

A GUIDE TO WRITING A MARKETING PLAN FOR YOUR FAMILY DAY CARE SCHEME

Marketing is a key part of business success. Marketing in family day care targets:

- the customer for the service, ie the families
- the provider of the service, ie the educator
- all those involved or influential in your local marketplace when it comes to children and their families
- women seeking work and/or small business opportunities

To achieve successful marketing in your family day care scheme you need to:

- decide which market segment to target, eg are you looking to recruit new educators? attract new families? or are you simply aiming to raise general awareness of family day care in your community?
- work out how you will reach and win new customers
- make sure that you keep existing customers satisfied
- keep reviewing and improving everything you do to stay ahead of the competition.

A good marketing plan starts by looking at your overall strategy, and the business environment in which you operate. It builds on your own strengths and weaknesses to work out what your marketing strategy should be. It sets out clear objectives and explains how you will achieve them. Perhaps most importantly it looks at how you can ensure that your plan becomes reality.

This guide outlines the key areas to look at and what to include in an effective marketing plan.

1. Marketing plan summary and introduction

Your marketing plan should start with an executive summary which gives the reader a quick overview of the main points of the plan. Writing the summary is a good opportunity to check that your plan makes sense and that you haven't missed any important points – it is important therefore to write it last.

2. Business strategy

It's a good idea to introduce the main body of the plan with a reminder of your overall business strategy, including:

- what your business is about (your mission – eg 'provision of quality home-based learning experiences for children')

- your key business objectives
- your broad strategy for achieving those objectives

This helps to ensure that your marketing plan, your marketing strategy and your overall business strategy all work together. For example, if your business strategy is based on providing a premium quality service then your marketing strategy and plan will need to take this into account, targeting customers who appreciate quality, promoting your service in ways that help build the right image and so on.

3. External and internal analysis for your marketing plan

Understanding the environment in which your scheme operates is a key part of planning. A **PEST** analysis helps you to identify the main opportunities and threats in your market:

- **Political** and legal changes, eg new regulations
- **Economic** factors, eg home interest rates, local business growth, etc
- **Social** factors, eg changing attitudes and lifestyles, local employment levels, ageing population
- **Technological** factors, eg growing use of the internet

You also need to understand the internal strengths and weaknesses in your scheme. For example, the scheme's main strengths might be an original approach to educator support and an enthusiastic coordination unit team. The main weaknesses might be the lack of an existing target group for the recruitment of educators and limited financial resources.

A **SWOT** analysis combines the external and internal analysis to summarise your Strengths, Weaknesses (internal), Opportunities and Threats (external). You need to look for opportunities that play to your strengths. You also need to think about the implications and decide what to do about threats to your business and how you can overcome important weaknesses.

For example, your SWOT analysis might help you identify the most promising group to target as potential educators. You might decide to look at ways of using the internet to reach customers. And you might start to investigate ways to raise additional funding to overcome any financial weakness.

4. Your marketing objectives

Your marketing objectives should be based on understanding your strengths and weaknesses, and the business environment and marketplace in which your scheme is operating. They should also be linked to your overall business strategy.

For example, suppose your business objectives include increasing the number of families by a particular percentage over the next year, that is, additional families over and above those you would ordinarily lose and replace. Your marketing objectives might include targeting a promising new group (eg new arrivals to your town) to help achieve this growth.

Objectives should always be **SMART**:

- **Specific.** For example, you might set an objective of attracting ten new families.
- **Measurable.** Whatever your objective is, you need to be able to check whether you have reached it or not when you review your plan.
- **Achievable.** While you should set targets that stretch you, there is no point in being too ambitious.
- **Realistic.** You must have the resources you need to achieve the objective. The key resources are usually people and money.
- **Time-bound.** You should set a deadline for achieving the objective. For example, you might aim to get ten new families within the next 12 months.

5. Marketing strategy for your marketing plan

Your marketing plan is how you put your marketing strategy into practice.

If you understand the market well, you can probably break it down into different segments. For example, you can break the families in your local area into those with and without school aged children – allowing targeting via school communications and activities; or those with new babies and targeting baby health and early childhood centres.

For each segment, you need to look at what customers want, what you can offer and what the competition is like. Try to identify segments where you have a **competitive advantage**. At the same time, you should assess whether you can expect high enough takeup of care to make the segment worthwhile.

Sustainable competitive advantage is an advantage that one service has relative to competing services. The source of the advantage can be something the service does that is distinctive and difficult to replicate.

Often, the most promising segments are those where you have existing customers. If you are targeting new customers, you need to be sure that you will be able to reach them.

Once you have decided what your target market is, you also need to decide how you will position yourself in it – such as that you offer a ‘high quality service at a premium price’ or a ‘flexible local service’.

Successful businesses try to build a strong brand and image to help them stand out. FDCA support for branding is available to all FDCA members.

Whatever your strategy, you want to differentiate yourself from the competition.

6. Plan your marketing tactics

Once you have decided what your marketing objectives are, and your strategy for meeting them, you need to plan how you will make the strategy a reality.

Many businesses find it helpful to think in terms of the **4 Ps**:

- **Product.** What your product/service offers that your customers value, and whether/how you should change your product to meet customer needs – this includes the service the scheme provides to educators.
- **Pricing.** For example, educators and/or your scheme might aim simply to match the competition, or charge a premium price for a quality product and service. You might have to choose between the two or somewhere in between.
- **Place.** How and where your service is delivered. This will include considerations of where the market is for childcare and the accessibility of educators in those areas.
- **Promotion.** How you reach your customers and potential customers. For example, you might use advertising, direct mail and referrals.

As family day care is a service, this should be extended by three more Ps:

- **People.** For example, you need to ensure that educators and staff have access to relevant training and professional development.
- **Processes.** The right processes will ensure that you offer a consistent service that suits your customers and also supports and delivers effective resources to educators.
- **Physical evidence.** The appearance of educators in your scheme and their homes, as well as the scheme office can affect how customers see your service. Even the quality of paperwork, such as brochures, posters etc makes a difference.

7. Implementation

Your marketing plan must do more than just say what you want to happen. It must include how you will make sure that it happens.

The plan should include a schedule of key tasks. This sets out what will be done, and by when. Without a schedule, it's all too easy to get bogged down dealing with day-to-day tasks and lose sight of what you are trying to achieve.

It should also assess what resources you need. For example, you might need to think about what brochures you need, and whether they need to be available for digital distribution (by email or from your website). You might also need to look at how much time it takes to enrol children and/or recruit educators – the time lag between each first contact and the first day of care.

The cost of everything in the plan needs to be included in a budget. If your finances are limited, your plan will need to take that into account and seek out low and no cost marketing activities, eg presentations to local school meetings, playgroups etc. You may also want to link your marketing budget to your budget forecast.

8. Control and evaluation

As well as setting out the schedule, the plan needs to say how it will be controlled. You need an individual who takes responsibility for pushing things along. A good schedule and budget should make it easy to monitor progress. When things fall

behind schedule, or costs overrun, you need to be ready to do something about it and to adapt your plan accordingly.

From time to time, you need to stand back and ask whether the plan is working. What can you learn from your mistakes? How can you use what you know to make a better plan for the future?

Tips for a good marketing plan

A good marketing plan:

- sets clear, realistic and measurable targets
- includes deadlines for meeting targets
- provides a budget for each marketing activity
- specifies who is responsible for each activity

Poorly thought-out objectives will cause problems. For example, you might set a target for the number of new enquiries. But if none of these enquiries turn into enrolments, you will have increased costs without any benefits.

Link to your strategy

Assess the marketplace to identify the opportunities and threats that you face. Look for where you can capitalise on your strengths or where you need to overcome a weakness.

Every part of your business must work together. For example, if you have limited cashflow you should avoid planning tactics that will have high one-off costs.

Remember to focus on your long-term strategy. Reducing customer service might boost short-term savings, but next year you might not have any customers left – educators or families.

Make it happen

A plan will not happen by itself. You need to make someone responsible for monitoring progress and chasing up overdue activities. Reviewing progress will also help you learn from your mistakes so that you can improve your plans for the future and/or adjust your current plan to meet its goals in different ways.

