

Develop a Creative Marketing Edge

by Barb Yackel

As directors and managers, we are always looking for creative ways to market our programs. Marketing ice arena programs can run the gamut from power hockey clinics to skater exercise classes for adults. Meeting the challenge can be difficult.

Innovative, effective and timely marketing can be just the edge you need to create excitement in your arena. Most facilities have a limited marketing budget, so how do you promote your programs? The following are suggestions to get your creative marketing thoughts started:

- Contact real estate agencies and your local Chamber of Commerce - people who develop and distribute “new to the community” packets for new residents. Provide them with brochures detailing upcoming programs at your facility to be inserted in the newcomer packets. Explore the possibility of getting your brochures distributed in local schools.
- Develop alliances with sporting good retailers. Discount coupons for lessons or new programs can be provided to retailers to be distributed to their customers. This can bring in non-residents who may not have previously considered traveling to your facility. In return, your retail partner may want to offer his/her discount coupons at your facility.

Utilize space within your arena for visual enticements.

- Use your concession stand and/or cafe to promote events. (Example: Use an informed Table Talker with upcoming program information.)
- Have a “Skating Wall of Fame” for visitors and arena patrons to view accomplishments of skaters and staff. This could also be a place to hang photos of ALL class levels, not just the more accomplished skaters. This will attract skaters regardless of their skill level.

Some facilities have the resources to take marketing to a higher level.

- Screen advertising is a unique marketing tool. When attending a movie at a local theater, the average moviegoer spends 14 minutes in their seat prior to the movie. Most theaters show a series of advertisements on the big screen during this time. The screen ad is viewed by each patron an average of three times per movie. For information and pricing of screen advertising, visit the website: www.ncninc.com.
- Make 10 to 15-minute videos of highlights from your programming. Include testimonials from participants and patrons. Include information on how viewers can get more information and how to register for programs. The video can be aired on local cable-access channels as well as at local schools and in your arena.

The timing of your marketing is important, as parents plan their children’s activities months in advance due to the busy lifestyles of today’s families. Make sure you are offering challenging and exciting programming/curriculum and great organization and that you have a quality director and staff willing to give 110 percent to the cause.

A reputation of having a clean, quality arena with excellent programs will speak for itself and keep your patrons returning for more. Your programs thrive on word-of-mouth publicity, which results from maintaining a reputation for excellence in all aspects of operating your programs.

Marketing your programs can be challenging and fun; creativity is the key. Keep your marketing edge sharp by getting your staff involved in brainstorming sessions. You'll be surprised at how many great ideas you come up with. Your creative marketing edge will lead to success for your programs and your facility.