

Running a digital admissions portfolio, not a collection of campaigns

Marketing Manager | Digital Strategy, Portfolio Governance & Admissions Growth | May – Jul 2022

The context

The [Indian School of Business](#) (ISB) is one of India's most influential management institutions, with campuses in Hyderabad and Mohali and a portfolio spanning postgraduate, advanced management and executive education. Today it has 20,000+ alumni globally and its PGP is ranked #12 worldwide and #1 in India in the Financial Times Global MBA Ranking 2026. The scale and reputation matter here because admissions marketing was not simply a lead-generation exercise. Every programme carried the expectations of a globally recognised education brand.

I joined the digital marketing function with a portfolio that behaved less like one marketing account and more like a small product suite. Different programmes served candidates at very different career stages, ran on different admissions calendars, carried different economics, and required their own acquisition, nurturing and conversion logic.

My job was to make those moving parts behave like one managed portfolio: diagnose performance, decide where budget and attention should move, govern delivery across platforms and partners, and turn the evidence into the next admissions roadmap.

SCALE

The portfolio at a glance

6+ programme families / propositions ₹3.1Cr+ (≈ \$300K) documented paid spend in PGPpro attribution alone	5 AMP specialist programmes 2,748 Google keywords in PGPpro alone	4 major acquisition platforms 68.72% PGP applications attributed to digital	3 funnel stages governed: acquisition, remarketing, conversion +53% YoY PGP digital logins
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THE CHALLENGE

The management problem was portfolio complexity

ISB was recruiting simultaneously across the flagship PGP, Young Leaders Programme, PGPpro, PGPMAX, the family-business programme MFAB, and a suite of Advanced Management Programmes covering business analytics, healthcare, public policy, infrastructure, and operations & supply chain. The audience could range from an early-career applicant to a senior executive with 10+ years of experience. A channel, message or conversion path that worked for one programme could be completely wrong for another.

The operational complexity sat underneath that proposition mix. Programmes ran in rounds and stages with fixed deadlines. Google, Meta, LinkedIn and Quora accounts had different campaign structures and economics. Salesforce lists, website visitors, landing pages, portals, webinars, events and organic content all fed the same admissions journey. Meanwhile agencies, contractual designers, content resources and internal programme stakeholders had to move in sequence.

I governed the work as a portfolio: programme objectives, funnel stage, historical conversion evidence and admissions deadlines determined where budget, specialist resource and management attention moved next.

PROGRAMME ARCHITECTURE

PGP

Flagship postgraduate programme

Multi-round acquisition + nurturing

PGPpro

Mid-career working professionals

Multi-city, multi-round

MFAB

Family-business leaders

Niche high-intent audience

YLP

Early-career / deferred pathway

Stage-based recruitment

PGPMAX

Senior executives

Pan-India executive audience

AMP Suite

5 specialist management programmes

Concurrent propositions and funnels

METHODOLOGY

The operating model: audit → prioritise → orchestrate → learn

I used a repeatable operating cycle across programmes, giving each proposition its own audience and admissions logic while making investment and delivery decisions against a comparable evidence base.

01 AUDIT

Establish the baseline

Previous-year performance, attribution, account structure, audience quality, CPL, conversion, creative performance, landing-page friction and channel gaps.

02 PRIORITISE

Turn evidence into resource decisions

Allocate budget by channel and programme, front-load or hold spend by admissions round, and identify where lead quality mattered more than lead volume.

03 DESIGN

Build the programme roadmap

Define audience, funnel, campaign architecture, remarketing logic, content tracks, landing-page actions, events and testing plan.

04 GOVERN

Coordinate delivery

Align programme owners, agency/creative resources, performance marketing, CRM data, web dependencies and deadline-driven approvals.

METHODOLOGY CONTINUED

Closing the loop

Optimisation and learning sat inside the same operating cycle. Each admissions round fed its evidence, exceptions and structural issues into the next roadmap and investment plan.

05 OPTIMISE

Manage by exception

Use search terms, negative keywords, placements, bid/budget changes, audience tests and creative performance to correct underperformance.

06 LEARN

Feed outcomes into the next cycle

Separate what worked from what did not, identify structural gaps and convert the findings into the next roadmap rather than resetting each year.

The common governance cycle created consistency in how decisions were made while preserving the proposition, audience and admissions logic of each programme.

The portfolio decisions

The account audits became decision inputs for budget allocation, admissions timing, funnel design and operating priorities across the portfolio.

PGP | Spend earlier so nurturing had time to work

73% of the lead-generation budget was deliberately spent in the first round. That was a scheduling decision, not simply aggressive media buying: acquire earlier, then create time to nurture prospects through a longer consideration journey. The cycle closed with digital logins up 53% year on year, digital applications up 23.45%, and 68.72% of total PGP applications attributed to digital activity.

MFAB | Optimise for applicant quality, not vanity volume

Digital logins fell 10% year on year while digital applications rose 5.26%. Paid digital still produced 66.45% of submissions and 61.64% of logins. I read that divergence as a quality signal: fewer logins did not automatically mean a weaker funnel if a greater share progressed to application. The next roadmap therefore focused on targeting and proposition quality rather than simply replacing lost volume.

PGPMAX | Reallocate on channel economics

Historical account performance showed Google delivering conversion at lower CPL than Facebook and LinkedIn, so the planned mix weighted Google more heavily. Within Google, CTR improved from 1.89% to 5.40% and CPL fell from ₹1,374 to ₹796. The optimisation levers were operationally mundane but commercially important: query control, negative keywords, responsive formats, placement targeting, sitelinks and landing-page changes.

PGPpro | Manage a large acquisition system, not an ad account

The Google structure alone contained 40 search campaigns, 234 ad groups and 2,748 keywords, alongside display and discovery. Attribution showed 1,832 organic logins, 921 Google, 366 Facebook and 77 LinkedIn against roughly ₹3.1 crore in documented paid spend. That evidence supported channel allocation, city-level prioritisation and the decision to treat organic and landing-page performance as part of the acquisition system, not separate marketing work.

AMP Suite | Standardise governance, preserve proposition differences

Five specialist programmes ran concurrently with different account structures. The audit surfaced cross-portfolio problems: creative did not sufficiently distinguish new from already-engaged users, application pages were thin, and lead follow-up cycles were long. Rather than solve each as a one-off campaign issue, the roadmap addressed the shared operating layer: segmentation, landing pages, content reuse, webinars, SEO and nurture.

FROM REACH TO APPLICATION

Admissions funnel governance

The roadmap work was full-funnel. Acquisition only mattered if the prospect could move through the rest of the journey. I therefore connected media decisions to CRM audiences, remarketing, programme content, events, landing pages and the application portal.

01	PROSPECT	Brand, generic and competitor search; interest, lookalike, job-title and contextual audiences.
02	CAPTURE	Lead forms, landing pages, programme pages, webinar and Eventbrite registrations.
03	NURTURE	Salesforce customer-match lists, website visitors, lead-form audiences, programme USPs, scholarships, placements, testimonials and countdown creative.
04	CONVERT	Portal-page journeys, application deadlines, eligibility messaging, sitelinks and conversion-focused remarketing.
05	LEARN	Logins, applications, CPL, CTR, source attribution and year-on-year movement fed back into the next

BEYOND CAMPAIGN OPTIMISATION

Operating-model redesign

The account audits also exposed a structural constraint: the digital team relied on contractual design and content resources and a creative agency, but there was no dedicated senior performance-marketing owner or community-management role in the structure documented at the time.

I proposed a clearer operating model that added a Senior Manager for Performance Marketing and a Community Manager, with defined programme ownership and reporting into the Associate Director. The point was not to add hierarchy for its own sake. It was to separate specialist performance accountability from general coordination, reduce ambiguity over ownership, and give a growing programme portfolio a structure that could scale.

OUTCOMES

What changed because of the work

The work increased digital contribution to applications, improved channel economics in key programmes, strengthened the use of remarketing and CRM data, and created roadmaps that recorded what to stop, what to scale and what required structural change.

+53%

PGP digital logins YoY

₹796

PGPMAX Google CPL after reduction from ₹1,374

+23.45%

PGP digital applications YoY

5.40%

PGPMAX Google CTR, up from 1.89%

68.72%

of PGP applications from digital

153%

reported improvement in mobile landing-page speed score, 32 → 81

66.45%

of MFAB submissions from paid digital

405

organic followers built on new PGP Admissions LinkedIn page

THE TAKEAWAY

Managing complexity across a high-stakes admissions portfolio

At ISB, I worked inside a high-equity institution with an established portfolio of programmes, multiple internal stakeholders, external partners, acquisition channels and fixed admissions deadlines. I governed those moving parts around the candidate journey and the commercial logic of each programme, while maintaining enough programme-level detail to make sound decisions on budget, timing, targeting and conversion.

The role required working at two altitudes at once: deep enough to diagnose a failing keyword, audience, landing page or nurture sequence, and broad enough to decide whether that problem warranted investment relative to the rest of the portfolio.

Across the portfolio, I segmented the problem, created a comparable evidence base, allocated resources deliberately, made ownership visible, managed dependencies and carried learning from each admissions cycle into the next.