

Influence schools

How brands can make an impact in the education sector

Let's face it.

Selling to schools is tough. Teachers and school leaders are just too busy to open your emails or hear your marketing messages.

So how can you overcome this natural reluctance to be sold to and get your brand or message to the people in school that matter?

This guide will tell you all you need to know.



Why are teachers so difficult to reach?

“Push marketing to teachers simply will not work anymore.”

*Graham Cooper, Product Strategy Director
Juniper Education*

Teachers and school leaders are busy. Really busy.

So busy in fact, that even before the Covid-19 pandemic, they were working an extra 9 million hours without pay.

It is no wonder that they have no time to read your carefully crafted marketing emails, newsletters and invitations to webinars.

This lack of time means that the way teachers consume information, form their opinions or choose to make purchases has changed.

Instead of seeing a product featured in an email or requesting a demo, a primary head may jump on a Facebook group and ask other heads what the best tool for recording safeguarding issues is.

A leader of a multi academy trust might scroll through advice on an academy association web site for recommendations for the best finance software.

And a teacher might decide to use the same literacy resources they've seen featured in an article on their favourite blog or teaching magazine.

Instead of responding to push marketing, teachers and school leaders are responding to recommendations and information from sources they trust to make buying decisions and form opinions.

This means the way brands and organisations communicate with those working in education needs to change too.

This paper will explain exactly how education suppliers wishing to attract more business and change the buying behaviours of school staff can adapt to this new environment.

“Teachers are moving from classroom to classroom with little time to check emails during the working day. Yet they are bombarded by email marketing from so many suppliers.”

Philippa Bowden, Brand Manager, Capita Reading Cloud

What's changed?

There have traditionally been two options for education businesses to reach their audiences:

1 Public relations – the art of developing a brand's reputation through earned media coverage, write ups on blogs and getting influencers to talk about you.

2 Marketing – the art of generating incoming leads for products through advertising, email marketing, events and content on a brand's social feeds and website.

Both disciplines are linked of course. The great reputation that the PR team creates helps generate leads. And marketing's promotions can lead to better brand recognition too.

But the way teachers and school leaders make buying decisions has meant that unless PR and marketing efforts are aligned closely, huge opportunities are being lost. The constant bombardment of email marketing is switching teachers off brands, not on to them.

“Education suppliers have been guilty of just talking about features in the past. But what teachers want help with is reducing workload or engaging students. If we do not help them solve these challenges, they will simply not listen to what we have to say.”

Graham Cooper, Product Strategy Director, Juniper Education

“Our job as educational suppliers is to show those that work in education how our products or services will save time and boost student attainment, not simply what the product can do.”

Richard Evans, Founder of The Profs and The Way Up



PR sells a brand

There is no doubt that the media coverage and recommendations a talented PR team generate can shift the weight of opinion towards a particular product or service.

The strength of a good PR team is that they know how to craft stories teachers and headteachers want to read.

They know that teachers will not respond to an overt sales push of a product, but they will see a case study about a school or a top tips piece on their favourite teacher web site or magazine and want to use the same tools featured in their own schools. Or see a product review by a blogger they follow and want a demo.

These methods work. According to Hubspot's Iliyana Stareva in her book Inbound PR, 47% of buyers rely on media articles before making a purchase.

This makes it the number one source after word-of-mouth recommendation.

For education brands, that means traditional PR needs to remain a large part of your communications plan, no matter what.

But if PR is done in isolation or with little reference to the overall business goals of an organisation, then it has its limitations as an effective tool to change buyer behaviour.

Let's use an example to illustrate this:

1	To the Moon is a fantastic new software program that helps engage children in STEM subjects. Kids are given different tasks they need to complete to help get their astronaut avatar to board a shuttle and fly to the moon.
2	To the Moon employs a traditional PR agency that has put together a plan with objectives, key messages, target audiences and deliverables. Their planned activity includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitching case studies of schools using the product to popular teacher web sites and magazines • Advice columns on subjects such as how to teach STEM in the early years • Hard hitting opinion pieces that examine what's holding pupils back when it comes to STEM • Product reviews from teacher bloggers. <p>So far, so good.</p>
3	But even though the overall goal of the team at To the Moon is to increase sales via the PR campaign, this particular objective wouldn't feature in the PR plan. Instead, the agency focuses on goals such as amount of coverage or tone of coverage. All of this is important, but no link is made to whether this coverage is actually increasing visitors to the web site, generating leads or understanding whether any of the leads generated are ready to buy.
4	Without closing this loop, the CEO of To the Moon is never fully convinced that the investment in PR is delivering on the company's overall business goals. Or that the articles and content being published are actually shifting the weight of opinion towards more teachers or heads buying the product.
5	The PR agency is also blind to this. They only focus on the amount of coverage they receive and pat themselves on the back each time a new article or review appears, without ever understanding if that coverage is having an impact on the target audience.

Marketing sells a product

Marketing, on the other hand, is laser focused on the sales goals of the organisation, namely on increasing leads. Although highly targeted, there can be drawbacks to this approach if it ignores the overall perception of the brand.

We have been on the end of many conversations with marketing people in education who have described how the regional sales manager will walk in and demand more leads in a particular area of the country. Or a product manager will ask them to prioritise campaigns for their product over all others after a particularly quiet month.

Marketing's strength is that they can deliver these campaigns at short notice.

The downside is that the everchanging nature of messages coming out from the brand makes it harder for teachers to build an attachment to the organisation.

The sales focused approach of the activity to meet the short-term goals of the product or sales manager also means that **teachers start to see the brand as just wanting to shift product.**

Teachers are probably more switched off by this 'sales only' approach than any other audience. They go into the profession because they care. They are willing to get up early and work late nights, weekends and holidays to help the children in their schools.

The brands they trust will be those that acknowledge this commitment and demonstrate that they too are committed to helping them do a good job.



Marketing sells a product

A marketing only approach therefore often fails to achieve the long-term goals most CEOs and marketing directors have for their brands.

The best way of illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of a marketing only approach is through an example:

1	Mission to Mars is a competitor business to To the Moon. Its target audience is the same teachers and heads looking to engage children in STEM subjects with their software, which takes children on a trip to Mars.
2	As they do not have a big team, Mission to Mars employs an education marketing agency to increase lead generation.
3	The agency embarks on a campaign that includes email marketing and advertising on popular teacher web sites.
4	The campaign is completely focused on selling the product, but not on creating an understanding of what the Mission to Mars brand stands for.
5	Emails focusing on the features are sent out, discounts are offered and quirky facts about scientists are included in a monthly email newsletter almost as an afterthought to help balance out the product news.
6	At the end of the first quarter, the agency is able to present data back to the software provider with numbers of click throughs from the email and advertising campaign. Sales have taken a slight upturn. All seems well in the world.
7	However, only a tiny percentage of teachers who received the emails opened them. Among the few teachers that did open the emails, there are only a handful that are not put off by the overt product focus.
8	Over time, more and more effort needs to be thrown in to the marketing campaign to counter the effect of diminishing response rates.
9	And despite the money that's been spent, a huge opportunity has been lost as few teachers are aware that the product was created by a former teacher, or that months of research went into creating it, or that Mission to Mars' in-house trainers know some great activities for inspiring STEM learning.
10	Mission to Mars has missed its chance to build a reputation as a brand that cares as much about teaching science as the teachers do.

The strengths and weaknesses of PR and marketing

So, what is an organisation that wants to sell more products or influence the opinions of teachers to do?

Both PR and marketing have their definite strengths. Marketing's ability to react to a quick need for leads and its ability to measure the impact on sales should be celebrated. PR's ability to talk a teacher's language and get the right people talking about a brand is exemplary too.

PR	Marketing
What PR does right <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand teachers and school leaders as an audience, what content they respond to and what they will ignore• Crafting key messages that resonate• Getting exposure for an education brand• Strong storytellers who know the right angle to get your content published• Know how to use existing engaged audiences that have been created by forums, media and education bloggers to deliver a brand's message	What marketing does right <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can easily measure impact on bottom line• Understand clearly-defined goals e.g. a certain number of leads generates a certain number of sales• Proactive and targeted in approach, focusing on a specific event or product launch• Experienced with data and measurement• Skilled with SEO and data-led campaigns
Where does PR go wrong? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education PR campaigns have traditionally not gone beyond awareness generation• Historically it has been difficult to measure the impact on bottom line	Where does marketing go wrong? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A tendency to focus on what the business is selling, not how it helps teachers• Limited understanding of how to use existing engaged teacher audiences via forums and social media• Use of interruption marketing tactics, such as email or advertising, which are not focused on building the long-term sales funnel

To take advantage of the two disciplines' strengths and to build teachers' trust, education brands need to change the way they have traditionally approached these two fields.

We believe the change starts with PR.



Education PR reinvented

Think about it. PR professionals have a long history of crafting messages and content that teachers will respond to. They have the skills to get your brand noticed and your reputation built.

If these talents are combined with a focus on the business goals of the brand, then a powerful shift can take place. One where PR does not just lead to increased awareness but to changes in behaviour and sales leads.

This approach requires a little more planning and more creativity upfront, but results in the type of PR that CEOs have been crying out for for some time.

Let's examine how this could work in an example.

- 1 Beyond the Stars, another science software provider in education, is keen to increase sales in a very crowded market. They employ a PR agency using a business-focused approach to PR.
- 2 Beyond the Stars briefs the agency. 'We want coverage in all the right places,' the CEO demands. But this agency is a little different. They ask a lot of questions about why the business wants the coverage. Eventually the answer comes: 'We want to sell more software,' explains the CEO.
This is the business reason behind the campaign and one which defines how the agency will approach the campaign from the outset.
The agency brings together the best of PR with lead generation activities to ensure the activity meets the CEO's objectives.
- 3 They research the target audience and discover their biggest concern is having enough time to create interesting engaging content for their students. A download is created which is full of engaging lesson ideas. This is put behind a gated area of the website where teachers' contact details are requested before they can access it (with the relevant opt in and out options for further marketing).
- 4 The PR team then generates a number of articles on creating engaging science lessons, which feature content from the download, and pitch these to the education media. Many of the articles will include a link back to the download on Beyond the Stars' web site. These links will increase traffic to the site, increase the number of sign ups they can achieve for the download and expose them to a new audience of leads.
- 5 The PR team does not stop there, engaging the help of influential bloggers to link to the report via their social media profiles. They ask the bloggers to try some of the ideas in the report too, write a post on their site and link back to it generating more traffic.
- 6 The PR team also creates a social advertising campaign that launches on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to promote the report.
They collaborate with the internal marketing team and run a related competition on the company's social feeds. They also post blogs on creative science lessons on the brand's website so the greatest exposure to teachers and school leaders is achieved.
- 7 The result is months of coverage on social feeds, influencer sites and the education press associating Beyond the Stars with creating engaging science lessons. There are also hundreds of new leads from the email sign-ups that can be nurtured by the marketing or sales teams.
- 8 The CEO can instantly see a return on investment and the marketing and sales teams are happy with all the new leads they now have to cultivate. The integrated approach has succeeded in improving brand awareness and securing new business.

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This example shows how employing this new type of integrated PR campaign can vastly improve the impact of your marketing and PR efforts.

And the good news is that this approach can work whether you are selling a product, promoting a service, trying to get sign-ups for a campaign or supporters for a charity. It also works whether you are targeting the heads of multi academy trusts, school network managers, headteachers or teachers. The content will be different and may need to be delivered in a different format, such as a webinar or video or via different channels, but if you follow the process, the results are the same.

So, if you are looking to reinvigorate your PR and marketing campaigns in this way, where should you begin?

Just follow our five-step plan outlined in the rest of this guide..

Reinventing your own campaigns A 5 Step Guide

1

Have a clear objective

Be as specific as possible about what you want from any campaign.

If an education business wants to increase revenue, this needs to be defined accurately. How many sales would equate to the revenue you are looking to generate? And prior to that, how many leads or what levels of web traffic will you need to achieve that number of sales? This information allows you to break the business goals down into clear targets to aim for.

If your goal is not sales, but changing opinions, try to define how many people you will need to reach with your message before the necessary shift starts to take place.

This exercise helps you focus the efforts of any campaign and ensures you do not get distracted. It will also give you a precise idea of what you need to measure to judge the campaign's success.

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2

Understand your audience, their hopes, fears and needs

Outline what your target audience needs.

Here you need to think beyond the features in your product. Delve into what problems they need help solving.

Speak to your prospects and find out what content they are consuming and where they are getting that content.

Are they reading the TES, SecEd or Academy Today? Are they listening to the EdTech podcast or NAHTEdge? Are they following Teacher Toolkit, UKEdChat or TeacherTapp on Twitter? Or is LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram more their thing?

Go to these outlets and try to unpick what it is your audience is learning from them in relation to the challenges that they have. And what format they like to digest their content in – audio, video, written?

3

Define your message

Use what you have learnt about your audiences to develop your key messages.

Maybe you have found out that the biggest concern for your audience of multi academy trust leaders is having access to up-to-the-minute information on the progress of pupils across their trust. If you have a product that helps solve this issue, your messaging should tap into this need.

Conduct some keyword research and discover what terms this group of individuals are searching on around the subject you have identified, to help refine your ideas.

4

Create a multichannel delivery plan

Once you have defined your messages, your next step is to think about what content to create.

You can use your knowledge of your audiences to help define what sort of content would be most suited to their needs.

A busy teacher audience may want a series of short guides or videos, rather than a long report, for example.

A school's IT team may want a Q&A webinar featuring experts in networking.

This content needs to be reused on your own site, on social feeds, in articles pitched to the press and in paid ads for it to have the biggest impact.

A good way to help plan your campaigns is to use the PESO model.

The PESO methodology was developed by Spin Sucks' founder and CEO, Gini Dietrich. The model was designed to help create integrated PR campaigns that deliver more than traditional PR. They combine paid (P), earned (E), shared or social (S) and owned (O) channels to draw your audiences in and generate results.

The box-out below explains each element in more detail and there is a visual representation overleaf:

Excerpt from the SpinSucks blog on PESO:

'Paid Media

Paid media, in this case, doesn't refer to big, fancy commercials and highly creative print ads. On the contrary, paid media for a PR program is social media advertising, sponsored content, and email marketing.

Earned Media

Earned media is what you know as either publicity or media relations. It's getting your name in print. Having a newspaper or trade publication write about you. Appearing on the noon news to talk about your product. It's what the PR industry is typically known for, because it's one of the few tangible things done.

Shared Media

Shared media is also known as social media. It's evolving as well and continues to build beyond just marketing or customer service teams using it. Organizations have begun to use it as their main source of communications internally and externally.

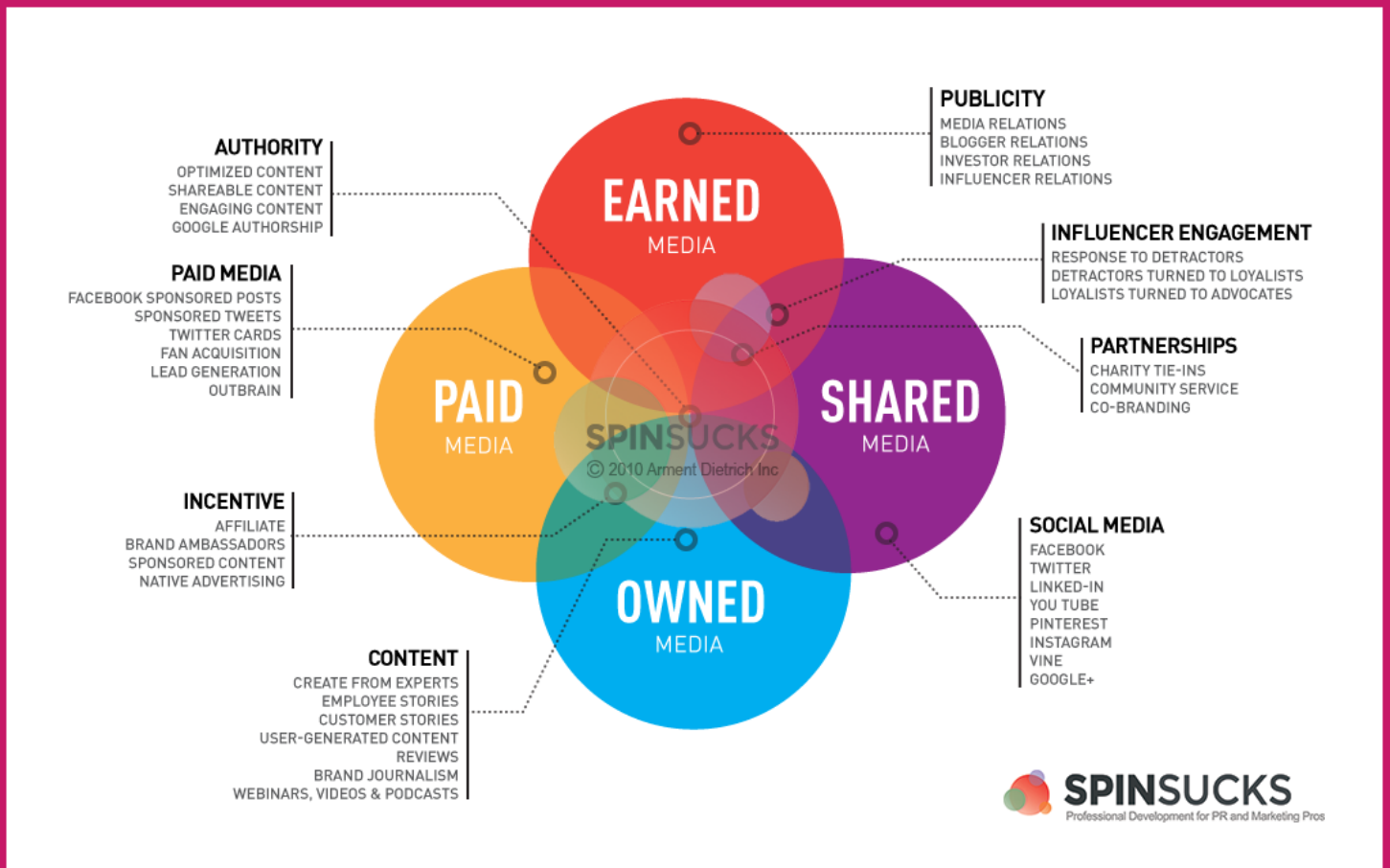
Owned Media

Owned media is otherwise known as content. It is something you own, and it lives on your website or blog. You control the messaging and tell the story in a way you want it told.'

Source: <https://spinsucks.com/communication/pr-pros-must-embrace-the-peso-model/>

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Using the PESO model allows you to optimise the opportunities for each piece of content. As described in the Beyond the Stars example earlier in this guide, a download or report can be promoted via social ads and blogger link ups (**Paid**), articles in the press and reviews on blogger sites (**Earned**), a competition and posts on social (**Shared**) and blogs and infographics on the brand's web site (**Owned**).

5

Measure and revise

The final step is to measure results along the way and revise activity as you go along.

Your ultimate goal may be more leads, so your measure of success may be the number of email addresses you receive. If you have a good CRM system, you should also be able to look at which campaigns generated the leads that resulted in actual sales so that you can refine your activity in future.

While the campaign is still running, also look at web traffic and click through rates you received for different elements of media coverage or social ads so that adjustments can be made during the project.

You may start with a campaign that focuses on social ads on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. But if only Twitter is delivering results, then you can re-focus your spend on that channel to make sure you get the greatest return on investment.

Do not be afraid to experiment either, as testing different channels and approaches only furthers your understanding of what your audience responds to.

Following these five steps, will ensure you create an integrated PR campaign that delivers on your business objectives.

Times have changed. The way teachers and school leaders buy has changed too.

Teachers do their own research online, they take heed of what bloggers say and they speak to other teachers for recommendations. They have become wary of sales pitches and marketing emails.

The only brands teachers want to engage with are the ones that are able to understand their challenges and help solve them.

Organisations wishing to sell to and influence teachers need to change the way they operate to ensure they keep up. Their messaging needs to resonate with schools. They need to be seen in the places school staff go for information.

And they need to help provide schools with solutions to their problems.

By reinventing their marketing and PR campaigns to meet these challenges, organisations can ensure strong growth of their brand and the increased influence they are aiming for.



There are two types of education PR.

One that only focuses on the coverage itself plus a few tweets or posts to promote it, and the other that focuses very closely on your business goals.

At the Influence Crowd, it's your business goals we concentrate on. That means we implement highly targeted, integrated PR campaigns that prove their value through incoming leads and changed opinions.

Using the knowledge and relationships built up over 16 years in this sector, we engage and delight your audiences through great coverage, shareable social content and by getting the key industry influencers behind you.

Contact us on **020 7117 6015** or email **hello@theinfluencecrowd.co.uk** to find out how we could help you achieve your business goals.



theinfluencecrowd.co.uk