

MARKETING YOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM



Kathy Frank

**Early Childhood Consultant, Indiana District --
LCMS**

WHAT IS MARKETING?

- Making prospects aware of your program
- “Selling” your program to prospects
- Converting prospects into enrolled families (your customers)
- Keeping enrolled families (customers) as long as possible



WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED WITH MARKETING?



- **Desire to fill center to capacity**
- **Use your early childhood program as a means of intentional ministerial outreach**
 - Early childhood education programs are one of our church's last "frontiers" and one of the most under-utilized approaches to evangelism
 - Parents of young children may have "drifted away" from the church, but, now as parents, they are "open" to returning and raising their child(ren) in the faith
 - Many parents of young children have no religious background or connection. They are coming to our doors, paying us for being "in the church." We need to take advantage of these opportunities.



GROW YOUR LIST OF INQUIRIES

#1 Create a “house list” – Another name for prospects data base

- Who? Current customers, past customers, graduated families, prospects, community partners, business referral partners
 - Data you’ll need: E-mail addresses, mailing addresses, phone numbers, children’s names
 - Why? You can send e-newsletters, articles on parenting, fun events happening at your center, etc.
 - Software: ChildCare CRM --
www.childcarecrm.com.krismurray



#2 Be found on the map

- The ONLINE map: Google, Yahoo, Bing and other search engines. See Child Care Marketing Online (Amazon)



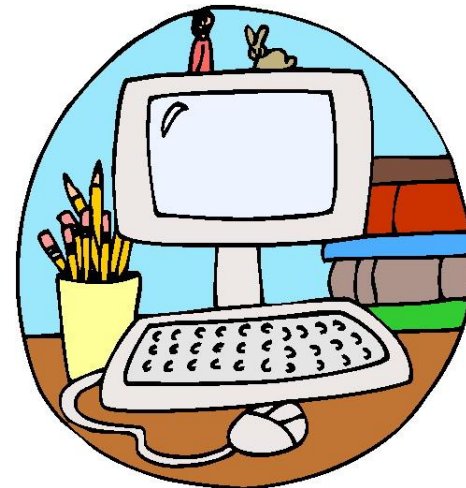
OTHER WAYS TO GROW YOUR LIST . . .

#3 Have a business Facebook page

- Set up your account
- Try to post at least 3 times a week (“peak” times: lunch time and 4:00 p.m.) Include photos.
- Ask all existing parents to “like” your page
- Put your Facebook page web address on all marketing materials and e-mail “blasts” Include it in your prospect packet
- Build “engagement:” Ask a question, conduct a poll, have a contest (Door decorating contest), etc.

#4 Be on Pinterest

- Go to [Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com) and create an account for your business
- Get permission from parents to post pictures of their children
- Pin cute pictures, artwork, holiday-related ideas, quotations, etc.



A FEW MORE IDEAS . . .



#5 Changeable text signage

- Affordable – less than \$200.00
- Vary the message (upcoming programs, “specials,” cute messages: “Happy Mother’s Day; Hugs to you from ____”

#6 On-line reviews

- 72% of people trust reviews they read online as much as a personal recommendation
- Have a system in place.
 - Ask 4 – 5 parents every other week to write a review.
 - Send an e-mail with a direct link to where you want them to write the review online.
 - Use these “testimonies” in your written marketing materials too

#7 Market to mom’s groups

- MOPS
- Chamber of Commerce; school administrators

#8 An on-site program for 2’s

- Low tuition or free
- 4 – 6 weeks for parents and children
- “Jesus and Me” (“Together with Jesus” or “Little Lambs”



DIRECT MAIL IDEAS

#1 “Lumpy” mail

- Send something “lumpy” in a mailer. Example: Hour glass with sand: “Time is running out. Enroll your child today.”
- Learn more at www.childcare-marketing.com/3dmail

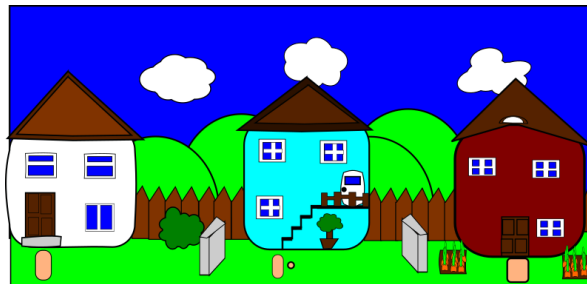
#2 Mail a children’s book (after a tour)

- Scholastic Books
- Address to the child
- Letter for the parent – how much you enjoyed meeting them; perhaps a special limited-time enrollment offer



#3 Best prospect “neighborhoods”

- Where do most of your enrollees come from?
- Direct mail, door-hangers, door-to-door visits, etc.



PHONE INQUIRIES

#1 Use a phone script – a “cheat sheet”

- Include a welcome and introduction
- Build rapport – ask about family and child
- Communicate program’s differences (Jesus Time, chapel, gym, music classes, degreed teachers, teacher experiences, class sizes, parent involvement, accreditation, flexibility, etc.)
- Book a tour or visit
- Get contact information
- Thank you; good-bye
- Follow-up
- **Teach staff to use it!!**



#2 Send an e-packet with rates

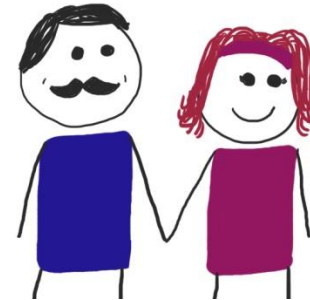
- Avoid giving rates over the phone – “Rather than just quoting rates, I’m going to do something special for you. We have a super-informative Parent Resource Packet that includes our rates along with other child care information. What’s your e-mail address? I’ll send it right over.”



OTHER PHONE INQUIRY SUGGESTIONS

#3 What to include in your e-packet

- Letter from director
- Teacher bios, experience
- Mission statement and philosophy
- Written parent testimonials
- Rates
- Tips for selecting quality child care
- Questions/answers with teacher/director



#4 Give an incentive to book a tour

- Family tote bag (toys, books, promotional offers, items with center's name – pens, t-shirt, magnet, etc.)
- “Law of scarcity” – “I have only two available openings for tours this week – Wednesday at 10 or Friday at 3. Which would you prefer?”

#5 Eliminate “no-shows”

- Let them know you expect them to call to cancel – “Could you do me a favor and call if something comes up so we can re-schedule? We have lots of parents calling to book tours and we’d love to be able to provide your slot to someone else if your plans change.”



CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE TOURS

#1 Make a great first impression

- Personal appearance – professional
- Verbal greeting – name, position
- Smile
- Handshake
- Preparedness (remind teacher, tour packet, goodie bag, parent questionnaire)



#2 Address all five senses

- Smell – fresh air, subtle fragrance
- Sight – curb appeal, engaging things to look at
- Sound – soft music
- Taste – offer snacks, beverages
- Touch – sit in a comfortable location; provide child-size table and chairs plus activities



A FEW MORE TOUR IDEAS . . .

#3 Parent “Needs Assessment”

- Complete together
 - “What are your goals for your child?”
 - “What are you child’s interests?”
 - “Do you have any concerns about kindergarten readiness?”
 - “Tell me about any parenting challenges? How can we help?”



#4 Goodie bag

- Something fun and educational (book, bubbles, crayons, etc.)
- “Branded” items with your school’s logo (mug, chip clip, etc.)

#5 “Follow up” plan

- Day 1 -- Mail letter and book
- Day 3 – Call (with cute message if it goes to voice mail)
- Day 5 – E-mail (thinking about you)



TOURS (CONT.)

- Day 7 – Hand-written note mailed to home
- Day 10 – Phone call
- Days 13, 16, 20 – E-mails

#6 “Drip campaign”

- Set up “autoresponder” series of e-mails written in advance (paste into e-mail management system – CRM to be sent automatically at certain intervals)
 - Follow up for a tour
 - People who have not yet toured



COMMUNITY MARKETING



#1 Partner with local realtors

- Partner with one or two
- Flyers and “freebies” – Free child care during closing or \$10.00 child care on moving day

#2 “Muffin runs”

- Brochures, flyers, testimonial flyers, promotions
- Fridays
- Target businesses that attract your ideal customers
 - Pediatricians
 - Hair salons
 - Health and fitness clubs
 - Children’s clothing stores
 - Managers of apartment complexes
 - Restaurants -- “Kids eat for free,” T-shirts with logo, flyers/brochures, helium balloons, small water bottle with a coupon attached, “25% off enrollment or 1 week free tuition if family enrolls by July 1.” (Don’t forget to take pictures and post on Facebook!)



COMMUNITY MARKETING (CONT.)

#3 Reciprocal referrals

- Businesses that attract or cater to families with young children
 - “Cross-promote” one another
 - Type brief summary of the “Referral Partner” program on letterhead. “We’d like to place your materials in our lobby so that your business can gain new customers from our loyal families in exchange for your doing the same.”
 - Pediatricians
 - Dentists
 - Realtors
 - Restaurants



#4 Press releases

- Publicize EVERYTHING!

#5 Welcome events

- Parent seminars
- Parents’ Night Out
- Presentations for kids -- Animal shows, Bubble Lady, magician, musical guest



STRENGTHENING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS



#1 Digital parent communication system

- Benefits
 - Peace of mind for the parent
 - Elimination of daily/weekly paper communications
 - Record of development over time
 - Resources: www.tadpoles.com/ (ipad; goes to e-mail)
 - www.kidreports.com (more options); www.LifeCubby.me

#2 Referral rewards program

- Rewards: cash, gift card, cash, reduction in tuition
- Capture “rewards” in a photo; share on Facebook

#3 Staff referrals

- Business cards (after 90 days) – “Fun Families and Teachers Wanted: Whether you are a potential client or employee we want to meet you! Please bring this card to our school and the staff person whose name is on the front will receive a cash reward. Thank you! We can’t wait to meet you!”



CUSTOMER RELATIONS (CONT.)

#4 Birthday cards

#5 Family connection events

- You want families to feel “connected” (impacts retention and overall customer satisfaction)
- “Connection” events:
 - Sledding party
 - Picnic/barbeque
 - Family nature walk
 - Zoo or museum trip for the whole family
 - Pizza party
 - Play center party



#6 Center-wide newsletter

- Monthly columns: Highlight families/staff; Interest stories: Teacher Q and A, “The Rembrandt Corner” – feature a student and his/her art work; “Thanks for Your Referrals” (with photo); “Ask an Expert: Director Sally’s Parenting Tip of the Month,” etc.
- Plus menus, curriculum themes, puzzles, events, etc.



DEVELOP YOUR VALUE

#1 Written testimonials EVERYWHERE

- You cannot have too many testimonials. They are worth their weight in gold
 - Website
 - Social media sites
 - Framed on walls in your center
 - In parent newsletters
 - At the bottom of your email signature
 - In email blasts to prospects
 - In your e-Packet
 - Hint: Use teacher testimonials too



#2 Hold a testimonial contest

- Set a deadline
- Rules – Everyone who submits a testimonial will be entered into a drawing for _____.
- Questions/thought-starters: “Why did you choose us?” “What do you love most about us?” “How have we helped your child?”
- Prize
- Effective way to communicate the contest
- Reminders right before the deadline



PRIORITIES

#1 Set aside time for marketing

#2 Choose a few ideas and implement to COMPLETION

- Utilize staff
- Ask board members to get involved
- Identify parent “champions”



**So . . . What are you going to do differently?
Believe things can be different and GET
STARTED!**

Resources: [The 77 Best Strategies to Grow Your Early Childhood Program](#) by Kris Murray and [The Ultimate Child Care Marketing Guide](#) by Kris Murray (both available from Amazon)

