

CASE STUDY: GEMS World Academy-Chicago



World Academy
CHICAGO

GEMS World Academy (GWA)-Chicago is the first international academy from GEMS Education in the United States. GWA-Chicago is among the most advanced learning environments in the world for preschool through grade 12. Since opening its doors in September 2014, GWA-Chicago has grown to a renowned private school boasting a rigorous International Baccalaureate curriculum, extraordinary teachers, and an international perspective that is unmatched. As the flagship World Academy from GEMS Education in the United States, GWA-Chicago has established connections to GEMS Education classrooms around the globe and has set an extraordinary foundation for future GEMS Education across the Americas.



GEMS World Academy-Chicago Gains Insights to Create Targeted Content and Messaging That Increase Qualified Leads and Enrollment

The Opportunity: Improve Qualified Leads and Increase Enrollments Through More Targeted Content

A major opportunity facing GWA-Chicago was to further refine, define, and nurture its target audience.

Brand awareness was critical in the early years of the school's opening. As a result, the targeting was broad and the messaging was broad. This successfully established the GWA-Chicago brand within Chicago.

With awareness established, it was time to focus its targeting and content development to attract and engage with families interested in the kind of education and experience GWA-Chicago provides and, therefore, improve the quality of leads in its sales funnel.

The Solution: Improve Content Effectiveness Using Journey Maps and Personas

WHY AKOONU

The team at GWA-Chicago knew that in order to improve content development—everything from messaging across its website and blog to email campaigns and media placements—it needed to define its target audience with laser focus.

“ We needed to break down our broad audience into individual target segments that each have unique needs and ambitions. This would allow us to more truly understand what matters to them,



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Joe Sticca
Chief Innovation Officer
at GEMS Education

so we can relate to them more effectively through our messaging and content,” said Joe Sticca, Chief Innovation Officer at GEMS Education.

Once GWA-Chicago identified its segments, it needed a thorough and authentic understanding of its personas.

“When it comes to understanding our audience, we can’t go on assumptions. We need to invest the time in speaking with them directly to know what makes each persona unique, and to understand the nuanced differences within each target segment. It’s only through these insights that we can speak their language and relate to them through our content.”

When GWA-Chicago saw Akoonu, the team quickly realized Akoonu offered a superior way to garner the in-depth insights it required for each segment as well as to manage and share these insights efficiently across the organization.

“It was clear that Akoonu’s framework and methodology for developing personas and journey maps would allow us to gather deep insights into our different audiences. But what really stood out was the ability to easily manage the dynamic information and share this throughout our extended marketing and content development teams. Asset management is essential, and the ability to manage everything, including our research library, on one virtual platform was key for us.”

USING AKOONU

GEMS outlined 3 primary goals it wanted to achieve with Akoonu:

1. Build a thorough understanding of audiences and develop personas and journey maps to focus content marketing
2. Use journey maps to inform and prioritize content development and highlight content opportunities by persona
3. Use persona insights for ongoing content development and refinement to nurture contacts and increase qualified leads and enrollments

Based on data analysis and initial research, GWA-Chicago first identified its four target market segments, which were defined by household and family dynamic, such as ex-patriot families and dual income families, and seven personas within those segments that shared unique traits, such as first-time moms and modern dads.



Next, in order to gain accurate insights, GWA-Chicago used Akoonu's configurable interview scripts to conduct and record interviews with individuals and actual customers. The insights from the interviews were key to informing persona and journey map development. After completing the interviews, GWA-Chicago leveraged Akoonu's persona and journey map frameworks to develop all seven personas and journey maps for each segment.

Results

GOAL 1: Build a thorough understanding of audiences and develop personas and journey maps to focus content marketing

GWA-Chicago's development of personas and journey maps within Akoonu revealed key insights, including top priorities among its personas, key differentiators from the perspective of its personas, and clearly identified distinct needs, which could be addressed immediately in its content plans.

As a result of these insights, GWA-Chicago continues to align its messaging and content with what matters most to each persona and is creating specialized nurturing content based on each persona's distinct needs and priorities throughout their school selection journey.

GOAL 2: Use journey maps to inform and prioritize content development and highlight content opportunities by persona

GWA-Chicago used Akoonu's configurable framework for journey maps to create, within each market segment, a five stage journey from awareness through engaging, applying, enrolling, and loyal advocacy. At each stage, GEMS captured the needs, research activities, and information (content) preferences of each persona.

“ It has been enlightening just how helpful the Akoonu journey maps have been in providing insights into how our personas interact with brands throughout their school selection journey. We can now be more sophisticated in speaking with our personas through targeted content depending on their journey stage.”

GOAL 3: Use persona insights for ongoing content development and refinement to nurture contacts and increase qualified leads and enrollments

As a result of having a more comprehensive understanding of its audiences, GWA-Chicago can more effectively nurture qualified leads through targeted marketing in an effort to increase enrollments at GWA.

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As an example, GWA-Chicago is now applying the insights gained from its personas and journey maps to its email nurture campaigns.

“ We crafted each email specifically around what our personas and journey maps revealed was important to our personas and what are differentiating priorities. This reiterates the importance of each persona and demonstrates the concrete differences between them that we can apply in our content.”

Platform Approach Improves Productivity and Organizational Alignment

“ Using Akoonu to manage this work enabled us to develop our journey maps and personas significantly faster than if we had started from scratch. The built-in methodology was very helpful and a huge value- add. The ability to publish and share these buyer insights across our organization and with our media partners ensures everyone has a deep understanding of our audience.

Also, the journey maps and personas that we created in Akoonu are a great checkpoint on creating content. In order to excel at content, you need to understand your audience. And now we do. We don't have to make assumptions anymore. We know where to focus our content creation efforts. We're very confident our more effective content will increase engagement and support our admissions teams in closing the deal.”