

Class Act

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School-based marketing programs offer the opportunity to reach a large captive audience and introduce today's youth to the joys of ice skating.

by Susan Snyder-Davis

School-based marketing opportunities can be an excellent way for ice arenas to reach potential skaters by working with schools. It's very important to remember that the main goal is to educate children with your materials. You will be even more successful if you can help schools achieve some of their direct educational goals.

One of the obvious reasons to prepare a school-based program is that reaching one teacher can ultimately lead to reaching 20 to 100 kids and family members. This is probably much more effective than traditional direct marketing methods.

It's important to note in preparing these targeted materials that teachers and school administrators will have a natural tendency to resist anything that appears to blatantly promote products and services. Even with this in mind, here's the exciting thing to know: Because schools — even private schools — have strained budgets, they are typically open to being provided highly targeted, high-quality curriculum materials. It's also another way to energize and enthuse children about learning. It can be an in-room field trip departure from their usual classroom routine.

Here are some tips for preparing your school-based marketing program:

- Materials can tie into health and physical education topics as well as reading.
- Materials must be educationally sound.
- Materials' print quality must be good, however not necessarily full color and/or expensive.
- Materials must not hint of being self-serving.
- Materials must be age-appropriate for group you will be reaching — not too juvenile for older kids and not too difficult for young children.
- Materials must not disregard the importance of the teacher as the gatekeeper to the audience (if you do, be aware that your program may not be repeated).
- Don't make your marketing message bigger than the educational message or your program will backfire; your marketing message needs to be subdued at best.
- Don't underestimate children's ability to figure out your motives.
- Once you reach the important credible criteria of an educational package, then you may use the following:
 - Your logo on materials
 - Your coupons

- Background information about your company as the provider of the materials
- Videos, posters, contests, workbooks and games

As an extension of your school-based program you may consider developing creative educational concepts for your facility, such as:

- Reading incentive goals and rewards — a series of reading projects that you reward with incentive coupons for your facility; the same could be done with math
- Working with the PE classes by encouraging after-school physical activities with coupon incentives
- Introductory instruction at the school followed by classroom field trips to the skating center for instruction
- After-school programs — there's a need for safe, stimulating places for youth to go after school. If you already offer after-school programming for your community or want to in the future, you may be interested in the Lights On After School Web site found at www.afterschoolalliance.org/loa_2004/glance.cfm. Here you'll find event-planning details, program promotion tips and marketing/PR materials, and even a place to list your after-school program.

Arrange to meet with your nearby school systems. Start by contacting the principals or assistant principals to determine the appropriate contacts. Take a list of topics you feel comfortable addressing, such as reading motivation, physical education, good-behavior incentives, etc., and ask the administrators what you could provide that would be in line with their curriculum guidelines. Ask how you could help them with their curriculum needs and educational goals. It is best to communicate with them first, without having a set agenda already in mind. Flexibility will be key to getting your program accepted and being permitted to offer future activities.

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