



TSI Case Study: College Moves in a Global Pandemic

Introduction

In March 2020, the world was facing a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic that turned personal & professional lives upside down. We feared for our own lives and the lives of our loved ones and friends. Masks, temperature guns, social distancing, virtual work & school, not seeing family & friends in person, hand sanitizers, and much more started to become the norm in this strange new world.

“This was a business that didn’t exist pre-pandemic and we had to create brand new systems and approaches to offer effective solutions on the fly. I couldn’t be more proud of the team, their brilliant ideas and flawless execution”

- Chris Smith, TSI CEO

A Unique Challenge: The College Experience

“It was pretty clear that no one knew how to solve this problem.”

College students, many of whom were already away from school for spring break, were abruptly told to ‘go home’ and return to school in a few weeks once things calmed down. But... things didn’t calm down. Students across the country were stuck at home while their belongings were still in their dorms and there were no obvious plans of how to reunite the two. Some belongings were needed in short order to continue in a new virtual learning model or for other reasons, and many personal items, furniture, jewelry, and mementos needed to be secured for later retrieval and use.

“How do you finish the semester when all your stuff is still on campus?... It was pretty chaotic to figure out how to reunite students and the belongings in their rooms.”

- LB Bergene, Duke University, Senior Associate Dean, Housing & Residence Life, East Campus



Students weren’t allowed on campus. Most dorm rooms had 2+ students which made dividing items from afar difficult. Many schools had skeleton staff available on campus. PPE was scarce yet required to have in-person presence and interaction. So, what were college housing administrators, students & parents to do?

“...Duke looked like a ghost town. In the dorms, it was like the Bermuda Triangle - with food

still on plates, beds unmade. It looked like students would be coming right back.”

- Matt Geis, Field Director for TSI Ops.

The Solution - A TSI Team Effort

“Many at TSI had college-aged students themselves and were facing this very dilemma.”

TSI’s Marketing, Sales, and Operations teams got together to create a reasonable, affordable, and effective approach to reunite students and belongings - within a unique set of limitations. The Sales team reached out to school administrators (typically in housing/residence life roles) at colleges and universities nationally to better understand the specific challenges of the situation on the ground.



The Operations team spoke with TSI’s existing vendors to assess their current capabilities and capacity. They also started outreach to new vendors who could help expand on traditional offerings. The Marketing team began work on setting up a template approach to student engagement and school reporting.

“It was clear that no one at the colleges knew how to solve this problem, nor should they have. I mean, a global pandemic smack dab imperfectly timed in the middle of spring break?! Our team had never faced a challenge like this but we quickly banded together to build a pretty complex and impressive solution. We knew we needed to have a high level of human touch as well as an intelligent technology & database system to support it.”

- Chris Smith, CEO of Transit Systems, Inc (TSI)

“Product” Overview

“Parents and students were stressed, concerned, and nervous. We worked seamlessly with multiple vendors.”

The core solution developed by the TSI team hit all the major requirements of students, school administrators, CDC recommendations, and business efficiency. Each implementation varied slightly but all were built from the same basic product.

For partner schools, TSI would assemble a local team of movers and organizers, led by an on-site project manager from Headquarters. Students would be directed to a TSI portal to view their options and sign up for service. Then on designated days, the on-site team would execute.



On-site team at Duke sorting items for storage

High-level process (more detail to come):

- Student registration and service selection
- Zoom call with student
- Preparation of student items
- Pickup and delivery/storage of items
- Follow up with students and administrators

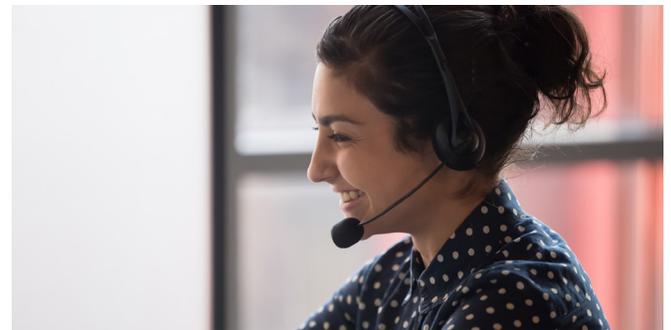
“We worked with schools and students who lived across the country, and each was a little different. We needed to create a custom implementation for each school and get up & running very quickly; clear communication was key. Our team organized and held Zoom calls with students across the US, Europe, and Asia.”

- Heather Hannah, TSI Operations Lead

Marketing & Sales - Details

“Coming up with a turnkey way to create a custom student experience was important.”

The Marketing & Sales teams gathered the intelligence needed to innovate and fine-tune a best-in-breed solution to the ongoing challenge. TSI proactively contacted colleges & universities all over the country to see if they needed a solution and to better understand the nuances of each school’s situation.



“The Operations, Sales, Marketing, and Customer Service teams knew that to deliver quality solutions, we needed to speak to schools and students with sensitivity. It was very personal for everyone, including ourselves. Anyone manning the phones knew they needed to provide a comforting, flexible, smooth & seamless customer experience. We also needed them to gather info on common concerns and requests to help define the final service offerings.” - Stephanie Rosenlund, Director of Marketing, TSI

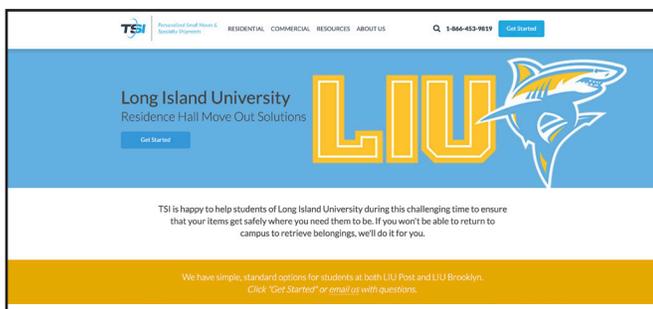
Partnerships with schools were formed through 1:1 sales outreach. Schools signed on with TSI for the core program plus whatever customizations their situation required. At that point, the relationship was passed on to Marketing. The team built a custom landing page for each school, including an image of campus, school colors, and logo. The pages detailed relevant service offerings and timelines, pricing, and details students needed to know from the school.

As students visited the page and made their selections by submitting a form, the Marketing team put together regular reports to keep the school administrators up-to-date; that enabled schools to reach out to “stragglers” and ensure no student’s needs went unaddressed.

Reporting typically included student name and other identifying information, a listing of student items, service(s) selected whether they wanted insurance, and payment information.

“We had more than 2,000 students that were dealing with uncertainty. We chose TSI because they specialize in moving solutions, organizing, packing & moving. Another key differentiator was their willingness to customize their services specifically to college students with the advent of technology.”

- Grace Reynolds, Lafayette College, Director of Residence Life



Landing page for Long Island University students

Operations – Implementation Details

“Our mission is revolutionizing logistics through innovative solutions & the pandemic tested our resolve.”

The college move-out offering wasn’t the traditional solution that TSI offers clients; instead, it was an inventive and creative application of a variety of services. As a data-driven company with high-touch customer service, TSI needed to bundle traditional services and add a few twists.

Combining storage solutions, moving services, shipping, organizing, packing, labor, and project management was the answer. Each school had a slightly different combination, but all had a package of services to meet their students’ needs. TSI’s operations team leveraged existing vendors as well as brought in brand new ones to make this work.



Duke students doing drive-thru pick up of items in fall

Once the students completed the online part of the process, the Operations team worked with school administrators to schedule on-site days to execute. Teams were assembled and deployed.

“Finding movers during the pandemic was tricky given all the protocols. The schools didn’t have the experience we have in logistics for moving. On top of that, it was a deep dive into project management with so many layers to what we were dealing with.”

- Bob Whitehead, TSI, Director of Operations

Operational process:

- Students were scheduled for video conferencing by a logistics expert at HQ.
- An on-site professional organizer held and recorded Zoom calls with each student to scan their room and log the items to be shipped and/or stored.
- The organizer packed items and divided them into piles for storage or shipping as designated by the student during the call.
- The moving team followed organizers to collect packed items and take them to designated spots for shipping pickup or storage.
- Once a student move was completed, students received photos of their items, photos of their boxes and their destinations, and text/email notifications to confirm the number of shipments.

“What was important to us in finding a partner was that we found a company who could handle students with high standards and knew how to not co-mingle belongings. We had double and triple rooms and honestly, we didn’t know how to handle it. They held those virtual sessions, and their solution far exceeded our expectations.”

- AJ Lutz, The New School and Parson School of Design, Director of Housing

The On-site Experience

“Little did I know, I was going back to college and would be living on campus again!”

Move-outs happened over approximately 60 days in the spring and summer of 2020. TSI also re-delivered items to the schools that reopened in the Fall over a 45 day period in August and September. TSI had a team on the ground at each university, consisting of local movers, project managers, and organizers. When the teams arrived onsite there was a multitude of little details to work out in terms of logistics. There were deliveries of storage pods, supplies, PPE, and more. An additional layer of complexity was living in a new, Covid-19-compliant environment. That meant the need for masks, hand sanitizers, and social distancing.

“Back in March 2020, we didn’t know what we know now about the virus. We thought if you touched a surface, you may easily get infected with the virus. That impacted everything we planned for as we shut down the campus. New York City seemed like the epicenter, and we had 800 students to take care of. Even though NYC seemed like a ghost town, our city-based campus made this a huge challenge for us and TSI. Ingeniously, they set up 4 different sites to accommodate.”

- AJ Lutz, The New School and Parson School of Design, Director of Housing

“Little did I know, I was going back to college to live on campus! When we got there, Duke looked like a ghost town. In the dorms, it was like the Bermuda Triangle - with food still on plates, beds unmade. Parents and students were stressed, concerned, and nervous. We worked seamlessly with multiple parties to fulfill the program – project managers, professional organizers, local moving crews, providers of onsite shipping containers, and more.” - Matt Geis, Field Director for TSI Ops was on the ground at Duke University.

“With 5,500 students on campus, it was pretty chaotic to figure out how to reunite students and their belongings in their room. I spent pretty much every day with Matt Geis from the TSI team, we worked so very well together.”

- LB Bergene, Duke University, Senior Associate Dean, Housing & Residence Life, East Campus



Sorting and packing items by student

The Role of Technology

“We needed to solve this problem at scale because it wasn’t a few students, it was thousands of kids.”

Technology played a large role throughout the process, allowing TSI to service more than 3,000 students within a few months - across multiple campuses and with home addresses and time zones varying from around the world.

Phase 1: Student communications and registration

The custom landing pages with distinct forms for each were critical to a) making each school's program feel unique, and b) gathering student data and payment details at scale.

Phase 2: Scheduling and school reporting

Once a student was registered, TSI was able to take advantage of a backend database to easily compile the details needed for both school administrators and the team that would be executing. The operations team then utilized email and texting platforms to schedule students for their Zoom calls.

Phase 3: On-site execution

Zoom calls were key to correctly identifying each student's belongings and what to do with them. Calls were recorded and stored in the Cloud for future reference if needed.

Phase 4: Tracking

After the Zoom session and preparation of belongings, on-site organizers/packers utilized AirTable software to catalog inventory & provide still images of dorm room contents. This tool was leveraged for databasing every job with final details and pictures. It showed proof of the job happening and the details associated with it.

Phase 5: Payment and reconciliation

All of the AirTable details flowed into TSI's Oracle NetSuite ER for final accounting based on an actual number of boxes, services delivered, oversized pieces, etc. The ERP already had payment information because of web forms each student completed, so reconciliation and billing were streamlined.



Teamwork on the ground at St. John's U

The technology utilized throughout each phase of the process was another feat of teamwork

- ensuring that the best tools were being used and integrated to maximize efficiency.

"I was in college myself at the time and sent home without warning and had no idea I wouldn't be coming back to school anytime soon. Once I went to work for TSI, I helped consult on technology solutions because I knew exactly what my peers' needs would be."

- Alyssa Bernstein, TSI College Logistics Coordinator

Results

"Since we solved this crisis during a pandemic, I feel like we can tackle anything."

- * Over 3,000 students moved out (in ~60 days)
- * Over 2,500 students moved back (in ~45 days)
- * 25,000 boxes packed
- * 18 colleges and universities served
- * Shipped approximately 10,000 boxes
- * Stored approximately 15,000 boxes and 15,000 unboxed items (TVs, microwaves, bikes, lamps, etc.)

Samples of Colleges & Universities Served:

- * Duke
- * St. John's
- * Clemson
- * Villanova
- * The New School
- * Tampa
- * Lafayette
- * James Madison
- * LaSalle
- * Long Island
- * Howard
- * Spellman
- * Lehigh

"The way we were able to package and customize our services hugely impacts us for future business with relocation services, multi-unit family properties. With our project managers and organizers and moving & shipping service partners we can solve so many logistical challenges. We've been able to step back after this really big project and gain perspective of what we accomplished and how we can leverage similar approaches for other clients."

- Bob Whitehead, TSI, Director of Operations