

**YORK
CHILDCARE
LTD**
Out of School Service
Tel:01904 679864

MARKETING YOUR CLUB

This information is intended to help Out of School clubs improve their marketing skills with the aim of making their clubs as successful as possible in terms of attendance and their profile in the community.

“Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements”
Chartered Institute of Marketing

What is marketing and why should we do it?

Marketing encompasses many aspects of your club and should be a continuous process. The aim of this guide is to encourage you to look at how you currently market/sell your club to the people who use it and how you can improve on that practice to benefit the club further. It will focus on which marketing techniques you can use to reach this goal.

The aim of marketing is to ensure that you are letting everybody know about the club and in doing so, retain the current users and attract new ones. Evaluation methods are strongly linked to marketing as the process inevitably involves assessing what you currently have in place and how that can be marketed and improved.

Where are we now?

The first step in working out a marketing plan for your club is to assess your current situation.

As a starting point, use the identified aims and objectives for your club, sometimes known as a mission statement. This doesn't need to be any longer than a paragraph but should contain information about the club's purpose, why was it established. From here, you can expand to cover what the club hopes to achieve in the future and what the underpinning values of the club are.

An example mission statement, using the above guidelines:

“The out of school club aims to provide childcare opportunities for all children living in the local area and attending the local school. It is hoped that the club will increase the number of children attending and expand to provide a holiday club in the future.

The club aims to provide a high quality, affordable service and will conduct itself to the highest standards in everything it does.”

In helping you establish where the club is now why not find out from those who are currently involved:

Seek the views of existing customers

Look at how many customers you currently have and who they are. Find out why they use the service. This can be done as a simple question on the initial registration form, which should be renewed annually, or in an evaluation questionnaire.

Ask the children for their views

Ascertaining the views of children and young people can be more complicated than it sounds and a range of methods should be used according to the age of the child and their individual needs. For example it may be more effective to ask a five year old to draw a picture of their favourite thing about the club than expect them to articulate it or worse write it down! As the users of the club you should be trying to find out from their point of view what they like / dislike.

Involve the staff team

Ask the staff what they think about the club, encouraging honest views for a more accurate picture. These are the people who deal with the parents on a daily basis and hear comments that could improve the club’s working practices.

Looking at what you’ve got already may encourage you to think about whether or not this is the most effective way to do things. For example, you may currently reach parents via the school newsletter, but some parents don’t have children at that school, maybe it would be more effective for the club to produce its own newsletter (more information about this further on!)

In combining the above answers with your own knowledge, experiences and ideas about the club you can do a profile of your club, looking at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (commonly known as a SWOT analysis). This can be put into a simple tabular format (example below). Assessing your club in this way can provide a visual tool that should identify what you need to do to improve your club and consequently where you need to target your marketing.

Example SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Quality staff Satisfied parents Good location	Low local profile Premises – no room to expand Few voluntary management committee members
Opportunities	Threats
New housing estate Networking Local business park	Increasing local competition Lack of available staff New legislation

Where do we want to get to?

Doing a SWOT analysis will give a good idea of the clubs current strengths that can be emphasised, the opportunities that can be exploited and the weaknesses and threats that need to be reduced or eliminated.

The club, as a whole, involves many parties, including the voluntary management committee, staff, parents, children and local community. In order to find out where the club wants to aim for, it may be useful to find out from the people it concerned as to the direction they want to see it take.

Seek the views of existing and potential customers

You could carry out a regular evaluation to find out what improvements they would suggest. Would existing customers recommend the club to others? Establishing parents reasons for not using the club could highlight important issues that need to be addressed.

Ask the children for the their views

As the users of the club you should be trying to find out from their point of view what they think would make the club better.

Staff could write down children's ideas as they arise, for example constant requests for a day trip or residential holiday. Provide a book, folder or suggestion box for the purpose and remember to look in it!

Find out if there are children in your area that don't use the club and what the reason for this is.

Involve the staff team

What do the staff think would improve the club?

The SWOT analysis and feedback from those currently involved in the club should give you some idea about what direction the club should be taking towards its improvement and how it can market itself.

How are we going to get there?

Whether you were aware of it or not, marketing of the club actually started from the moment the initial research was done. From this time the idea of a new service is in parents' minds; therefore potential 'customers' have already been primed way in advance of any development reaching fruition. The key factor now is to maintain the marketing of the club on an on-going basis, in a positive manner.

How can we make our marketing more effective?

In marketing your club, effective communication skills play a key role, and this involves assessing who you are trying to reach, and why, so you can tailor you marketing to reach these people.

Effective marketing is targeted. This can involve evaluating with your current users and identifying and meeting their needs or identifying a new potential market, For example: A new business opening nearby which starts early in the morning. You could target the latter groups needs, for example, through the provision of a breakfast club, and market this to them. This could be done more effectively through developing good links with the company, who may look to buy in subsidised places for their employees.

Deciding how you say or offer something to people is just as important as deciding what you say to them. What you want to offer them needs to be sold to them in a way

that meets their needs. For example, if your concessionary places are unfilled, you may wish to target your marketing at parents who are eligible for this concession. You could say “Would you like to return to work safe in the knowledge your children are safe and enjoying themselves when they’re not in school?”, which is likely to be far more relevant and effective than “We have concessionary places available”.

You also need to target where the best place to reach these people is going to be as this will determine how you market the club. If the people you wish to contact are all parents at the school you could put something in the school newsletter, or if they all attend a certain meeting you could offer to go and do a talk for them. Alongside this consideration goes the time you carry out your marketing. To reach the maximum number of parents you may wish to have a poster permanently displayed somewhere, but also hand out flyers on the school gates as they collect their children from school.

The right attitude

In marketing, it is important to always put the customer first and see things from their perspective. In doing this you should be able to identify what sort of things would attract them and market your club accordingly. As a Voluntary Management Committee, you are perfectly placed to do this, as the likelihood is that you are customers of the club yourselves!

Thinking about it from this perspective, if your children do attend the club – are you happy with the service? how do your children feel about attending? What other things would you like to see as a parent?

Building and maintaining relationships

Every contact with existing and potential customers matters as it will influence whether or not they are happy with the service and will recommend it to others. Every phone call should be answered in a professional manner and visitors to the club should be made to feel welcome however ‘inappropriate’ the moment may seem! Although friendships may develop between management, staff and parents who use the club, at the end of the day the club needs to be run in a professional way. You could also get ideas from other clubs by finding out what they do. This could involve contacting clubs directly, or getting hold of material that has been produced by other clubs. You could attend local networks and bring up the issue of marketing, there will probably be many clubs facing the same situation as you.

Marketing Techniques

Make sure you are looking at every aspect of the service you are currently providing from the customer’s point of view.

Make sure you have a clear idea of what the benefits of your service are and also what they could be in the future.

If you have done this and decided what your objectives are, what you want to say, how, to whom, where and when, it is time to look at the range of ways to communicate- Which marketing techniques you are actually going to use?

Many of these have already been mentioned in context.

1. Word of mouth – make sure this is a positive method as it is the one that is likely to bring the most numbers into your club.
2. Targeting specific people or organisations if there is a particular area of the club you wish to target.

3. Attend meetings and networks or set them up yourself
4. Have a strong and instantly recognisable identity, which is very visible in the local community.
5. Make links with the local press and taking the time to write press releases for them. Inviting them to events however small. (more information on accompanying sheet)
6. Producing flyers, posters and direct mail shots
7. Make sure you are included in the school newsletter.
8. Producing your own newsletter (more information on accompanying sheet)
9. Maximise the use of access to the internet
10. Hold open days

All these techniques can be used to market your club. They can be used most effectively if you have decided who you want to target and why, and identified what the best ways to reach them are, this will maximise your chance of success in your marketing strategy. Using your local press, producing your own newsletters and holding open days are looked at here in more detail.

These are common mechanisms for marketing a club effectively, we hope the following information enables you to use these techniques successfully.

Remember, with proper planning, involving staff and customers, parents and children alike, clarifying the benefits of your club, being clear communicators and continually reviewing your services, you should receive positive outcomes from your marketing plans. Know what you need to do and which techniques you will use to meet your desired outcomes.

Using the Press.

Advertising

Think about which publications your target audience actually read- is it the local free paper or the city- wide newspaper?

Do people read the council bulletin put through their door and is there a best time of day or evening or time of year to have your advert or feature in the publication.

Remember to always negotiate the price of advertising and always make them aware if you are a registered charity.

Editorial coverage

Editors are interested in anything that is obviously 'new information' – so if you are a new club, why not invite the Press to your opening with the added interest of that special VIP to cut the ribbon!!

They would probably be interested in a special event such as an anniversary, an opening, an expansion, a recent fundraising success, an individual child's achievement, a visit from the fire brigade, etc.

An activity linked with a national charity event or special day may fit in with a larger feature already planned.

It is always worth phoning the person responsible for reporting on community events and asking them if they would like you to write an article and send it in. This may be easier for them and they may just send a photographer to get a picture. Often though if you personally invite them to the event they will come and write something themselves which includes comments from people involved they speak to on the day. It is wise to always have an article or press release ready any way in case they do not actually arrive so that they will receive it before it becomes old news!

Remember you can always write in to the paper with your views on childcare issues to be included in ‘ letters to the editor’.

Some publications welcome articles about childcare to go along side any features or adverts. It is always worth sending articles in, it may mean free advertising and will certainly get your organisation known as one that takes an interest in the area of childcare and related issues thereby raising your profile in the community.

Local radio

If you have an opinion on a certain issue, take the time to comment on phone- ins to the local radio station. This is not an appropriate forum for direct advertising but your opinions will be heard by others and your first name and type of organisation may be enough to identify you to local parents!

Remember you can use the local radio to publicise events and you could organise a club trip to the local radio press office or radio station to build up those useful business links whilst giving the kids a trip!

Useful Contact Numbers:

- Yorkshire Evening Press and York Star – York 653051
- BBC Radio York – York 641351
- Minster FM – York 488888

Producing A Newsletter

In the childcare sector, the primary need is to attract and retain parents who use the service and also encourage referrals. Newsletters are an excellent marketing tool if they convey professionalism, competence and at the same time are interesting and something people actually want to look at.

First Steps

Get a good range of newsletters from various organisations, some similar to yours, some quite different. This should give you a good overview of what works and help you choose a format that suits you.

You will need to consider how you are going to practically produce a newsletter- most home computers with basic software makes the job easy but not having access to a computer should not preclude you from having your own newsletter.



Don't forget that York Childcare Out of School Service have a computer you are welcome to come and use, just contact the office on York 679864 to arrange a time!

Who is going to produce the newsletter also needs to be taken into account, as well as frequency of its production and the costs incurred.

Ideally it would be produced by a nominated person on the committee, at identified times throughout the year, with costs built into the budget.

Each newsletter should clearly show the name of your club, logo and mission statement or a sentence describing the aim of your project. Ideas can be found in other publications about current issues, themes and presentation. You could also have a box for children and adults to put their articles, jokes, pictures and so on for the newsletter.

It is also worth thinking about the current concerns or priorities of your target audience, for example, Working Families Tax Credit and how to access it. You don't necessarily need to explain the mechanisms in detail but communicate to the readers that you are up to date with current initiatives and will be making sure parents have all the information they need. You could also provide a contact for further detailed information or suggest they talk to you individually and confidentially about their personal circumstances.

Often the detail of legislation is not as important in the newsletter as proving that you care about these issues too and understand what parents want to know about. It is a way of inspiring their trust in your organisation.

Consider circulating your newsletter widely in the community and let parents know who will be potentially seeing the newsletter and therefore increase its profile and possibly their willingness to be involved or even featured.

You could ask people to write articles for the newsletter, or local businesses may wish to advertise with you - which could finance the newsletters production and make sure you provide contact details of where they can find out more.

Ideas for Newsletters

A calendar of events

Latest government initiatives

Current childcare issues

Children's activities – photographs and narrative

(e.g - photographic record of a longer term project such as creating a garden, or before and after pictures).

Children's drawing / writing

Competitions for parents and adults (it is quite easy to ask local businesses to donate some small prizes for the purpose eg cinema tickets

Focus on food – printed menus if applicable.

Reports of special trips and visitors to the club (e.g - entertainers)

Reports the club has had from registration inspections

Information on training / qualifications gained by staff

A profile of members of the management / staff teams

Welcome to new children / best wishes to those leaving

Birthday calendar

Information on how parents can get involved

Meeting dates

Funding news

Charity events – how to get involved

Opportunities for volunteer input

Ideas for Monitoring and Evaluation

Marketing, to be worthwhile, must be capable of being evaluated so that you can decide if you are simply getting it right.

To do this you could try to find out how many people first found out about your club from the newsletter and ask readers what they think of it as part of your general termly evaluation questionnaire.

As a regular feature you could include a readers response slip on the back of each newsletter to invite feedback or contributions.

As part of their 'Good Practice in Childcare' series, the Department for Education and Employment have produced a publication entitled "Writing your own newsletter".

Copies of this publication are held in the Out of School Service for reference, or you can obtain your own copy by contacting the Out of School Service o York 679864 or the Department for Education and Employment Publications Office on 0845 6022260 quoting reference: E.Y.D.C.P. Rep 6.

Open days- The value for new clubs

Open days are extremely useful for new clubs to hold prior to actually officially opening the club to children. They should be well attended if advertised widely in the community.

Open days provide an opportunity for potential customers and other interested parties to gain information- to view the premises, the equipment, proposed activity programmes and most importantly meet the people who will be looking after their children if they decide to use the club.

Many parents will feel a lot more comfortable signing their child up to attend after an open day and many children want to see where they will be coming after school!

Ideally open days should be attended by all those involved in the setting up, management and running of the club. It is better to wait until you have all your staff in post first as these are the people who the children and parents want to meet the most. Proposed activity plans can be displayed and the actual equipment and toys made available on the day.

Always provide refreshments and activities for attending children including siblings under five. The best time to hold the open day is probably a weekend or after school during the times the club would actually open. This will depend on the venue of course.

Parent packs, policy documents and registration forms should all be available.

If the organisers and staff wear name badges and are available to chat and answer questions and parents are happy with what they see and hear, the day should result in many families registering with the club.

Do not hold an open day until everything is ready- a half painted wall or unavailability of parent packs does not create a good impression.

This is probably not the occasion to actually invite the press as you want their attendance on the actual GRAND OPENING DAY but you could send in a press release about it to advertise it to the community .

A valuable marketing tool for established clubs

Open days are also useful for established clubs as a marketing tool.

This sort of event should bring everyone together and provide an ideal opportunity to develop and improve working relationships with your customers.

It is the ideal forum for consultation and evaluation. Views on the current quality of provision and ideas for changes and improvements are most likely to come up during informal discussion, but the more methods you can provide the better.

You may decide to have a wall chart, a suggestion box or questionnaires provided or even all three!

Make open days or sessions fun social events with marketing as your hidden agenda.

If new clubs use these techniques from the start of their project, and existing clubs build this into their practices, effective marketing will become a habit and the profile of their service in the community will continue to be high.

**New and established clubs
Open Day checklist**

	Who	By when
Organisation meetings 1 2 3		
Invitation list		
Designing invitations Sending invitations		
Telephone follow up		
Designing Posters Deciding where to display them		
Delivering them		
Press release* Writing Sending		
Article for school newsletter Writing Delivering		
Displays		
Policy documents *		
Parent Information packs * Registration forms *		
Children's activities		
Name badges *		
Signing in book *		
Monitoring forms *		
Parking		
Toilets		
Welcome arrangements		
Questionnaires		
Suggestion box		
Refreshments		
Costs		

* of particular importance for new clubs

Examples of good marketing

One new club invested in T-shirts emblazoned with the club name and logo.

The photo of the staff and management that appeared in the press following the grand opening with the headline **NEW KIDS CLUB OPENS** made the name and location of the club obvious to all, even those who did not bother to read the text.

One after school club put a big blank piece of paper on the wall with the title **What we think about the club!** This was for the children and parents to write or draw on and was to form the basis of research to see how the service could be improved. It also served the purpose of giving the message that the club was committed to on-going consultation with users which is very positive as usually customers who feel their opinion is valued will remain loyal.

One club who recognised the importance of forming and maintaining a good relationship with the schools in the area, designated a member of the committee to be **School Liason Officer**. This person wrote to the Heads requesting a meeting with each to introduce themselves. They then made sure they kept the school up to date with developments by sending minutes personally addressed to the Head teachers, they invited the Heads along to all special occasions and always thanked them for their continuing support in any publicity. In return the school helped the club by putting out letters through the school, inviting them to attend prospective parents evenings, included information in the school newsletter and featured them in the school prospectus.

Sample

Open Day Questionnaire

Note This questionnaire is designed for use by established groups but could be adapted for the needs of new groups seeking the views of potential rather than existing customers.

For Parents / carers

1. Are we meeting the needs of you and your child / children?

Yes

No

2. How can we improve our services to meet the needs of you and your child / children?

3. Overall, how would you describe the club? (please circle)

Excellent

good

satisfactory

poor

4. Do you find the staff helpful and approachable?

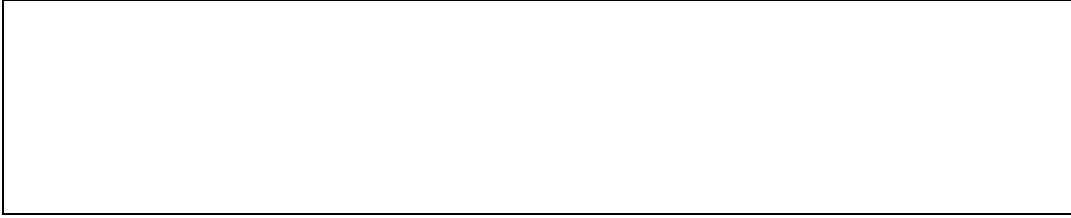
5. Would you recommend us to other families?

Yes

No

If not why not?

Any other comments



Thank you for taking the time to fill in his questionnaire. Please feel free to discuss your views of the service we provide at any time.