

Marketing Magic And Mess Ups

Report on ASTCA Conference Auckland 2001

While attending the ASTCA Conference in Australia, in May this year, it was obvious that we were all there for one purpose – “to encourage everyone to swim”. This means we have to attract people to swim schools in order to do so. What are some of the best ways to do this?

Talking to others attending, there were a number of common findings amongst the swim schools nationally. Generally most swim schools found 80% of customers are found through word of mouth - referrals from existing clients.

Paul Sadler of Melbourne found 83% were referred by existing clients 3% Yellow pages. Forbes Carlile's figures are similar. 81% referred and 3% yellow pages.

Paul Sadler's philosophy on marketing his swim school is “When you know, you cannot not know”. He believes every policy and procedure at your own business becomes a marketing strategy.

Presentation

The Swim School needs to be a stimulating environment and plenty of colour. The lessons need to be progressive, stimulating and focused.

Marketing to the Swimmer.

Most swim schools offer a swimmer of the month promotion in house. Paul Sadler has a t-shirt give away to every 5km gold swimmer. A sweat shirt for 8km gold swimmer and so on.

Each swimmer has a progressive sheet, suitable to hang up on the fridge. Each goal achieved has an appropriate sticker. It is visible at home daily, complete with the name of the swim school across the top.

Within the swim school; children respond to a created vision of achievement. (this means retaining swimmers) At the entrance to Paul Sadler's Swim Schools the walls are covered with certificates that can be achieved. Within the complex there are those swimmer who are “forever mounted on the wall of fame.” The coloured certificates indicate the different level of his swim schools.

The most vital aspect of marketing to children is THE INFLUENCE OF GREAT TEACHING.

Marketing to parents:

As teachers and managers of swim schools we need to plant the seed to set achievable goals for the students. For example "lets keep Julie until she can achieve her 1km swim certificate"
First contact with parents must be a positive one. They need newsletters regarding winter swimming, the staff, and good stories of fearful children.
Where to place the spectators is important. A parent who can't see can't tell others how wonderful your staff is or what great value for money they are taking getting. They need to hear your good teaching.

Advertising Vs Public Relations.

When the swim school has a good news story of "Jimmy fell in the lake – but because of his swimming lessons he was able to save himself"; or a theme day that is of particular interest to the community tell the local newspaper. The free issue newspapers are worth while using to promote your swim school. When the space used for an article compare with advertised space, it is really worthwhile to use the avenue of a good news story at no cost to you. It is important not to fall into the trap of focusing on a fear campaign.

To 'Sell' your stories there are a number of simple ways to do this. Theme days are a great way. Put a sign outside inviting families to be a part of Teddy Bears Picnics, grandparent's weeks bring a friend day, daffodil week, and red nose day. (The general public needs to be able to see this sign.)

Sometimes it might worthwhile to take the local journalist out to lunch. It is important to establish a contact.

Shopping Mall Promotion

Posters promoting your business displayed on a community billboard can be effective, but a manned display is more worthwhile. Photos of your programme, "super swimmers" and plenty of baby photos certainly attract attention. A give away of a balloon (with or without your logo) an brochure is an inexpensive tangible take away! At the end of winter Graham Dunn Swim School on the Gold Coast, spend a full Saturday in the Shopping Mall. Graham or Flora the owners of the business are there on hand. They have, over the years become recognised celebrities in their community.

Paid Advertising

If you do need to advertise make sure you get your value for money. For print media the top left-hand corner is best. It may also be the most

expensive. Make sure your ad appears in a section of the newspaper where it will be seen by the customers you would like to attract. Entertainment sections, next to the movies and coming attractions is always a good place to start. Also the continuing education section in local newspapers at the beginning of each term is also an alternative to the daily or weekly appearance. The lesson here is to make your dollar count.

A way to advertise at little or no cost, is through school newsletters or kindergarten newsletters. A simple logo attached to your notice attracts eyes to your item.

Never underestimate the power of radio. A block of advertisements can be worthwhile at various timeslots. Choosing the correct radio station network is the main issue.

Fridge magnets may be a cost but when it is time for those lessons it is amazing how the little magnet that has been sitting on fridge can network a string of new customers. So it was agreed a magnet to your existing customers is money well spent.

Mail Outs

Direct mailing and follow up was successful. Letter Box Drops were found to be time consuming and not economically viable, as the response was not huge.

Promoting Your Qualified Instructors

Framed qualifications promote professionalism in your swim school. In Australia the members of AUSTSWIM promote their membership by placing their membership certificate inside the door of the premises. The membership means that the swim school has met certain criteria.

There are only four things in business

1. Create new customers.
2. Keeping your customers.
3. Turn them into fans.(they bring in new customers)
4. Have fun in doing it.

MAKE WHAT YOU DO AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE.

Have fun swimming,

Sue Mayo,
Chairman Swim Teachers Committee.