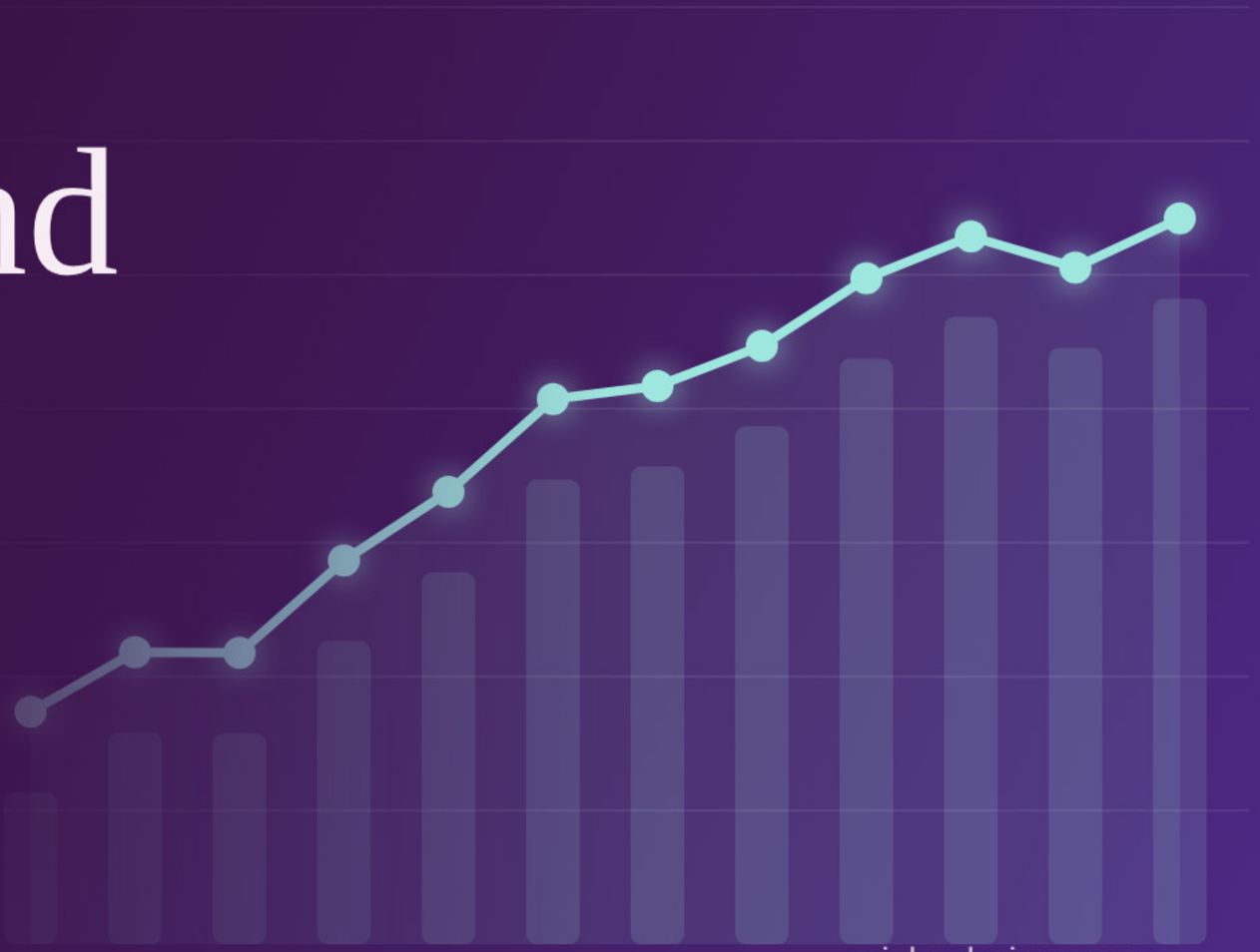
GURU CONFERENCE 2026

Using AI to find what drives campaigns



Mickey Baines
SVP of Market Development, Human Capital Education

mickeybaines.com



ABOUT ME

Hello, I'm Mickey.

Technologist by trade, enrollment manager by heart. I learned more about assessing performance in six years on air at QVC than in twelve years working in higher ed.

200+
institutions served

12
years inside higher ed

15+
years consulting

PICKING UP FROM LAST YEAR

Last year was how to personalize. This year is how to see where it's working.

Inbox

AI RANKING BY OPEN RATE

Admissions	Your application is almost done	52%
Admissions	3 ways to maximize your scholarship	46%
Admissions	Did you get your answers?	44%
Accounting Dept.	Financial Accounting or Tax Accounting?	41%
Financial Aid	Parents: help with the FAFSA	39%
Events	Don't miss Admitted Student Day	34%
Student Life	Meet your future classmates	31%
Admissions	Your next step at Awesome U	27%
Admissions	Reminder: deadline approaching	22%
Admissions	Important update from Admissions	18%
Office of the Dean	A message from the Dean	15%
Admissions	Newsletter: October edition	12%

Strong lines rise. Weak lines fade back.

Demo data

How improvements get made

TODAY

Once a year, and mostly at random

- Changes wait for the cycle to end
- Where to focus is often a guess
- Returns are hard to trace

WITH AI ANALYSIS

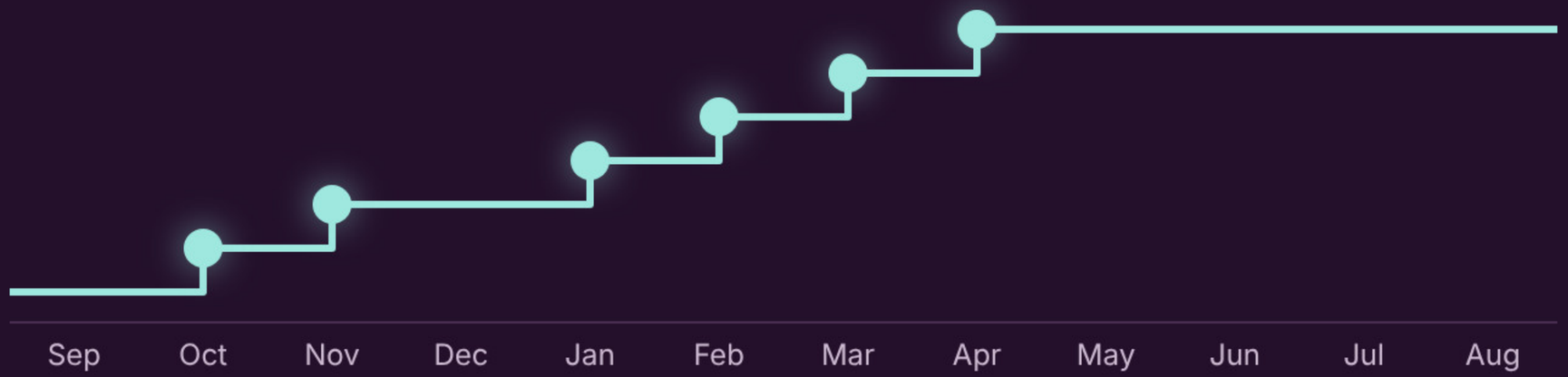
Targeted, all cycle long

- See which messages engage and convert
- Aim fixes where they return the most
- Adjust mid-cycle, while it still counts

Once a year



All cycle long



Same effort, aimed better and sooner, compounds.

Every example carries a difficulty label

Easy

Start this week

Runs on a report you already pull.

Moderate

Look across the cycle

Adds timing or funnel stages, and a bit more judgment.

Complex

Plan time to prepare

Depends on access, setup, or several sources. Learn it before a launch.

Ground rule for every example: aggregate performance data only. No student-level PII.

Three ways to run each example



Export

Download a report you already pull and hand it to your AI tool. Works anywhere.



In-platform

Use the AI built into your CRM, like Slate's, so the data stays in the system.



Connected

Link your AI tool to your CRM and marketing automation platform. No more import and export.

Examples that need a connection say what your institution may need to approve.

Six examples, easy to complex

01	Subject-line analysis	Easy
02	Topic analysis	Easy
03	Timing in the cycle	Moderate
04	Where inquiries stall	Moderate
05	Connecting AI to your systems	Complex
06	The dashboard, layer by layer	Complex

01

Subject-line analysis

Which words and lengths drive opens and clicks.

Easy

Which words in your subject lines drive action?

ASK AI

“Here are last cycle's subject lines with open and click rates. Which words, lengths and patterns show up most in the top performers and the bottom performers? Then compare what you find with published best practices.”

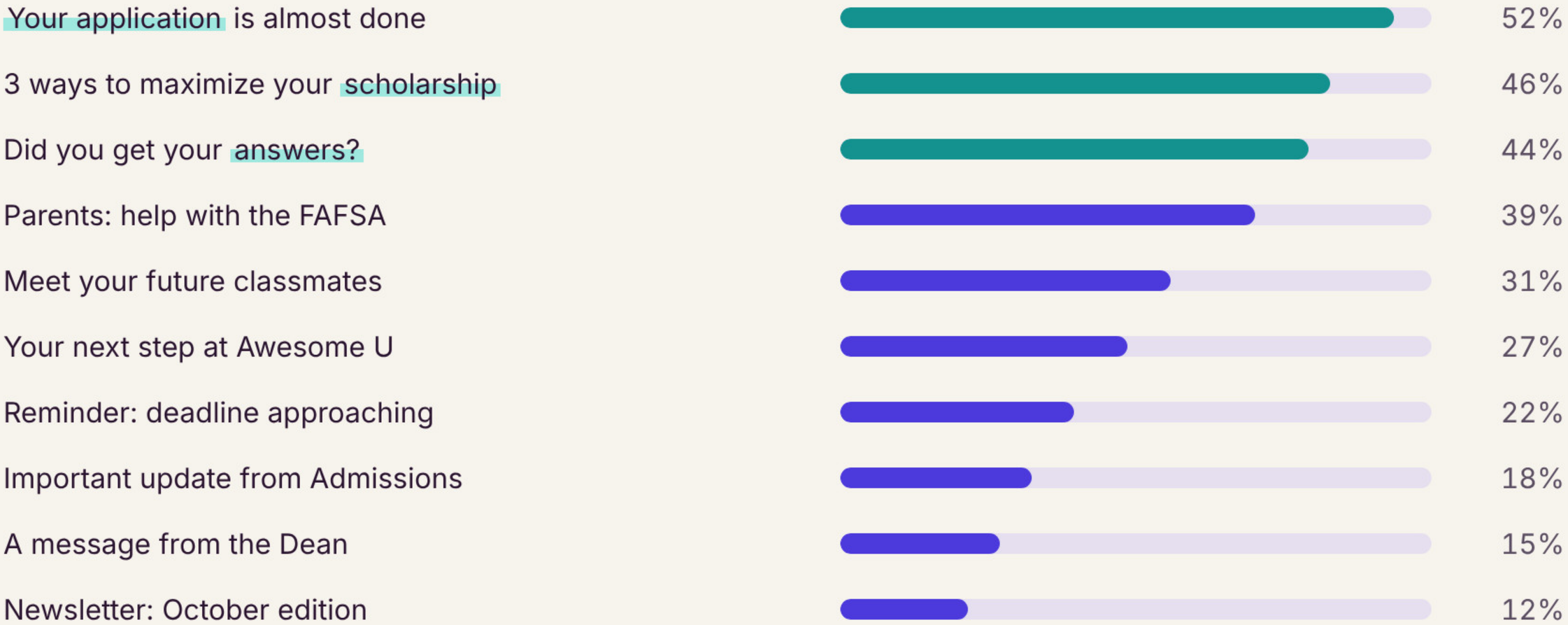
WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- The words that move your own audience to act
- The length range that performs best for you
- Where you match published key drivers, and where you don't

Easy

Works with: Export · In-platform · Connected

Which words drive opens?



Personal, specific and question-led lines rise to the top.

Demo data

02

Topic analysis

Which content topics drive the most interest across your comms.

Easy

Which topics drive the most interest?

ASK AI

“Here are last cycle's emails with the topic of each and its click rate. Group them by topic and rank the topics by engagement. Which should we send more of, and which should we retire?”

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- The topics prospective students actually engage with
- Where you send more than the interest supports
- What to build more content around

Easy

Works with: Export · In-platform · Connected

03

Timing in the cycle

When in the cycle each topic drives more interest.

Moderate

When does each topic drive the most interest?

ASK AI

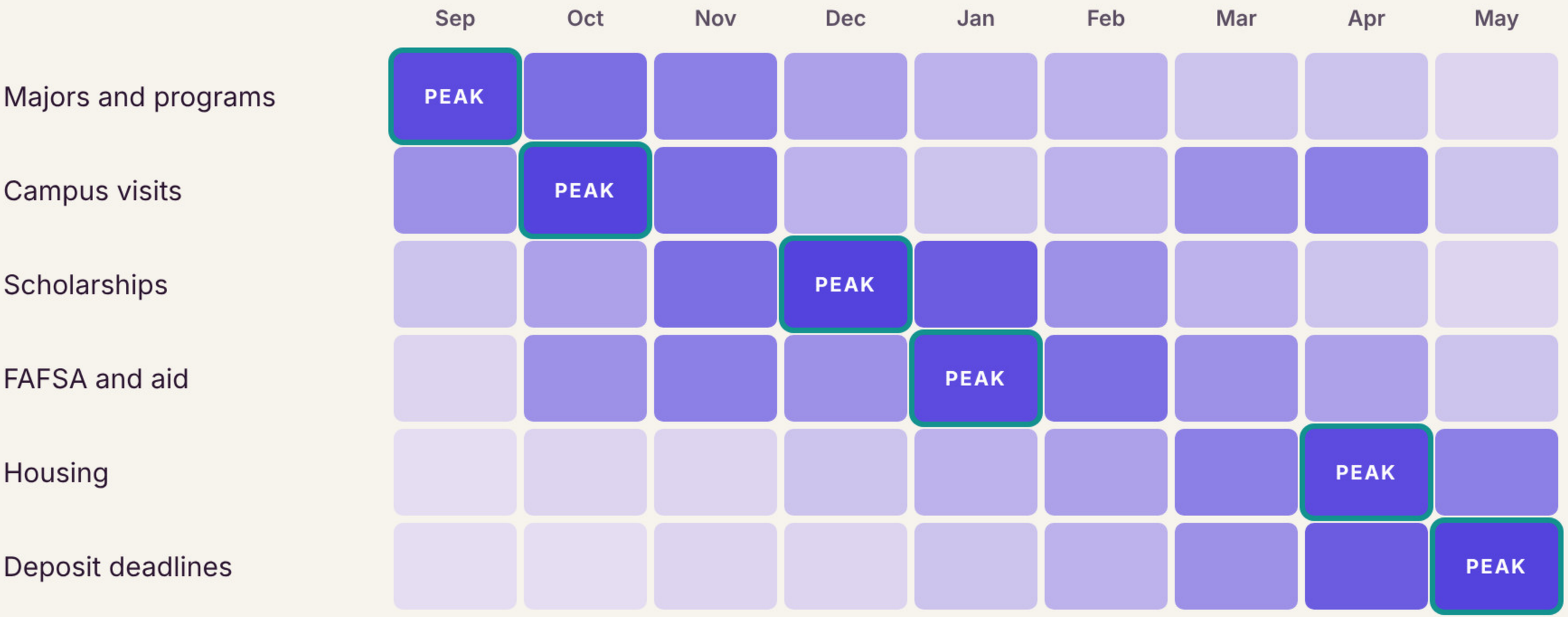
“Using the same topic groups, show how engagement for each topic changes month by month across the cycle. When does each one peak, and where are we sending it too early or too late?”

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- When each topic peaks in the cycle
- Topics sent before or after the interest is there
- What to move this cycle, before next year

Moderate Works with: Export · In-platform · Connected

When does each topic peak?



Send each topic when the interest is there.

Demo data

04

Where inquiries stall

The stages where prospective students slow down or drop off.

Moderate

Where are inquiries stalling?

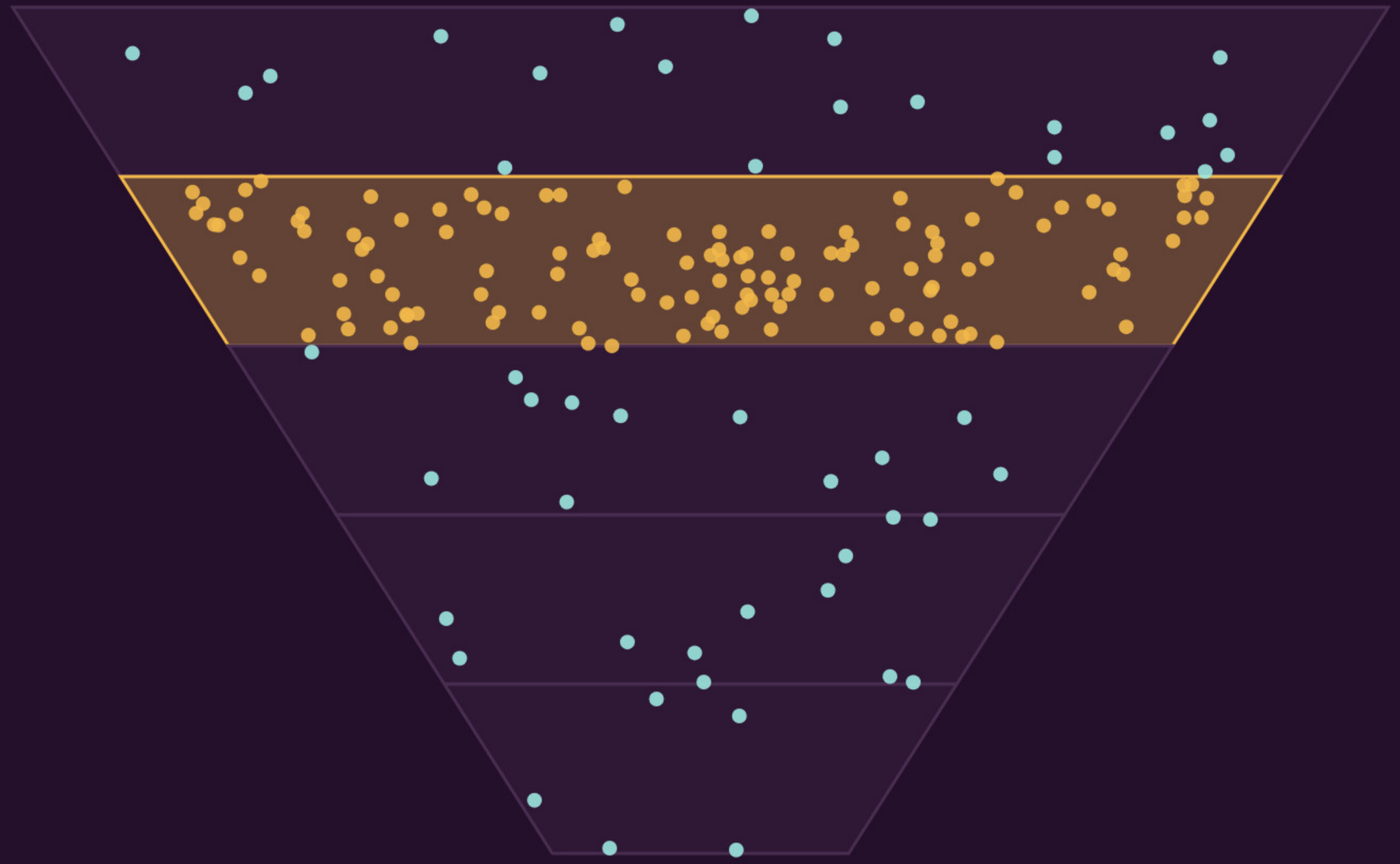
ASK AI

“Here are counts of prospective students by funnel stage and month, for this year and last, with no names or IDs. Where are they waiting longest or dropping off, and what changed from last year?”

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- The stages where momentum slows
- Whether it's getting better or worse than last year
- Which stage your next comms should target

Moderate Works with: Export · In-platform · Connected


Inquiries
Started application
STALLING HERE
Submitted
Admitted
Deposited

Demo data

05

Connecting AI to your systems

Ending the import and export cycle, where your institution allows it.

Complex

Why connecting is labeled Complex

THE TECHNICAL STEP

Usually the easy part

- Many platforms now offer connectors
- Point it at aggregate performance data
- Earlier examples then refresh on their own

THE REAL HURDLE

Access and governance

- Some platforms can't connect yet
- Your institution may need to approve it
- Data rules govern what the AI can see

Complex Works with: Connected, with In-platform as the fallback

Export and import



CRM

AI tool

Manual exports this cycle: **7**

Connected

CRM

AI tool

Refreshes on its own.

Working within your governance structure

Read the policy for its data rules

Most AI policies set rules for student data. Set the AI's permissions to follow them.

Early policies may be out of date

Many were written before platforms added controls over what AI can see and process.

Policies do change

One institution we spoke with re-reviewed its policy as tools expanded and staff kept asking for an approved tool.

Blocked today? Start in your CRM

Run the same analysis with your CRM's built-in AI, like Slate's, while the policy conversation happens.

06

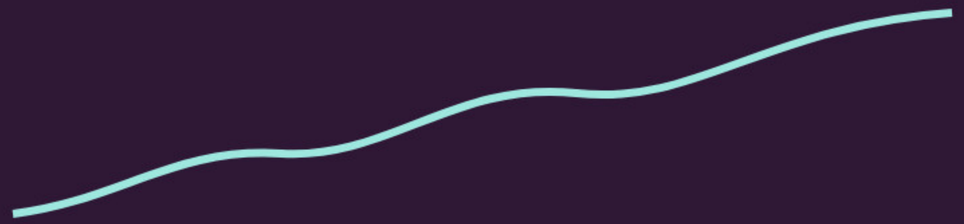
The dashboard, layer by layer

A working model you can ask questions of directly.

Complex

Awesome University · demo dashboard

LAYER 1 · WEBSITE



LAYER 2 · EMAIL



LAYER 3 · CAMPAIGNS



LAYER 4 · INQUIRIES AND PIPELINE



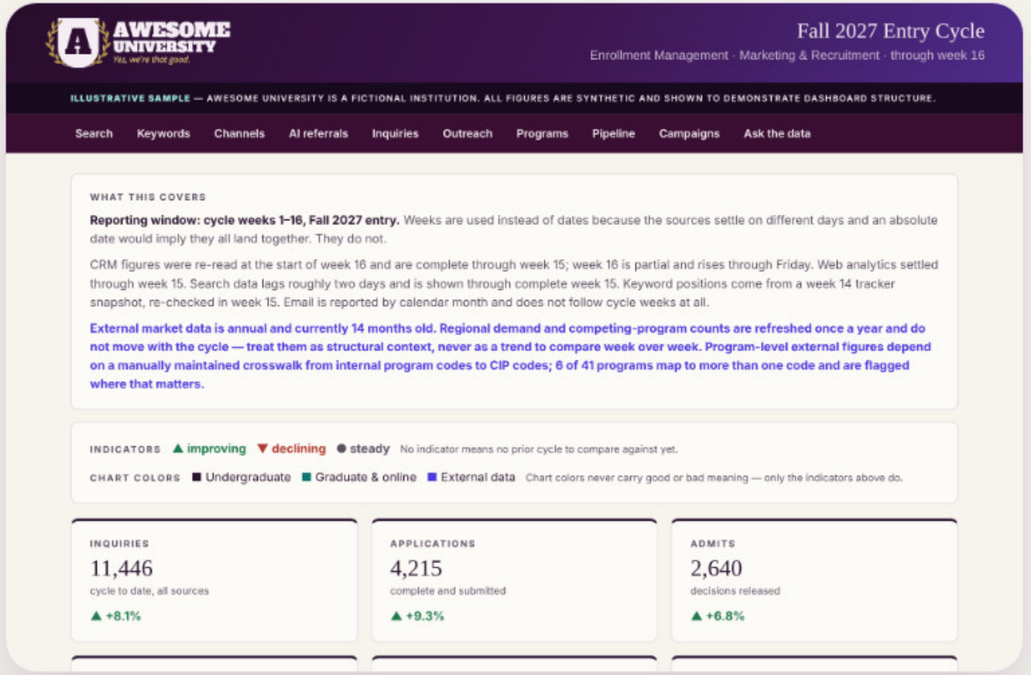
It doesn't have to be the final version out of the gate.

Demo data

The demo: Awesome University

Our own dashboard, rebuilt for a fictional institution with demo data.

- Connected: HubSpot, Salesforce, Microsoft Clarity
- Exported: Google Search Console, Google Analytics
- Prompt it with questions as you go



Complex Demo data for a fictional institution. Not client results.

AWESOME UNIVERSITY
Yes, we're that good.

Fall 2027 Entry Cycle

Enrollment Management · Marketing & Recruitment · through week 16

ILLUSTRATIVE SAMPLE — AWESOME UNIVERSITY IS A FICTIONAL INSTITUTION. ALL FIGURES ARE SYNTHETIC AND SHOWN TO DEMONSTRATE DASHBOARD STRUCTURE.

WHAT THIS COVERS

Reporting window: cycle weeks 1–16, Fall 2027 entry. Weeks are used instead of dates because the sources settle on different days and an absolute date would imply they all land together. They do not.

CRM figures were re-read at the start of week 16 and are complete through week 15; week 16 is partial and rises through Friday. Web analytics settled through week 15. Search data lags roughly two days and is shown through complete week 15. Keyword positions come from a week 14 tracker snapshot, re-checked in week 15. Email is reported by calendar month and does not follow cycle weeks at all.

External market data is annual and currently 14 months old. Regional demand and competing-program counts are refreshed once a year and do not move with the cycle — treat them as structural context, never as a trend to compare week over week. Program-level external figures depend on a manually maintained crosswalk from internal program codes to CIP codes; 6 of 41 programs map to more than one code and are flagged where that matters.

INDICATORS ▲ improving ▼ declining ● steady No indicator means no prior cycle to compare against yet.

CHART COLORS ■ Undergraduate ■ Graduate & online ■ External data Chart colors never carry good or bad meaning — only the indicators above do.

INQUIRIES
11,446

APPLICATIONS
4,215

ADMITS
2,640

Popular uses and high-value uses

POPULAR, LOWER VALUE

“Many popular use cases drive low value”

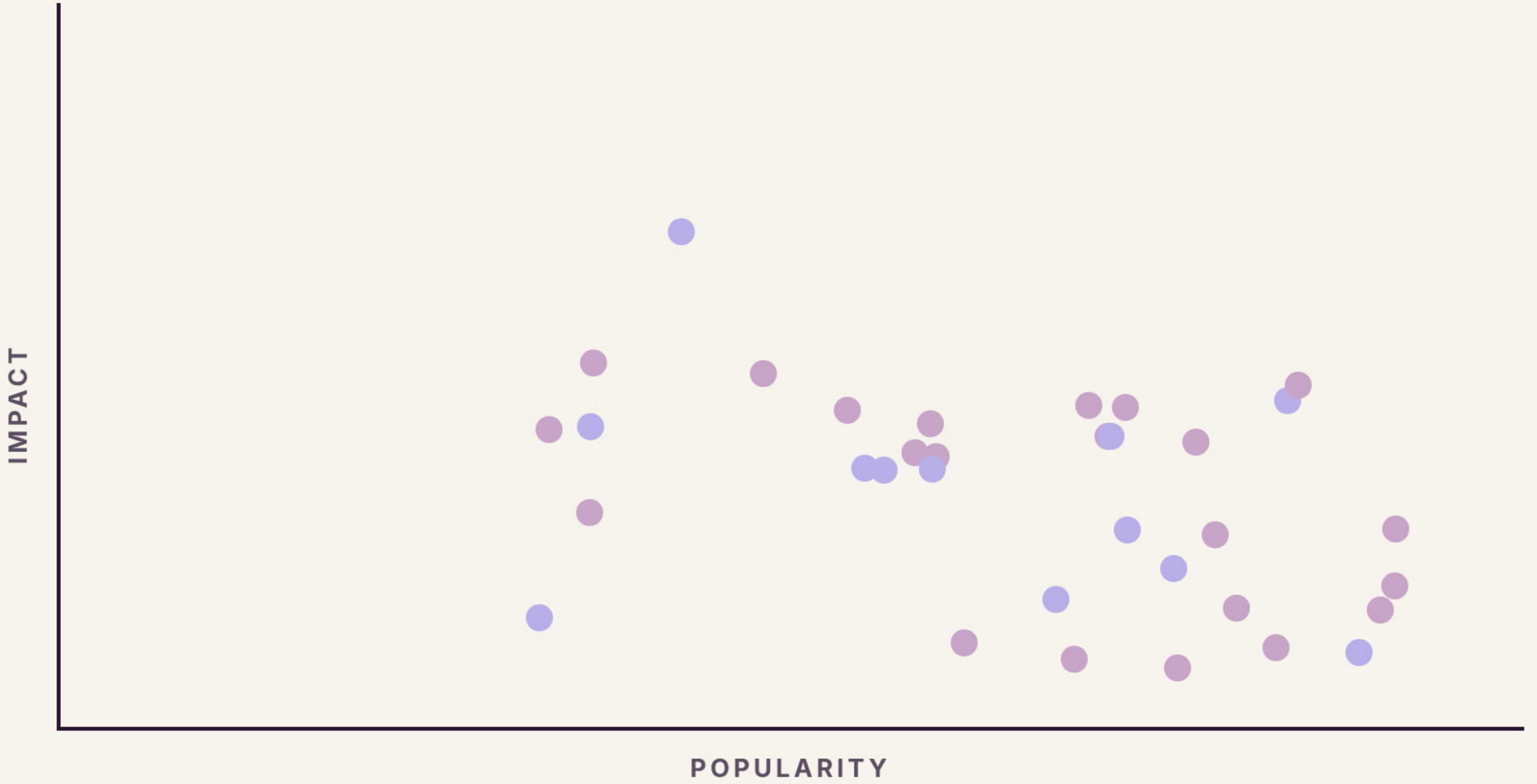
- Create content
- Update content
- Research market and competition
- Send personalized emails

HIGH VALUE

“High value use cases are data and context rich”

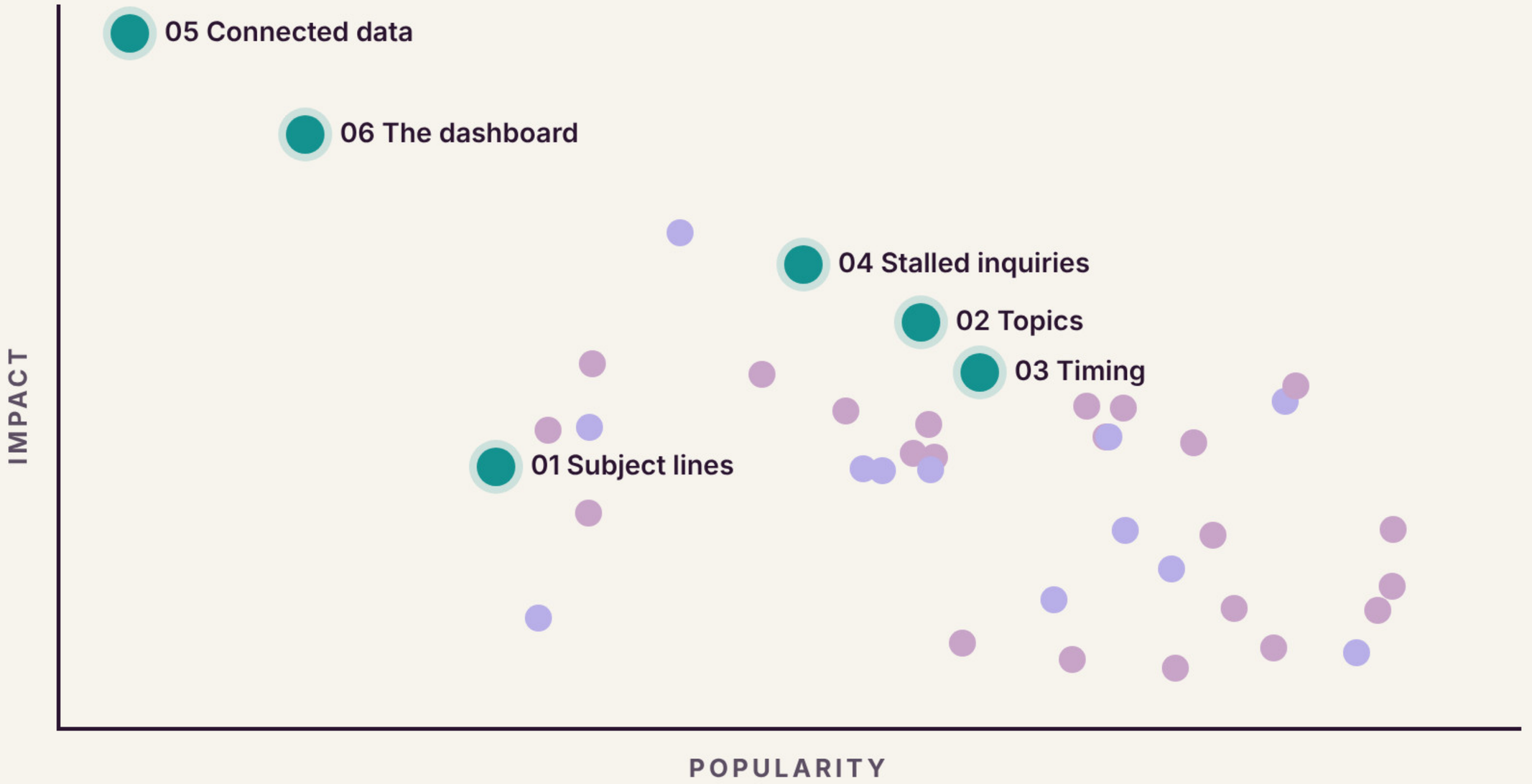
- Analyze campaigns
- Optimize content for conversions
- Prioritize pipeline
- Flag at-risk deals

Source: Yamini Rangan, HubSpot INBOUND [year] keynote. Use cases as shown on her slides.



Grey dots: where most AI use sits today

Illustrative, after HubSpot INBOUND keynote chart



Teal dots: today's six examples

Grey dots: where most AI use sits today

Illustrative, after HubSpot INBOUND keynote chart



WHAT THIS SESSION WAS REALLY ABOUT

The most impactful uses build your intelligence, and use it to make smarter, stronger, faster decisions.

Your next step

Find your label

Easy, Moderate or Complex. Which examples could you run today?

Go one or two steps deeper

Pick the example just past where you are.

Use it this cycle

Act on what you learn before the next big send.

Opportunities to extend learning with this content

More on the resource page

- Every prompt from today's six examples
- A set of best practices in subject lines document for use in the prompt
- Tips on improving and expanding on these prompts
- Bonus examples with a video walkthrough



mickeybaines.com/guru-2026-resources

Thank you.

LINKEDIN

linkedin.com/in/mickeyb

PODCAST

Spark & Scale on YouTube

WEBSITE

mickeybaines.com

EMAIL

mickey@mickeybaines.com