

# Let's Discuss - *Marketing in LDC*

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Practical suggestions that will help you to achieve QA Principles 1.6; 2.1; 2.2 and 7.1

Marketing begins and ends with your customers. In child care 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?—look for the hidden benefits that you possess.
- ◆ Ask parents what they value most about your service.
- ◆ Ask them about their frustrations or irritations when dealing with the child care industry generally.
- ◆ When you have a list of parents' 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
- ◆ Value your existing customers
- ◆ Treat every parent as if they are your 'only' parent
- ◆ Be genuine
- ◆ Follow-up to ensure parents are happy
- ◆ Treat every parent 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
- ◆ Distribute brochures—to doctors surgeries; child health clinics; hospitals; colleges; schools; libraries; community centres; local businesses
- ◆ Parent evenings—plan an interesting talk or social event and ask parents to bring along their friends
- ◆ Advertise—community radio/newspapers; local government directories; Yellow Pages
- ◆ Articles in community newspapers—get to know a journalist, plan newsworthy events
- ◆ Displays—community noticeboards, shopping centres; local events

## Key points of difference in LDC

- ◆ Is your service large or small and what benefits does this provide?
- ◆ Does it offer special programs for different age groups—e.g. pre-school program; Reggio Amelia; dance programs; languages; after school care?
- ◆ 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 the premises new and specifically designed for child care, or have you created a homely environment in established premises?
- ◆ What is especially appealing about the outdoor play environment?
- ◆ Are there any specific benefits in your location—near to highways; close to hospitals, colleges, schools, other large places of employment or study?
- ◆ Are your staff experienced, skilled and trained—what are the specific benefits your staff offer families?
- ◆ What do parents' say about your service—keep a record of parent's 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.
- ◆ Identify your competitors and their USPs. What are you offering that is different?
- ◆ Develop a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) for your service.
- ◆ 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 increase utilisation by 10% within 3 months.
- ◆ Develop a Marketing Plan based on your list of ideas. Ensure you have at least one marketing strategy each month so that you are constantly reminding your target market and current customers about the services you offer.
- ◆ 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?
- ◆ Are there adequate road signs?
- ◆ Are you recognisable as a child care centre?
- ◆ Is the outside welcoming?
- ◆ 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.*