



# The Beginner's Guide to International Schools Marketing

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## About the Authors

### Matthew Ward

With 10 years of experience in marketing, advertising, and communications, Matt provides strategic direction to education businesses, helping them connect with schools and teachers in the UK, the US, and Internationally.

Raised in Silicon Valley and later working in one of America's high-tech start-up capitals, Boulder, before eventually completing his tertiary education at an English University, Matt brings a transatlantic and international savvy to his clients' education strategies.

His first foray into education marketing was developing the international student body at his alma mater through global student recruitment marketing. He's since led hundreds of education marketing strategies for clients in sectors spanning EdTech, Software, Commercial Buildings, Teacher Training, Travel, Education Resources, and Wellbeing.



## Steve Whitely

With a passion for improving Educational Technology globally, Steve has worked in the EdTech sector for over 36 years striving for and delivering award-winning products and services.

Steve has a wealth of experience designing and delivering technology in the classroom and has spent over 18 years working with and successfully trading with the education sectors in various countries. His trade relationships extend into Europe, North and South America, the Middle East, China, Vietnam, Japan and Australia, which provides him valuable insight into Educational Technology all over the world.

From concept to creation, Steve has developed and manufactured a wide range of STEM products currently sold and used within schools worldwide.

The excellence of these products has been internationally recognised, with many receiving the prestigious BETT, ERA and World Didac awards.

Learn more about Steve Whitley on his site [EdTech Consulting](#).



# Introduction

Inside this guide, you'll get a complete overview of the information you need to consider marketing your products and services to schools teaching in the English medium across the globe.

With over 12,000 schools and more than 5.5 million students, the international schools market is worth £40bn.

This guide will give you the understanding you need to take your first steps toward earning a portion of that expenditure.

We'll give you the information you need to begin planning your strategy as you start to export your products and services across the globe.

If you are already selling your products and services to UK schools, there's no reason you can't unlock the potential housed in international schools.

With similar organisation structures, curricula, and staff roles, the barriers to entering this global market are easy and quick to navigate.

At the end of the guide, you'll be invited to discover just how many schools and staff you can tap into using our database of 6,000 schools and 185,000 educators across 55 countries that are waiting to hear from you.



# 1. What is an International School?

So what is an international school?

Unlike national or domestic schools, international schools offer a wholly or partly English curriculum outside of English-speaking countries or an internationally oriented school within an English-speaking country.

Typically international schools cater to students that are not nationals of the host country; these could be the children of staff working in business, international organisations, or foreign embassies, or as military personnel.

However, it's common for most students in some parts of the world to be local. These students are studying to pursue an education that will allow them to secure a coveted place at an English-speaking University.

## 2. Understanding the Different Types of International Schools

Education systems share global similarities, but some distinctions might impact your marketing strategy. To help you navigate the nuances of the many international school types, here's a list of the 23 different types of schools you're likely to encounter when selling into the International Schools market and a brief explanation of each.

If you're comfortable with the many different types of International schools, feel free to skip this chapter and pick up from chapter 3, Structure and Operation.

### Nurseries

**Including:** Nursery Through Kindergarten, Through Preparatory, Through Middle, Through Secondary, Through High, Through Sixth Form, and Through College

A nursery school is an educational establishment that provides children with early childhood education before they enrol in compulsory education. Nursery schools may be publicly or privately operated and may be subsidised from public funding.

### Early Years Foundation

**Including:** EY Through High, Through Middle, Through Secondary, Through Senior, Through Sixth Form, and Through Upper

Early years schools provide education that meets the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework in the UK. This framework outlines the standards that schools and childcare providers must meet for the learning, development, and care of children from birth to five.

### Preschool

**Including:** Pre-School Through Elementary, Through Lower, Through Junior, Through Middle, Through Junior High, Through High, Through Secondary, Through Senior, Through Sixth Form, and Through Upper

The terms 'Nursery' and 'Preschool' are often used interchangeably. However, in most countries, there are a few key differences between the two.

Preschools tend to follow a planned curriculum, as per the 'school' part of their name and run more closely to standard school hours (8 am-2 pm, for example, with closures over half terms and holidays) as opposed to nursery schools that may provide childcare for up to 12 hours a day, including half-term holidays.

### Kindergarten

**Including:** Through Primary, Through Middle, Through Secondary, Through High, Through Senior, Through Sixth Form, and Through University

A form of preschool education, kindergarten provides an approach based on playing, singing, hands-on



activities and social interaction to facilitate a softer transition from home to school.

## Primary

**Including:** Primary with Early Years; and Primary Through Middle, Through Senior, Through High, Through Secondary, Through Senior, and Through Sixth Form

Primary schools provide primary education to pupils usually aged four-11 (but sometimes up until the age of 13), sitting between preschool and secondary school.

Primary school is the term used in the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa; and interchangeably with the term 'junior school' in Australia.

In North America and the Philippines, it's known as grade school, and elsewhere across the globe, including the US, it's known as elementary school.

## Elementary

**Including:** Elementary Through High, Through Middle, Through Secondary, and Through Upper

In many cases, 'elementary school' is used as a synonym for primary school. However, there are some subtle differences in a few locations, specifically regarding the age range of the intake. In Japan, elementary schools are roughly the same as primary schools; they accept pupils from the ages of six to 12, after which they enter junior high school.

## Secondary

**Including:** Secondary Through Sixth Form, and Through College

A secondary school is an establishment that provides secondary education, following on from

primary school and preceding vocational or tertiary education. Attendance is usually compulsory for students up until the age of 16.

## High School

**Including:** High School Through Sixth Form, and Through University

In most areas of the world, 'high school' is simply a term used interchangeably with 'secondary school'.

However, in the United States, high school is the term used for the education students receive in their final stage of secondary education – usually from 14 to 18. As opposed to secondary schools, which can deliver both levels 2 and 3 of the International Standard Classification of Education, American high schools usually only provide level 3.

## Infants

**Including:** Infants Through Junior, and Through College

Infant school is a term primarily used in England and Wales for settings providing primary education to pupils between four and seven.

Infant schools are usually small settings providing Key Stage 1 education to pupils before moving to a linked junior school.

## Junior

**Including:** Junior Through Middle, Through Senior, and Through Sixth Form

After moving on from infant school, pupils in England and Wales will usually progress onto their linked junior school, which educates pupils from 8 to 11.

After junior school, most pupils then move onto secondary school. As with infant schools, pupils



at state junior schools learn the standard national curriculum, the same as state primary schools.

## Senior

**Including:** Senior Through Sixth Form

The term 'senior school' has a few different uses, depending on the country. In England and Wales, senior school is another word for secondary school – post-primary education provided to students from 11 to 16.

In Scotland, senior school is another word for fifth year, or S5, a mandatory part of the leaving certificate and the last year before finishing school to head to Higher Education or work. Most students are usually 17 or 18 during senior school.

## Lower

**Including:** Lower Through High, and Through Sixth Form

In the UK, lower schools are found in a few local education authorities as part of a three-tiered approach to education consisting of lower, middle, and upper schools.

Lower school, or first school, is the first step in pupils' compulsory education, catering for pupils from the age of four or five until eight or nine.

## Middle

**Including:** Middle Through Secondary, Through High, Through Senior, and Through Upper

Middle schools are part of the three-tier education system, usually educating pupils between the ages of nine to 13 (although, depending on the region, this may be as young as seven).

However, unlike lower and upper schools, middle

schools are commonly found worldwide, educating preteen and younger teenage students.

## Upper

Upper schools are a type of secondary school included in the three-tier education approach.

Upper schools teach pupils from 13 or 14 to 16 (or 18, if the school operates a sixth form). In some areas, upper schools are known as high schools.

## Pre-prep

**Including:** Pre-Prep Through Preparatory, Through Upper, Through Senior, and Through Sixth Form

Pre-prep schools, found in the UK, teach children until they begin prep school. They're usually feeder schools associated with a specific prep school and so will follow the same curriculum, learning programmes, and development targets – just tailored to the younger pupils.

## Preparatory

**Including:** Preparatory Through Secondary, Through College, and Through Sixth Form

The term 'preparatory school' can refer to two different establishments depending on the country.

A preparatory school (or 'prep' school) is a fee-paying independent primary school that educates pupils until 11 or 13. The school aims to prepare students for entry into an independent secondary school (usually one of the English public schools) or a state selective grammar school.

In the United States, however, preparatory school is a type of secondary education designed to prepare students aged 13-18 for higher education (also known as college-preparatory school or prep school).



## Sixth Form College

Sixth form college represents the two years of education undertaken between the ages of 16 and 18 as standard (although it's not uncommon for some students to retake a year and finish at 19). Sixth form refers solely to post-16 academic education and not to vocational education.

## College

Across the globe, 'college' can refer to several different establishments: a high school or secondary school, further education college, higher education provider without university status, a training institution that awards trade qualifications, or a constituent part of a university.

## University

Universities are institutes of higher (or tertiary) education and research, offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to award students with academic degrees in a variety of disciplines.

There are over 25,000 universities across the globe, each with its ways of working and degree standards; some universities have tighter admission regulations and education standards, making a first-class degree more impressive.

## Distance Learning

Distance Learning, or Distance Education, teaches students who may not always be physically present

in school.

Distance Learning was established in the 1800s, with students learning through lessons sent via the post.

Technology then progressed to enable learning via radio and then television, but now distance learning happens online. Distance learning programmes may be a hybrid of online and classroom instruction or may take place solely online.

## Group

Groups are clusters of international schools that usually provide British and American education to expatriate families and national students.

One example is the International Schools Group, a not-for-profit district that operates five individual schools across the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

These schools, categorised into American and British schools, offer the standard American curriculum and the National Curriculum of England and Wales.

Besides the curriculum, schools in these groups will be accredited, licensed, and governed following the country's usual education standards.

## What's next?

Now that you're familiar with many different school types, you'll want to come to grips with the types of students attending international schools.

Students in international schools are not all the children of foreign dignitaries, and there are a number of reasons they attend.

Gathering information on the types of students obtaining an international education is an important first step in informing your international marketing strategy.



## What type of students attend international schools?

Depending on the school's location, you'll find international schools are populated mainly by the children of expats living outside of their native country.

There are, however, exceptions to the rule.

Here's what to expect in different parts of the world.

## Who attends international schools in the Middle East?

International schools in the Middle East host mostly students whose first language is English. Most of these students are the children of professional expatriates and affluent local families.

## Who attends international schools in China?

In contrast to the Middle East, most students in Chinese international schools are native to China. English will be a second language and but also a priority for these students.

Often these students are studying at an international school as a pathway into higher education and likely an English university.

In some countries, there are rules governing what schools native students can attend and when. Many countries require a certain degree of state education.

For instance, China is currently reassessing how much foreign investment and private interest they're going to allow to influence the education of native Chinese children.

These new regulations are changing the landscape of international and for-profit education in China and have significantly impacted education firms operating in the country.

That said, non-native students remain unaffected by new rules and regulations.

## Who attends international schools in America?

Many international schools in America cater to families working for international or government organisations in big cities that want their children to have a European education.

These schools create a pathway toward Ivy League schools.

## Who attends international schools in Europe?

There's a number of international schools across Europe, with one of the largest concentrations of private schools occurring in Spain.

Our readers will know there's a large contingency of UK expats in Spain due to its affordability, weather, and proximity to the isles.

However, the education system in Spain leaves something to be desired by both expats and Spanish natives.

Another reason for European demand for international schools is the need for English-medium curricula.

The first thing the child of an expat family would need to do before accessing the national education system in another country would be to learn the local language.

For parents looking for a continuous English-medium education, international schools are necessary so that their children are up to speed and prepared for higher education when they return home.

## What's next?

Understanding the motivations of the families and students attending international schools will help you tailor your messaging to speak to the staff.

The goal is to align your products and services with the school's objectives and its stakeholders.

Once you've determined why the school should want your product, you'll need to decide who you want to speak to, which leads us to how international schools are organised.



## 3. The Structure and Operation of International Schools

International schools are frequently all-through schools split into multiple campuses, but some variation remains across the landscape.

One school may be broken down into a kindergarten, primary, and secondary, all nearby, but with clearly defined boundaries and individual staff and governance. In contrast, some schools have a shared SLT and Head Teachers.

Due to the variation in school leadership, you'll find roles like Head of Primary and Head of Secondary feature more prominently in international schools.

There are both individual schools and all-through schools, with the ratio of primary to secondary schools being similar to that of the UK, meaning there are more primary schools than secondary schools.

Because all-through schools are commonplace, it's not uncommon for the number of pupils in a school to reach into the thousands as they accommodate students from kindergarten through secondary school.

It is also the case that a single secondary school may be part of an education management group such as GEMS Education, the world's largest operator of Kindergarten-to-grade 12 schools, similar to an MAT in the UK. That group will also have schools of different levels acting as feeder schools for the secondary school.

### Leadership in international schools

Be aware that there are as many variants of school leadership structures as schools with leadership spread throughout.

Schools may have more than one Deputy Head, a Head of Curriculum, and a Head of Education, so where possible, include all relevant school staff in your target audience and tailor your messaging to those roles.

Many education businesses are keen to isolate what they perceive to be the one key decision-maker in the belief that because they are the person that will ultimately approve a purchase, they are the only contact that matters; this isn't the case.

A good approach will utilise multiple points of contact for maximum impact.



## Strategy for targeting groups

Consider groups of schools in the same way you might consider MATs.

When promoting a whole-school solution to MATs, you would target the SLT of the Trust but also influential figures in single academies. A smart strategy would be to apply the same approach to school groups.

Targetting groups is best done with both a bottom-up and top-down approach. By connecting with teachers and senior leaders, you'll cultivate awareness of your product at both levels and enable more productive decision-making conversations.

If you can successfully get into one or two schools within a group, you can leverage that into further opportunities in other schools.

Not all international schools are a part of groups, and not all groups are the same size. Some have dozens of schools, and others only have a couple of schools.

Keep track of the number of schools in a group and adjust your strategy accordingly.

## What's next?

We've determined the 'who?' and the 'how?', now it's time to determine the 'when'.

Much like UK schools, international schools could make a purchase at any time of year.

Rather than coaching you to sell or market your products at a certain of year, the next section will shed light on things to consider when timing your campaigns.



## 4. Key Dates in International Schools

There isn't necessarily a cyclical budgetary calendar, with international schools receiving most of their funding from fee-paying students.

Even with set term times, independent educational establishments are free to decide on their spending.

There is a financial year, and they will forecast their income, allocate budgets, and prioritise their spending. Still, there isn't a meaningful and consistently observable pattern that suppliers can plan around.

So, what should education businesses pay attention to?

### Holidays

Events to take note of in international schools are holidays.

They're a great deal more activity that occurs in international schools surrounding holidays than in state schools because they often involve the travel arrangements of the entire student body.

Because of the organisation and effort involved in facilitating the mass migration of students to and from schools, it's wise to leave some clearance on either side of major holidays to allow the flurry of activity surrounding student arrivals and departures to subside.

### Be aware of culturally significant events in the host country

Consider culturally significant events in your target market and their impact on your marketing and communications.

Suppose you're targeting a predominantly Muslim country. In that case, you'll want to note the month-long observation of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and be sensitive to this period.

As a side note, a base understanding of the culture and prevailing belief system in the countries you're approaching will help you understand their perception of your company and culture.



While you might be working with an international school, you will likely encounter people native to the country and local customs while navigating the international schools market.

Similarly, your workweek may not match up with school staff in other countries. While your weekend may fall on Saturday and Sunday, in Saudi Arabia, the weekend falls on Friday and Saturday. Before a royal decree came into place about ten years ago, it used to be Thursday and Friday.

So, don't idly schedule your broadcasts and be mindful when trying to contact individual clients.

## **What next?**

You now have a great understanding of the schools you want to target as if they were in your back garden.

However, they are not on your patch of green.

Take the time to understand the education landscape in the countries you're considering marketing too from a political, economic, and socio-cultural standpoint.

In the following sections we'll discuss a few things to look out for when researching your target market.



## 5. Challenges and Solutions for Engaging International Schools

### Research the countries you'll target

Don't make the mistake of judging your opportunities in the international school market based on the sheer volume of schools in a given region.

While the largest number of private schools may be in China, secondly in India, followed by the UAE, and then Pakistan, several things may impact your ability to deal with schools.

#### China

As we know, China is working on new rules and regulations governing what students can receive international tuition and when. Still, the support staff of the schools you're dealing with may be Chinese, and thus you may encounter cultural differences with respect to striking a deal.

#### India

India has an enormous number of private and international schools because the quality of state education is poor. Still, the fees charged in these schools are significantly less than those set at schools in more affluent nations.

Education businesses may struggle to sell high-cost solutions in this market due to a broad price differential.

#### UAE

Opportunity in the UAE is not only abundant because the majority of schools are English, American and Australian, but also because the cultural divide is more easily bridged, they share a similar timezone, and it's easy to travel to.

That said, because it's a hot market, there's more competition, and it may be more complex and take more investment to access.



## What to consider when planning your strategy

While marketing to international schools isn't without its challenges, it's important to note that you have already overcome the greatest challenge of them all – messaging.

Because international schools are already teaching English and English-medium curriculums, your messaging for international schools will remain largely the same.

## Pricing structure

If there's one thing to consider when taking your product abroad, it's probably your pricing structure.

### **Questions to ask yourself about your pricing:**

Will you charge the same for your products and services abroad that you do at home?

There may be additional costs involved in selling internationally.

Should you charge less and make up the deficit by aiming for a large volume of sales?

Can you charge more in more affluent nations because of the additional cost of delivering your services internationally?

And indeed, while deciding on your pricing, consider that while in the UK prices are more rigid, in other countries, bartering is part and parcel of the deal, and they will expect a discount as part of the negotiation.

**Top Tip:** To make negotiations easier, keep your prices off of your website. If you are transparent with your pricing, consider geofencing your website so that UK IP addresses can access your pricing page, but traffic from other countries can't.

Pricing is especially vital if you're planning on working through distributors, agents, or resellers. Even with online solutions, consider if you'll want someone in-country to make the sale or support it.

What incentives will these ancillary teams require to support your operations?

Have these conversations and build their costs into your pricing. The last thing you want is for your partners in-country to attempt a sale, only for the prospect to find your pricing elsewhere for 40% less than advertised.



## Shipping, Tariffs, and Duties

Be aware of the cost of selling your products, particularly physical ones, into your target market.

Many countries protect their domestic market by putting up a trade barrier via steep tariffs and duties taxing imports.

Some countries may take a laissez-faire approach, and your business may be virtually free from economic intervention from local government, whereas others may require further consideration.

## Local Rules and Regulations

Does your product breach the rules and regulations?

If you're offering an online solution or resource, is the content sensitive towards local history, religious, and cultural beliefs?

These are things you'll want to consider, especially around sensitive subjects in countries with firmly held religious, cultural, and political practices.

On the flip side of the coin, can you add value by regionalising your product?

Many international schools must provide some teaching relevant to the host country. For example, in the Middle East, international schools have to teach Islamic studies to operate.

If you're up against a competitor with a similar product, you stand a better chance of winning the sale if your product has regionalised features.

## Data and Privacy

Finally, consider local governance concerning data protection and privacy.

Think about what data you're gathering and where you're storing it.

Be aware of your policy and practices surrounding collecting, storing, and processing school data regarding the host countries' data protection and privacy laws.

Are you using servers to control data in your home country, belonging to individuals in the host country?

If so, consider spinning up a local server to align your company with local laws and regulations, especially in places like the UAE and Asia.



## 6. Strategy for Engaging International Schools – How Do You Start New School Relationships?

The best approach for gaining new international business is using multiple routes to market.

Email marketing will be your first port of call, but you'll need to invest more time in following up and chasing your leads.

It may not be as simple as sending out a high-impact, high-volume email blast and waiting for the enquiries to roll in.

Send a considered and tailored sequence of emails designed to win over the staff type you're communicating to, taking into account their pain points, needs, and cultural code.

After that, pick up the phone.

What does an ideal email strategy look like?

1. Introduce your brand and company.
2. Demonstrate your offer through a free value asset.
3. Invite your prospect to a webinar or demo.
4. Can we set up a meeting strategy call via Zoom or meet in person?

Before you deploy an international strategy, prepare yourself to dedicate time to exporting your products and services internationally.

A successful strategy for international schools will require follow-through, whether that's in-country or from home.



## 7. The First Step to Selling to International Schools

Now that you have an advanced understanding of international schools, are you prepared to view your target audience?

### Build your audience out of 100% safe data

You can determine your target audience through our 100%-secure Campus database by selecting from 6,000 schools and 185,000 contacts to begin your international marketing strategy.

To the best of our knowledge, we are the only International Schools data provider in the world that will safeguard you against using 'risky' International Schools data.

Many countries have their local email, privacy, and data laws, making it illegal to process the data and email school contacts in certain circumstances.

Therefore, to ensure that we're not being irresponsible or risking our clients getting into 'hot water', we only ever collect and provide the data of the schools in countries where it is permitted.

### Here's how you can target

We've worked hard to reduce the complexity in international schools to a straightforward set of labels that will connect you with the right educators.

Now you can identify your target audience by faculty, seniority, subjects, and specialisms that resonate with you and your business and comb the international database for precisely the establishments you're looking for.

Set your search parameters using 55 countries, 10 regions, 80+ school types, over 100 curriculums, 56 languages, and hundreds of staff roles.

### Sell to international schools

If selling to international schools is a new area for you, then get in touch, and we'd be delighted to discuss your requirements and help you create a strategy for reaching international schools.

[Get in touch](#), and we can discuss the potential our international school data holds for you.



# Sprint Education

T. 01684 297374  
E. [info@sprint-education.co.uk](mailto:info@sprint-education.co.uk)  
W. [www.sprint-education.co.uk](http://www.sprint-education.co.uk)

