

BARTON CARLYLE RESOURCES

Top Tips #1 AGENTS

How to select great agents

The use of Agents is well-established in many markets worldwide. However, there are still many colleagues who are new to using Agents. We are asked often how to go about building Agent use into a comprehensive international strategy, and how to ask the right questions to get the best available Agents. Essentially, make sure that you can do business together and build a professional relationship from the outset. Spending time upfront and putting in place a quality contract, will be invaluable steps in the longer term. Try these tips to help your prospective Agents show their best:

1. **Ask to see their client list.** Who are they already working with? How does your institution fit into that portfolio? Consider whether they are brands alongside which you are happy to be seen. Are your competitors in their portfolio?
2. **How much do they know about your institution?** Ask them to demonstrate their knowledge of your institution, its USPs and offerings, and how the market might respond.
3. **How much country knowledge do they have?** Ask the prospective Agent to summarise their knowledge of the education system in your country, any visa issues – have they ever visited your country? What are the selling points of studying in your country? What might the drawbacks be when recruiting?
4. **How well do they know their local market?** Ask the prospective Agent to summarise the current trends in their market, including key opportunities and threats.
5. **Who do they have relationships with?** Ask for some examples of existing connections and relationships that would support the agreement, such as access to influencers, funding bodies, Schools or institutions as appropriate to the market.
6. **How well are they doing?** Your Agent should be able to give you numbers of students sent to your country in the last 3-5 years (depending on age of company) – by level of study and subject areas.
7. **What physical infrastructure do they have in place?** Ask for information on the size of offices, interview or training rooms, and the geographical location. This will tell you whether in-person training and student counselling are possible. The geographical spread of offices will support the building of a country strategy around key locations of your representatives.
8. **Who are the team that would be servicing your account?** In order to understand the depth of expertise and experience, evaluate likely staff turnover rates and establish training requirements. This might include staff numbers, key roles, experience of personnel, any training undertaken or ongoing, and any professional development programs in place.
9. **Company Information.** Factors such as company age or professional association memberships and accreditation will help you to assess the level of experience in working as an Agent. They can also give an indicator as to the likely quality of service you can expect.
10. **Take up references.** Ideally, ask for three references. This can go some way to ensuring quality and reliability in an appointment, though of course the Agent will have slightly different relationships with each of its clients.

AND FINALLY, DON'T FORGET YOUR LEGAL AND FINANCIAL DUE DILIGENCE ON THE AGENT, JUST AS YOU WOULD ANY OTHER BUSINESS!

Check out these extra resources:

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/managing_education_agents_report_for_bc_2.pdf - An evaluation of the current position in the UK, where agent use is widespread.

<https://www.icef.com/en/icef-agents/> - A summary of training, accreditation and opportunities to connect with agents from ICEF, a specialist organisation delivering networking and market insight for international student recruitment

<http://www.nafsa.org/findresources/Default.aspx?id=8839> – Useful resources from the USA on working with agents

<http://www.nacacnet.org/International/InternationalInitiatives/Pages/International-Student-Recruitment-Agencies-Guide.aspx> -- This invaluable, practical guide from NACAC is aimed primarily at undergraduate recruitment for US institutions and deals with the full range of issues in the agent relationship.

**Barton Carlyle consults regularly on the appointment and management of Agents, and conducts workshops on the topic worldwide. Contact us to see how we could support you:
Email pamela@bartoncarlyle.com**