



Edu-Marketing: A Full Service Approach to School Marketing

Selling to the school market isn't what it once was. No longer the province of general marketers selling to naïve buyers, the education industry has burgeoned into a tough sales environment limited by ever-tightening budgets and increasing regulation.

Gerry Bogatz, President of MarketingWorks Inc., shares her secrets about proactive market consulting that her company has used for ten years to help its clients pursue strong positioning in the education market.

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by **Gerry Bogatz**

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The education industry is experiencing dramatic growth. As more and more competitors come into the market, companies must become more savvy in distinguishing their products and services from the competition and in building relationships with educators that are critical to selling in schools. Companies have learned that relying on mainstream marketing, whether provided in-house or by an agency, will not give them the leg-up they need in today's competitive environment. Whether or not you have your own marketing and sales capabilities, be sure you depend on school marketing specialists – or edu-marketers.

What is edu-marketing? Edu-marketing is the comprehensive understanding and implementation of marketing and sales in the education marketplace. This highly specialized niche has opened the door for numerous companies selling educational products and services. While built solidly on the principles of marketing and sales, *edu-marketing* goes a step further by tailoring marketing and sales campaigns to meet the very special needs of the education market. These special needs include:

- Understanding school buying cycles and how they impact school purchase decisions. The best offer will not be acted upon if there's no money to be had, so be sure to plan your campaigns when you know educators are planning their purchases.
- Knowing who the decision-makers are and what messages will attract them. Understand the challenges that face educators today and offer them solutions. Know how to segment your target audience and tailor your message specifically to the needs of each group of educators will greatly increase your chances for success.
- Understanding the current trends in the marketplace and how they impact the success of your product or service. Analyze trends to understand what dollars are available in a particular state or district; how standards are being implemented in that state; who in the school or district is empowered to make the buying decision; and what the competition is doing to meet the needs of educators. These are all key elements in preparing successful educational marketing campaigns.

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What services does edu-marketing include? The impact of *edu-marketing* is clear throughout the planning and implementation of every successful marketing campaign. Here are just a few of the thing you need to be successful:

- Design your market research up-front and elicit reactions from your target market on an on-going basis. Asking the right questions from the start is key to understanding how the factors that are impacting education will affect your product's ultimate success.

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- Develop marketing plans that target the right educators and keep your product in the forefront of their minds. Include key influencers as well as decision makers in your plans, going to the places they go and appearing in the periodicals they read.
- Conduct direct mail campaigns that educators will actually open and read. Like the rest of us, teachers and school administrators are inundated with "junk mail" that never gets opened and ads that never get read.
- How can you ensure that your mailing will attract attention? Try including a really attractive offer on the outside envelope. Or better yet, mail an oversized postcard that has the offer clearly and succinctly stated. Another approach that works with many groups is to include your offer in a business letter, recognizing that professional educators want to be addressed as professionals. Educators have little time to sift through their mail in any detail, so it's up to you to make their jobs easy.
- Follow up the leads you get from direct mail, advertising, and exhibiting with inside sales performed by trained professionals. The folks on the phones cannot be traditional telemarketers, who are in danger of insulting their audience the minute there's a deviation from a prepared script. Rather, inside sales personnel must understand and speak the language of educators and address their needs.
- Try relying more and more on inside sales to build the customer relationships that are key to the growth of your business. Depend on these educational sales professionals to get key referrals to other educators, to respond to e-mail and Internet inquiries in a friendly and professional manner, and to be the face and smile behind your customer service.
- Provide customer service and ongoing product training so that educators have a convenient way to learn how a product can best be used. Without this after-sales support, educators will look for other ways of solving their problems, and your product will end up back on the shelf, gathering dust with all the others that never get used.

- Manage all of your marketing and sales activities through a database that provides the kinds of reports that allow you to monitor and improve your sales process on an ongoing basis. Use your database not only to record sales but also to take notes about conversations that will make subsequent contacts with educators more meaningful; to rank prospects as to their likelihood of purchasing so that you can follow up on “hot” prospects more often than others; and to source your leads so you can learn which of your marketing efforts are working and which are not.
- Finally, give your products the project managers they deserve. The very best marketing plan will lead to disappointing results unless it is implemented by a manager that understands how the world of education works.

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Why work with edu-marketers? Because they bring understanding and expertise to your efforts as only educational marketing professionals can. Remember that a single mistake in any one aspect of your marketing plan – like mailing to the wrong people, or at the wrong time, or with an offer that doesn’t get read, or with insufficient follow-up to the leads that are generated – can lead to disappointing, or even disastrous, results. Just as you wouldn’t take your car to a brake shop to have the muffler repaired, you shouldn’t rely on someone who doesn’t have a solid background in educational marketing

when you’re trying to sell to schools. Whether your company has a marketing department or relies on outsourcing, you’ll end up with marketing and sales efforts that work if you incorporate *edu*-marketing into your plans.

Gerry Bogatz is president of MarketingWorks, Inc. – the education marketplace connection – a firm that specializes in edu-marketing. Offering a full range of services, MarketingWorks assists companies that want to increase their sales and visibility in the education marketplace. Clients have included Educational Testing Service, Turner Learning, U.S. News & World Report, Creative Classroom magazine, T.H.E. Journal, Discovery Channel, Computer Curriculum Corporation, Steck Vaughn Publishing, McDougal Little, and Time-Life Education. For more information on edu-marketing services, contact Gerry Bogatz at MarketingWorks, Inc. at 1.888.MWORKS4.