

Marketing Your Early Childhood Program



With the busy day-to-day responsibilities of running a child care program, it can be difficult to find time to “market” your program. We are here to help you with a few simple, yet effective, ways to market and promote your program.

Branding

Have you given thought to your program’s “brand”? Entrepreneur.com defines branding as, “The marketing practice of creating a name, symbol or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products”. Think about what makes your program unique. What are your program’s strengths? These are the qualities to build on. Creating a mission statement is a great way to describe what your program is all about. For example, the mission statement of Delaware Stars reads, “The goal of Delaware Stars is to invest in participating programs to increase access to high quality care for all of Delaware’s children, especially those from low income families.” Mission statements are meant to be concise and should convey the most important aspects of your program. Having a clear mission statement will help attract like minded families to your program. It is also important to know your community. Who are you marketing to? For example, if your program has a lot of families that work non-traditional hours, it may be helpful to adjust your opening or closing times. When thinking about branding and marketing it is best to focus on a few key aspects of your program. It is impossible to be everything to everyone so focus on the most important features. Once a “brand” has been established, be sure that the information is communicated to staff. The important factor in branding is consistency. Everyone who is part of the program should have a clear understanding of the mission statement. This is something that can be incorporated into the hiring process.



Internal Marketing

One of the first, and arguably most important, strategy to consider is internal marketing. The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance states that internal marketing is about maintaining relationships with current families and staff. Check in with current families. Be sure to have a forum where they can offer suggestions or opinions. This could be a survey, parent meeting, or suggestion box. Provide opportunities to build community within your program. Invite parents to classroom events and field trips. Another idea is to offer an incentive for current families who refer new families. Administrators, think about your current staff. How are you supporting them? Each year we have staff fill out individual professional development plans. Think about scheduling time to talk about their individual goals and skills they wish to develop. When holding staff meetings, give time for new suggestions and ideas. Programs thrive when everyone has a voice. One of the best and most cost-efficient marketing strategies is “word of mouth” referrals. The best way to achieve word of mouth support is to ensure that current families and staff are happy with the program.

Social Media

Does your program currently use social media? If used properly, social media can be a great way to get the word out about your program. And the best part- it’s free! Social media is an efficient avenue for advertising open houses, fundraisers, and other events. There are several different social media platforms available. The most popular ones are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

- Facebook- Programs can create a public business page. This is a great way to share information about your program. Facebook business pages are public; which means anyone can search for it and “like” it. Encourage your current families to “share” your page with their friends/followers on their personal pages. On a separate note, you can also create a private group page and only allow access to families in your program. You can use this to keep families informed of upcoming events.
- Instagram- This platform is all about sharing pictures and videos. This is a great way to share events and activities happening in the classroom.
- Twitter- Programs can use this platform for sharing short bits of information. Each tweet can only be 250 characters. You can also use hashtags to make it easier for people to follow specific topics.
- Pinterest- Using Pinterest, programs can create different themed boards to share resources or ideas. Programs could create a board for each classroom or even boards for different topics such as, curriculum, fine motor activities, early math resources, etc.



Social Media (continuation)

It is best for programs to concentrate on one or two social media platforms. Each platform has the ability to communicate through direct messaging. In addition, there are apps to help with scheduling posts and using analytics to help determine the effectiveness of your pages. Keep in mind that programs will need to have parent permission before posting pictures of the children.

Connecting with the Community

One of the best ways to build a solid reputation in your community is to connect with local agencies and organizations. Think about connections that could serve as a mutual benefit. Look for organizations whose missions resonate with that of your program. Think about reaching out to local libraries, community centers, and other businesses serving children and families. Another option is to partner with area schools. Does your program have school age children that attend for before and after care? Reach out to see if your program could be considered for a referral list. Also, look out for workshops and events through your school district. Another way to connect is to see if they would be willing to provide information on school readiness and registering for kindergarten.

Professional Development

Family Child Care Business Practice 3: Marketing and Insurance

Making a Difference Conference:

- Marketing Your Program for Center-based Child Care Providers
- Marketing Your Family Child Care Program

These are just a few simple ways to support the goal of growing or maintaining your program enrollment. Remember, before you can market effectively, you need to have a clear understanding of your program's mission.

Be sure that your mission statement is evident to all who walk in your building!