



How To... Market Your Setting

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The word “marketing” worries many early years practitioners. Some see it as the unknown, which only “the professionals” can do – and a service for which they would need to pay an awful lot of money for. On the other hand, many understand that marketing their setting and standing out from the crowd is essential - they appreciate it doesn't need to cost an arm and a leg, and they embrace it!

Allan Presland, early years business expert, CEO of Parenta and author of best-selling book “Improving the Business of Childcare” shares some of his wealth of knowledge on marketing businesses to help nurseries become – and stay – visible.



In the competitive world of early years education, marketing your setting is becoming more and more important. It's what gets you noticed and it's what makes the difference between your business “just about scraping through”, “breaking even” or in a few cases even “turning a profit”.

It's worth remembering that in theory, every new enquiry, lead or referral that you get could potentially increase your revenue by £6,000 to £10,000 per year!

Now, more than ever, nurseries need to stand out. The introduction of the 30 funded hours has put many nurseries under so much pressure - some even going out of business as they struggle to make up the shortfall caused by the government's (not so) “helping hand”.

Marketing your childcare business doesn't need to be expensive – there are many ways in which you can make your setting stand out to potential customers, thus creating ways to put you at the forefront of parents' minds as they make the decision of who to entrust their children with for their early years education.

Unless your setting is running consistently full with no free spaces then a few simple questions will enable you to make the decision about whether you “need to do marketing”.

“Is my setting full all the time?”

Running your setting at anything less than around 95% occupancy is going to be costing you money.

“Do we have anything in place that ensures we can fill spaces during quiet periods?”

Do you think ahead and look at occupancy patterns of previous years to help you with forward planning?

“Are we relying purely on ‘word of mouth’ to get new customers?”

Good recommendation is really important, but it shouldn't be depended on to raise your occupancy levels.

Timing is everything

Looking at ways to advertise your setting at times when you need it most - way before you actually need it - will put you ahead of the competition. For example, many practitioners see September as being the month which holds the main intake of the year, so they start thinking about advertising in the summer, or a little before. In reality, the end of July could be the time that you push for new children to start, therefore avoiding a slump in business during August when many parents take their summer holidays.



Build an army of supporters!

Your existing customers have the potential to be your greatest supporters, so coming up with ways to continue this great relationship once they have ‘signed up’ is a good idea. Involve them, ask them to spread the word, to become your “ambassadors”, and include them in conversations about how to raise awareness of your setting – you may be surprised just how many parents want to help! If your customers love your service, they are likely to talk about it with their friends and colleagues and this will lead to more enquiries and referrals coming in. Try to get as many testimonials as possible from happy parents – you can never have too many great things said about you when it comes to the business of childcare! A great way of keeping testimonials current and up to date is to keep them short but ask parents to complete surveys regularly – this will give you much more content for future use. You could share these testimonials on your website for other parents and carers to see.

Offering incentives to parents if they introduce your setting to their friends and family which results in a new child joining your setting can be a successful way of getting new business.

Keep a close eye on the competition

Having an idea of what your rivals are doing can help you win valuable business. Why not play detective and investigate their strengths and weaknesses? Without too much under-cover work, you can find out what they are charging per child and what is included in their service. Some include little extras like healthy snacks but others may charge for children taking their own packed lunch – so it's worth keeping abreast of what is happening in these settings in your area and using these strengths and weaknesses to your advantage by using them in your marketing. You can also find out about nurseries in your area by signing up to their newsletters and visiting their websites.



“Read all about it!”

Getting leaflets designed and printed professionally won't cost much money at all, but will make your setting stand out from the competition. These leaflets can be distributed door-to-door in the local area and parents can help with this too. They can also work as an eye-catching reminder which can be given to prospective parents after their showrounds as something for them to take home with them.



Perception is everything

Making the effort to have your nursery name and sign well displayed is definitely worth it. Perception and reputation are important factors, from the way your staff conduct themselves in the community whilst wearing their nursery t-shirts, to the way the phone is answered and the way parents are greeted at your front door. Marketing isn't just about placing an advert in the local paper. It's so much more than that. It's an ongoing process to engage with prospective parents and carers so that they are aware of your setting and truly believe your setting is the right one when making that all-important decision. Even the simplest of things can be really effective, but they are not always obvious. For example, using signage outside (and also nearby, where appropriate) can make all the difference – if a prospective customer can't even find your setting, their first experience of your setting won't be particularly positive. Whereas, having clean, colourful and welcoming banners or signs advertising your setting not only helps with people finding you easily, it also doubles up as an advertising board for future business!



Have a think about going above and beyond when conducting showrounds and looking at things from a slightly different perspective – from the potential customers' point of view. What would make you choose your nursery over a competitor's?

There are so many small things that can be done that will really make a difference. You could choose a specific area within your setting to meet and greet, conduct the showround and then finish with a quick summary of what they have seen and agree a follow-up date. Even having a bowl of fruit in that area shows that you are thinking about making healthy choices during the day, which can be a great selling point for parents.



Make your website work hard for you



If you are struggling to think of new ways to advertise, then investing in a nursery website could well be the answer. The internet is pretty much now the first go-to place for parents wanting to find a childcare provider. Having a website for your nursery is like having your very own marketing team working on promoting your setting 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year! Your website is, in effect, your shop window. Ensuring your website is optimised which means when parents are searching in your area, your setting will appear on the first page of Google. It's important to ensure that your website can be viewed on all devices by parents as most websites are now viewed on mobile devices.

Go social!

Building up a social media following is a great way to get in front of your existing and potential customers. It can be tempting to delegate the social media marketing to one of the younger members of the team, simply because you may feel they are the 'experts' but beware – social media posting for a business is totally different from posting personal content. It might be worth your while investing in getting some advice on how to get your social media accounts up and running.

The team at Parenta has created hundreds of childcare websites and social media accounts for settings over the years and understands that parents want to get the most out of their online experience when looking at your website and engaging with your social media activity.



The subject of "Marketing Your Setting" is discussed in much greater detail in Allan Presland's no. 1 best-selling book "**Improving the business of childcare**" – an easy-to-read reference manual specifically for childcare owners and managers. Its main purpose is to help early years practitioners identify where their business skills gaps lie and teach them how to overcome them, thus enabling them to run their businesses more successfully.

If you want to improve the visibility of your setting, increase its capacity and engage with existing and potential customers, Parenta's team of early years education marketing experts can provide you with advice and the ideal bespoke solution – from the creation of a simple logo, a letterhead or leaflets, to a fully responsive childcare website and social media package. More information about our website demos and testimonials can be found here:

bit.ly/ParentaWebsites.

Parenta Solutions



Software:

NURSERY MANAGEMENT - ABACUS

- Save hours by reducing planning time by 50%
- Speedy invoicing to all parents and carers in minutes
- Instant view of all financial reports
- Manage payments and track debt

ONLINE EYFS TRACKER - FOOTSTEPS 2

- Record meaningful, detailed and essential EYFS observations
- Improve essential safeguarding and save hours of time
- Reduce your workload and spend more time with the children
- Identify at a glance each child's development pathway

ONLINE DIARY - DAYSHARE

- Share every magical moment of each child's day with their parents and carers with our online diary software

PARENT PORTAL APP

- Bringing parents and carers closer to their child's day by providing a timeline of their progress
- Download Parent Portal App on Android or iOS

FEE COLLECTION

- We collect fees, allowing you to focus on childcare, not credit control
- Reduces stress about pay day
- Helps you eliminate bad debt from your setting
- We operate on a 98% success rate across the board



Training:

Increase employee motivation and keep staff for longer within your setting by offering training – the ideal tool for you to develop your team.

Parenta courses include:

- Level 2 Childcare
- Level 3 EYE Diploma
- Level 5 Childcare Leadership Qualification
- Business Admin Levels 2 and 3
- Advanced Qualifications in Team Leading and Management

PLUS ... Parenta offers a free recruitment service - no fees!

Websites:



- Our childcare websites generate genuine interest and leads from parents and carers
- Social media accounts – including Facebook and Twitter – help your setting's visibility
- Full website support service enables you to focus on what matters.

Working together for our children

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