

# REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

DIGITAL MARKETING SERVICES FOR THE  
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN BULGARIA

NOVEMBER 2023

## PROJECT:

The American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) is issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Digital Marketing Services

AUBG is soliciting responses from companies and individuals with experience in paid growth, organic growth and data analytics.

The submissions of all bidders will be compared and evaluated pursuant to the evaluation criteria set forth in this RFP, and a single bidder will be selected as the provider of services and deliverables. This RFP does not commit AUBG to select any organization, award any work order, pay any cost incurred in preparing a response, or procure any services or supplies. AUBG reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received, cancel or modify the RFP in part or in its entirety, or change the RFP guidelines, when it is in the best interest of AUBG to do so and entirely at its sole discretion.

## BACKGROUND:

The American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) offers excellent U.S. education at a very competitive price. AUBG is accredited both in the United States and in Europe and upon successful completion of their studies, AUBG students obtain both an American and European diploma.

AUBG currently offers 14 bachelor programs and one executive masters. The university is home to over 1,000 students from 40+ countries, and more than 80 international professors. AUBG provides the best student facilities in the region: from comfortable dorms to the award-winning building of the America for Bulgaria Student Center and the largest English-language library in Southeast Europe, students enjoy a safe, world-class residential campus.

Close to 6,000 alumni have graduated from AUBG, with 99.8% employed or enrolled in grad school within a few months of graduation. AUBG alumni score remarkable compensation results and many hold leadership positions in the corporate, NGO and government sectors.

AUBG is an undisputed education leader according to the 2022 Bulgarian University Rankings, with Business Administration, European Studies, Journalism and Mass Communication, and Political Science and International Relations rated best in the country and all evaluated programs earning top spots.

## PRODUCT:

### Competitive advantages and key messages:

- **High-quality American liberal arts education** in English, focused on delivering skills and knowledge for a successful career now and in the future;
- **Outstanding alumni success worldwide** with 99.8% of graduates finding work or continuing their education within months after graduation;
- **Great value for money** with tuition and living expenses only a fraction of what it would cost at a similar institution in the U.S. or Western Europe.

**Context:**

- Increasing enrollment at AUBG in the past few years – record numbers due to increased promotional activities;
- Increase in Bulgarian students – locals choose to stay due to various factors, including awareness of AUBG, high fees in the UK after Brexit and growing expenses in the Netherlands;
- Decrease in international students poses a risk to the diverse environment at AUBG, a key benefit for the university;
- Bulgaria in the EU – students still have easier access to good education in Western Europe and are drawn by opportunities beyond Bulgaria;
- Students and parents first choose an occupation, then major(s) and then university which challenges the basis of AUBG’s liberal arts education system;
- Unawareness of the advantages of a liberal arts education;
- Lack of awareness for Bulgaria as a destination, particularly for education;
- Perception of high tuition fees;
- Perception of inconvenient location;
- Price-sensitive market;
- Reluctance to take loans for education.

**Competitors:**

- Universities in the Netherlands, UK and other European countries;
- Universities in the U.S.;
- Other universities in students’ home countries.

**Student Journey**



## **TARGET:**

**UNDERGRADUATE TARGET GROUPS**

1. **Primary** – prospective students

- Ages 17-19
- Study in grades 10-12
- Good academic performance and level of English

2. **Secondary** – parents

- Ages 38-58
- Average or higher monthly household income
- Urban

#### UNDERGRADUATE TARGET MARKETS\*:

|                 |            |         |         |
|-----------------|------------|---------|---------|
| BULGARIA        | ALBANIA    | SERBIA  | KOSOVO  |
| NORTH MACEDONIA | KAZAKHSTAN | USA     | GEORGIA |
| MONGOLIA        | RUSSIA     | UKRAINE |         |

#### EMBA TARGET GROUP

- Ages 28-50
- Three+ years of managerial experience
- High level of English
- Looking for career growth

#### EMBA TARGET MARKETS\*:

|          |         |        |        |
|----------|---------|--------|--------|
| BULGARIA | ALBANIA | KOSOVO | TURKEY |
|----------|---------|--------|--------|

\*All target markets are subject to change according to the AUBG recruitment strategy.

## OBJECTIVES

American University in Bulgaria is looking to partner with a recognized firm to help us improve our online presence and achieve our enrollment goals. We would like to blend our team's skills with the time and talents of an experienced firm to roll out a world class digital marketing strategy.

Our team has highlighted a set of goals for our digital marketing efforts and is looking for a firm that will make these goals their own:

- Increase online visibility and brand awareness among target markets
- Increase engagement across our social media platforms
- Assist Recruitment & Lead Generation through Paid
- Utilize retargeting strategies
- Improve Organic Visibility
- Improve Visibility with Data Collection Solutions

- Measure and analyze performance to assess the effectiveness of strategies and make data-driven decisions for optimization and improvement

### **Purpose**

Proposals for the development and implementation of digital marketing strategy should be a tool in implementing our five-year growth strategy – to increase enrollment to 1500-1700 students in the undergraduate programs (currently 1,000), to 150 (currently 25) in the graduate programs (additional to be launched), and in certification programs (to be launched).

### **Project objectives**

- To propose and implement a digital marketing strategy that will help us achieve our main strategic goals
- To recommend relevant channels and platform such as, but not limited to Meta, Google, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter.
- To manage the project budget efficiently and effectively
- To visualize and ensure monitoring of the results in real time
- To ensure a smooth transition between ad platforms and Slate (the CRM AUBG uses)

## **STATEMENT OF WORK**

The selected digital marketing agency will be responsible for providing a comprehensive range of services to meet our specific goals and objectives. The following services are indicative of what we require, but we are open for new suggestions relative to our target audiences.

### **1. PPC (Pay-Per-Click)**

#### **Google Ads (the whole Google inventory):**

- Keyword research and selection
- Ad campaign strategy and management
- Bid management and budget control
- Performance tracking and reporting
- On-demand dashboards for campaign reporting

#### **Social Media Advertising:**

- Facebook and Instagram ads:
- LinkedIn Ads
- TikTok ads
- Other social media platforms as relevant to our target audience
- On-demand dashboards for campaign reporting

### **2. Web Analytics and Reporting**

- GA 4 management
- Regular performance tracking and reporting
- Custom dashboard creation
- Data analysis and insights
- Collect, aggregate, visualize & activate the collected data

### **3. Search Engine Optimization (SEO):**

- Keyword research and analysis
- On-page and off-page SEO optimization
- Technical SEO enhancements
- Backlink building and outreach
- SEO audits and ongoing monitoring

### **4. Collaboration with the AUBG Communications and Marketing Team**

You will be working closely with the AUBG Internal Marketing team, specifically with the Digital Strategy Manager. We will collaborate on drafting, enhancing, and updating the digital marketing strategy, aligning it with the areas we handle internally: social media management, content creation, video production, and email marketing. The AUBG team will be responsible for providing text and ad creatives. We will rely on your recommendations for copywriting and visuals, aiming to optimize performance based on your expertise.

## **BID SUBMISSIONS**

Deadline: 5:00 pm EET on December 4, 2023.

Late submissions will not be considered. Proposals shall be submitted electronically to [purchasing@aubg.edu](mailto:purchasing@aubg.edu).

The bidder's proposal documentation and any exhibits must be prepared in the English language in their entirety.

Proposals must include:

- Statement warranting the validity of the proposals for a minimum of 30 days from the deadline for bid
- Submissions, explicitly stating that throughout the validity period Bidder unreservedly and unconditionally waives his right to withdraw or amend the bid
- A proposal outlining high level project plan, as well as itemized cost estimates
- Conflict of Interest statement
- Customer References for at least 2 similarly situated customers as compared to AUBG
- CVs of proposed engagement team members
- Company overview, including key financial and ownership information
- Expected levels of availability and support from AUBG staff. Example of monthly process flow and coordination.

## TIMELINE

**Announcement of RFP**

**November 10, 2023**

**Question submissions deadline**

Please send to [marketing@aubg.edu](mailto:marketing@aubg.edu).

**November 20, 2023**

**Responses to questions**

**November 24, 2023**

**Application package submission deadline**

Submit all documents to [purchasing@aubg.edu](mailto:purchasing@aubg.edu).

**December 20, 2023**

5:00 pm EET

**Announcement of finalists**

**January 8, 2024**

**Finalists' presentations**

In-person at AUBG's Skaptopara Campus in Blagoevgrad.

**January 2024**

**Announcement of winner deadline**

**January 19, 2024**

**Contract execution**

**February 15, 2024**

## EVALUATION

**Experience and expertise (25%):**

- with companies with long conversion cycles;
- in managing multiple international markets;
- in the education sector;
- with Slate CRM (<https://slate.org/>) is an advantage.

**Customization and scalability (10%):**

Ability to tailor digital marketing strategies to the university's specific needs and adapt them as the institution grows.

**Performance tracking and reporting (10%):**

Robust tracking mechanisms and comprehensive reporting to analyze campaign performance and ROI.

**Innovative strategies and technologies (10%):**

Integration of innovative marketing strategies and cutting-edge technologies to stay ahead in the competitive digital landscape.

**Compliance and data security (10%):**

Adherence to legal and industry compliance standards, with a focus on data security and privacy.

**Pricing and budget (20%):**

Offered price and cost-effectiveness of the expected results vs. the proposed budget

allocation.

**Client references and case studies (5%):**

Positive client references and relevant case studies showcasing successful digital marketing campaigns for similar projects.

**Collaborative approach and communication (5%):**

Open communication, collaboration, and willingness to work closely with the university's marketing and admissions teams.

**Training and support (5%):**

Provision of training and ongoing support to the university's team to effectively utilize digital marketing tools and strategies.

## SELECTION

The submissions of all bidders will be compared and evaluated pursuant to the evaluation criteria set forth in this RFP. The American University in Bulgaria reserves the right to accept or reject one or all offers, partially or as a whole. This RFP does not commit AUBG to select any organization, award any work order, pay any cost incurred in preparing a response, or procure any services or supplies. AUBG reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received, cancel or modify the RFP in part or in its entirety, or change the RFP guidelines, when it is in the best interest of AUBG to do so and entirely at its sole discretion.

A three-year work agreement will be signed with the winner.

## TERMS

Bidders must specify if they intend to use subcontractors for any part of the services and/or deliverables under this potential engagement. AUBG reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to approve any subcontractor, which bidders propose prior to the project kick-off.

## CONTACTS

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