

PUBLISH A NEWSLETTER

Keep everyone informed about your center's services and students.

By Matt Alderton



Like any business, successful child care centers need good marketing plans: a prominent advertisement in the Yellow Pages, a listing in the local newspaper or even just good old-fashioned word of mouth. The most powerful marketing weapon in a child care professional's arsenal, however, goes straight from her desktop to her customer's mailbox. It's called a newsletter.

Publishing a successful newsletter doesn't require a lot of time. It doesn't require a lot of money, either. All it requires is a little bit of news, some creativity and a strong desire to forge an intimate connection with your staff, parents and community. Here's what you

need to know to publish a newsletter of your very own.

Strategy

Michael J. Katz is founder and "chief penguin" of Blue Penguin Development, an e-newsletter service company based in Hopkinton, Mass., and author of *E-Newsletters That Work*. After working for 15 years in a traditional corporate job, Katz realized that most business owners ignore two key ideas when they're trying to grow their companies. The first, he said, is that it's much easier and more profitable to grow your business by focusing on your existing relationships than by trying to get the attention of strangers, whether through

direct mail, print advertisements or even sponsorships. The second is that people like doing business with people they like.

"All things equal, relationships carry the day and it's important to build and maintain these, particularly for small companies with small budgets," Katz said.

In order to foster those relationships and grow a business – even a child care center – needs a sales strategy, he added.

"It's important to realize that we are all selling a commodity," Katz said, "at least in the eyes of potential clients. It's impossible to know how technically competent your doctor is, for example, and the truth is, for most ailments, it doesn't matter. I'd argue that the same is true for child care. You and your competitors all have more or less the same qualifications and skills. Given that, the differentiators are trust, likability and relationship. Stop claiming superior competency and try to make a connection with prospects."

A simple – and inexpensive – strategy for making connections is through a newsletter. Published quarterly, or even monthly, it keeps you top-of-mind and gives your child care center a human dimension that will resonate with potential clients and nurture relationships with existing ones.

Target Audience

One of the most important pieces to any publishing plan, whether for a project as large as a book or as small as a newsletter, is an audience. Most newsletters have two audiences in mind, according to Roger Wildermuth, president and chief executive of Speedcolor (www.speedcolor.com), a commercial printing company in Peoria, Ill., that caters to small businesses. The first, he said, is a business' current customer, with whom the publisher wants to continue its existing relationship. The second is its potential customer, on which the publisher wants to make a positive and lasting impression.

"The key is to create something of value that your target audience wants to receive," Katz said. "Not a thinly disguised commercial for

your services, but a truly valuable, stand-on-its-own-two-feet publication aimed at parents of kids who fit the profile of your clients."

Relevant Content

Don't just write about your business. Write about what daycare centers can do for families to make their lives better.

You should provide content, Katz said, that is useful, interesting and authentic to your ideal client. "If you can do that," he said, "they'll anticipate, open and pass along your newsletter. And when the time comes that they need what you have to offer, they'll get in touch."

A newsletter's content ought to be built around an editorial mission statement. Decide what type of information you want to offer and create content that reflects your goals. If your goal is to encourage parental involvement in their child's care, consider creating an events calendar that highlights your center's schedule. If you want to extend your center's reach into the home, include short "how-to" articles that explain lesson plans or activities that you employ in the classroom. To use your newsletter as a public relations tool, include staff profiles and features. Perhaps you even

want to share some of your professional knowledge about children and child care; include content that reflects your own expertise, whether it relates to early childhood development, health care, nutrition or learning.

"If you have a newsletter that has very strong, helpful and constructive editorial content," Wildermuth said, "it invokes a strong intellectual and emotional response in the reader that is ultimately important in making such an important decision as who to entrust your children with."

Appealing Design

Design is a large consideration in any publishing project. You must decide the format of and size of your newsletter, its color-scheme and whether or not you will use graphics with your text. A publication's aesthetics are what will draw an audience in to read it.

Perhaps the easiest way to design your own newsletter is to use an electronic template; most word processing programs include several, along with step-by-step instructions for layout and design. Keep your design simple by using subheadings to break up text and by keeping graphics and photographs to

a minimum. If you do use photographs, Wildermuth said, you should use pictures taken at your center, rather than random stock art. "If you're trying to attract a human being," he said, "the best thing you can do is have a picture of another human being using your service."

The key to good design is readability, so pay attention to things like columns, margins and color. If your newsletter is hard to read, parents won't read it at all.

Production and Distribution

Depending on the size of your audience, you can choose to either print your newsletter yourself, or to outsource the job, either to a professional printer or, if you're interested in publishing your newsletter electronically, to an Internet vendor.

If you want your newsletter to appear in print, decide how many copies you want to distribute. "If you're just going to send out 100 [copies], you ought to buy a high-quality ink jet printer. That's the most cost effective," Wildermuth said. "If you're going to publish 500 to 1,000 copies, you might want to go with a professional printer."

If you opt to publish your newsletter yourself, an easy and economical

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95 Watt AC Pocket Power® Inverter VEC041POB #770688

- Powers Home Electronics & Mobile Office Equipment
- Provides 110/120 volt AC Power from vehicle's 12 volt DC accessory outlet
- No Installation Required

500 Watt AC Vehicle Power System VEC052POB #148648

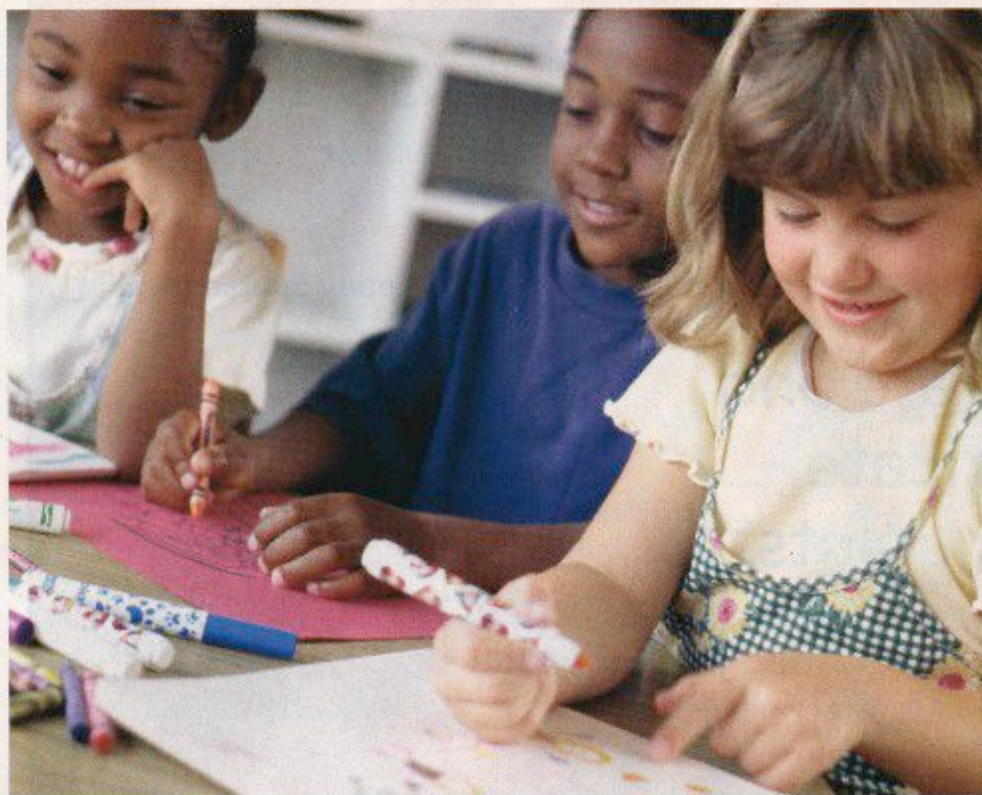
- Converts vehicle's 12 volt DC power into household 110/120 volt AC power
- Includes 12 volt DC vehicle accessory plug & heavy-duty direct battery clamps
- Ideal for power failure emergencies

Travel Cooler™ & Warmer VEC245POB— #132130

- Advanced thermo-electric system cools and warms
- Extra long 8' power cord with fuse protected 12 volt DC power plug
- 17 liter, 20 can, 4.5 gallon capacity
- Plugs directly into vehicle's 12 volt DC accessory outlet
- Stainless steel finish




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format is to use one or two 11-inch by 17-inch pages, printed on both sides and folded to create a small, four- to eight-page booklet. Distribution, then, is as simple as printing out mailing labels

and applying postage. If you pre-sort your mailings by ZIP code, you can save money and use a bulk rate for postage. If your newsletter meets proper specifications, you may even be able to get a special second-

class rate permit from the post office for educational materials.

Katz suggested that providers consider distributing their newsletters electronically, to save both time and money. You can write the content yourself, he said, but a vendor will handle formatting, design, distribution and list management, all for minimal cost. The price, Katz said, is approximately \$10 per thousand names on your list each month. Another advantage to electronic publication is that you'll be able to track the success of your newsletter with data such as open rates, bounce rates and click-through rates, each of which monitors who is actually opening your e-mails and who is clicking through to your newsletter and reading it. "You may also get requests to republish what you've written from readers, invitations to speak and, hopefully, clients who say, 'I've been reading your newsletter for six months and we're ready to make a move.'" 

Matt Alderton is a Chicago-based writer.

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- 450 Amp Instant Starting Power – Instantly jump-starts vehicles anytime, anywhere
- 260 PSI Air Inflator – Inflates vehicle tires & sports equipment
- 12 Volt DC Portable Power Supply – Power for DC appliances & accessories
- Portable, Cordless & Rechargeable – Heavy-duty for automotive, marine, camping and roadside emergencies



High Frequency BATTERY CHARGER VEC1095POB #295455

- 25/10/2 Amp charge rate with 75 Amp engine start
- Faster – Up to 2-3 times faster than conventional models, for quick engine starts
- Safer – Spark-resistant reverse hook-up, short-circuit & overcharge protection
- Smarter – Microprocessor controlled with built-in digital battery diagnostics and temperature compensation



Sport Spot™ VEC184POB #132137

- 2,000,000 Power Series™ corded/cordless/rechargeable spotlight
- Built-in 15 hour area light & utility workstand for hands-free operation
- Charges in vehicle with 12 volt DC car cord or at home with 120 volt AC adapter (both included)
- Includes convenient carry bag



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