

Best Practices for Working with Recruitment Agents

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Overview

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International Higher Education Trends

Worldwide demand for higher education increasing

- 190 million higher education students today. +20 million more by 2020.¹

Number of students studying abroad increasing

- +3 million students study abroad today. 7 million total anticipated by 2025.¹
- Greatest interest in English language programs.
- United States most popular destination.

International enrollments at U.S. campuses increasing

- 586,000 in 2002 | 764,000 in 2012²

Number of international undergraduates now greater than graduates

- 261,000 UG and 265,000 grad in 2002 | 309,000 UG and 300,000 grad in 2012²

References:

1. <http://www.scienceguide.nl/201306/where-will-international-students-go.aspx>
2. 2012 Open Doors Fast Facts

International Higher Education Trends (Continued)

Number of agencies and students using agencies increasing

- Approximately 7,000 agencies in 148 countries¹
- 60% of all students sent by agents¹

Number of U.S. universities working with agents increasing

- 22% of 4-year U.S. institutions using commission-based agents²
- 33% not using agents, but considering doing so¹
- AIRC member institutions and ICEF North American workshop bookings increasing³
- Private campuses (76%) more likely to use agents than public (35%)³

References:

1. Working with Student Recruitment Agents, 2013 AIEA presentation
2. 2011 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College & University Admissions Directors
3. 2013 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College & University Admissions Directors

International Recruitment Agents in Overview

Organizations that provide *advice, support, and placement assistance* for individuals interested in studying in another country, and *recruitment-related services* for institutional partners.

General

- Large, Medium, and Small
- Mostly for-profit
- Scope differs by organization
- Practices differ by country

Services

- Student application advising, processing, and support
- Institutional marketing and representation
- Support when recruiting in country
- Orientation and travel assistance
- Translation

Advantages of Working with Recruitment Agents

Student/Family

- Local contact
- Institution and application advice
- Pre-departure assistance
- No language barrier

University

- Language and culture
- Understand and can provide access to local market
- Networked with education institutions
- Marketing and advertising
- Payment on delivery
- Enhance diversity

Disadvantages of Working with Recruitment Agents

Student/Family

- Unfulfilled promises
- High fees
- Poor service
- More interested in making money than clients' interests

University

- Risk of institutional misrepresentation
- Culture and communication challenges
- Lack of transparency
- Application fraud

Disadvantages (Continued)

- **Fraud and Misrepresentation:** In 2011, 47% of admissions officers believe agents help students fabricate application documents.¹ Now 61% believe they do.²
- **NACAC debate:** In 2011, 64% support NACAC ban on using commission-based agents.¹ Today, 58% support using agents.²
- **Quality assurance:** AIRC, ICEF, PIERS, National and regional oversight organizations abroad.

TIP: Do not outsource quality assurance. Develop and deploy agent policies that promote quality, equity, and ethics.

References:

1. 2011 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College & University Admissions Directors
2. 2013 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College & University Admissions Directors

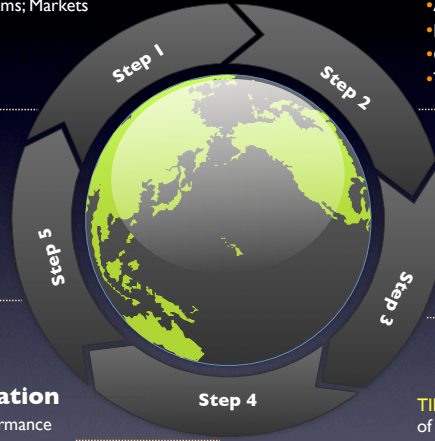
Campus Action

1. Planning

- Numbers; Programs; Markets
- Timeline
- Staff
- Budget

2. Policies & Procedures

- Admissions requirements
- Handbook
- Contract and commission
- Training and education



3. Implementation

- Identify agents
- Vet agents
- Contract with agents
- Work effectively with agents

5. Repeat

Process from Step 1

4. Evaluation

- Agent performance
- Student satisfaction
- Fit with recruitment goals

TIP: Developing an agent network is a lot of work. If possible, create a dedicated staff position for managing agent relationships.

TIP: Working with recruitment agents should be only one part of your institutional recruitment plan.

Planning Considerations

- Strategic recruitment plan
- Target number of agents based on target number of students
- Country distribution
- Resources available for finding, training, implementing agent plan, along w/ commission payments
- Time commitment/staff hours
- Tracking system

Identifying Agents

- Inquiries (agent “cold calls”)
- Colleague and alumni referrals
- Recruitment tours/fairs
- Conferences (NAFSA, AIRC, ICEF)
- US Commercial Service (webinars/Gold Key Service)

Vetting Agents

Step 1: Phone and in-person meeting/s to discuss expectations (numbers, fees, responsibilities, etc.)

Step 2: Application/questionnaire

Step 3: Check references, memberships, and proof of licensing in home country

Issues to consider

- History, staff, company structure
- Promotion and marketing strategy
- Volume of students they work with
- Type of schools they work with (number, type, location)

Key agent skills

- Understands your recruiting goals and is a good fit with your institution (eg., quality vs. quantity)
- Understands the local market
- Markets your organization truthfully and effectively
- Able to verify all documentation
- Able to help you integrate students into the culture of your institution

TIP: Careful vetting has an upfront time and resource cost but pays dividends in the long run.

Contracting with Agents

All contracts should:

- Define roles and responsibilities
- Outline specific performance indicators
- Detail compensation, to include mode, timing, and circumstances of payment:
 - ✓ None
 - ✓ Commission based on percent of tuition (first year/length of stay)
 - ✓ Fixed commission
 - ✓ Fee per student
 - ✓ Volume bonus
 - ✓ Annual retainer
 - ✓ Student fees
- Define guidelines for university logo and name use
- Include dispute resolution, termination, and duration clauses

TIP: Ensure all contracts are in compliance with campus regulations.

TIP: Develop and deploy standard contract and payment plans for use with all agents.

Working with Agents

Information

- **Agent manual:** Should expand on the themes outlined in the contract.
- **Website:** Post all information helpful to prospective and current agents.
- **Marketing:** Develop and provide marketing materials (hardcopy; electronic) and work to ensure that your marketing efforts are in alignment.
- **Education:** Provide training (U.S. higher education; immigration regulations; university history, culture, and programs; marketing; brand management; etc.)

Communication

- Respond as quickly and clearly as possible to agent queries.
- Provide regular individual (phone calls/Skype, emails) and group (emails, newsletters, blog) updates.
- Organize site visits and familiarization trips.
- Include a FAQ page on your website.

TIP: Good communication and correspondence are essential to success.

TIP: Consider a trial period and then monitor new agents closely during the initial stages of your relationship.

Evaluating Agent Relationships

Agent

- **What:** enrollments, timeliness, meeting goals; marketing; fraud/transfers/no shows; payments
- **How:** questionnaire; online survey; annual review of contract terms

Student

- **What:** numbers; GPA; success/retention; complaints; satisfaction (receive accurate information?; recommend agent to friend?; real costs?; how find agent?; most positive service aspects?)
- **How:** Post-arrival survey; focus groups; one-on-one conversations; parent email

Institution

- **What:** ROI (return on investment); conversion rates; retention; student quality
- **How:** budget review; annual review of contract terms

TIP: Effective management of information about your agent relationships will save staff and time resources and lead to better decision making.

TIP: Strong agents relationships take time to build. Not every agent will work out.

Keys to Success

DO

- Set realistic goals
- Develop effective policies
- Provide sufficient staff support
- Select agents carefully
- Be consistent across agent relationships
- Communicate regularly and clearly (website!)
- Offer agent training and site visits
- Demand accountability, ethics, and transparency
- Track results

DO NOT

- Allow agents to make admissions decisions or control your brand
- Use agents as an exclusive recruitment strategy

Questions and Discussion

For more information about working with agents, or
developing/enhancing recruitment plans, contact:

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