

Let's Discuss - *Marketing in OSHC*

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Practical suggestions that will help you to achieve QA Principles 2.1; 3.1; 3.2; 3.3 and 8.3

Marketing begins and ends with your customers. In OSHC services these are your families.



- ◆ The role of marketing is to attract and keep customers.
- ◆ Without customers you do not have a business.
- ◆ If you can attract and keep customers profitably your business will remain healthy.
- ◆ The most profitable businesses are those that set out to build long term relationships with their customers.
- ◆ Marketing is finding out what your customers want and then delivering it to them at a cost that ensures your business's viability.

- ◆ You must identify who your potential customers are, attract them to your business, convince them to buy from you rather than your competitor, and build a strong relationship with them.
- ◆ Marketing should be seen as an investment and not an expense.
- ◆ You must develop a plan and commit to it—ad-hoc strategies don't provide consistent results.
- ◆ Be patient—it may take a few weeks to see the benefits.
- ◆ Your marketing efforts must be maintained in good times as well as bad.

Developing your USP

(Unique Selling Proposition)

- ◆ Ask yourself, why should families choose this centre rather than another one?
- ◆ What makes you uniquely different from other centres?
- ◆ What do you offer that is distinctive and appealing to parents and children—look for the hidden benefits that you possess.
- ◆ Ask parents and children what they value most about your service.
- ◆ Ask parents about their frustrations or irritations when dealing with the OSHC industry generally.
- ◆ When you have a list of families' values and concerns consider how your centre could respond in a way that would set you apart from your competitors.
- ◆ Make sure you are able to deliver on your promises.
- ◆ Remember you can't be everything to everybody.

Marketing Principles

Test and measure all your marketing activities· check which strategies are working and eliminate those that are not performing

Your customer's perception is your reality· you therefore need to know what people think about your service; don't make assumptions that parents know as much as you do about child care and your service in particular; turn your customers into advocates by delivering more than they expect

Differentiate your business from your competitor· what benefit do you offer families that your competitors do not?

Learn all you can about your customers and their needs· the only way to find out what parents really want is to ask them· never assume you know

Use a range of strategies to market your service· and see which ones bring success

Take action· adopt a can-do attitude. Plan your strategies. Expect that you may fail at first, but find out why it didn't work and adapt and try again. Never give up.

Always listen to customer feedback

Factors for success

- ◆ *Smile—look happy*
- ◆ *Listen and show respect*
- ◆ *Be enthusiastic—get excited about your service*
- ◆ *Employ people that are positive and enthusiastic*
- ◆ *Value your existing customers*
- ◆ *Talk to the children and find out what they like to do*
- ◆ *Be genuine*
- ◆ *Follow-up to ensure parents and children are happy*
- ◆ *Treat every parent and child the same way you would like to be treated*
- ◆ *Anticipate needs*
- ◆ *Treat your staff the way you want them to treat your customers*
- ◆ *Empower your staff to anticipate and respond to parents' needs*
- ◆ *Call parents by name*
- ◆ *Keep them informed of what you are doing*
- ◆ *Find solutions*
- ◆ *Provide benefits*
- ◆ *Keep your promises*
- ◆ *Don't over promise but over deliver*

Every time someone tells you they are impressed with your service, write down a testimonial. Then send it back to them and ask for their approval to use it.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

- ◆ Word-of-mouth—help parents talk about your service by providing a regular newsletter
- ◆ Local schools—introduce yourself to the principal; supply programs and enrolment forms; speak or set up a display at school orientation days
- ◆ Distribute brochures—to doctors surgeries; colleges; libraries; recreation centres; local businesses
- ◆ Special events—plan a special event and invite children to bring along their friends
- ◆ Advertise—community newspapers; local government directories; Yellow Pages
- ◆ Articles in community newspapers—get to know a journalist, plan newsworthy events

Key points of difference in OSHC

- ◆ Is your service large or small and what benefits does this provide?
- ◆ Do you offer before school, after school and vacation care?
- ◆ Do you cater for different age groups?
- ◆ Are excursions an incorporated part of your program?
- ◆ Are children's interests and preferences included in the program?
- ◆ Do you offer special interest activities e.g. bicycle maintenance; sports clinics; pottery; computer games; gardening etc?
- ◆ Do you offer great facilities for children's play e.g. climbing equipment; sports oval; basket ball court?
- ◆ Are you located on school grounds?
- ◆ Do you collect children from a number of schools in your area?
- ◆ Do you have your own bus for school pick ups?
- ◆ Are you community managed or run by a local government or other large organisation, or a privately operated service? What are the benefits of your model of management?
- ◆ Are your staff experienced, skilled and trained—what are the specific benefits your staff offer families?
- ◆ What do parents and children say about your service—keep a record of their comments about the service and quote them in your marketing strategies?

Getting Started

- ◆ Get together with your staff team to identify the unique features of your service. You may find it useful to do this in the form of a SWOT Analysis. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- ◆ Send out a small survey to parents asking them to provide feedback on what they like most and least about your service.
- ◆ Meet with the children to determine the things they value most about the service.
- ◆ Develop a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) for your service based on the feedback you have received.
- ◆ Use your USP in all your advertisements and publicity material about the service.
- ◆ Identify who your target markets are and how you can reach these people i.e. where do they go to find information about child care? Brainstorm ideas with your staff.
- ◆ List all of the ideas and decide which methods you will try first. Begin by trialling cost free or low cost strategies, as if these are successful, this will save you money.
- ◆ Set some targets that you are seeking to achieve as a result of your marketing e.g. to gain 10 new enrolments in the forthcoming vacation care program.
- ◆ Develop a Marketing Plan based on your list of ideas. Plan strategies for each vacation program and each school term so that you are keeping your target market and current customers informed about your services.
- ◆ Keep a record of each new contact, enrolment or increased business from your current customers that has been in direct response to one of your strategies.
- ◆ Evaluate which strategies are providing the best results. Change or cease to use strategies that are not successful.
- ◆ Review your targets and revise them or set new targets when they have been achieved.

Visibility & Image are important factors:

- ◆ Is your service easy to find?
- ◆ Do you have a sign outside that states you are an OSHC service?
- ◆ Do local schools know where you are and direct people to you?
- ◆ Is the outside welcoming to both children and parents?
- ◆ Do visitors want to step inside—is the first impression friendly, welcoming, clean, organised, colourful and bright?
- ◆ Do your staff look professional—do they wear a uniform?
- ◆ Do staff welcome visitors and deal with telephone enquiries in a professional way?

MAKE THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE.

You must educate parents about what makes your service special. Tell them about the benefits you offer and all the little things you do to make your service more enjoyable. You cannot bore your target market with too much information. The only people you'll bore are those not in the market for child care.