

# Effectively Marketing Your Service

By Lauren Boyle

*Being able to effectively market your service is becoming increasingly important as more child care services become available and families gain more knowledge about child care.*

*The following article discusses strategies for identifying and marketing to your potential clientele.*

## Defining your audience or potential clientele

When considering strategies for marketing your service, it is important to ensure these are manageable, cost effective and time efficient. Defining your audience allows you to target your marketing messages to the audience who is most likely to access your service. Identifying your potential clientele also assists you to avoid costly and ineffective mass marketing techniques.

Families who have children in the age group or groups that your service caters for will be your main focus for marketing purposes, as they are the people who are most likely to directly access your service. However, other potential target markets include:

- Child related services that complement your service. For instance, health and intervention services or child care services that can be accessed by your clients either prior to or after using your service
- Local primary schools
- Government departments such as local councils and State and Federal education departments

These organisations may be able to recommend your service to families.

It is important to identify the predominant needs and characteristics of your potential clientele in order to develop effective marketing strategies. Useful information about your target audience may include:

- Where they live
- Where they work
- What they believe is important in a child care service
- What they need from a child care service

Learning why families currently use your service, and what they like and dislike about your service is a useful way to inform and strengthen your

### A useful marketing plan can:

- Increase community awareness of your service
- Build customer loyalty to your service
- Allow you to compete for business with other services
- Improve the effectiveness and viability of your business
- Help you to maintain a good waiting list to help support business in the future

marketing plan. This information may be gained by:

- Asking families how they found out about your service when they make initial enquiries
- Conducting exit interviews when families are leaving to find out why they are leaving
- Regularly seeking feedback from families about what they value in your service or what they would like to see improved. This information may be gained through questionnaires, surveys, daily interactions and meetings

Using this information to develop a profile of your service will allow you to develop a marketing plan that will promote your service to those who are most likely to require your services. An effective marketing plan also assists you to successfully manage your resources and time, and will enable you to budget realistically for marketing activities.

## Marketing Materials

Large scale advertising can be an expensive and unrealistic option for many services. Carefully considering *where* you advertise is essential. Thinking about where you will be most likely to attract the attention of your service's potential clientele will help to maximise the effectiveness of your marketing materials, reducing unnecessary costs.

Some places where you may be able to advertise to a large number of potential clients at minimal cost include:

- Telephone directories
- Local newspapers, magazines and business directories
- Local school newsletters
- Relevant and appropriate websites, such as child care directories, or websites devoted specifically to child care issues

Producing an effective brochure about your service and what it offers can also be a useful marketing tool. Brochures can be distributed to potential clients in a number of ways:

- Handing them out to families when they make initial enquiries about the service
- Including them in the service's information pack
- Placing them in local child care health and/or intervention services such as maternal health clinics, paediatric doctor's offices, speech therapy services
- Making them available through local community noticeboards
- Distributing them through letter box drops. Please note, this strategy requires careful consideration, as it can be time consuming and ineffective when large numbers of brochures are distributed to people who have no need to access your service

Another effective way of promoting your service is through inviting the local media to special events that are occurring at your service. These might include special visitors to the service, such as a farm animal visit or a visit by an Indigenous dance troupe, a family fair day or an open day, Christmas performances and celebrations of cultural events such as Chinese New Year and Indian Diwali.

Where possible and appropriate, ask that any media coverage of events in your service include information such as your service's name, its location, what it offers and contact details. It is important to remember to gain written permission from parents/guardians, staff and carers where names, photographs or filmed footage will be used.

Developing a public presence can also assist your service to strengthen its ties with the local community. Services can engage in community activities such as street festivals, community fairs,



exhibitions at shopping centres, garage sales and fundraising events.

### **Involving stakeholders in marketing your service**

It can be beneficial to provide all service stakeholders with opportunities to contribute to developing and reviewing your service's marketing plan and to participate in implementing your marketing strategies.

Your service may find that you have family members or committee members who possess an expertise or an interest in marketing, and families who are already using your service are often skilled in identifying your service's strengths and benefits. Families and committee members may have an interest in developing marketing materials such as advertisements, brochures, and articles for inclusion in local media, or they may be interested in helping to distribute marketing materials.

### **Using participation in CCQA to market your service**

One of the most effective tools that your service can use to market itself is by focussing on high quality aspects of your service and conveying this successfully to potential clients. Services can support this aspect of their marketing strategy by prominently displaying their most recent *Certificate of Accreditation* or their *Certificate of Registration* and, where available, the composite *Quality Profile* certificate.

Services need to ensure that they are advertising and marketing appropriately and truthfully when referring to their participation in CCQA. NCAC requires that:

- Only services which have registered with NCAC can publicly advertise their participation in a CCQA system
- Services which are registered with NCAC, but have not yet progressed through CCQA and received an Accreditation Decision, cannot claim to be 'Accredited'. Similarly, a service cannot claim to be 'Accredited' if it has recently undergone a Validation Visit or is currently awaiting an Accreditation Decision
- Individual staff and carers cannot make claims that they are 'Accredited'. A service's Accreditation status relates to the service as a whole rather than to individual service owners, managers or employees
- Only services which have successfully progressed through the relevant CCQA system, met the standard required for Accreditation and are in receipt of a current *Certificate of Accreditation* can claim to be 'Accredited'
- The use of NCAC's *Putting Children First* logo in any service advertising is not permitted

It is important that you let your target audience know what your service's current focus is for quality improvement, as well as any priorities that your service has for delivering particular services or programs. For example, your service may have a strong multicultural program, or you may be able to offer a parenting support program. It is essential that your service be clear, confident



and transparent about what you currently do to provide quality care. Comparing your quality to that of another service or to another group of services may not be helpful as this may reduce the focus on what you can offer to families.

If you have any questions about marketing your service's Accreditation status appropriately, please contact NCAC's Marketing Communications Team on 1300 136 554. ■

## References and further reading

- Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd. (1999). *Keeping on Track: Children's Services Administration Manual* (4th ed.). Marrickville, NSW: Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd
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