

Early Years Commissioning Team Guidance Notes Marketing

Why do you need a marketing strategy?

Effective marketing is essential to a sustainable childcare business. In conjunction with regular consultation it can ensure you connect with your existing and future customers and maintain excellent communication. This will help you to deliver a service that meets the needs of your community and therefore ensures the ongoing success of your business.

Identifying your Unique Selling Point

You may be very confident that you know what your USP is however it is very important to consult with your families. Childcare is a continuously changing market and priorities change accordingly.

It will be your ability to satisfy your customers' needs better than your competitors that will ultimately bring new customers. By knowing as much as possible about your potential customers you will understand how best to reach them and what marketing methods will be most effective. It will also show that you value and respond to their opinions. It is likely that you will use a combination of methods to reach a diverse audience.

Branding and your identity

You will need to decide on your image and the impression you wish to create. This can include your name, your logo, the colours and fonts used and also some key words. You might include your vision statement. These elements of your brand or identity should be used for all your promotional activities and resources and will therefore become familiar within the community and hopefully synonymous with good quality childcare.

Website

The majority of parents will start with the internet when they begin to think about childcare services. It is essential that you have an effective and attractive website which is easy to navigate and provides all the essential information. Your website can be as simple or as complex as you want. A web designer can set up your website or you can buy a package and create one yourself. It is an advantage to have an element of the website that can be easily and regularly updated. This will allow you to headline anything new such as extra sessions available or reminders about upcoming events. Explore whether you can link to other relevant websites such as Schools, Children's Centres and Ofsted. Make sure that enquiries that come through your website are regularly monitored and responded to quickly.

Ensure that you subscribe to Surrey County Council tool for parents Childcare Finder and update your entry regularly.

Social Media

Consider creating facebook and twitter accounts to help you to communicate with your parents and potential customers. It is an advantage if you have a member of staff who is competent with networking who is happy to take on the responsibility for maintaining these accounts.

Text Alerts

Many parents like to receive updates by text so ensure that you request mobile telephone numbers and permission to send text alerts.

Word of Mouth and Reputation

This has always been a very powerful form of marketing. Keep a book of references and thank you letters accessible and also on your website and social media. Ensure that staff understand that they are your ambassadors within the community and should remain aware of this when wearing your uniform or on their own social media sites. Ensure that you have a social media policy for staff.

Signage

Good quality signage will bring your service to the attention of the local community. Include your logo and contact details and make sure it is clear what services you offer. Ensure that you have obtained permission if necessary.

Make sure the outside of your premises is well maintained, clean and tidy. This will be the first thing that visitors encounter and their first impressions of you and your staff need to be favourable. Periodically walk the perimeter and try to see the premises as if for the first time to make sure you are creating the best impression possible.

Promotional Material

These can be in the form of newsletters, leaflets, posters, banners or postcards and you will decide between these based on the method of distribution and the target audience. If you are only trying to reach existing clients then newsletters in book bags or via email might be used. If you wanted to reach the immediate locality you could pay to have leaflets delivered within half a mile of the setting. A mail shot might be used to target a specific housing estate. You need to make sure that you are communicating the right information and reflecting the image that you want to project. It is helpful to 'test' any promotional material on a third party before you send it out.

Adverts and Local News Press

You can pay for adverts to appear in local press however these can be very expensive. It is a good idea to forge good links with local press. If you have any special events or occasions you can send them photos and text and they will sometimes print these to celebrate your successes. This will help to raise your profile in the community.

Special Events and Open Days

Take every opportunity to raise your profile by joining in with any community events. If you are holding an Open Day make sure it is well advertised and offer incentives to attend such as craft activities or treasure hunts. Create opportunities for parents to come and see your setting in action. Build this in to your marketing strategy so that events are scheduled according to when you need to recruit new children for the term/year ahead. Forge links with local Schools, businesses and Children's Centres and make sure they have up to date information and contact details for you.

Welcome pack

A good quality prospectus can be a very valuable tool. An attractive, well-presented document should be sent out to anyone who makes an enquiry about your business. This should include all the relevant information about your service and your contact details. Information that will change, such as fees, can be provided as an insert so that you don't need a costly reprint too frequently.

How will you know what works?

You will need to monitor each promotional activity so that you can gather information on their effectiveness and value for money. Always ask and record how parents heard about your service so that you can incorporate this when deciding on future marketing strategy. Make sure you obtain contact details so that you can follow up those parents who do not choose to use your service so that you can get effective feedback.

Further advice

For further advice regarding marketing a childcare business, or details about training, contact the Early Years Commissioning Team on email: childcarebusinessadvice@surreycc.gov.uk