designers."

By continuously refining their approach, engaging with students on a personal level, and embracing technology, LDE UTC is setting the standard for how schools can successfully attract and enrol students in an increasingly competitive landscape.