

B2E MARKETING DURING A PANDEMIC

Key Trends & Insights



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Executive Summary

The last 18 months have been difficult for everyone, both personally and professionally, including educators and the companies that support them. And with the delta variant of COVID-19 continuing to spread, it appears we're not out of the woods just yet.

However, in spite of the challenges to operating during a pandemic, the education marketplace continues to grow. With the right mix of strategies and messaging, companies that sell to education have managed to succeed amid trying circumstances.

In a survey of business-to-education (B2E) marketers during summer 2021, we found that optimism remains high, and sales have increased for a majority of companies since the pandemic began. Still, more than three out of four companies have had to adjust their approach to marketing as a result of the pandemic.

In this report, we've summarized the key findings from our survey and what they mean for education marketers in 2022 and beyond.

Let's get started.

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1. THERE IS REASON FOR OPTIMISM AMONG B2E MARKETERS.

Sales have increased since the pandemic began for a solid majority of the companies that sell to education. More than two in five companies believe they'll emerge from the crisis "stronger than ever."

2. THE PANDEMIC HAS LED TO CONSIDERABLE CHANGES IN B2E MARKETING, MANY OF WHICH HAVE LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS.

More than three-fourths of B2E marketers say the crisis has forced them to adjust their marketing strategy in some significant way—and 52 percent say they've made lasting changes in how they operate.

3. ONE CHANGE IN PARTICULAR—MOVING AWAY FROM CONFERENCES AND EVENTS—IS LIKELY TO BE A SHORT-TERM TREND.

Although live events have dropped off in importance during the pandemic, they remain a critical strategy in the eyes of B2E marketers: more than two-thirds of respondents said they would attend in-person events in 2021 if the opportunity arises.

4. THE AVAILABILITY OF FEDERAL RELIEF AID FOR EDUCATION HAS PLAYED A SUBSTANTIAL ROLE IN COMPANIES' MARKETING EFFORTS.

Seven in 10 companies have linked their marketing strategy or messaging to the availability of pandemic relief funding for schools or are in the process of doing so.

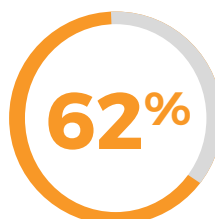
5. ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILDING BRAND AWARENESS HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY HARD DURING THE PANDEMIC.

Not being able to connect with customers and prospects in person during the pandemic has made it harder for B2E marketers to forge relationships and raise awareness of their brand.

6. GENERATING HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT HAS BEEN CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS.

Content is always important, and in the absence of in-person conferences and meetings it has taken on an even greater role in B2E marketing.

THERE IS REASON FOR OPTIMISM AMONG B2E MARKETERS.



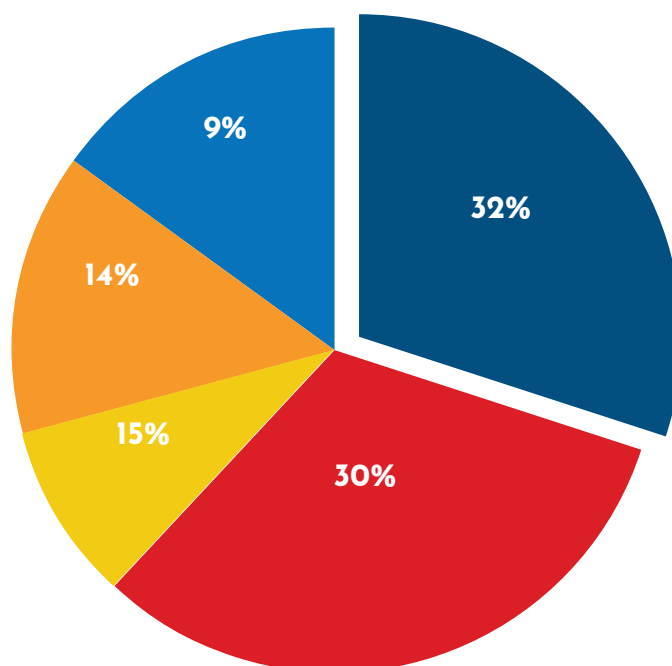
of companies' sales to education have increased since the pandemic began.

WHILE the pandemic has hit certain industries quite hard, such as arts and entertainment, food service and travel, the education sector appears to have fared much better.

In our survey of companies that market to education, a large majority of respondents (62 percent) said their sales have increased since the pandemic began—and 32 percent indicated that sales are up “significantly.” Only 24 percent said they’ve noticed a drop in sales.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUR EDUCATION SALES?

- 32% Up Significantly
- 30% Up Slightly
- 9% No Difference
- 14% Down Slightly
- 15% Down Significantly



GIVEN the shift to remote learning that occurred en masse when the pandemic began, a bump in sales might not be surprising for companies that offer products or services used to support distance education in particular.

However, our survey revealed that sales also increased among 55 percent of companies that don't offer a product or service applicable to distance learning. This finding speaks to the important role that companies have played in helping schools meet a wide range of student needs during a very difficult period.

LOOKING AHEAD, B2E MARKETERS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY OPTIMISTIC.

Nearly four out of five (78 percent) have a positive outlook for the remainder of 2021 and beyond—and 42 percent agree with the statement: “We’re emerging from the pandemic stronger than ever.” Only 4 percent expressed pessimism.

The pandemic has underscored the need for high-quality solutions to help educators close long-standing achievement gaps and prepare all students for success. For companies that combine proven education solutions with strategic, well-executed sales and marketing campaigns, the opportunities for growth are nearly limitless.



Trend 1:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

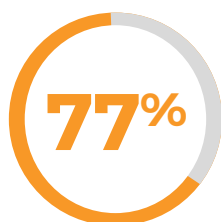
1 62% of companies say their education sales have increased since the pandemic began—and 32% say their sales are up “significantly.”

2 78% have a positive outlook for the remainder of 2021 and beyond.

3 42% agree with the statement: “We’re emerging from the pandemic stronger than ever.”

THE PANDEMIC HAS LED TO CONSIDERABLE CHANGES IN B2E MARKETING.

MANY OF WHICH HAVE LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS.



of B2E marketers have changed their strategy in response to the pandemic.

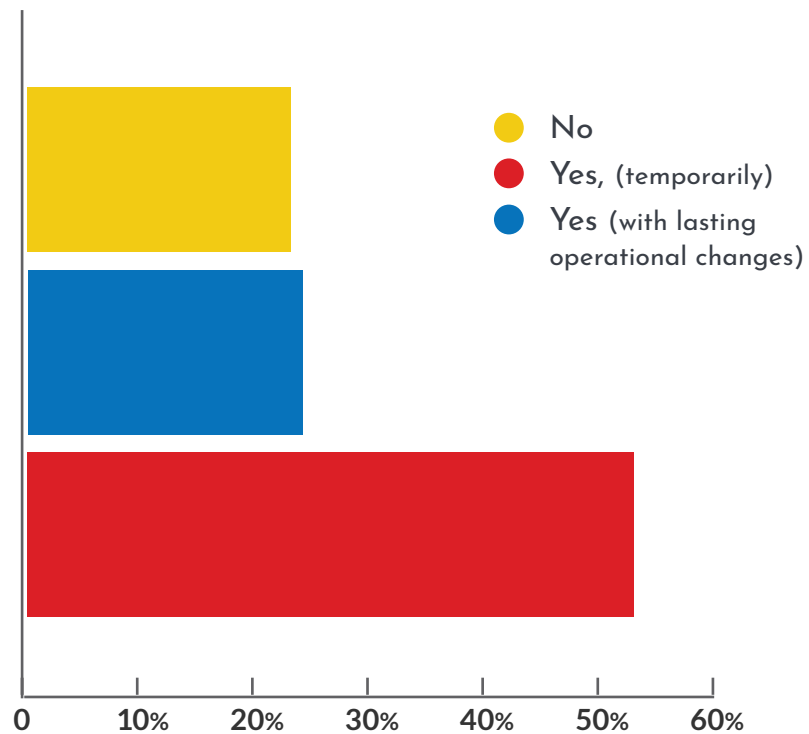
ALTHOUGH education sales have remained strong during the pandemic, B2E marketers still faced many challenges over the last 18 months—and more than three out of four companies (77 percent) have had to adjust their marketing tactics as a result.

Some respondents said they've pivoted to using online webinars instead of live presentations to lure customers. Others reported becoming more strategic or targeted in their approach.

“We had to shift the positioning of our products to match what was happening in the market,” one respondent said, noting that the company has changed its messaging to focus on how its products could address emerging needs, such as learning recovery, and support social and emotional learning (SEL).

A large majority of these marketing changes are expected to become permanent, as the pandemic has forced companies to rethink and improve upon their existing practices. In fact, more than twice as many respondents said they have made “lasting” changes (53 percent) as those who said the changes would be temporary (24 percent).

HAS THE PANDEMIC FORCED YOU TO ADJUST YOUR MARKETING IN ANY SIGNIFICANT WAY?



“Our sales reps have learned how to be more effective on video conference meetings, and we’ll never rely on face-to-face meetings as much as previously,” one respondent said. Another noted: “We’ve upped our communication game.” Still another said: “We’ve made some pivots, but that is also part of how our business operates. I expect we would have done pivoting without the pandemic as well.”

Trend 2:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 77% of B2E marketers have changed their strategy in response to the pandemic.

2 Of those, more than two-thirds expect these changes to become permanent.

3 Changes include adopting a more targeted approach, improving communications, increasing the use of video, and becoming more strategic in terms of messaging.

ONE CHANGE IN PARTICULAR—

MOVING AWAY FROM CONFERENCES & EVENTS—IS LIKELY A SHORT-TERM TREND.



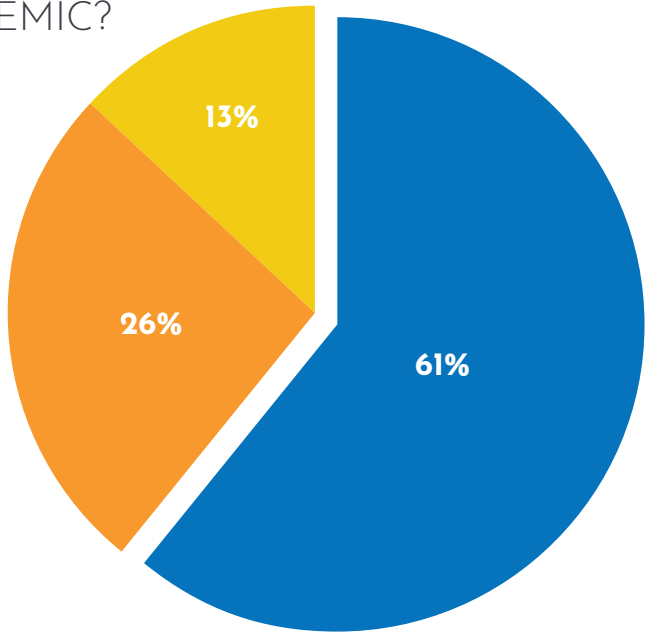
68% of B2E marketers will attend events in person this year if possible.

While tactics such as email, social media and content marketing have become more important during the pandemic, 61 percent of survey respondents said conferences have become less important to their strategy as these events have moved online.

HOW HAVE YOUR MARKETING TACTICS CHANGED DURING THE PANDEMIC?

EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

- 13% More Important
- 26% No Change
- 61% Less Important



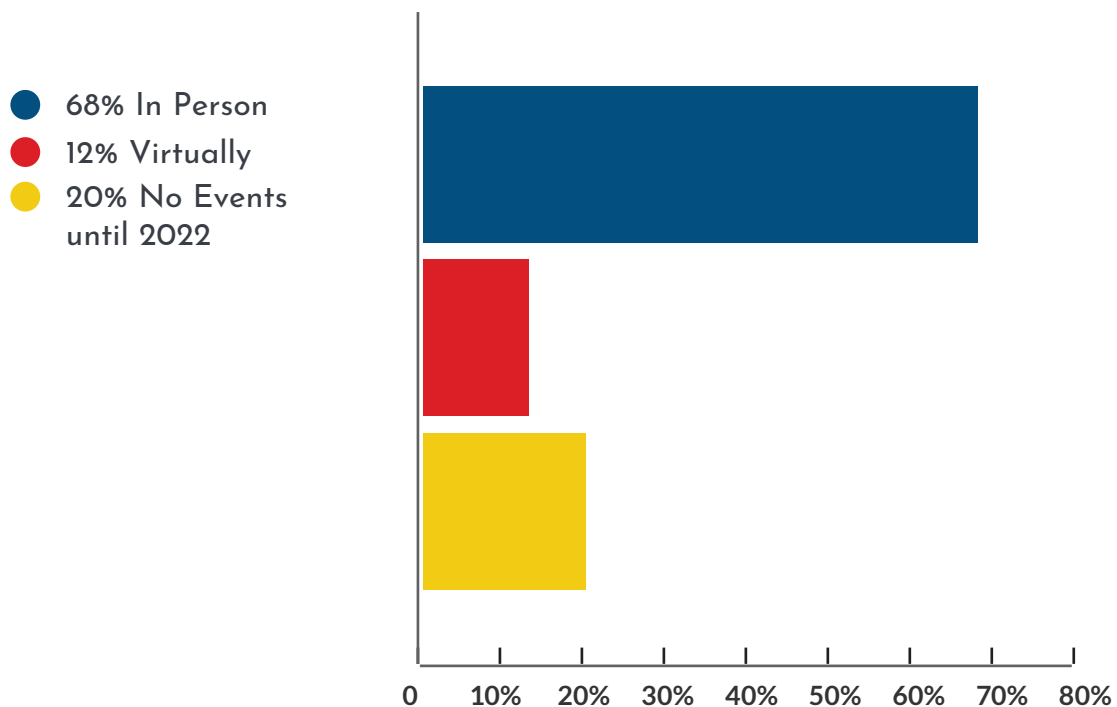
DESPITE the availability of online conferences and events, our survey suggests that B2E marketers haven't recognized as much value in these virtual options—and many said they've shifted their conference spending to other priorities over the last 18 months.

"No in-person gatherings has forced a complete pivot," one respondent said.

While some in-person events are making a comeback, virtual options will likely remain—ensuring flexibility and safety for attendees.

68 percent of B2E marketers said they plan to attend events in person this year if they're able to. Only 12 percent said they plan to attend events virtually this year, while 20 percent said they don't plan to attend conferences again until at least 2022.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR CONFERENCES AND EVENTS THIS YEAR?



Collecting sales leads (72 percent) and networking (67 percent) are the most common reasons why B2E marketers hope to attend conferences next school year. A third of respondents would like to use these events to learn or gather market information. Sixty-five percent of the companies that sell to education plan to exhibit at conferences in 2022, and 36 percent intend to be a conference sponsor.

Trend 3:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

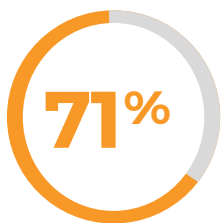
1 Conferences have become less important for most B2E marketers as these events have moved online during the pandemic.

2 But that's likely to change as in-person events return: 68% of companies said they plan to attend events in person this year if they're able to.

3 Collecting sales leads and networking are the most common reasons why B2E marketers hope to attend conferences in 2022 and beyond.

THE AVAILABILITY OF

FEDERAL RELIEF AID FOR EDUCATION HAS PLAYED A SUBSTANTIAL ROLE IN COMPANIES B2E MARKETING EFFORTS.

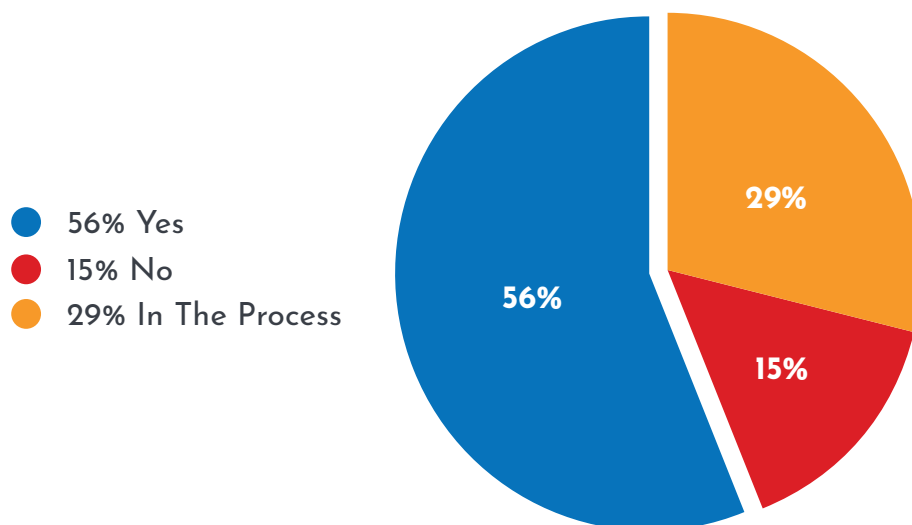


of B2E companies are using pandemic relief aid in their marketing to schools.

SINCE March 2020, federal lawmakers have passed three COVID-19 stimulus bills that provide billions of dollars in emergency relief aid for schools and colleges. This pool of money is playing a key role in B2E marketing efforts.

According to our survey, 56 percent of respondents have linked their marketing strategy or messaging to the availability of pandemic relief aid for education. Another 15 percent said they're in the process of doing so.

HAVE YOU LINKED YOUR MARKETING TO THE AVAILABILITY OF FEDERAL RELIEF AID FOR EDUCATION?



RESPONDENTS who have incorporated emergency relief funding into their marketing have taken a variety of approaches.

For instance, 84 percent said they've created content pieces explaining how education buyers can leverage this funding to purchase their products—and 63 percent said they've contacted existing customers or prospects with information about how their products are allowable expenditures. Companies have also used social media to disseminate this message, and they've trained their sales reps to bring it up in conversations with clients.

The majority of respondents (74 percent) said it was either too soon to tell how successful these efforts have been, or else the response they have gotten has been similar to other initiatives. Of those who have seen definitive results from connecting their marketing to the availability of federal funding, nearly three times as many said they've had a better response from these efforts (19 percent) than those who have seen worse results (7 percent).

Twenty-five percent of companies said they have purchased lists and marketed their products as eligible for federal funding to schools they haven't done business with before. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that B2E marketers will have better success if they adopt a more strategic approach by targeting schools with whom they've established a prior relationship.

“We do not purchase lists due to our generally poor results,” one respondent said. Another noted: “Our feeling is that this should be handled as an ‘oh, by the way’ rather than leading with it. If prospects respond that their budget doesn't allow for our solutions, our reps bring up that funding is available and our solutions are eligible.”



Trend 4:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 71% of companies are using the availability of pandemic relief aid in their marketing to education.

2 Developing content and reaching out directly to prospects are some of the most popular strategies.

3 Among marketers who have done this, 19% have seen better results from this approach.

ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILDING BRAND AWARENESS HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY HARD DURING THE PANDEMIC.

“THE LACK OF IN-PERSON CONFERENCES [HAS MADE IT HARDER] TO GET OUR BRAND NOTICED.”

CUTTING through all the chatter and getting the attention of education buyers is always a challenge, especially in what has become a very crowded marketplace. The pandemic has only compounded this challenge.

In-person meetings and events are highly effective venues for companies to introduce themselves to prospects, forge relationships, establish trust and close sales: As the *Harvard Business Review* reports, a face-to-face request is 34 times more successful than an email. Our survey confirms that not being able to connect with customers and prospects in person has made it more difficult for B2E marketers to develop relationships and build awareness of their brand.

“The lack of in-person education technology conferences [has made it harder] to get our brand noticed,” one respondent observed. Another said: “Building awareness fast enough [has been a challenge]. Our competitors in the U.S. made dramatic inroads because they were known, trusted domestic brands and we weren’t.”

In the absence of in-person meetings and events, B2E marketers have had to rely more on other strategies. However, this has further intensified the noise that marketers have had to break through in promoting their solutions—and many respondents noted the “Zoom fatigue” their customers and prospects are feeling.

“Some of the channels that previously were effective, [such as] email marketing and online webinars, have become more saturated during the pandemic and [therefore] less effective,” one person wrote.

Trend 5:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Getting buyers' attention has become more difficult during the pandemic.

2 The lack of in-person events has made it harder to develop relationships and build brand awareness.

3 In the absence of face-to-face events, channels such as webinars and email marketing have become more saturated and therefore less effective.

GENERATING HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT HAS BEEN CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS.



of companies say content marketing has become more important during the pandemic.

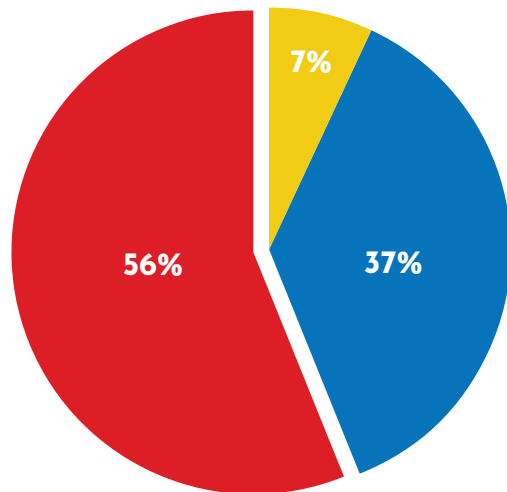
CONTENT is always important, and in the absence of in-person conferences and meetings it has taken on an even greater role in B2E marketing initiatives.

How can companies build trust and brand awareness, especially at a time when face-to-face interaction is limited? By offering timely, actionable content that helps educators solve their most pressing challenges—while proving themselves both knowledgeable and reliable in the process.

According to our survey, establishing thought leadership has become a more important marketing goal for 56 percent of companies during the pandemic. Producing high-quality content is a key way to do this—and education marketers agree. 55 percent of respondents said their content marketing have grown in importance.

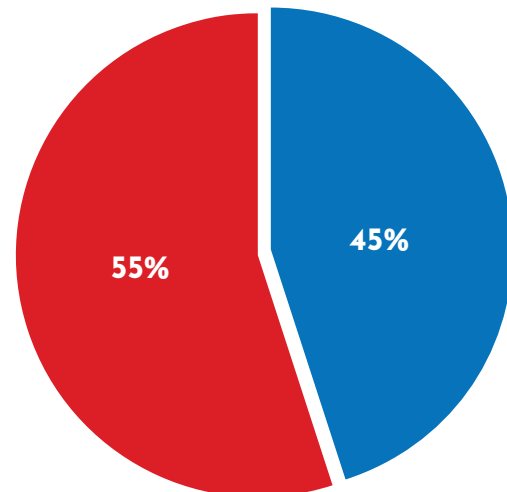
HOW HAVE YOUR GOALS AND TACTICS CHANGED DURING THE PANDEMIC?

Building Thought Leadership



- 56% More Important
- 37% No Change
- 7% Less Important

Content Marketing



- 55% More Important
- 45% No Change

“Thought leadership content was really important,” said one B2E marketer in explaining the company’s success over the last 18 months. “Educators are stretched very thin while trying to navigate the pandemic, so building trust and providing useful recommendations was important, [as opposed to] leading with direct product pitches.”

Another survey respondent relayed that creating compelling content to help educators take care of students’ social-emotional needs during the pandemic “has brought more interest to our company.”

Trend 6:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 56 percent of B2E marketers say thought leadership has become a more important marketing goal during the pandemic.

2 55 percent say content marketing has become a more important tactic.

3 Offering timely, actionable content that helps educators solve key challenges helps build trust and brand awareness.

LESSONS LEARNED

In our survey, we asked B2E marketers to tell us their success stories and the lessons they've learned in marketing during the pandemic. The responses we received were insightful.

Although the advice we have gathered from the survey results might not be new information for savvy B2E marketers, these recommendations are a good reminder that the keys to marketing successfully during a crisis amount to the same best practices that will serve companies well in this marketplace any time.

BE AGILE.

In uncertain times, when circumstances are changing almost weekly, it's important for companies to be able to pivot quickly, identifying the current landscape and adjusting their strategies and messaging accordingly.

"Agility has been one of our strengths in the pandemic," said one respondent. "We've seen success in our ability to adapt our messaging, positioning, targets and vendor partners to provide needed solutions throughout the pandemic."

Being agile also means having multiple strategies that you can use, so when one isn't working effectively you can move on to another. As another respondent put it: "Variety is the spice of life. You can't just do one thing over and over again if you want to be noticed."

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

"There is no such thing as a silver lining in a pandemic, but it did have a way of freeing us to try things in a different way," one survey respondent noted. "Our mantra was: 'How can we help?' From granting free access to creating activities that educators could share with families, we were able to support and grow our customer base. Customers were looking to deepen relationships with trusted vendors, and they had no time or patience for anything that even had a whiff of salesiness."



BE EMPATHETIC.

Time and again, we heard the value of being sensitive to the challenges that educators were facing during this difficult period. “Empathy matters in building relationships and building sales,” one respondent noted.

Show customers and prospects that they matter to you as human beings and not just as potential sales targets. Use language that is sympathetic to their needs and struggles. Put relationships ahead of closing sales. Don’t be pushy; instead, take a long-term view.

“Call every customer and just ask how you can help them,” one marketer advised. “Don’t sell anything, help them.” As another person explained: “The value you provide now will be remembered when they can return to normal purchasing decisions.”

Being agile also means having multiple strategies that you can use, so when one isn’t working effectively you can move on to another. As another respondent put it: “Variety is the spice of life. You can’t just do one thing over and over again if you want to be noticed.”

BE RESPONSIVE.

Understanding what your customers want and moving quickly to satisfy them is always important for success. During a crisis, when needs multiply and educators are desperate for help, it’s absolutely critical.

“Listen to customer needs and react quickly,” one respondent said. “Be the one who brings knowledge and info to customers.”

Many companies offered some of their products or services to schools free of charge during the height of the pandemic, and they’re seeing this generosity be rewarded now. Offering free services in spring 2020 yielded about a one-third conversion rate to paid services for the 2021-22 school year for one respondent, who added: “We’re hoping to repeat [this strategy] this fall.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

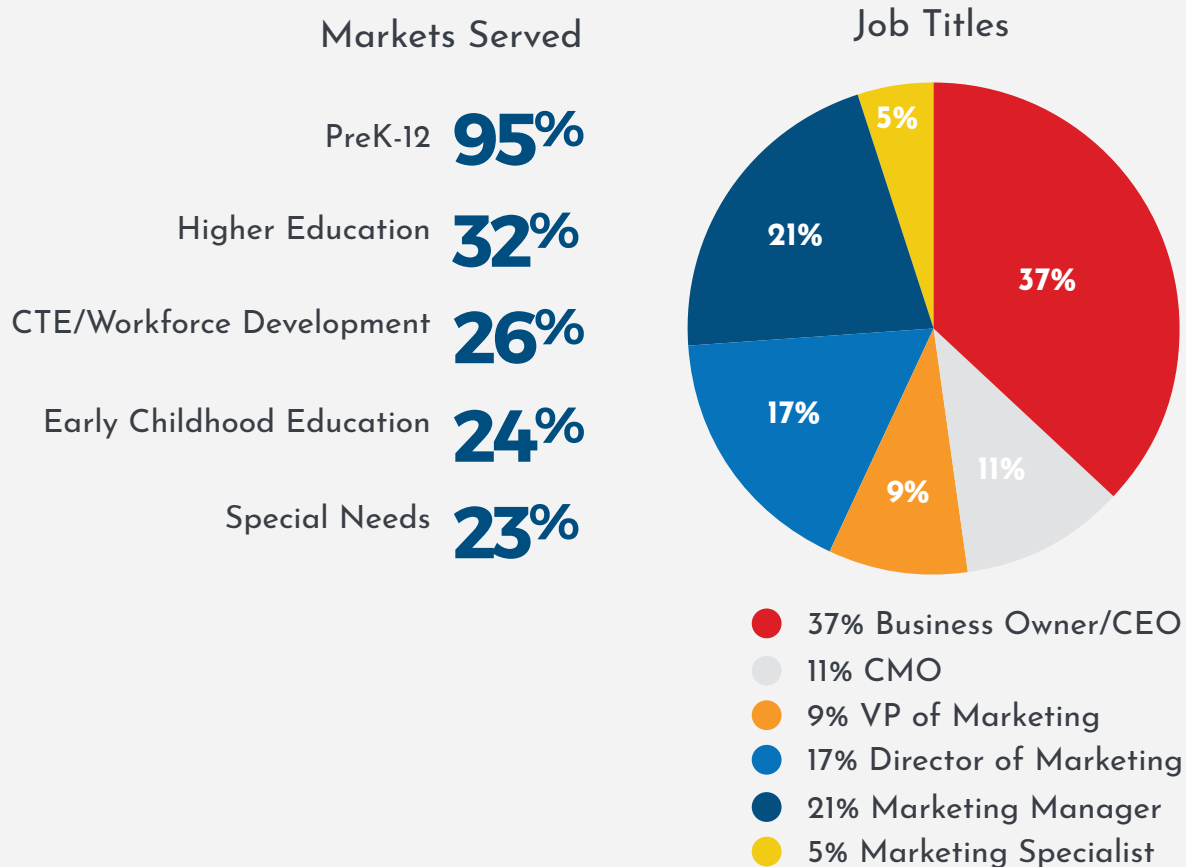
The pandemic has created several challenges for schools and the companies that serve them. It has also revealed an urgent need for solutions to help educators target learning loss and address students’ social-emotional health as well as their academic success.

For companies that offer high-quality solutions backed by strategic, well-designed marketing campaigns, there are many opportunities for success. To take full advantage of these opportunities, B2E marketers should follow what amount to best practices in any situation: Be agile, be empathetic, listen to the needs of customers and prospects, and respond quickly and effectively.

Methodology

This report is based on a survey of nearly 100 marketing professionals and business owners who sell to the education market, conducted in June and July 2021. To collect these responses, we reached out to our proprietary database of marketers and owners. We also shared the survey via social media.

Respondents were asked to identify the sector(s) they serve within education and their job level or title. With this information, we can provide additional insight from specific groups in future materials. The overwhelming majority of respondents (95 percent) serve the preK-12 market. One-third sell to higher education, and about a quarter target niche markets such as early childhood education, special needs, or CTE and workforce development.



OUR BUSINESS

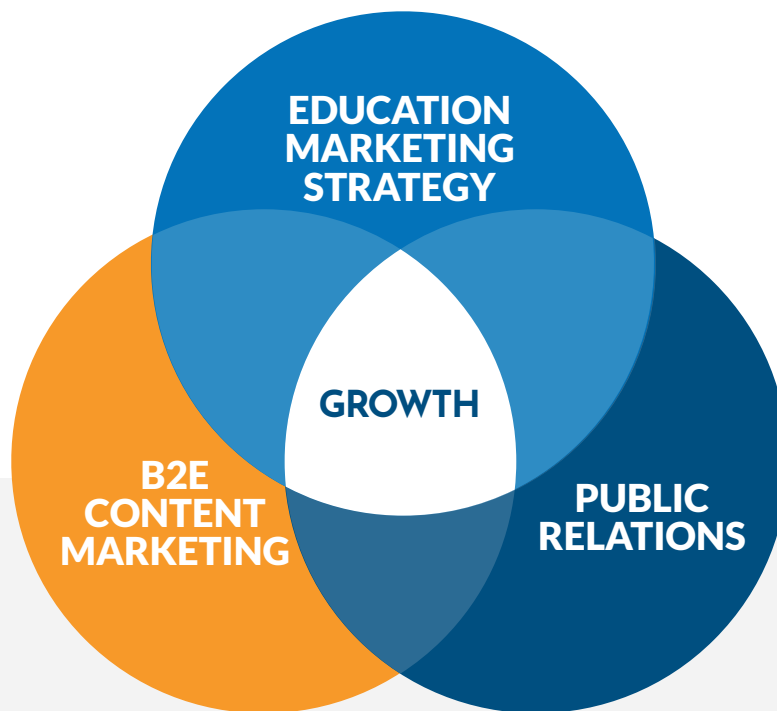
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CB&A accelerates the growth of companies that provide products and services to K-12 school systems and higher education institutions.

OUR CAUSE

We believe that by accelerating our clients' growth, we are contributing to positive outcomes for students and educators.



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