Marketing your Family Child Care Business

Increase exposure and gain clientele by following these *EASY* marketing suggestions for your family child care home. As you can see, most of them cost little to nothing at all! Be *patient* - don't give up! And remember... the sky's the limit when it comes to marketing strategies!

Call Solano Family & Children's Services: Ask to be added to our FREE referral database. Although this is the most cost-effective form of marketing, it simply isn't enough to provide sufficient exposure to the community about your family child care home, so read on for more ideas!

Flyers: Try your hand at designing a flyer! Keep it simple, and uncluttered - don't forget to proofread! Include the name of your child care, license number, hours of operation, and the ages you serve. A brief description of your program should highlight why you feel parents would appreciate your services. See below for flyer ideas:

- **Tear-off Flyers:** Much like regular flyers, only with special tear-off strips at the bottom for families that are on-the-go! These are very convenient, but will require routine replacement, so make it a habit to check on them often just like with any of your flyers!
- **Coupon/Promotional flyers:** These promotional flyers have coupons printed right on them, giving families an extra incentive to call and ask about your program. You can offer anything from a free week of care, waived registration fee, discounts, a free date night and more! Don't forget to include terms, conditions, and an expiration date!
- **Door Hangers:** The SFCS Die Cut area offers a variety of ideas, including a door hanger that can be personalized and hung on neighborhood door handles. Die cutting is inexpensive and you can produce about 100 door hangers within 30 minutes… if you come focused and prepared!
- **Car Windshield Flyer:** Windshield flyers are smaller, and thus less expensive to copy because you can arrange three flyers on one page! Although you can find your target market quite easily by spotting car seats and toys, there have been incidents where providers are held responsible for already existing damage on cars and/or windshield wipers. Be *extra* careful if you go this route! Some cities limit where flyers can be placed, so educate yourself first.

CAUTION: Never list your full address on flyers. Listing your nearest cross street is enough to give people an idea of your general location, and is the safest way to market your family child care home. Don't forget that ALL advertisements must include your license number.

Sample locations for placement of flyers: These are few examples of family-friendly locations:

- **Laundromats:** Families frequent these businesses often, and they usually have bulletin boards for flyers.
- **Libraries:** A great place where families go, which may also have bulletin boards.
- **Local Veterinarian or Pet Shop :** People with children often have pets, so get to know the local veterinarian and ask if you can hang your flyer on their bulletin board, or at the pet shop!
- **Books:** You can purchase a few children's books and glue your business card or a small flyer to the inside cover. Donate these books to businesses that families visit often (i.e. doctor and dentist offices). *Always ask for permission before leaving the book.*

Other forms of marketing: Here are a few examples of commonly used marketing tools:

- **Business Cards:** A great way to present a professional image! These can be made at home with card stock paper, or you can choose from a number of online sites or local merchants. Hand your business card out wherever you go! Request the help of family, friends, and even clients!
- **Car Magnet:** Magnets can be purchased, or you can make one, using materials from craft stores.
- **Car Signs:** An inexpensive way to make a car sign is to create a flyer and tape it to the inside of your car window, in a location that does not obstruct your view. This will be seen by families when you are driving or parked! ***Check the CA Driver Handbook—Additional Laws regarding "obstruction of view," before proceeding with this strategy.***
- **Street signs:** By backing your flyer onto sturdy cardboard and posting onto wooden street poles in family-friendly, high-traffic areas (i.e. the local elementary school or playground) you can easily reach your target market as they walk or drive by! A good time of year to employ this method is just before school or summer begins! ***Check and follow all city ordinances before proceeding with this strategy.***
- **T-Shirts:** Create a customized t-shirt for you and/or your child care children, you can be your own walking advertisement! Hit the pavement, and get in some excellent physical activity! This method doubles as a safety feature because you can easily spot all your children during fieldtrips. Make them inexpensively at home with iron-on transfer paper, or fabric paint. Or, you can order them through a print store. You could even make colorful visors or totes with your logo, name, license, and phone number!

Directories and Online Marketing:

- **Newspapers, Local publications, and Directories:** For a fee, you can include an advertisement for your business in local community publications and directories, city newspapers, and even church newsletters. Ask if there are any special promotions available for first-time advertisers. Consider investing in a multi-month advertisement if it will save you money in the long term.
- **Online Directories:** Certain websites allow advertising of your child care business, but they may often send unwanted announcements, sell your email address to companies, or expose you to spammers. There may be reputable sites out there, but keep safety in mind and practice caution when deciding to respond to emails. **Never** post your address, personal information, or pictures, and **never** respond to a request for personal information.
- **Websites:** With today's technologically savvy market, websites can be a great way to reach potential clients! If you're not handy with computers, consider hiring a high school or college student. Create your site using 'key words' so that it is easily found with a search engine. ***Never post children's pictures without written consent.***
- **Online Social Networking:** Consider setting up a business page on a social networking site. You can set it up with information, news, and pictures about your child care. You can post status updates about projects, events, etc., and even customize privacy settings so that certain posts are only visible to parents. This will really appeal to families that use social networking every day, and hopefully gain you tons of "likes"!

In-Person Networking: Promoting your business via face-to-face contact.

- **School Pick-Up:** Not only could you have a magnet, but just seeing you in a van, picking up children can be an indicator that some great business is brewing. Don't forget to wear your T-shirt. Be **VISIBLE**!
- **Contact Large Businesses:** It helps to know someone "on the inside", but if not, contact the HR rep and share your flyer and business card. You never know if they may find the information valuable enough to keep their employees working. **Note**: It helps if you offer evening/weekend care when approaching businesses such as hospital and emergency services, pharmaceutical companies, or other 24 hour workplaces.
- **Realtors:** Speak with local realtors to discuss how affordable, local, child care can be a selling point. Ask permission to leave behind some business cards to be given out to families moving into the area.
- **Apartments:** Visit local apartment complexes and speak to the manager about having a small stack of your child care flyers and/or business cards available for new and existing tenants.
- **Children's Fairs:** Purchase an inexpensive table to use at community events held throughout the year. Set up a craft activity for children to participate in (our lending library has some great die-cuts you can use!). Wear your marketing t-shirt and don't forget to offer a brochure or business card when your table is visited! A board with pictures of your program on it can be used to highlight your services!
- **Craft Fairs:** Let your creativity shine! Sell Christmas decorations, baked goods, or crafts. Don't forget to attach your business cards to them and to wear your t-shirt!

- **Community Events:** Contact your local parks and recreation department to ask about any upcoming events. Ask about vendor booths. Always keep your eye out for upcoming festivals advertised in your community. Don't miss an opportunity to be seen and get your information out there!
- **Local Swap Meets:** Much like a community event, you can host a booth/table and set it up with brochures, flyers, and displays. You can offer lollipops with your business card attached to them as well.
- **Be a Volunteer:** Volunteer in your community, at church events, community events, and for big businesses. Don't forget to wear your t-shirt, which may need to be replaced by now, due to fading!
- **Neighbors:** Invite your neighbors over to see what your child care is all about. Some may have been skeptical, but when they see the value you bring to the neighborhood, they could end up being great promoters of your business!
- **Yard Sale:** Planning a yard sale anytime soon? You can market your child care to your neighborhood by setting up a display about your setting that includes flyers and handouts. Be prepared to be asked for a tour of your child care by having someone who can take over the yard sale while you attend to potential clients.
- **Open House:** Post signs in your surrounding area with arrows directing people to your home. Decorate the outside of your home with a sign and balloons to get people's attention. Make sure your home is clean and inviting (the aroma of baking cookies can definitely add appeal!). Provide some yummy refreshments, and set up a table for children to enjoy a creative art activity. Providing a written description of the activity and highlighting developmental benefits will emphasize your professionalism. Provide a brochure, business card, and information on special services.
- **Provider Support Groups:** Find out if there is a provider support group in your area. Attend a meeting, and exchange phone numbers. Share resources, and ask for any suggestions that have worked well for their business.

More Marketing Ideas

Utilizing Incentives: Ideas on offering incentives to gain clientele:

- **Giveaways:** You can find endless ideas through print shop websites - ink pens, coffee mugs, balloons, and more! You can also convert your business cards into refrigerator magnets by purchasing magnet backing at your local office supply store, or simply purchase pre-made magnets online!
- **Discounts & Perks:** Consider offering discounts or perks in your program as an incentive to attract more business. Some ideas: 4th week free, sibling discount, family ice cream treat in exchange for a client referral. If a client or friend refers a family who enrolls in your services, don't forget to reward them! Even a heartfelt "thank you" card could be all you need to do! Free date night child care is also a reasonable perk for a client who refers a new family!

Holiday Advertising: See below for ideas on taking advantage of Holiday events to promote your business:

- **Halloween:** A perfect night for advertisement! Decorate your home and place each piece of candy in a small zip lock bag with your business information. Don't lose potential clients by handing out choke hazards, such as hard candy. Be mindful of what is safe, or even offer healthy alternatives. Parents will really appreciate this! You may also want to have a Halloween-themed poster board featuring some pictures of your child care, complete with mini flyers for parents to take on their way out!
- **Easter Egg Hunts:** Contact the coordinators of local Easter egg hunts and ask if it is possible for you to make a donation of Easter eggs that would include both a piece of candy and your business information inside. You will have better control of the area your eggs are placed if you also volunteer your time in scattering the eggs!

Keep your message simple
You only have a few seconds to grab the attention of a prospective client.
Have a simple, but powerful message that clearly states what you have to offer.

Include a clear call to action
Lay out exactly what you want families to know. Do you want them to call you, visit your website, or send you an email?
Design the message to make that action clear and easy to follow.

Know your customers or "target market"
Research the demographics of your current customers and develop a targeted list based on those characteristics. Seek those types of individuals out.

Email more than once, but don't overdo it
Many variables can affect the response to a mailing – the content of your subject line can either motivate potential clients to open your email, or prompt them to delete it before opening it.