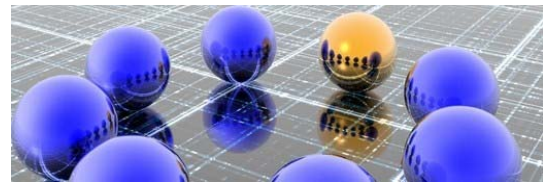


# 'Advocacy' Drives Sales in the Education Sector



If 'advocacy' is a term with which you are not yet familiar it would be worth brushing up on your marketing vocabulary.

Marketing is often criticised, justifiably, for being open to fads but advocacy – or 'word of mouth' as it is also known – is very much here to stay. Indeed, it is rapidly becoming the most powerful form of marketing available to a company and research conducted by Portfolio Communications earlier this year revealed just how important it is when selling into the education sector.

Figure 1 shows that *word of mouth* is the most important source of information used by schools when choosing a supplier. In many ways this should not come as any surprise – seeking advice of others before making a decision is something people have always done and will continue to do – but why has advocacy marketing suddenly become so important?

The reality is that advocacy has always been around but there are two factors that have played a major role in its rapidly growing importance in sales and marketing.

The first is that we are all now suffering from 'information overload'. As people become ever more bombarded with information they turn increasingly to those they trust most when faced with having to make a decision. This is just as true in the workplace as at home.

For schools this means seeking others within their contact network who will not only have faced similar decisions but are also likely to have knowledge based on direct experience; or at least know somebody who has.

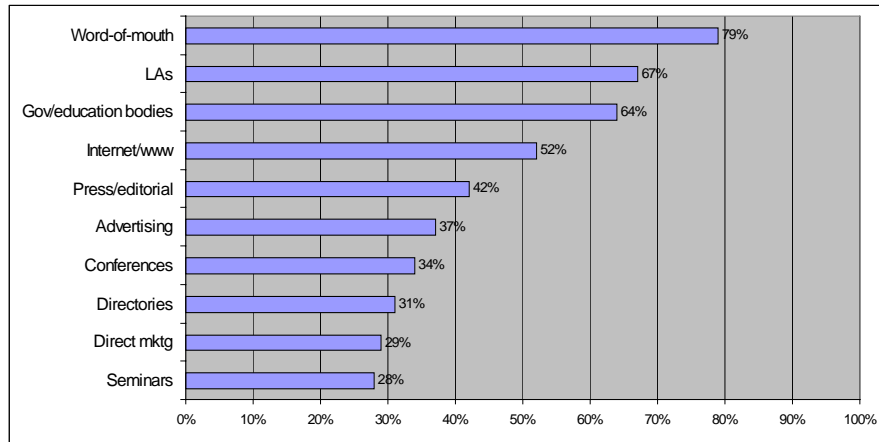


Fig 1. Importance of information sources when schools choose a supplier

The second major factor driving advocacy marketing is that we are now more 'connected' than ever before. An email can quickly be fired off to a number of people inviting their views and opinions, responses to which will most likely arrive within just a few hours.

So how can companies take advantage of word of mouth/advocacy marketing to increase their education sales?

The first golden rule is to ensure that people have information about your product or service that *adds real value to their knowledge base*. Critically, this should not be sales literature, which falls into the category of 'information overload' identified earlier. Ideal material is information around your product or service that people can inherently trust. This could be an objective white paper, a research report or an opinion-piece.

The second golden rule is to ensure this information gets to the right people, or 'advocates', who are most likely to be asked by their peers for advice and opinion. This might appear daunting but the

good news is that the best advocates are typically those who are most receptive to this type of information. In fact, their superior knowledge-base is one of the main reasons people will seek out their opinion in the first place.

Word of mouth/ advocacy is rapidly becoming a must-have technique within the sales and marketing armoury, especially in the education sector.

To learn more please visit our dedicated advocacy web site, which can be found at [www.portfolio-advocacy.com](http://www.portfolio-advocacy.com).

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