



DIGITAL MARKETING IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Proven Strategies for
Success
by Lilac James



FORWARD

Every year in the United Kingdom there are over 10,000,000 pupils of all ages in education, and this number is growing every year.

Independent schools, public schools, further education establishments, and adult education providers are operating in an increasingly competitive digital environment and can no longer rely on word of mouth alone.

Lilac James has specialised in digital marketing within the education sector since 2008 and we have a phenomenal track record of generating ROI through SEO, Google Ads, and social media marketing.

In this report, we're going to share what we've learned so you can excel in your digital marketing.

Increasingly, we have found that nearly every student an educational establishment acquires will have conducted research on Google and Social Media before making a purchase decision.

This provides huge opportunities for establishments willing to invest their time, effort, and energy into getting this right.

In this document, we'll share our evidence-based approach to generating real, and provable results for a range of objectives within the education sector, primarily, student acquisition.

Everything in this report will be backed up with real client case studies.

If you are interested in professional marketing services, please don't hesitate to reach out for a no-obligation initial consultation.

Jamie Stenton

Director

Lilac James Co.



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to help educational establishments firstly understand the changing marketing environment within which they operate, and then to share some best practice and strategies that we have found dramatically improves student acquisition and other business objectives.

The Education sector is growing fast. With an estimated 10,000,000 individuals studying within the UK each year.

2023 saw an increase of 65,000 students when compared to 2022, and this growth trend is set to continue.

Nearly 600K students are from overseas, with 120K of these being from within the EU. There is significant interest abroad in studying within the UK, which presents educational establishments with tremendous opportunity, but also a tremendous challenge – how do you reach, and attract these people?

Headline stats for education in 2023:

10,094,231

Number of pupils

In 2022/23,
maintained schools.
Increase of 65.653
from 2021/22

2,990,120

Number of FE Students

In 2021/22 - Increase
of 136,770 from
2020/21



11.6%

**Percentage of 16–24–
years old NEET**

In April to June 2023
up 0.3 percentage
points on the
previous quarter.

567,309

**Full-time equivalent
number of teachers**

In 2022/23,
maintained schools-
increase of almost
3,500 from 2021/22

2,972,330

**Number of HE
students**

In 2021/22– 72% total
undergraduate,
28% total
postgraduate

48.4%

**Percentage of 19–64–
year-olds with NQF
level 4 or above**

67.0% NQF level 3+
and 83.1% level 2+. Q4
2022

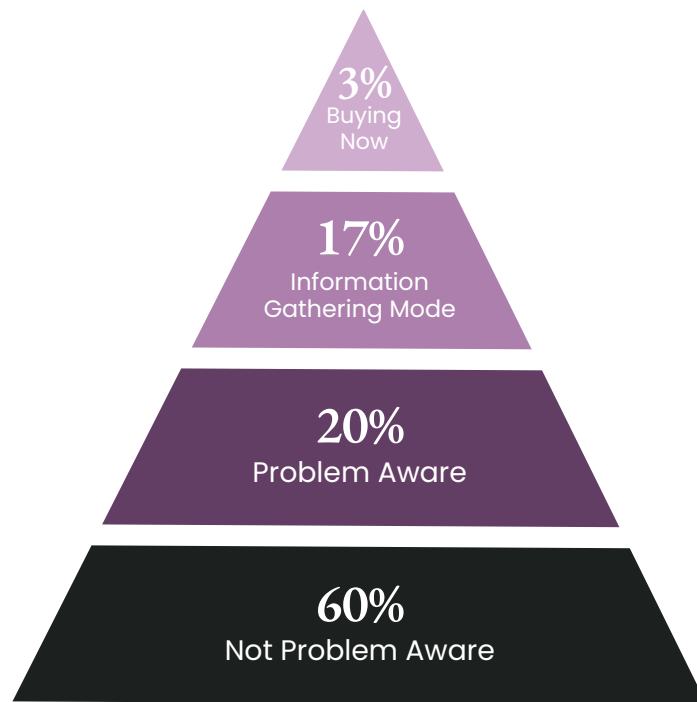
The vast majority of these students will be younger persons, for whom digital media is integrated into their lives.

Your future student's journey toward their chosen school, or course starts much earlier than you may think, with students (or parents/guardians of students) conducting research and following social channels sometimes for years before making their final decision.

This customer journey, and the behaviours within, offer you significant opportunities to get in front of your target customer and nurture them towards a sale.

THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Before we consider the customer journey, we'll quickly explain the 'larger market formula', as this explains where many businesses go wrong with their marketing and lead generation.



The big mistake most businesses make is over-focusing on the small 3% of people who are actively looking to immediately buy a course or secure a school place.

Whilst it is important to target these people, there is a far greater amount of people who are not 'buyer ready'. For these people, it is far more important to have marketing assets, and a marketing system to continually nurture people towards a sale.

Let's take a moment to consider the customer journey:

Typical customer journey of education customer:

AWARENESS

If people don't know who you are, what you offer, and what makes you stand out, then they can't possibly become a student.

Typical Activities – Conducting research, and utilising Google to research educational institutions and suppliers that offer the type of courses or outcomes that they desire.

INTEREST

The interest stage can sometimes last for several years, with potential students showing an interest in becoming a student, but perhaps they're not yet in the position to commit to a course.

Typical Activities – Once your prospect is aware of you, if they're interested, they will conduct research and look at you further. Common activities will be checking reviews, researching alumni and case studies, following your social media, downloading brochures, and reviewing your website.

DESIRE

Your potential student then moves into the desire phase, where they want to study with you, but there are unknown barriers in their way that are preventing them from doing so. This could be genuine issues that need to be overcome, or it could simply be a timing issue.

Typical Activities – It's important in the desire phase that you attempt to achieve a physical connection with the prospective student. Activities can include open days, and tutor 121's.

ACTION

Your prospect commits to studying with you

Typical Activities – Within the desire phase, it's vital to engage prospective students (or parents) so you can identify barriers to them studying with you. Common barriers can be overcome and can include finance, visa issues, or time constraints.



Retention – Once someone studies with you, it is vital that we achieve a great customer experience, and have options to upsell other courses, or further education. It is always easier, and cheaper to sell to a happy customer than it is to find a new one.

Advocacy – Happy customers are more likely to refer other similar individuals to your educational institution. Prospective students (or parents) are more likely to commit to studying with you if they have had a positive referral from a trusted person.



HOW DIGITAL MARKETING CAN FIT INTO YOUR CUSTOMERS JOURNEY

Before we discuss the tactics of successful marketing strategies within education, it's important to consider which strategies fit into the customer journey, and how they can be utilised at various stages.

This is not an exhaustive list, and you're only ever limited by your budget, expertise, and the time investment required to get these strategies to work well together.



TACTICS: SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

When social media advertising within the education sector, you can have many different and simultaneous objectives, but in this document we're going to discuss the three most common:

1. Building Brand Awareness.
2. Achieving Open Event Sign Ups.
3. Direct Applications.

The biggest mistake we see education institutions make with advertising in general, is always going straight for direct applications.

Unless you're targeting a warm audience, this is the equivalent of going on a first date and asking the person to marry you! You may get lucky periodically, but you'll get 1000 people saying no before the first person says yes.

Depending on your educational establishments position within the market, a direct applications campaign may work fantastically. For example, Hills Road Sixth form college, is a high performing and sought after college based in Cambridge, direct application adverts work well for them given their significant brand awareness in the local area.

However, even in their case, direct application adverts must be used sparingly, and strategically.

Here are some top tips for each advertising campaign type:

1. Brand Awareness

- Low budget.
- Focused on Meta.
- Create Ads that target both the student, and parent with different and relevant messaging.
- Send traffic to your website to look around.
- Monitor engagement metrics to ensure you're targeting the correct audience.

2. Achieving Open Event Sign Ups

- Events should have limited capacity, Ads can then create genuine urgency and scarcity, which promotes action, and attendance.
- Ads should drive relevant persons to a well written, simple and effective landing page, where they can register their details.
- Once they have left details, a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) tool should send email sequences, confirming attendance, providing more details, and over time nurturing attendees with further information about your establishment.

3. Direct Applications

- Preceding the launch of a direct applications advertising campaign, consider running a pre promotion campaign that highlights from when people can apply.
- When the direct application campaign goes live, target predominantly a warm audience that is already familiar with your brand.
- Retarget Ads towards your email list, and a lookalike audience of your email list.
- Retarget previous website visitors.
- Ensure that your application process has as little 'friction' as possible. Aka, make it as easy as possible for someone to submit their application.

Of course, there are many more strategies that can be deployed, and the exact strategies to deploy will depend on your precise situation, and what you are looking to achieve.

Strategies for selling adult education courses of low value will be perfectly fine with direct to application campaigns.

The more commitment that is required from the student (and supporting parents) in both time and money, the more likely it is you will need build a well-considered and executed marketing funnel.

Here are some of the adverts we have produced for various education clients:

Hills Road Sixth Form College:

Although the target customer was students in year 10, it's actually their parents who are the key decision-makers and action-takers. We therefore targeted the parents and achieved hundreds of open day sign ups.





The only independent school in Wimbledon for children aged 3-11 with a dedicated holiday camp in the school holidays. [...See more](#)



willingtonschool.co.uk
Meeting the needs of modern parents

[Learn more](#)

11

2 comments



Like



Comment



Share

International Business College Manchester:

This client had an extremely strong offering of 100% funded HND courses and the provision of a free laptop for qualifying students but they needed their Ads to reach very specific people.

They were seeking individuals who had recently immigrated to the UK, who were eligible for study support. We carefully refined audience targeting, and ensured messaging and imagery was relevant to the target audience.

The image selected for this Ad was meant to provoke an emotional response 'make your parents proud by studying with us'. This particular advert produced hundreds of enquiries.

Willington Independent Primary School:

These were brand awareness Ads to promote the school, and its dedicated holiday camp to 20,000 known parents within their catchment area.



Looking to achieve a qualification and open up a rewarding career? We offer 100% tuition fees PLUS up to £21,000 in funding, and [...See more](#)



FORM ON FACEBOOK
Did you miss the September 2022 intake?...

[Learn more](#)

9

2 comments



Like



Comment

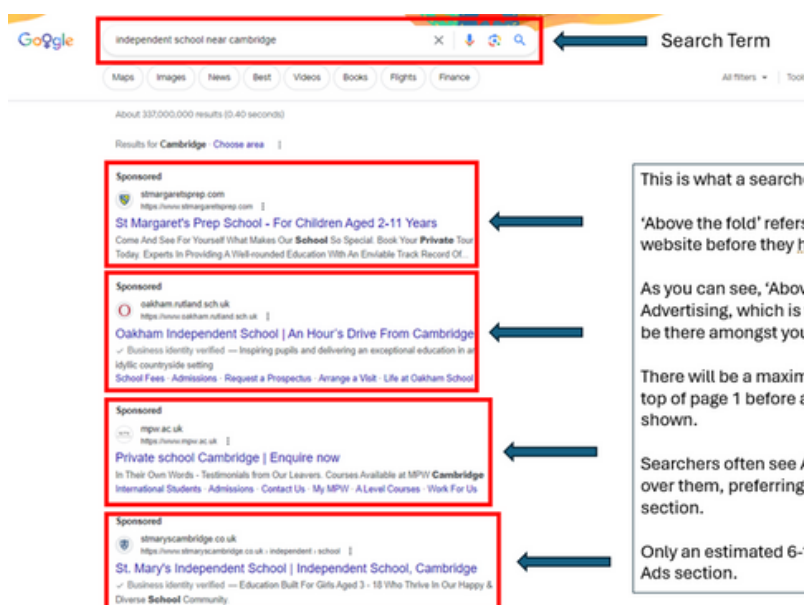
TACTICS: SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

Often, the strongest-performing website traffic, that is far more likely to convert, is from organic search engines.

The great thing is that traffic from search engines is completely free.

The bad news is that there is only a maximum of 10 page one positions on page 1 of Google, and if you're not on page 1... you'll get very little high-quality website traffic from Organic search.

Let's take a moment to examine what an average page 1 looks like for a relevant search term:



The screenshot shows a Google search for "independent school near cambridge". The search bar is highlighted with a red box and labeled "Search Term". Below the search bar, there are tabs for Maps, Images, News, Best, Videos, Books, Flights, and Finance. The results show "About 337,000,000 results (0.40 seconds)". The first four results are sponsored ads, each highlighted with a red box and an arrow pointing to the text box on the right. The ads are for St Margaret's Prep School, Oakham Independent School, Private school Cambridge, and St. Mary's Independent School. The text box on the right explains that these ads are what a searcher will see 'above the fold' and that there will be a maximum of 4 ads displayed at the top of page 1 before any organic positions are shown.

Search Term

independent school near cambridge

Maps Images News Best Videos Books Flights Finance

About 337,000,000 results (0.40 seconds)

Results for **Cambridge** Choose area

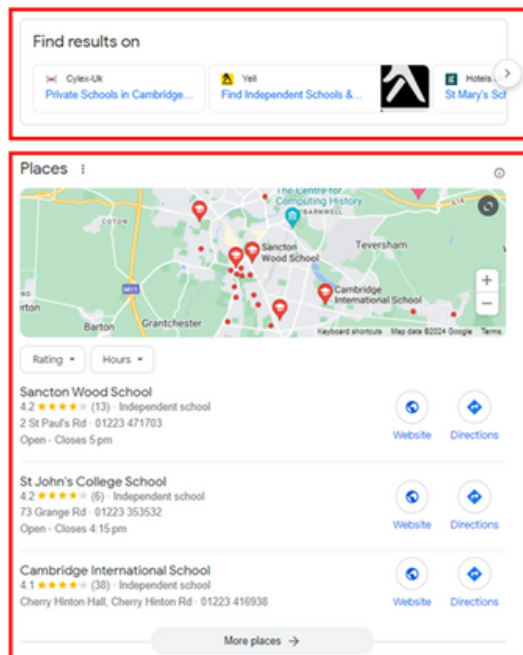
Sponsored
stmargaretsprep.com
St Margaret's Prep School - For Children Aged 2-11 Years
Come And See For Yourself What Makes Our School So Special. Book Your **Private** Tour Today. Experts In Providing A Well-rounded Education With An Envious Track Record Of...

Sponsored
oakham.rutland.sch.uk
Oakham Independent School | An Hour's Drive From Cambridge
✓ Business Identity verified — Inspiring pupils and delivering an exceptional education in an idyllic countryside setting
School Fees · Admissions · Request a Prospectus · Arrange a Visit · Life at Oakham School

Sponsored
mpw.ac.uk
Private school Cambridge | Enquire now
In Their Own Words · Testimonials from Our Leavers · Courses Available at MPW · Cambridge International Students · Admissions · Contact Us · My MPW · A-Level Courses · Work For Us

Sponsored
stmaryscambridge.co.uk
St. Mary's Independent School | Independent School, Cambridge
✓ Business Identity verified — Education Built For Girls Aged 3 - 18 Who Thrive In Our Happy & Diverse School Community

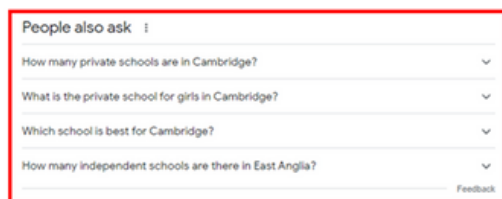
This is what a searcher will see 'above the fold'.
'Above the fold' refers to what someone sees on a website before they have to do any scrolling.
As you can see, 'Above the fold' is dominated by Advertising, which is why it's important for you to be there amongst your competitors.
There will be a maximum of 4 Ads displayed at the top of page 1 before any organic positions are shown.
Searchers often see Ads as less credible and skip over them, preferring to click on the organic section.
Only an estimated 6-10% of searchers click on the Ads section.



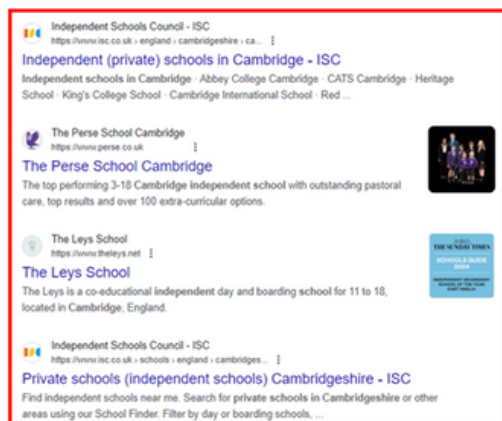
Due to Google having a monopoly in the search and information market, they have been forced to divert searchers to other third-party information websites. Which websites are displayed here are particular to the unique search term and offer you a good clue as to where else your business needs to have a digital footprint.

The next part is the 'Map Pack' which attracts up to 25% of all page clicks. The information displayed here is drawn from your Google Business Profile, so it is vital to ensure that it is optimised and fully updated.

As you can see, reviews are very prominent, so it's vital that you encourage happy customers to leave great reviews.



This is known as the 'People also ask' section, or the 'FAQ' section. This is a great way of finding out what information your target market is searching for. You can then provide this information on your website, and social channels to really engage your audience. If your content is good enough, with enough information, Google may also choose to display your information as a 'featured snippet'. By clicking the dropdowns, Google will display relevant answers to the questions that it sources from across the internet, the list of questions will then grow.



Finally... we have the organic section.

Most of the page clicks will be won here. Whilst this slide only displays the top four positions, there are a maximum of 10 on page one, however the higher up the page your position, the more traffic you will attract.

Only 4% of searchers are thought to go to page 2.

The great news is that most education establishments only have a limited number of competitors in their local area, so achieving page 1 positions is generally not too difficult for a specialist SEO agency like Lilac James.

The big SEO risk factor for an independent school or educational establishment is a website redesign.

During a website redesign, educational establishments run the risk of reverting all their SEO back to square 1. One of the uncontrollable ranking factors with SEO, is website longevity, and a new website can run the risk of making Google think your website is brand new again.

If you're getting a website redesign, always speak to an SEO specialist!

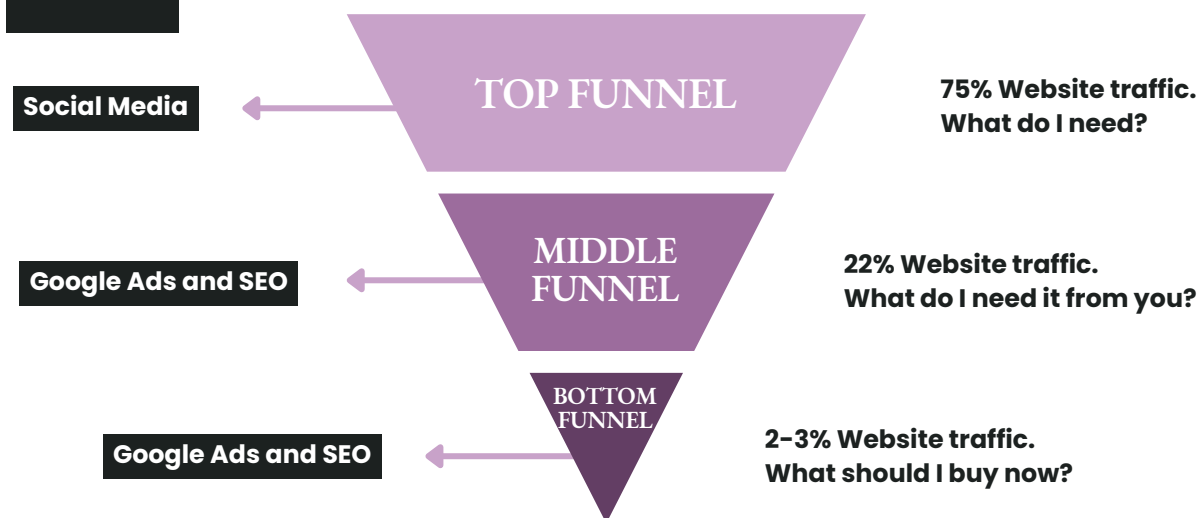
Here are some of the huge ranking improvements we made for Kimbolton Independent School in Cambridgeshire:



TACTICS: GOOGLE ADVERTISING

We have shown how Google Advertising appears on page 1, but what is key with Google Advertising, is how it attracts potential customers at both the 'information gathering' and 'buying now' phases of the customer journey.

Social Media, is best for brand awareness and bringing people in from the 'Top of Funnel', whereas traffic from Google operates fantastically at the middle and bottom of the funnel as shown below:



The fantastic thing about Google Advertising, is that you only pay when someone clicks on your Advert, whereas with Social Media Advertising, you pay for 'impressions' aka you pay when your Ads are shown.

Big Risks with Google Advertising

1. Wasting money on poor-performing keywords.
2. Following too many inappropriate Google Guidelines (normally telling you to put your budget up).
3. Wasting money by driving good traffic to a poor website or landing page.
4. Failing to fully utilise AI features by not testing 'Performance Max' campaigns.

Global Boarding School Group:

Lilac James run the Google Ads for a global boarding school client that manages 15 large boarding schools across the world. Here are our Google Ads results from one campaign, for one of their 15 schools:

Google Ads					
Clicks	Impressions	CTR	Cost	Avg. CPC	Conversions
5,121	134 K	3.81%	£4,436.35	£0.87	197.30

197 direct applications achieved for £4,436.35 in advertising spend.

Frewen College (specialist school for children with dyslexia and dyspraxia):

Frewen College are seeking to find very specific students who need particular support with their needs. There is a clear keyword demand, so we were able to refine their Google Ads campaign to ensure their Ads were displayed only for relevant search terms.

Google Ads					
Clicks	Impressions	CTR	Cost	Avg. CPC	Conversions
2,317	84,376	2.75%	£792.58	£0.34	42.37

The result has been an average student application for just £18.85.

I really hope you found this education marketing guide helpful.

We plan to keep it up to date and are happy to keep adding to it if there is certain information that people are seeking.

If you are seeking help with your marketing efforts, please don't hesitate to contact us at info@lilacjames.com

Jamie Stenton

Director

Lilac James