

Customer Success Story

About USC Marshall School of Business

Founded 100 years ago, the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business has deep roots in the California business community. The Los Angeles school offers students an innovative curriculum that balances academic flexibility with entrepreneurial action and global impact. In addition, the business school hosts several admissions events throughout the year to engage a diverse range of prospective students. These events are customized to highlight options attractive to different audiences — whether traditional students, pre-career individuals, or early- and mid-career professionals.

Challenge

USC Marshall staff members used a third-party event solution outside of Salesforce to manage the admissions events. However, the outdated, paper-based system caused a myriad of issues, including:

- A cumbersome registration process for prospective students.
- Need for customization of event landing pages and registration forms.
- Inefficiencies for the admissions team tasked with planning multiple events.
- Difficulties getting the correct information to and from prospective students viewing and registering for admissions events.
- Time-consuming, repetitive data-entry chores such as paper check-in forms manually recorded in the Salesforce database after each admissions event.

For Alexi Waul, then serving as senior associate director of MBA admissions, the arduous process reflected poorly on the university.

USC Marshall
School of Business



Higher Education



United States



**Blackthorn
Events**



“We needed a better event management system,” Waul says. “It had to be simple to navigate, efficient, and look inviting to prospective students.”

The USC Marshall team started the vendor selection process with an obvious list of requirements:

- **Flexible, editable event pages and forms:** an events platform that easily customizes event landing pages and quick-to-complete registration forms, all branded to USC Marshall.
- **Ability to scale admissions events:** quickly duplicate events using event clone features and easily add multiple session dates for one admissions event.
- **Automated check-in process** for event attendees.
- **An easier way to analyze each event's success** inside the existing Salesforce platform, right next to other institutional goals.



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Solution

After thorough investigation and discovery, USC Marshall chose to implement Blackthorn Events as it met all the requirements outlined by the department. Once implemented, the team used Blackthorn events on nearly 65 occasions from November 2019 to February 2020, before COVID-19 restrictions were implemented.

Using Blackthorn, the USC team found it could create admissions events in half the time. Online registrations became streamlined, and attendance at events increased by 10%. “Ease and speed have been positives for the school,” Wilson says. “The experience has made a great first impression on our prospective students. About 20% of event attendees subsequently applied to USC Marshall.”

The USC team now creates and manages events directly in Salesforce. All event registrant information is automatically stored in the Salesforce contact database as an attendee record related to leads or contacts. Waul found much-needed relief in streamlining admissions events processes with easy-to-use features that help the team get usable attendee data much more quickly, saving 10 hours of manual data entry work per week.

“Blackthorn is more customizable with what you can do on event and registration pages,” Waul says. However, he adds that the app is equally helpful in analyzing data on the back end. “We’re looking forward to using the speaker highlights, schedules, and other features. We’ve used it for our classroom visit setup, and we’re planning to use the recurring event feature for admissions events with multiple time options.”

Waul lauds the plug-and-play nature of Blackthorn apps and notes how the staff is chasing away outdated, paper-dependent processes. “We tried the mobile check-in app, and it worked great,” he says. “It’s helping us avoid using paper and having to log attendee information twice.”

Success!

As USC Marshall adapts during the COVID-19 pandemic, the school has suspended in-person information sessions and pivoted to virtual sessions instead, implemented through Blackthorn Events. Attendance at the virtual events has averaged 67, a 10% increase over previous in-person sessions.

“Blackthorn has been a huge benefit to Marshall, and I think this is even more obvious with our need to move to online events quickly,” Wilson says. “We’re also working with our executive education group to help them implement Blackthorn for some of their online webinars, and we found that it scales very nicely.”

While streamlining the event management process, Blackthorn has also simplified the school’s outreach efforts. The admissions team can trigger an automated email after attendees register with a link to event information and a QR code to use during check-in. Virtual event registrants receive an email with a link to join the meeting or session online.

The collaboration has worked so well the campus is taking the next step. As Waul moves into a new role as USC’s head of university-wide Salesforce implementation, he hopes to expand Blackthorn’s use beyond the business school and the university.

Ready to check it out?

Jump into our Guided Tour to see Blackthorn Events in action.

1. Navigate to the Blackthorn Events listing [on the Salesforce AppExchange](#).
2. Click “Watch Demo” to start your Guided Tour.
3. That’s it! You’re now on your way to learn how easy it is to manage all of your events directly in Salesforce!

