



# EXPOSED THE TRUTH BEHIND MARKETING TO SCHOOLS



# SPRINT EDUCATION...

is an award-winning digital agency that has pioneered education marketing to the UK education sector since 2007.

We create over 48 million teacher connections for our clients every year through delightful digital and off-line marketing plans, and our education marketing software (Campus); attracting teachers, school staff, and educational establishments to our clients' brands.

## **This whitepaper was created by Ben.**

"I co-founded Sprint Education back in 2007, and since then I've learnt so much about our industry, the inner-workings of marketing to the education sector, and importantly the pitfalls education businesses **MUST** avoid when it comes to choosing an education agency to manage their marketing. This report is designed to help guide you towards investing your marketing budget wisely, and ensure your marketing strategies succeed."



### **Ben Lewis**

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# CONTENTS

Exposed! The Truth Behind Marketing to Schools... ..	4
The 3 Conversations .....	5
#1 The Data Conversation .....	6
#2 The Software Conversation.....	13
#3 The Email Broadcasting Conversation.....	20
Important Disclaimer .....	25
The Next Step.....	26

# EXPOSED!

## **The truth behind marketing to schools, and the 3 conversations you MUST have with your marketing provider.**

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I don't believe in keeping secrets and over-complicating concepts which can baffle customers; concepts which could, with a little straight-talking, be grasped by anyone.

I also massively believe in having enough clear knowledge in order to make sensible and informed decisions, especially when it comes to making business decisions which can, let's be frank, change lives!

It's these two concepts, coupled with the recent rise of the battle between outreach and inbound marketing philosophies within the education sphere that has encouraged me to write this groundbreaking education marketing report.

Over the last few years I've been talking to hundreds of education suppliers (it's what I do every day). Some are new to the market, some have been looking to leave their current marketing agency, some are looking to bring their marketing back in-house, and some are companies with many years' experience of selling to schools.

It has struck me in no small way how much some of these companies have failed to consider when planning and executing their marketing. To be honest, it petrifies me that the most fundamental issues surrounding marketing to schools are not being considered, or worse, that education suppliers are being misled" down a strategic path that is doomed to fail.

## The 3 Conversations

I will now dissect the three most common conversations I have with education suppliers aiming to sell more to schools. As you are reading this report I'm guessing that these are the conversations and questions that you are hoping to have answered too. I'll then give you the precise questions that you should be asking your education marketing provider within these conversations to ensure your marketing budget is invested with the right team and the right strategy.

Any education marketing specialist worth their salt will be happy to have these conversations with you, and they should be only too happy to answer the questions I am about to recommend to you.

Now, what I'm about to share with you might cause you some alarm... it might make you feel uncomfortable, or you might read it and sit back with a confident smile on your face knowing that the facts I'm sharing with you have already been shared with you by your current education marketing provider; and you already know how to not fall into even the most basic pitfalls surrounding education marketing this year.

Oh, and you'll notice, in the interests of transparency, and in the spirit of this very report, I've asked members of our team to answer each of the questions on behalf of Sprint Education. I like to think that these are exemplary answers and if you agree you can always use them as a benchmark when you're talking to other education marketing specialists.

**This report will be so powerful to you that it is likely to change the whole way you execute your marketing.**

# #1

## THE DATA CONVERSATION

In the past when I've been asked the question, "What makes Sprint Education different from other education agencies?" I've always focused on the superior designs we create for clients, the strategic themes that we've pioneered for sellers to schools, and the fact that we're the only agency to own and host our own email servers (which results in open rates 43% higher than the industry average by the way).

Although our data was as great – if not better – than anyone else's (currently including around 30% of teachers opted-in through Teacher Perks), it never really seemed sexy enough to focus on too heavily.

However, for all that I wanted potential clients to focus on our superior content and sending infrastructure, for many of them it all still boiled down to the data. Which got us thinking, what could we do to make our education database as revolutionary and downright sexy as the rest of our service?

### **"What makes Sprint Education data better than other education marketing agencies?"**

Back in December 2018, 11 months on from the launch of Teacher Perks, we took stock of where we were at with our Education Data:

- 25% of teachers in our database were opted-in.

- 20,000 monthly updates being made by our in-house Data Team.
- 155,000 direct to teacher email addresses that we could target.

So, we'd opted-in a quarter of our database within 12 months (Teacher Perks launched in January 2018), the database was being cleansed at an impressive rate, and we had a huge audience of teachers we could market to directly on behalf of our clients.

But it wasn't enough. So we decided to completely re-think how we managed our data and do something extra ordinary (or even extraordinary!).

### **Realising we needed to expand our team...**

We were faced with the challenge of expanding and constantly cleansing a colossal and rapidly changing database.

To achieve this we knew we had to expand our team of data managers with new recruits that had a fantastic work ethic, a meticulous eye for detail, and who would class data management as their dream job (I mean, we all love getting stuck into some data management but we know it's not exactly like playing bass for the Rolling Stones).

### **Finding exceptional people to drive us forward...**

Then it hit us. What if we gave people the opportunity to work for us from home, fitting in their data management work around their busy lifestyles/jobs - and being paid based upon the number of meaningful updates they make? Would that be enticing enough to attract people of the calibre we wanted?

Within just a couple of days we were inundated with applications, including some exceptional candidates such as Ben, a commercial

airline pilot, Melanie, a Freelance Editor, and Steve, a retired Systems Analyst for a FTSE250 company.

### **Implementing processes and training to ensure scrutiny...**

After shortlisting our preferred candidates we set them multiple tests, including...

- Proof Reading - to ascertain the applicant's attention to detail.
- Data Collection - to illustrate tenacity for gathering information.
- Presentation - to see how accurately they present key material.

Then the successful candidates were given access to a test version of our Campus software and asked to complete 5 hours of data management, each working on schools in a specific LEA and each referring to a comprehensive training manual that Pauline and Kelsey (their office-based line managers) had prepared for them.

Their work was then checked rigorously, and once it was clear that they had achieved the required standard, they were released onto the live Campus database. Their work was then spot-checked daily going forwards.

### **Assessing the impact today...**

As of today, we now have 11 external data managers and the number of meaningful updates has more than tripled from where we began in December 2018. The results for the last 3 months are:

- Month 1 = 59,466 updates.
- Month 2 = 62,383 updates.
- Month 3 = 74,548 updates.



In Month 3 these 74,548 meaningful updates equated to:

- 25,070 new teachers/staff added to the database.
- 31,207 new job roles added to the database.
- 18,271 new teacher/staff emails added to the database.

However, it's not just in terms of expansion that our clients are benefitting from the almost 24/7 nature of our new data management processes. Every month on average we are now:

- Closing 3,773 teachers/staff who have left.
- Editing 1,960 existing teacher/staff email addresses.
- Editing 3,213 existing teacher/staff job roles.
- Visually checking and verifying 3,214 teachers/staff.

These numbers are fantastic, but the real reason we are making this huge investment is of course to generate delivery and higher open rates for our clients. And it's working...

- Previous 12 Months' Average Open Rate = 23.1%
- Last 12 Months' Average Open Rate = 27.0%

This is a significant increase, which really does show that the data is more accurate than ever before. And not only that, with the database having expanded by around 38% (we can now email 255,000 teachers/staff directly), our clients are now able to shout about their products and services to a much wider audience.

It's certainly an exciting time to launch your marketing to our world-class education database.

## Questions to ask when searching for an education data provider:

### Q. Who owns your data and does anyone else use it?

Recent research shows that many education specialists share their lists with other agencies, resulting in huge groups of education providers all hitting the same data. Here at Sprint Education we don't pass out our data to any other education agencies to share with all of their clients.

### Q. Can I speak to your data-controller about your GDPR-compliance?

Always ask to have a chat with the data-controller to ensure their data is GDPR-compliant. They should be happy to answer any of your questions which should include:

- Q. Can you explain to me how your data is GDPR compliant?*
- Q. Is the data gathered with explicit opt-in consent?*
- Q. If you rely on Legitimate Interest to process data, can I read your LIA (Legitimate Interest Assessment)?*
- Q. How do you unsubscribe your data?*
- Q. What methods do you use to expand your data?*



**Sophie says** - *“Just give us a call. We’ll be happy to talk you through our data-cleansing process and how we pioneered the analysis of the returns data from every email campaign we send for our clients. We’ll also tell you*

*about how large portions of our database are gathered with explicit opt-in consent, and how the rest of our data complies with the GDPR under the Legitimate Interest clause. Also, our double unsubscribe failsafe guarantees that we'll never send to a school that has unsubscribed from our mailings. Finally, I'll tell you about how we've built a unique opt-in education ecosystem through Teacher Perks and encourage you to read our detailed report on the GDPR and its impact on marketing to schools." [Read it here >](#)*

### **Q. How often is your data updated, how can you prove this?**

Ask about their cleansing and expanding cycles, and what techniques they use to keep it clean. Please note Sprint Education's Data Managers make, **on average, 65,000 data updates every 30 days.**

### **Q. Do you have any data integrity reports running?**

With the best will in the world, it's just not possible to keep over 7 million data records up to date simply by cleansing an LEA or county at a time. Trust me, we used to update our database in this way until we realised that we would have to work way smarter if we were ever going to be able to keep it all in tip-top condition.

So, make sure you ask your education data provider for a detailed overview of how they cleanse their data. Do they have any data integrity reports running over the database that help them to identify the records that may be incorrect or which need urgently updating or investigating? If they don't, then the likelihood is that they're simply aimlessly ploughing through the database!



**Ian says** - *“We have over 50 SQL reports running over our database on a nightly, weekly, or monthly basis. These reports highlight everything from where a teacher’s name or email address is formatted incorrectly, to discrepancies between our data and data published by the Department for Education, and importantly where a data record hasn’t been updated or visually checked in the past 12 months. These reports are all automated, so all we have to worry about is investigating the results and making the relevant updates, ensuring our day is spent focusing on the data records that most require our attention!”*

**Q. Who are your Data Managers, and how are they qualified/tested to manage your data?**

Understand who and how the education data is managed and updated. Is it outsourced to a foreign non-English speaking country which may degrade the quality of the data?

Sprint Education’s Data Managers play an integral role, and only access the data once they’ve passed a rigorous selection process.

# #2

## THE “DIY” CONVERSATION

*“I want the data plus marketing software to manage my own education marketing strategy”.*

I'd estimate that 8 out of 10 calls I take from education business owners and marketing managers are all focused on an insatiable desire to grab hold of an education database; upload it into MailChimp, HubSpot, Salesforce, or the like; and then send any old content expecting there to be a flood of leads and sales hitting their inboxes.

Sadly, more often than not, it doesn't work out this way!

This is due to several reasons that have not been considered before setting out on a DIY approach to education marketing.

If the above strikes a chord with you then it is crucially important that you read this next chapter.

Firstly, here are the four most common mistakes/incorrect assumptions that I come across daily when speaking to education service/product providers who are planning to manage their own education marketing.

1. I can buy teacher direct email addresses to keep.
2. I can upload education email addresses into my email software.
3. Any old CRM/marketing software will solve my problems.

4. I/my team are great at producing great marketing content.

If the answers to all of the above was “yes” then the education marketing world would be a far simpler and delightful experience for sellers to schools. The reality is however, that the answer to the above list is usually no, nope, not a chance, and probably not!

To prevent you falling foul of any of the above pitfalls and so you are fully informed of what you need to do when planning your own education strategy, consider asking your marketing provider (or in many cases yourself/internal marketing and design team) the following questions.

## **Questions to ask when attempting your own education marketing:**

### **Q. Are your email addresses direct to teachers/staff?**

You’ll find it almost impossible to source the direct email addresses of education staff members (certainly ones that have been gathered in line with the GDPR).

On your search for the holy grail of education data you are likely to find plenty of options for school generic email addresses, but you will come up short in the pursuit of direct to teacher/staff email addresses. (Unless you come to Sprint Education of course!)

Check the small print as it will usually explain here that the emails you are buying are in fact only school office email addresses and are leased for a 12 month period only.

Here at Sprint Education, we can help you navigate the challenge of accessing teacher emails. Simply subscribe to our Campus software and

you then have the option to broadcast your emails within the software to teacher and staff direct email addresses.



**Selina says** – *“Campus gives you the ability to broadcast your email campaigns from within your account to the direct inboxes of over 250,000 teachers and school staff members. As Head of Campus Support I’m on hand to help ensure that your use of Campus (and the ability to email teachers directly) will give you the edge over your competition.”*

### **Q. Will I be able to upload your education data into my existing emailing platform?**

Please, please do not spend thousands of pounds on education data without first making sure you’re actually going to be able to upload that data into your emailing system.

It’ll be interesting to hear what answer you get, because if you were to call me and ask me the same question I’d have to tell you that no, there is a very good chance your sending platform will not allow you to upload a large portion of the data you purchase.

This is because sending platforms like MailChimp are designed for businesses that market to consumers (where opt-in consent is required) and use an artificial intelligence system to approve all email data before it is uploaded. Of course, as you’re using public sector data (and not marketing to consumers) you don’t require opt-in consent in order to market to your list. However, MailChimp (or any other generic sending platform) doesn’t know this and will therefore incorrectly judge

that you don't have the required permission to email some of the contacts in your list.

If your education marketing provider tells you otherwise then the alarm bells should start ringing immediately.



**Ollie says** - *“At Sprint Education, we’ve built Campus – education data, marketing and sales software that not only gives you access to our education database of all schools, colleges and universities, but uniquely has the direct email addresses of over 250,000 teachers and staff members built in so you can send your emails directly to their inboxes all from within Campus – no need to export and use in a third party system.”*

### **Q. What CRM/marketing automation software do you recommend my business invests in?**

This is one question that I've been continually asked throughout the years. Any business with serious aspirations for their education marketing is going to require software not only to send their email campaigns, but also to capture leads, track website interactions, nurture relationships with contacts, create quotes and invoices, and analyse their sales performance.

The trouble is that I've never felt comfortable recommending generic business software to our clients when I know full well that those systems are poorly-aligned with the unique requirements of an education business. Not to mention the huge financial cost and process inefficiencies that result from businesses trying to knit several disparate IT systems together.



Time and time again I've heard what can only be described as horror stories from clients who, as their businesses have grown, have invested heavily in multiple bits of IT and software; only to realise further down the road that those investments have resulted in a tangled web of systems that actually hold them back instead of helping them to flourish.

Before you waste any money on generic software, please get in touch with one of our experts and have a chat with them about what you're looking to achieve with your education marketing. I'm a business owner myself and I know first-hand just how crucial it is to get these decisions right first time, rather than having to try and disentangle yourself a few months or years down the line.



**John says** - *“Our education marketing and sales software, Campus provides our clients with all the tools they need to manage their education marketing and sales processes, all seamlessly integrated and in one place. I’d love to show you how Campus can give your team the ability to broadcast your emails to the direct inboxes of over 250,000 named teachers and school staff members, along with an integrated lead generation form builder, CRM system, and a quoting and invoicing system. Campus has already transformed many of our clients’ education businesses, from small start-ups right through to huge global brands, and I’m sure it could do the same for you.”*

### **Q. What tactics would you take if I opted to have you create my marketing content and strategy?**

When asking this question, if the answer you hear sounds like this...

*“Let’s hit as big an audience as possible, which types of teachers do you want to target?”* (The scatter-gun agency).

Or, *“Let’s follow an inbound methodology* (they may show you a generic inbound diagram) *and slowly encourage teachers to fall in love with you, like a tender loving marriage... blah blah blah!”* (The inbound agency).

Then alarm bells should be ringing.

Although both approaches have their place (and some success) in the education marketing world, both are relying on two very distinct and generic approaches to marketing.

Scatter-gun is old-school, obtuse and clumsy; whilst inbound (also now a dated approach) tends to be an off the shelf concept that is not truly education focused at all, and encourages you to invest heavily in the hope that a small and slow stream of teachers will begin to follow you and begin to buy over a long period of time.

Neither are concepts created specifically for the marketing to schools and teachers sector, (which is dramatically different than the B2B or B2C marketing world). Your approach to smart, education-focused design, content, and strategy must be built on themes, principles, and timings that are absolutely created and designed for selling to schools and teachers.

When we write/design our clients’ marketing on average we generate 57% more responses than their own efforts, and other agencies.

How do we do this? Let Benjamin explain...



**Benjamin says** – *“I could harp on about how our combined decades of experience, our ability to write on a teacher’s level (many of us here were once teachers), our coding skills to ensure your emails navigate filter systems, and our world-class designs will mean our content/designs will generate more leads for you. But although that’s all true, what really gives us the edge is our unique approach to crafting a strategy and the content that comes with it.*

*For each client’s strategy we construct a plan built on specific “themes” and “timings”, all hand-selected to complement each client’s unique objectives.*

*Our collection of “themes” and database of “timings” have been chiselled out from a deep pool of performance data collected from over 4,000 education campaigns we’ve executed.*

*We’ve then tested and polished each “theme” concept, format and “timing”, so we know exactly when and where to implement the right theme, design, wording, subject line and timings within a strategy to maximise every last response possible for you.”*

If you’d like to understand more about our Themes from concept to design and strategy, get in touch. We’d be delighted to explain how it works.

# #3

## THE EMAIL BROADCASTING CONVERSATION

*“An education marketing provider should be much more than just a data broker or inbound-only agency; they must prove that they have a robust and secure broadcasting infrastructure in place to ensure your communications are broadcast safely to your target teacher audience.”*

Whether you've partnered with a marketing agency to manage and broadcast an email strategy on your behalf, or you've subscribed to some marketing software to broadcast your own email marketing to schools and teachers, the conversation about the sending infrastructure you will be relying on is **INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT!**

When you commission somebody to send a marketing email campaign on your behalf there are things that you should know that they know as standard! Feel rightly dubious if your education marketing provider cannot talk to you in-depth about the technical aspects of your campaign – getting all of the technical aspects of a campaign right is no easy task. You'll want to be 100% sure that your marketing provider knows what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what affect their

technological infrastructure and expertise will have on the success of your campaign.

To do emailing properly isn't cheap or easy. At Sprint we invest £750,000 a year in our technical and data infrastructure to ensure our clients' emails achieve the highest delivery rates in the UK education sector. The high cost and expertise involved in doing emailing "right" means many other agencies simply cut corners with their infrastructure. They know that it will save themselves thousands of pounds a year and that you'll probably never even know that their mismanagement of their broadcasting infrastructure is detrimentally effecting the safe delivery of your email communications to teachers inboxes.

There are three broad technical areas (that are actually pretty easy to get your head around) that, if you don't understand their principals, then you are running the risk of not just executing a poor email marketing campaign, but even damaging your brand. They are: software, IP addresses, and deliverability.

## **Questions to ask when planning an email strategy:**

### ***Q. Where is the email software installed?***

If your marketing provider cannot prove to you that their email marketing software is installed on their own web servers, beware... it means they are not 100% in control of the system they use. If they are renting space on someone else's server it could go down for maintenance, it could break, or the company owning the server could even go bust. I know what you're thinking, "Anyone's own system can do

that.” but at least those who have their own system also have the power to go down for maintenance when it doesn’t affect their customers or have someone in-house ready to fix the problem straight away.



**Jackie says** - *“Our email software is installed on our own servers. We do not rent them or share them. They are 100% ours and they live in a secure site in Cheltenham. That’s just less than 9 miles from our offices in Tewkesbury. We control our servers remotely and if anything does go wrong our slave (backup) server takes over with no downtime – they’re what a tech Ben would call ‘mirrored’ – it’s all very clever. If things were to go drastically wrong one of our Linux experts would be on-hand to fix the issue - so far, since launching in 2007 we’ve not had to do that though.”*

### **Q. Can you tell me about your sending IP addresses?**

You should know the IP number of the email sending server that your provider is using to send your emails through. They will be able to give you a list of the IP addresses that they use to send your mail through. If they cannot, or will not, then alarm bells should be ringing.

The reasons you need to know the IP address is that it has the BIGGEST effect on the success of your email marketing campaign. If a receiving network doesn’t like the IP your mail is being sent from, it simply won’t let it through. Fortunately, when your provider gives you the sending IP, you can perform a couple of quick and easy tests to check the ‘quality’ of the IP. You’ll want to check it against global blacklists e.g. <http://whatismyipaddress.com/blacklist-check>. If the machine that is being used to send your mail has, in the past, sent email campaigns

that have been classed as spam then you're likely to be tarred with the same brush – a lethal blow that you MUST avoid.



**Jen says** - *“We have two substantial sending IP ranges, each of which we have lovingly christened with the name of a Harry Potter character. Keeping a sending IP healthy is a bit like keeping a tidy garden. You’ve got to feed the plants (send through it regularly), get rid of the weeds (only send using quality school data), and mow the lawn (regularly manage your relationships with ISPs and Blacklists). We continually monitor the cleanliness of our IPs to ensure superb deliverability. We would NEVER jeopardise our clients’ reputation by sending their marketing material out through an unhealthy IP.”*

## **Q. How can I be sure that my emails will be delivered?**

There are several important technical things that your provider should have set up AS STANDARD. If they don't, and they don't talk you through why they are important, then your campaign will simply not get delivered to as many inboxes. Check the following with your provider:

- Does your provider have forward-confirmed reverse DNS set up on their IP/domains? They should have!
- Does your provider have SPF (Sender Policy Framework) set up? They should have! This essentially 'signs' your email as it leaves their server and proves to the receiving server (your customer) that the server is allowed to send out mail. In simple terms, SPF set up protects against a spammer hijacking the domain you are sending from and making you look very bad indeed.
- Do they have DKIM set up? They should have! This is an industry standard. It shows that the 'from' domain and the DKIM signature match when sending traffic over a dedicated IP.

When you receive a test email from your provider, open the message and view its headers (if you don't know how to do this then give us a call and we'll talk you through it). Check through it and if you find:

- Received-SPF: none – this is bad
- Received-SPF: pass – this is good
- dkim=neutral (no sig)– this is bad
- dkim=pass (ok) – this is good



**Pauline says** - *“Every email we send is stamped with an SPF signature, reverse DNS and DKIM is set up/configured as standard. We’ve spent a great deal of time and money to ensure our sending infrastructure is second-to-none.”*

### **Q. Where is your physical web/mail-servers located that my emails are sent through?**

By finding out the IP address you'll be able to find out where the machine that is sending out your mail is in the world. Believe it or not, this is really important. Many UK servers don't like receiving mail from places like the USA, Russia, China etc. because they are programmed to think that the mail is more likely to be spam. In short, USE A BRITISH IP, and be aware that just because you are using a British-based education marketing provider, it DOES NOT mean their IP is British!



**Guy says** - *“Our physical servers lead a happy, free-range life in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire – UK.”*



# IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER!

As I mentioned at the start of this report - these 3 conversations are what I'm asked about daily by education suppliers. However, just because I'm asked to discuss them, that doesn't mean that is what I **should be asked by someone looking to sell more to teachers.**

If these are the only conversations and questions that you have been considering then you might as well pack up and admit defeat to the marketing to schools monster right now.

Why? These conversations are important, sure. Even more so 5 years ago. However, the selling to schools landscape has changed spectacularly in recent times, and therefore so must your whole marketing to schools mindset, the questions you ask yourself (and your education agency), your methodologies and the strategic approaches you implement.

If you are brave enough to embrace change and be taken out of your comfort zone, then you stand every chance of trumping your more forward-thinking competitors, and ultimately triumphing in your selling to schools battle.

As a thank you for reading this report I'll be sharing with you information over the coming days, weeks and months about what you really need to know about how to sell more to schools, the concepts and blueprint strategies that truly work, and how you must think and act differently to take on the education sector and win!

Keep an eye on your inbox!

# THE NEXT STEPS

I could go on about Sprint Education for pages, but frankly it's best for you to give us a call and ask us about what we can do for you.

The two main channels you're probably interested in discussing are...

1. **Campus:** You're after the education data and software/tools to manage your own direct to teachers/staff marketing, and you'd like to learn more or see a demo of our Campus software.
2. **Managed Strategies:** You want our team of Education Experts to plan, design, manage, and execute your education strategy across channels ranging from email, postal, social media, and PR.

I really appreciate the time you've taken to read this report and I really hope that it makes a difference to your business. If you have any questions then I'd love to hear from you, so get in touch today on 01684 297374, or email [ben@sprint-education.co.uk](mailto:ben@sprint-education.co.uk).

Wishing you every success,



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