

# How to Break into the School Market:

## Educational Product Marketing 102 — Suppliers

At NSSEA headquarters, we receive about 20 inquiries a week from motivated people just like you with a product they have invented/published/created and want to see marketed to the education industry. Very few of these actually make it to market. How can you increase your chances for success? You may well be asking: How does the School Market work? How do I get my product into classrooms?

The majority of high profit educational products manufacturers/publishers use a dealer channel distribution model as their preferred method of distribution. Rather than selling direct to consumers, they market to dealers (retail stores, distributors, catalogs, etc.) who order their products and then resell them directly to schools or to consumers (parents, teachers, etc.).

**Why use the dealer channel instead of marketing directly?** First, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. This distribution model is established and works well. Second, dealers know their customer base intimately — something that would take you years to accomplish. Third, dealers add value to your product by integrating them into their current product offering mix.

**How will I fit in?** Many of the companies in this market are small one-or two-person operations. Others are second or third generation family businesses. This results in a friendly, noncompetitive atmosphere that is unique to our industry. You will find that most experienced school marketers are willing to share their expertise and knowledge.

### So, how do I get started?

1. **Have a great product.**

Test it with every parent, child, and teacher you know. Do your research. What need does it fill in the marketplace? What direct benefits does it provide? Is there already a product out there that addresses these needs? How is yours different? Better?

2. **Start local and small.**

Visit a local parent-teacher store. To find one near you go to NSSEA's online store locator at [www.TeacherStores.com](http://www.TeacherStores.com). Target these stores, and then expand slowly. Establish a reputation for customer service and a solid track record.

3. **Contract with a Manufacturers Rep.**

These are companies that act as your outside sales force in exchange for a set % commission of the products sold. NSSEA provides any interested manufacturer with a free list of school market reps with territories and product lines you can contact.

#### 4. **Join NSSEA.**

Once your business is established, we urge you to join the trade association for the school market. A world of networking opportunities and member benefits will be opened to you. As a member, your company will also be recognized as a serious business who is investing in its future success.

#### 5. **Invest in promotion.**

Two NSSEA publications, free to members, will help you get started: NSSEA offers a myriad of ways to promote your product to the dealer channel including magazine ads, mailing lists, Web site links, and much more. Because NSSEA members receive 50% off the normal advertising rates in NSSEA publications, we urge you to join NSSEA before booking an ad with us.

#### 6. **Attend Ed Expo or the School Equipment Show**

- A. This is the industry's back to school show held every March in a different city. It is the industry venue for launching and introducing new products. Ed Expo is an order-taking show and many dealer attendees shop the show and then place the orders upon returning home and checking their store's inventory. The School Equipment Show is held annually in the Fall, and is the meeting place for decision makers in the educational furniture and fixtures market. The School Equipment Show features sales meetings, exhibits, workshops and educational programming.
- B. Exhibiting at a tradeshow is a large investment and you should do everything you can to maximize your investment by taking advantage of all the free and inexpensive promotional opportunities available to you (ex. offering a show special, sending out a pre-show invitation letter, etc.). To save overall costs, we urge you to join NSSEA first.
- C. If you cannot attend this show, you can still promote your company by taking an ad in the *Show Program* or sponsoring an event.

National School Supply & Equipment Association

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