



EDTECH MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE:

How to Reach Buyers in a Booming Market





EdTech demand is surging, but solution providers need help seizing the market opportunity.

Education Technology (EdTech) innovation has been one of the unforeseen bright spots emerging from COVID-19. As school systems scrambled to adopt digital learning tools to accommodate unexpected remote and hybrid environments, EdTech providers have emerged at an impressive clip, with new solutions featuring cutting-edge technologies. Based on Crunchbase data, global venture capital (VC) funding for EdTech companies reached \$4.1B between January and July 2020, which is \$1.5B more than was raised during the same period in 2019.

According to [industry research](#), the global online education market will reach \$350B by 2025 due to the introduction of flexible learning technologies in the corporate and education sectors. Advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), gamification, virtual reality and augmented reality, and cybersecurity, to name a few, are also driving this market. We also see tech titans like Bill Gates calling on the tech industry to [reimagine education](#), which brings even more attention to this marketplace.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CARES Act was signed in March 2020 and included a \$30.75B infusion for an [Education Stabilization Fund](#). CARES Act funding, combined with VC investment rounds across 85 deals totaling [\\$706M through July in the U.S. alone](#), are further fueling an unprecedented boom in EdTech.

But as with any market that suddenly becomes red hot, the pressure is on for marketers to differentiate from a tsunami of competitors to help sales teams seize the opportunity. Here's how EdTech marketers can effectively maneuver some of these challenges.

Strategies for Tackling the Top EdTech Marketing Challenges

CHALLENGE #1

Competition is Fierce Making it Difficult to Stand Out

Everyone wants in on EdTech, from established players to start-ups looking for funding. The notable investments signal that the pandemic has drastically changed the education landscape, forcing EdTech marketers to put some pep in their step when it comes to their 2021 plans and beyond.

▸ So what should you do?



RECOMMENDATION: DIFFERENTIATE YOUR STORY

To break through the noise and generate media interest, EdTech solution providers need to become thought leaders and take a research-based approach to demonstrate their tools' tangible benefits to steal mindshare from some of the most valuable Edtech companies like Byju's, Coursera, and Udemy as well as the slew of startups out there.

Conduct a thorough messaging and positioning initiative leveraging market research and competitive analysis. It's important to know what the competition messages to the market, how they sell, and what makes their solution important. Once you have done your research, delve into your solution and discuss what makes it truly unique or novel. Be objective when asking yourself: Does our solution introduce a novel way to improve learning comprehension? Does it require less bandwidth for students with slow internet access? Beyond explaining what you do, be sure to focus on the "why." Your message should make clear the reason for using your solution versus the competition.

It's important to build that messaging framework with your leadership team so marketing and PR have their buy-in when they take that new and differentiated message to market. Also, test that message with third-party experts and customers to validate your strategy.

CHALLENGE #2

The Market Is Nuanced and Fraught with Controversy

It's critical to listen to the marketplace and address touchy issues and topics. When Bill Gates and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announced their partnership to reimagine education, they experienced some blow back from critics, including [teachers](#). Other critics were quick to surface issues regarding the well-known digital divide.

**RECOMMENDATION: PROACTIVELY PREPARE MESSAGES AROUND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

COVID-19 sparked awareness around the inequalities that lie within America's education system. It is well documented that many schools and families do not have the same level of access to technology and the internet at home or in the classroom as others do. This uneven playing field has received much media attention over the past few months and EdTech organizations need to be prepared to address it. Marketing around this message is complex and requires sensitivity and careful thought. Don't run from the message; rather, address the issue. If you don't have a technology solution, make it a part of your Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives so you can speak to the market about it.

**RECOMMENDATION: ENGAGE THE CRITICS TO SHOW YOU UNDERSTAND THEIR CONCERNS**

Educators are rightfully worried about the impact of remote and hybrid classrooms on learning. Speak directly to the issues, such as remote learning privacy concerns or the efficacy of learning in virtual classrooms, in your outreach, but not just with product facts. Instead, approach the challenges with genuine empathy, as well as research that can support your solution. By showing that you share their concerns, you can begin a dialogue, which may ultimately persuade those with doubts to become advocates.



CHALLENGE #3

Security is a Sensitive Topic

Much like the digital divide, security is another nuanced message, so some EdTech companies are hesitant to address it head on because they are uncomfortable or they don't have a "great story." With so many educators now looking to and relying on EdTech to keep schools open, they require secure solutions that can be adapted and deployed immediately.

**RECOMMENDATION: ESTABLISH TRUST AND CREDIBILITY**

By addressing cybersecurity in your messaging and branding plans, you can keep your executives and thought leaders on the same page with one cohesive message. Your customers and prospects want to know their data and privacy is safe with the EdTech solution they select. To establish your company as a proponent of security, tell your prospects that you follow the [guidelines](#) of the **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)** and the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** so administrators, teachers, and parents alike can trust the use of your solution. Also, be sure to develop messaging around other security certifications and standards to give your prospects peace of mind.



CHALLENGE #4

We're Running Lean and I Don't Have the Time to Monitor the News To Stay Relevant

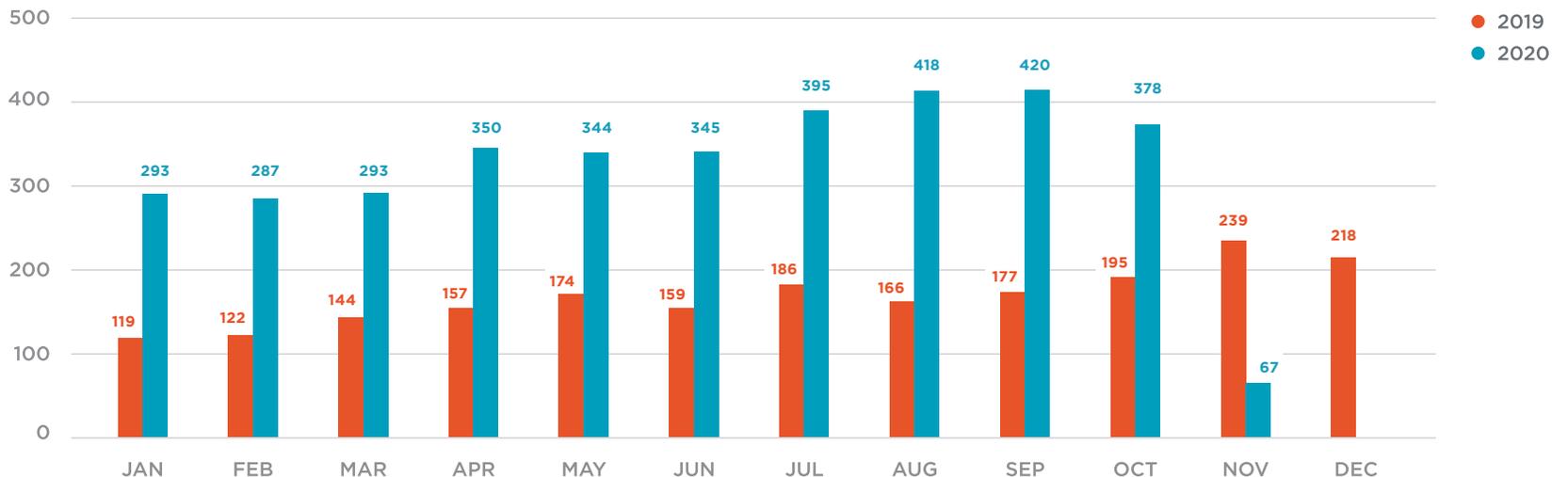
Even if you're a "news junkie" who reads avidly, it's nearly impossible to have your finger on the pulse across dozens and dozens of targeted EdTech and business publications and blogs. Google Alerts certainly help, but the notifications can clog an already jammed inbox or newsfeed.

 **RECOMMENDATION: TAP MEDIA EXPERTS WHO HAVE A PULSE ON THE EDTECH MARKET FOR YOU**

Make sure the subject matter experts within your organization are well versed in conversations happening outside the walls of your company; their market knowledge and research will inform the playbook. It's also the job of your PR or marketing agency to bring that market intelligence to the table. To give you an example of how we help EdTech marketers and communicators, Merritt Group has conducted media research that identifies the most significant media outlets and topics:

COVERAGE OF EDTECH OR EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY TERMS IN 2019 & 2020

Source: Muck Rack



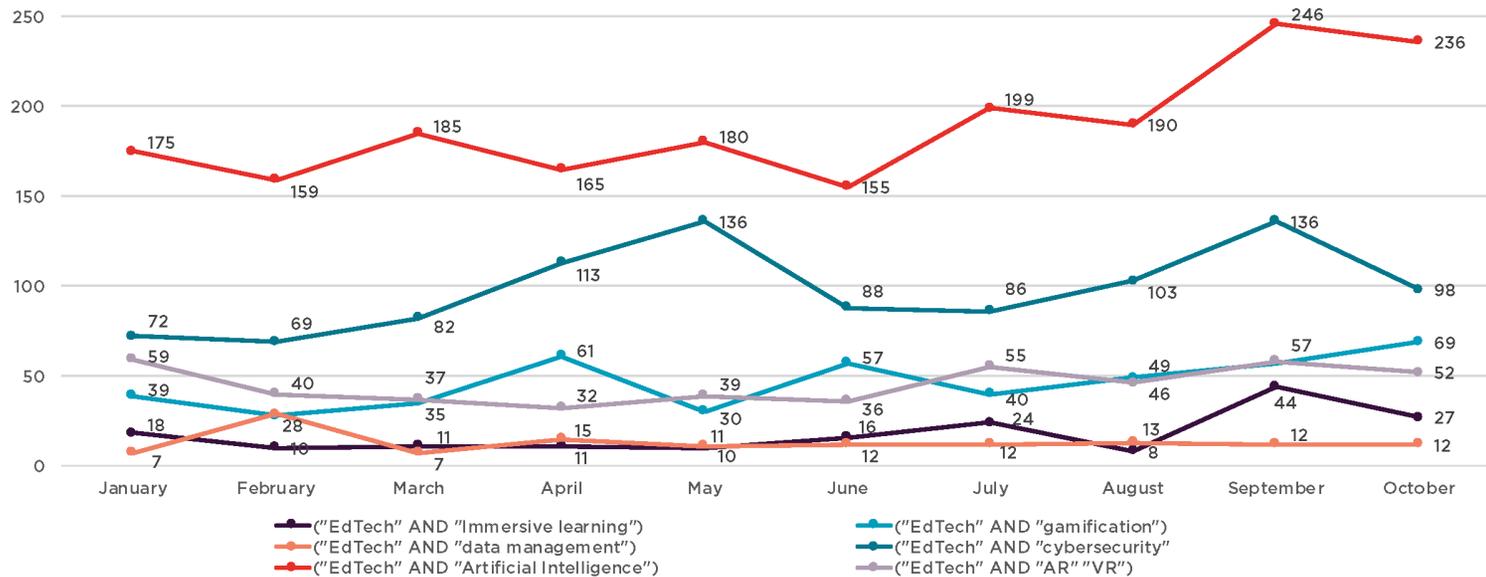
Compared with 2019, coverage across the EdTech industry has practically doubled. From February 2020 through September 2020, we saw major momentum in the media compared with 2019. It was not a coincidence: *it was driven by COVID-19*. At Merritt Group, we expect coverage to remain strong given the fact that COVID-19 is still disrupting online learning. While schools are back in session, schools, teachers, and parents are still learning about the marketplace.

Diving deeper into the Muck Rack data, the EdTech media coverage over the last 12 months has appeared predominantly in business, technology, and education media publications such as *EdTech Magazine, Inside Higher Ed, Bloomberg, TechCrunch, Forbes*, and others.

▸ So what is the media writing about it?

TRENDS WITHIN EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

Source: Muck Rack



Clearly, cybersecurity and AI are leading the coverage, as the market grows more concerned with protecting data and user information (and school system networks) while turning their attention to the next-generation of learning technologies. Gamification and AR/VR are also in the mix, as educators look to the future of learning, especially for a remote student population. Tying your message and your paid outreach to these top-of-mind topics can earn you much greater visibility in an increasingly cluttered marketplace.

CHALLENGE #5

A Changing Media Landscape Is Making it Difficult to Reach My Buyer

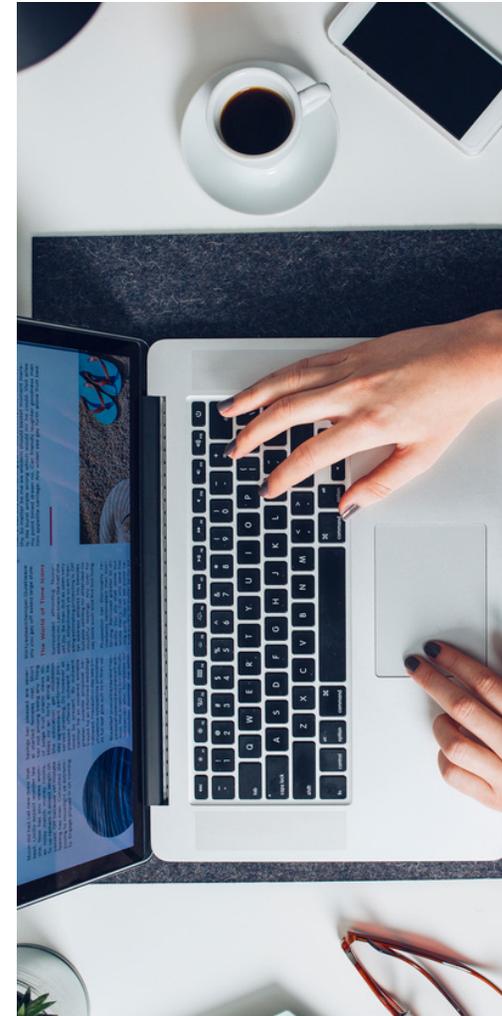
Currently, the media landscape is complicated with extensive COVID-19 coverage and presidential election news, but it doesn't need to be difficult to navigate as long as you know who you are talking to. Make it a priority to identify and engage with influential bloggers and editors at the right publications. For most Merritt Group clients, there are 10-15 critical influencers in a given market. Don't boil the ocean; stay focused and engage with the key influencers. They want to understand the nature of the problem you're solving and how your solution addresses the challenges dominating the headlines. Many want contributed content as long as it is timely, thought-provoking, and not full of marketing jargon.



RECOMMENDATION: FOCUS OUTREACH ON THE APPROPRIATE OUTLETS

Vast amounts of EdTech media coverage has appeared across business, technology, and education media publications such as *EdTech Magazine*, *TechCrunch*, *Forbes* and others over the last six months. So where do you focus?

If you are a remote learning software tool, consider exploring publications like *THE Journal*, *eSchool News* or *EdSurge* to help tell your story to the right academic decision-makers. If you have a new round of funding under your belt, think about an exclusive media placement with *The Wall Street Journal* or *VentureBeat*. If you have super-savvy subject matter experts (SMEs) at your company, work with your agency to create narratives that can be pitched out to publications as bylines and op-eds.



RECOMMENDATION: CREATE A LEAD GEN-FOCUSED CONTENT MARKETING PLAYBOOK

If you don't have a regular cadence of corporate news to share, that's OK, too. Develop a holistic thought leadership-focused content strategy that takes into consideration paid and owned channels to reach, influence, and convert your audiences. A few tactics that work particularly well with EdTech buyers include:



Partner with publications such as *Education Week* and *EDUCAUSE Review* for paid content campaigns (including activities such as webinars, sponsored posts, ads, etc.) that can drive net-new leads you can then nurture. Whether it's a school board, school administrator, teacher, parent, etc., strategically align your paid strategies with outlets that specifically reach your target buyers. Quite often, a surgical strike is more effective than making a media buy at a publication with a broad technology readership.



Start blogging regularly, if you haven't already.

This is the easiest way to get your message out to elevate your brand, so partner with an agency that has writers with an understanding of the EdTech market and trends. Align your agency writers with your SMEs to develop a regular cadence of content that speaks to the pain points of your buyers. Make sure you tap analytics tools such as [Buzzsumo](#) to identify topics and write content that will resonate with your audiences; optimize your copy for SEO; then, amplify your blog posts through your social media channels.



Develop down-funnel sales enablement materials.

After helping generate and nurture leads, arm your sales team with the right messaging and differentiated positioning that will resonate with your target audience. Create a package of assets designed to close deals including sales decks, toolkits, and talking points to address customer challenges and objections and clearly lay out your solution's value proposition. Always put yourself in the customer's shoes; focus on solving problems, not listing features.



RECOMMENDATION: INVEST IN THE *RIGHT* VIRTUAL/HYBRID EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Most U.S. conferences will be virtual for the foreseeable future, but these events can still provide tremendous opportunities for your SMEs and thought leaders throughout 2021. (If you are interested in virtual events, please check out our [Lay of the Brand podcast](#) called “Virtual Event Speaking: Land the Gig, Make It Unforgettable.”)



The [EDUCAUSE Annual Conference](#)—which has been around forever and caters to the higher ed audience—went virtual this year, but they still had an [agenda with great topics and speakers](#). (If you are looking for K-12 events, [EdSurge.com](#) is a great resource.)



If you have reduced your travel budget because of COVID-19, allocate that money for webinars and create a more frequent cadence. Your agency partner can help you host your own event or build partnerships with media companies that can help market and host your webinar... and bring your target buyer to the virtual table.



Conclusion

The market shows tremendous promise given the renewed attention around COVID-19. EdTech marketers—ranging from large public companies to smaller VC-backed companies—have a prime opportunity to ride the recent wave in the news cycle and position their organizations at the forefront in what could be an education revolution.

EdTech is at a critical turning point, and implementing the right marketing and communications strategy—with the right agency partner—will make all of the difference. Merritt Group has the expertise to elevate your brand above all the marketing and media noise. Across performance marketing, content marketing, creative, and public relations, Merritt Group can help you reach decision-makers, so buckle up and get ready to get schooled.



To learn more about how Merritt Group can support your PR or marketing strategy, contact:

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