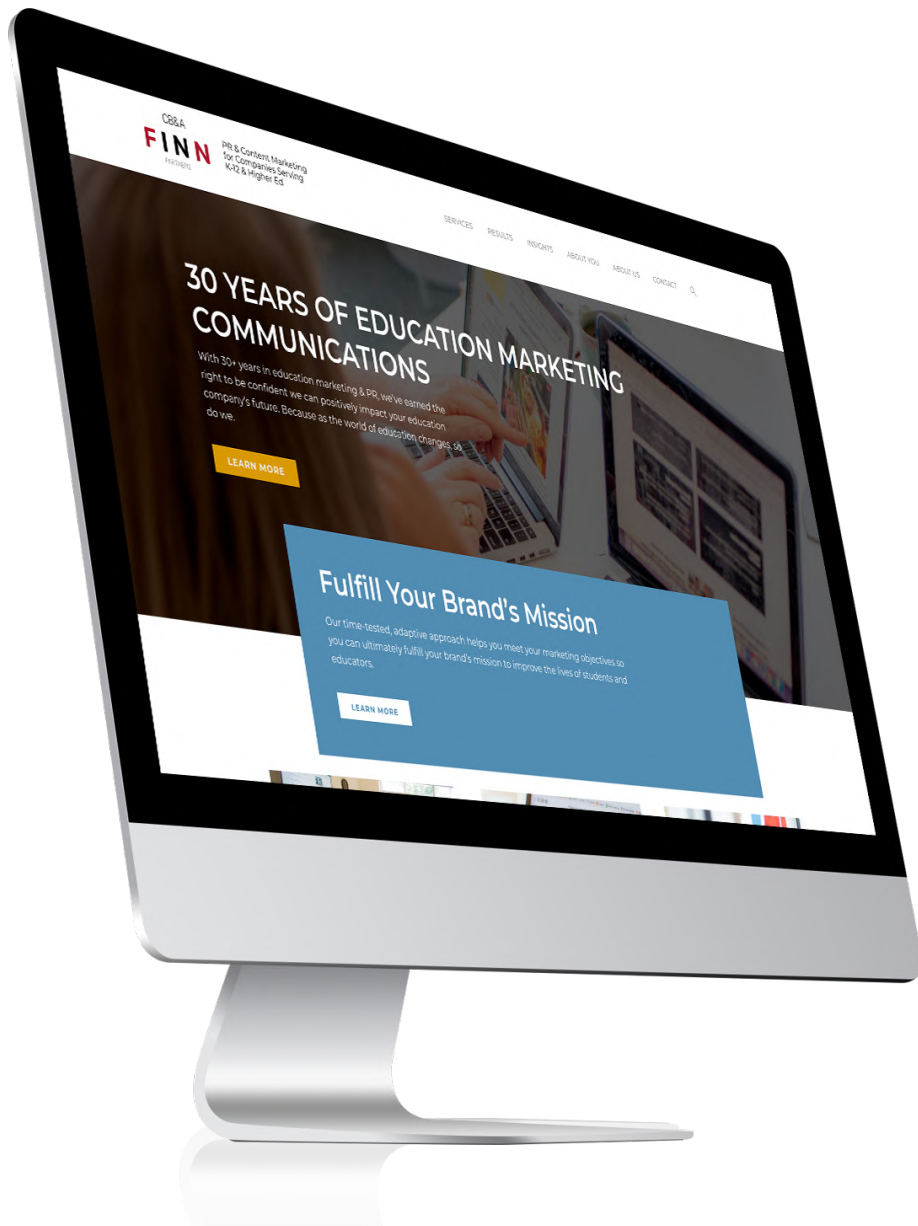


HOW EDUCATION MARKETERS ARE PREPARING
FOR A POST-ESSER 2025

CB&A Education Marketing Trends & Insights for 2025



For the sixth consecutive year, [CB&A, A FINN Partners Company](#), surveyed business-to-education (B2E) professionals to uncover trends in the education marketing landscape. Our survey findings give you a chance to compare your own experiences and plans with your peers', and our insights and recommendations will help you prepare for a productive and prosperous 2025.

In our report, we found that education marketers are:

- Interested in investing more on geo-focused campaigns
- Slightly deprioritizing retention efforts (find out why they shouldn't be below)
- Prioritizing lead nurturing in an increasingly competitive market

Read on for the top 4 takeaways and our recommendations for a successful 2025.

4 trends that should matter most to education marketers

1 Up against the end of ESSER, optimism prevails

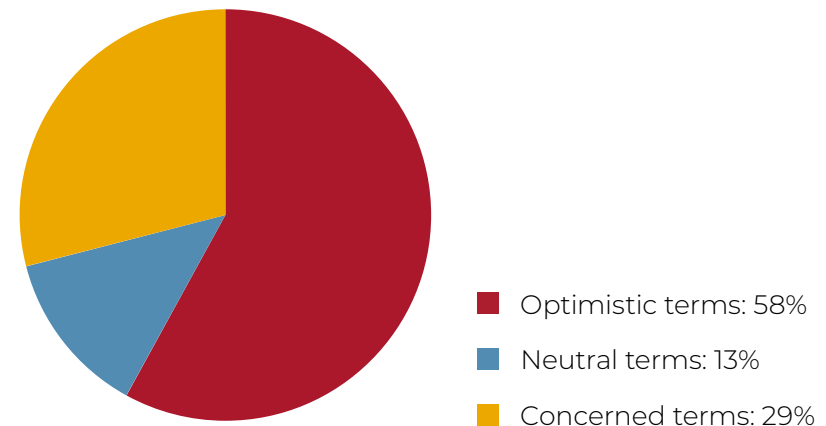
After an influx of nearly \$200 billion stimulus dollars in the past several years, school districts' budgets—and thus education companies' expectations—are coming back down to earth.

With almost all Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) dollars already spent or committed, districts will be making tough decisions, so your customer acquisition and retention may slow.

The good news is that the recession that would have reduced education budgets further has not happened and inflation has stabilized. The dreaded three-headed monster that was expected to make up the “2024 fiscal cliff” ended up being a one-headed monster for now.

Education companies serving PK-12 seem to be breathing a sigh of relief, having dodged the worst outcomes. In our recent Education Marketing Trends survey, we asked professionals who sell education products and services to describe their feelings about 2025 in one word. Over 71% of the words conveyed optimism or neutrality.

Describe your feelings about 2025 (next year) in one word:

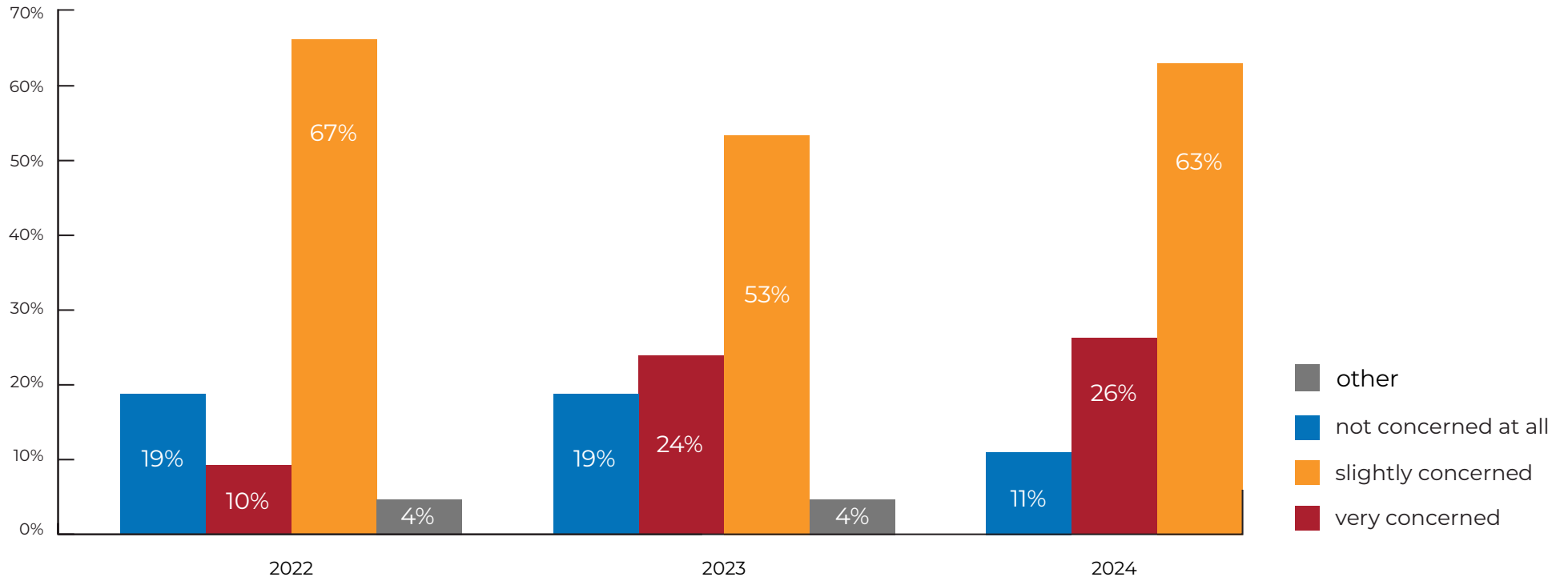


Describe your feelings about 2025 in one word:



That optimism is not endless, however. When asked, “Are you concerned about an ESSER funding cliff this fall?” 89% of respondents were either slightly or very concerned—a twelve point jump from last year. A solid majority of respondents are only slightly concerned, though, so even in ESSER’s 11th hour, it seems your fellow marketers are not sounding the alarm.

Q16: Are you concerned about an ESSER “funding cliff” in 2024?



To determine if education companies' optimism outweighs their concern, we asked respondents to compare their projected 2025 marketing budgets to their 2024 spending.

64%

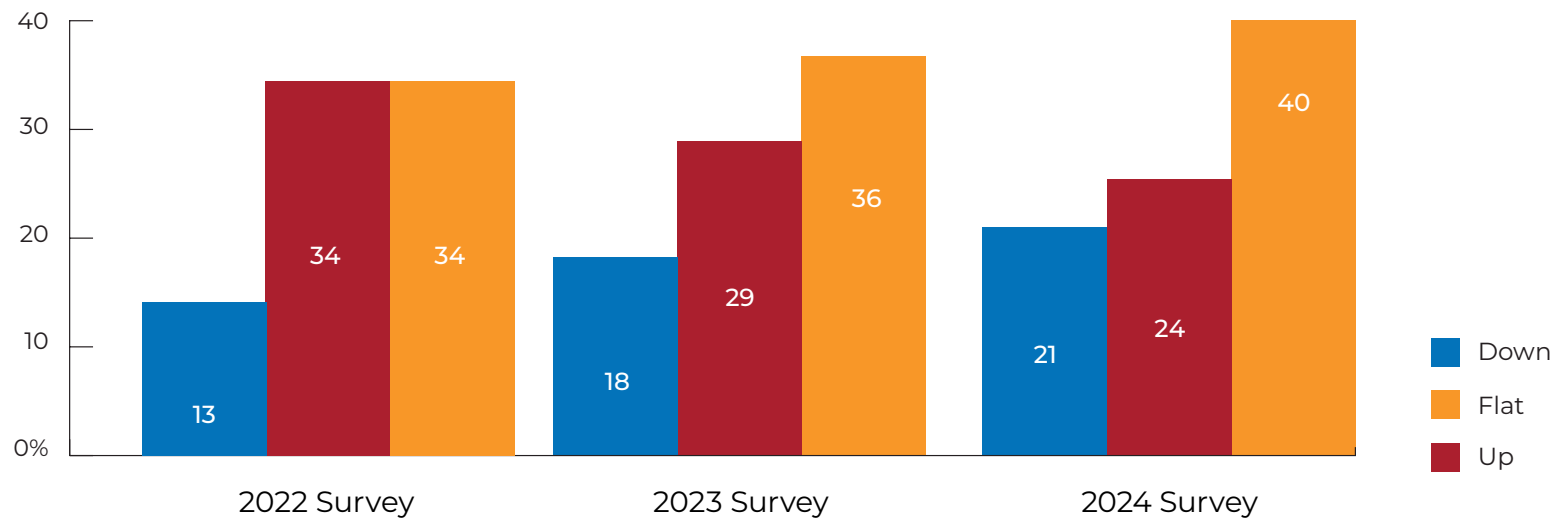
“ Almost two-thirds (64%) expect their 2025 marketing budgets to stay flat or increase, almost exactly the same as last year's breakdown. ”

This year's response was significantly less rosy than what we heard during the early days of ESSER. In our 2022 survey, almost 35% of marketers were looking forward to larger budgets the following year, while this year 24% are expecting a year-over-year increase. While budgets are still healthy, there's less expectation of meaningful increases next year than in the peak stimulus era. Budgeting appears to be reverting to the pre-Covid mean.

Compared to this year, my company's marketing budget for next year is projected to be:

There's certainly no indication of a crisis in our survey findings. Even if you're not expecting a large budget increase next year, you can still drive impressive marketing results using focus and creativity.

The need for more edtech and the federal funding influx the last several years fueled historic growth in our industry. That allowed many marketers to try new tactics that would have been previously out of reach. Now is the time to focus on some of those successful new tactics, while shifting away from the ones that have outgrown their ROI. Astute marketers will treat 2025 as a new era of post-ESSER opportunity, not a return to the education industry of 2020.



2 Geo-targeted marketing has momentum

Shrink your target to grow your business

One impactful way to increase your ROI without increasing your budget is to prioritize state-level marketing.

We have been hearing increased chatter about exploring more state-level marketing strategies from clients, prospects, and industry contacts. States have increasingly diverse requirements and priorities, and the differences among them continue to widen. That requires a significant investment in creating geo-specific messaging that resonates at the local level.

To validate our assumption that there's a trend towards more geographic-focused marketing, our survey dug into the current state of national vs. geo-targeted marketing approaches.

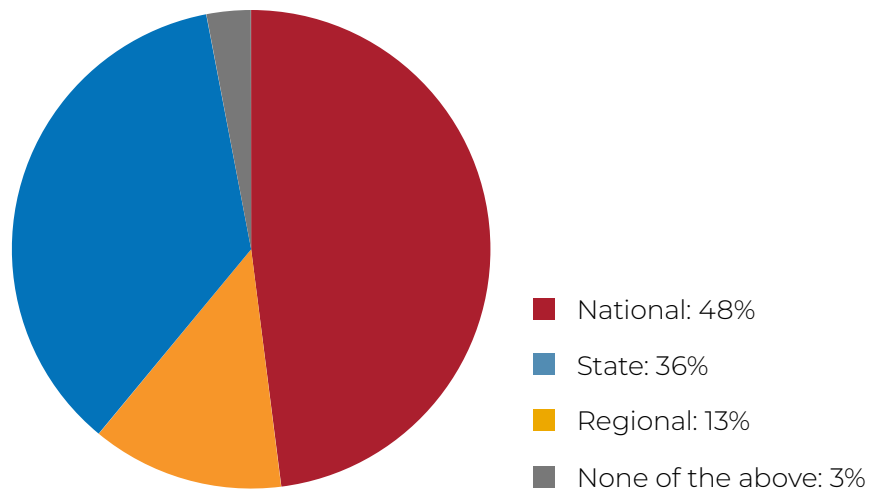
Nearly half of respondents currently employ national marketing strategies, and half focus on regional or state-specific campaigns. The results revealed a desire for more tailored campaigns, validating our original hunch.

“Almost 60% of respondents agreed with the statement, “We would like to do more regional or state-level marketing, but don’t have the resources or experience.”

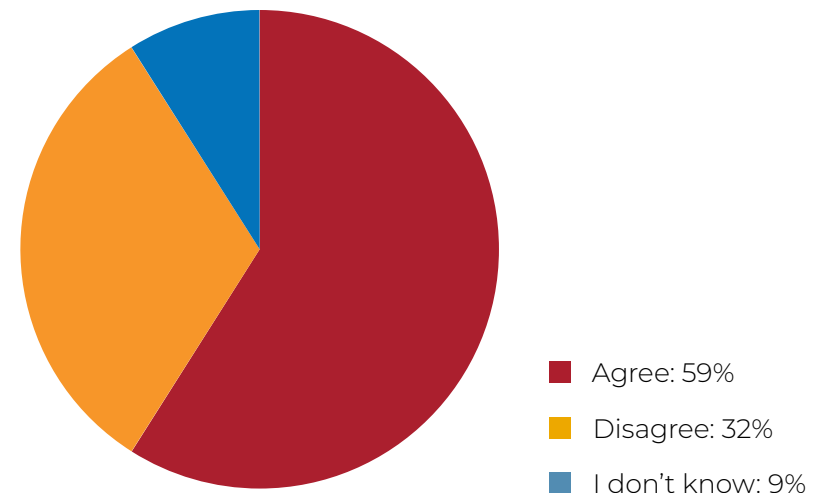
Notably, of those respondents who are currently focusing on national campaigns, 71% said they agree that they'd like to do more regional and state-specific marketing. In our experience, most clients benefit from allocating at least some marketing resources to state-level endeavors. EdWeek Research Center has shown that nearby and in-state districts have some of the strongest influence on district and school leaders' purchasing decisions.

To build on local momentum, you should amplify your local success stories using local news coverage, online case studies, and geo-targeted advertising. LinkedIn ads are a great place to start, since that platform offers job title and geographic targeting opportunities and you can test small budgets and expand from there.

What best describes your marketing approach?



Do you agree or disagree with this statement: We would like to do more regional or state-level marketing, but don't have the resources or experience.

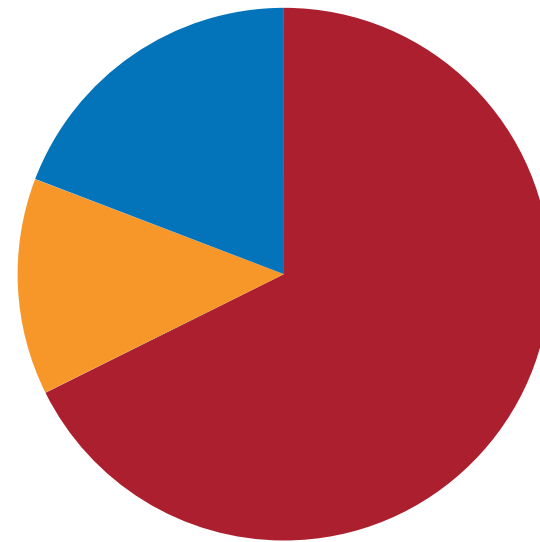


Augment your efforts with a marketing partner

If limited internal resources and a lack of experience are holding you back, a communications partner can help launch and manage a local marketing strategy while you focus on other projects. It takes many years to understand the nuance of each state and form relationships with local media. An education-focused marketing partner will already have those aspects covered, providing you with the tools you need from day one.

Our survey shows that over two-thirds of education companies plan to work with external marketing support in 2025, while only 13% plan to go it alone. A great way to prove the value of an external partner is to start with a focused, state campaign that can generate results. Then use that success to justify additional support as you expand into other states or regions.

Do you plan to work with external marketing support (e.g., an agency, freelancer, contractor) in 2025?



■ Yes: 67% ■ No: 13% ■ I don't know: 19%

3 Event marketing mounts a comeback

2025 Marketing Goals

Each year, our survey asks respondents to rate the importance of a range of marketing goals. As you can see in the graph on the next page, there were no major shifts in ratings this year. The top two priorities are still increasing sales and generating leads. If that is the case for your company, perhaps you feel that recent successful awareness and thought leadership efforts have primed your business to move into a period of delivering more tangible results.

In the past year, we have been supporting more clients with paid media campaigns that generate marketing leads. We also emphasize the importance of having a lead nurture process teed up for when those leads come in.

Another recent CB&A survey report, [What Business-to-Education Marketers Think of Event Marketing Right Now](#), uncovered that companies with a lead nurture process in place rate their event marketing ROI twenty points higher than those that don't. If you invest in lead generation in any channel, ensure that you maximize your investment with a strategic nurture strategy.



If you need a refresher on the different roles of marketing and sales teams in the lead generation and nurturing process, check out [“How to Strengthen the Partnership Between Education Sales and Marketing to Maximize Results.”](#)

Somewhat surprisingly, the biggest change since last year’s survey was a 6% decrease in the importance of using marketing to retain current customers. The end of ESSER created a more competitive market, and focusing on customer satisfaction and retention is an excellent and efficient way to stabilize your revenue. This is not a good time to deemphasize retention. The 5% increase in the rating of “Cross-selling / Increasing Revenue from Customers,” encouragingly indicates that many companies still view internal business development as a productive use of resources.

Last fall, we published [ESSER Ends in 2024: 5 Tips for Customer Retention and Renewal](#), and the advice is just as relevant today. One essential tip is to align your products and services with each customer’s strategic goals. You have likely noticed that districts are paring back their initiatives and refocusing their strategic plans. That means it is more important than ever to reassess how you position your company’s features and benefits to ensure they address your customers’ streamlined priorities.

2025 Marketing Tactics

How important will the following goals be in your 2025 marketing plan? (Please rate each goal on a 1-5 scale, with 1 having the least impact and 5 having the most impact.)

	2024 Survey	2023 Survey	% change
Content Marketing	4.18	4.23	-1.2
Email Marketing	4.04	4.18	-3.3
Events / Conferences	3.8	3.59	5.8
Thought Leadership	3.74	3.74	0
Account-based Marketing (ABM)	3.25	n/a	n/a
Social Media	3.24	3.33	-2.7
Media Relations	2.91	3	-0.09
Influencer Marketing	2.57	2.5	0.07



There were similarly no major changes in the priority tactics marketers plan to employ in 2025. In [our recent Education Event Marketing survey report](#), we found that education event marketing seems to have fully bounced back from Covid disruptions. Our report showed that almost 80% of respondents feel that in-person event marketing is the same or more successful than pre-Covid.

However, the results indicated that events were generating fewer leads than pre-Covid. If that is the case for you, we recommend honing a strong lead nurture strategy to make the most of the limited leads. You need to assure your prospects that you can provide results, with compelling content—like relevant case studies, awards, testimonials, and efficacy studies—so they will feel comfortable moving ahead with a purchase.

4 Education Marketers' learn from trade publications, industry reports, and LinkedIn

The education media landscape continues to evolve, expanding the formats and channels where savvy education marketers get their industry news. This year's survey was the first time we asked education company professionals about their media habits.

Based on the top ten most-read sources, it's clear that EdWeek is the top source. When asked to name the three specific education trade media titles they rely on most for education industry news and customer intelligence, EdWeek was mentioned by 64% of respondents, and EdWeek Market Brief was mentioned by 9%.

While the top ten titles made up over 80% of the listed titles, there was a substantial long tail of trusted resources. Twenty-five titles were mentioned fewer than two times, with niche publications like *EducationInvestor* and *NCTM* making the list.

At CB&A, we turn to many of the top ten titles ourselves to stay current with the latest education news, and recommend you do the same. But you may want to explore less-trafficked sources as you look to gain an advantage over your unadventurous competitors.

Top 10 Most-Read

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. EdWeek | 8. Chalkbeat |
| 2. District Administration | 9. Tech & Learning |
| 3. EdSurge | 10. (tie) eSchool News |
| 4. EdTech | 10. (tie) Inside Higher Ed |
| 5. EdWeek Market Brief | 10. (tie) Chronicle of Higher Ed |
| 6. K-12 Dive | 10. (tie) THE Journal |
| 7. The 74 | 10. (tie) EdReports |

Savvy education marketers know to look beyond the education trade publications for news and insights they can use to inform marketing, sales, and product development. While trade media tops the list of sources they read at least once a week, they also frequently glean information from LinkedIn posts. You'll find that fellow education marketers often share helpful insights on social media. Our industry is more helpful, open, and generous than most!

Consumer media and industry association reports round out the top three frequently-referenced media sources. Consumer media provides a global view of the cultural conversation around education, while industry reports give an in-depth and nuanced look at particular sub-sectors that you won't see elsewhere.

How often do you seek out education industry news and customer intelligence from the following sources? (Percent who answered weekly or more often):

Trade Media	81%
LinkedIn posts	71%
Consumer Media	47%
Industry Association Reports	40%
LinkedIn groups	39%
Webinars	22%
In-person Events	13%

Main Takeaways

- **Up against the end of ESSER, optimism prevails:** After years of angst about the fall 2024 fiscal cliff, it appears there was less to be worried about than conventional wisdom suggested. The recession hasn't arrived and inflation has been tamed, leaving education companies prepared for flat or slightly increased marketing budgets in 2025. You should focus your efforts on the successful tactics you've employed the past few years, and consider phasing out outdated and underperforming activities.
- **Geo-Targeted marketing has momentum:** Widening differences in state requirements and priorities have increased interest in geo-targeted marketing campaigns. If internal experience and bandwidth are limited, an external communications partner can help you build successful state-level campaigns.
- **Event marketing mounts a comeback:** Survey results did not indicate a large change in marketing goals or priority tactics heading into 2025. There's evidence that event marketing has emerged from a tough Covid-induced period, and we recommend focusing on nurture campaigns for leads you've generated from any channel.
- **Education Marketers' learn from trade publications, industry reports, and LinkedIn:** It's important to know where your competitors are getting their industry intelligence, and equally important to explore less-popular resources that can give you an edge.

Partner with an expert education marketing and PR agency to prepare your team for 2025

After an unprecedented 5-year period, the education industry is poised to return to a more typical year. As the industry resettles, winners and losers will inevitably emerge. You can increase your chances of winning by partnering with a marketing and PR firm with an extensive background in education.

Unlike generalist marketing firms, CB&A has specifically enabled education companies to thrive for over thirty years. We've helped lead businesses through multiple economic cycles and trends, and there's no marketing conundrum we can't solve.

Curious how we can take your education marketing to the next level? [Talk to us.](#)

About This Survey

This report is based on a September 2024 survey of 76 marketing professionals and other relevant representatives of companies selling to the education market. The overwhelming majority of respondents (88%) serve the preK–12 market, 6% sell primarily to colleges and universities, and the remainder serve early childhood. 54% have an annual marketing budget of under \$250,000, 33% exceed \$250,000, and 13% don't know.