



Developing a Marketing Plan

Prepared by the Business Consultants at Child Care Aware® of North Dakota

How you market your facility could determine its success or failure. Like any business, your program has a service that consumers want and are willing to purchase. You will need to sell your service to clients who need care for their children. A marketing plan can help you achieve this goal.

Determine The Need

A needs assessment may indicate your facility is needed. Additional questionnaires may have identified some of the following client needs and expectations:

- Type of service
- Operating hours
- Teacher to child ratio
- Staff qualifications
- Curriculum
- Activities schedule?
- Location
- Policies of the program

Developing A Marketing Plan

Placing an ad in the paper or on a local radio or television station will not necessarily make clients purchase your service. Some clients may never learn of your business through this means. The key to success is knowing customers' needs. Marketing is an essential part of business. Take time to plan the best strategy to promote your facility.

The 5 P's of marketing are:

- Product/service
- Price competitive within your market area
- Place facility is - adequate parking, good lighting, easily accessible
- Promotion
- Persuasion - ability to sell yourself and business

All of the above require an investment in dollars, time and effort. Your marketing plan should use advertising and networking. A short, descriptive advertisement should clearly identify the services and the location. The more care and attention you devote to your marketing program, the more successful your facility will be.

How to Market Your Program

Allow for advertising expenses in your budget. Start advertising your facility at least three months before you open. Newspaper, radio and television advertising can be costly. You may want to speak with an advertising agency for help designing your ad or creating a commercial. Make sure your advertisements are consistent with the image you are trying to project. Whatever advertising media you use, be sure to include the following information:

- Name, address and telephone number
- Ages of children who will be accepted
- Hours the facility will be open
- Fees charged
- A descriptive about the program and the qualifications of the staff
- Who to contact for more information
- Date you plan to open

Inexpensive Advertising Techniques

Here are some inexpensive options if you do not have funding to advertise by radio, television or newspaper.

- **Flyers** - Get permission to post them in public buildings, such as shopping centers, markets, restaurants and community centers.
- **Brochures** - Take brochures or flyers to offices, libraries, schools, hospitals, women's groups, colleges, and church groups.
- **Business Cards** - They are an inexpensive way to advertise.
- **Child Care Aware® of North Dakota** - If your program is licensed, you are eligible to be listed on referral lists through Child Care Aware® <http://www.ndchildcare.org>
- **Networking** - Perhaps one of the best ways to market your facility is through networking. Often parents choose their child's caregiver through word-of-mouth. Volunteer to speak to local civic and church groups. How good your program is will determine if clients provide referrals for it. Appearance of your facility is important. The activities you offer will determine satisfaction.
- **Yellow Pages Directories** - Be sure your entire market is covered by the intended directory. After assessing your competitors, decide on the type of ad you want to place.
- **Classified Ads** - Announce your opening in the newspaper. Make appointments with clients to discuss enrolling their children at the facility.

Know The Competition

Competition may include indirect competitors who are vying for the same clients. To determine the competitiveness of your market, find out:

- What businesses offer child care service?
- Who are your major competitors?
- How long have your competitors been in business?
- How will your facility benefit the clients more than your competitor's?
- Is there a need for additional facilities in your area?
- How are competitors similar to, or different from you?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- How is the competition's business doing?
- How will competitors act when you enter the market?
- What are their managerial abilities, financial situations, facilities, reputations?

Financial institutions and investors often place heavy weight on the elements of competition when deciding whether to fund a new business. Whether or not you apply for a loan to finance your center, it is good to know as much as possible about your competitors. You should evaluate your ability to compete very carefully. Join the game only if you are confident you can be successful.

Best Practices for Child Care Business Marketing

A Marketing Plan is a 4-Step Process

- Define your service and what makes it special.
- Define your market.
- Develop your specific strategies to reach your market.
- Begin marketing now

Describe your service

- Hours, location and type of care that you offer.
- Special features

Define your market

- How will your business stand out?
- What is needed in your community?
- Describe customers you will target

Develop Specific Strategies for Your Market

Here are some inexpensive options if you do not have funding to advertise by radio, television or newspaper.

- Project a professional image
- Evaluate your facility as if you were a customer seeing it for the first time. Is it clean, neat, cheerful and child-appropriate?
- Consider printing business cards. They are inexpensive and professional.
- Prepare a one-page business description describing your philosophy. Have policies, contracts and other forms ready for clients to examine.
- Use as much low cost and no cost advertising as possible.
- Highlight staff's professional development achievements in your local paper.
- Provide program information to local businesses, schools, churches, groups
- Get on the referral list of your local CCR&R agency
- Receive referrals from satisfied clients

Market Now

- Don't wait for vacancies
- Develop a marketing schedule (summer openings, back to school openings)
- Build marketing into your budget

For more ideas and help preparing a Marketing Plan, contact your local Child Care Aware® Office or Small Business Development Center.