SINGAPORE: The 'A' level results are not even out yet but universities are already launching large scale advertising campaigns to attract students.

Just 5 years ago, applications to local universities were a relatively no frills affair.

This year, the 3 local universities will all have a common acceptance deadline and they're going all out to woo students till the very last minute.

The universities are busting tens of thousands of dollars marketing themselves to potential students.

"Part of the reason is also due to the fact that budget is tied to the students they take in, all the changes MOE has made in the past few years to make the university sector more competitive. The world is not just divided between NUS and NTU, we have to work now to attract every single student," said Assoc Prof Tan Thiam Soon, the dean for the Office of Admissions at the National University of Singapore.

With autonomy status, the funding that the universities receive from MOE is mainly determined by student numbers.

Coupled with increased competition from private institutes such as the Management Development Institute of Singapore and Informatics, it is not surprising that marketing efforts have upped significantly.

The director for the Office of Admissions at the Singapore Management University, Alan Goh, said "The old model in which you sit back like a retailer, that model is long gone. Today, increasingly, you need to take on what we call a marketer's or marketing approach to recruitment so you need to be able to show people what your value proposition is all about."

And so SMU treats its potential students to career talks at 5 star hotels.

To portray itself as a hip and happening place, the university also dishes out free Zouk party passes, organizes concerts in the park, and arranges tea sessions at the Equinox restaurant where students can have a panoramic view of their new city campus.

In another innovative marketing tactic, the university also invites NS men to interaction sessions with their deans and faculty members. SMU says most other universities do not target the NS men specifically, and that 95 percent of the NS men who came for their outreach programme has already matriculated with the university.

Not to be outdone, NTU has signed agreements with the top 5 Junior colleges so that students can take undergraduate courses and accumulate credits even before they enter the university.

It is also advertising on trains, buses and extensively in the print media.

As the number of Singaporean students entering into university increases, it is not just the local universities that are vying for a share of the lucrative education pie.

Universities from UK, America, Canada and Australia will all be holding education fairs here while alumni members from top American universities are holding dinner functions to entice potential students. - CNA