



MARKETING & PROMOTION

How to fill vacancies

Jodie Clarke

The Empowered Educator

Hi Empowered Ed!

I truly hope you find this resource helpful.



A little about me...

Hi, I'm Jodie! I am a Mum in Australia to 3 girls - twins Ruby & Tara and my adult daughter Ashleigh. And I love the possibilities of early learning!

I'm passionate about helping educators **simplify** their documentation and planning and also enjoy more time engaging with the children in their care through **simple** play based activities & environments.

I enjoy creating blog posts, free tools and easy to use resources and training for educators, leaders and coordinators by drawing upon my 30 years experience in this profession.

I know what support educators really need because I have walked in your shoes. This profession is challenging enough so I aim to simplify not overcomplicate! My resources walk through the basics so you can take action.

The Facts.....

- I hold an Associate Diploma in Education (Child care)
- I hold an Advanced Certificate in Child Care
- I hold a Bachelor of Human Services Degree
- I have worked as an Assistant, Room Leader, Director, FDC Coordinator, IHC Coordinator, OSHC Coordinator, Occasional Care Coordinator, Project Manager, Service Manager, Family Day Care Educator, Presenter and Speaker in the Early Childhood and Community and Family Services fields.
- I have been writing and editing my blog now for over 6 years.
- I am the author of many E- Book resources for educators, A Postnatal Depression Workbook (& DVD) and a picture book for children.
- I have developed and presented webinars and online courses to support early childhood educators in their role.

Thanks for placing your trust in me....

Jodie Clarke

Marketing Strategies & Simple Ideas To Fill Vacancies

Putting in place a **child care marketing strategy** is often thought of as a time consuming and expensive process that educators, leaders and directors often only want to focus on 1 or 2 times a year ...then complain when nothing seems to work and the vacancies remain!

To keep your family day care service or early learning centre viable, enrolments consistent, and at the very top of the 'services to visit' list when families and carers begin the important journey of looking for childcare you need to put in place an **ongoing marketing strategy** that has you regularly **standing out from the crowd** with a healthy waiting list!

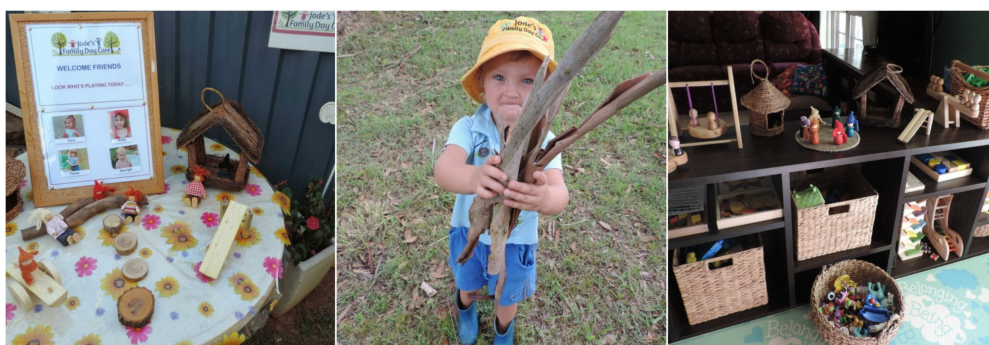
It is becoming increasingly challenging and often frustrating for early childhood educators and services to remain full when more and more centres and home based daycare services flood our communities – especially in smaller regional and rural areas. Then there are the ongoing costs involved, ever changing regulations and expectations and often overwhelming paperwork to get completed before even thinking of business and marketing plans. But it can be done and it doesn't have to take up a whole lot of your valuable time...how do I know this?

Because I have **been there, done that in both the centre and family day care professions** always with limited time and a small budget.

I'm not saying it's easy but we are talking about your business. Yes you love working with children...**BUT**, you are also **running a business** whether that is as a sole operator running a family day care from home or a community or commercial long day care centre.

You need to compete in today's growing early years market. **You have to stand out. You have to clearly show WHY** you should be a parent or carer's **first choice** to visit.

But that's just the start – getting them in the door isn't enough, you need to ensure you make an impression that not only welcomes but fills a cautious parent with confidence that their child will **belong and thrive in this space** even though they can't be there with them.



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You need a **marketing strategy** that helps you to do this...and keep the ball rolling day after day. Drop the ball and those vacancies and the possibility of negative word of mouth comments spreading and hurting your business begin to grow.

So how do you do this then? Regular readers of my blog and Simple Series guides know that I love to simplify those tasks that educators often tell me are overwhelming so I've made a list of strategies (with a simple breakdown of how to best use each one) to help get you started. Not all will suit your service or personal style obviously but that is why you are going to use the information in this guide to create your own custom plan!

I do want to mention that yes you are going to need to invest a **little time and money** right now but the rewards will be many once you have your basic marketing system in place and know how to tweak it when necessary to bring in that consistent and healthy income from enrolments.

How to create a Child Care Marketing Strategy .

Identify your best target market & what they need.

Think about your community and current families enrolled and using your service.

- What is the average age range? What are the family dynamics?
- What is the breakdown and ratio of working v non working v studying v shift work parents?
- Why do they need care?
- What do they value?
- What is the average income level?
- Do they tend to regularly use 1-3 days or 5-7 days of care?
- Consider surveying current service users to gain better insights.

Define and write down your service philosophy, goals and values.

To attract the staff and families that best suit your service and are therefore likely to hang around and become your most positive supporter to others – you need to first define what is important to you,

- What do you want to be known for?
- What is it about your particular service that sets you apart from others, that makes you stand out above the other competitors?

Now you have answered those questions write down **HOW** you are making sure your values and unique selling points are displayed or demonstrated every single day.

It's not enough to just talk about how good you are and the lofty goals you consider important...you need to **back up these claims with hard evidence**...not just for a few days of the year when you do a promotion but consistently everyday because when it comes to marketing – every action counts **EVERY SINGLE DAY**.

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Identify your current competition

You are running a business – doesn't mean you aren't passionate about what you do or the early learning service you provide but at the end of the day you need to pay the bills and you work damn hard to make that happen. So **never, ever feel guilty about thinking in terms of your service being a business.** It can be a great business meeting all of the values you list as important and you are indeed an early childhood professional – but it is still a business. So at times you need to take the sunhat off and put the x-ray goggles on instead.



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What services are currently in your area?

- What is the current ratio of FDC, OOSHC, Occasional and long day care in your area?
- What is the average fee?
- What do you think they are doing really well?
- What do you think makes you different to them?
- What are they offering that you don't? Could you?
- What do you think they could do better?
- What are the average current operating hours of the services in your area?
- Who would you identify as your top competitor? Why?

Involve Everyone in the overall (and ongoing) marketing strategy.

This is not just about the educators working in your service (if in family day care it's not just about you either!). A successful and consistent marketing strategy that brings in results for you will depend to a large degree on everyone that is involved in your service being clear about the marketing actions, behaviour, goals, and work quality expectations.



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Have you considered the following?

- What emotion would you like families to feel when they enter your service? Do you have clear expectations around this for all staff?
- What do your gardens and lawns look like? Are they well maintained? If you are not keeping up could you hire a lawn mowing or garden maintenance service to come every few weeks instead?
- Is your care area or service clean and hygienic? If you are finding this difficult can you invest in a cleaner or some time saving tools like hand held vacuumns?
- How do you ensure that a child (and their parent/carer) feels a sense of belonging, safety and the experience is an overall positive one? What steps do you take around this process? I personally have always shared a photo collage and brief story with families at the end of the day describing some of the moments the child seemed to really enjoy. And I am adamant that even when working in a large centre with different staff on different shifts that all parents must be greeted with a few words about their child's day EVERY DAY. There is no excuse just because that child might not be in your room – that's what communication books and handovers are for so use them. I can't emphasise enough the importance of these small actions being consistent to help solidify your reputation and help you stand out as a quality service.
- How are prospective enrolments greeted or given information on your service? If you have someone working the front desk are they clear on your customer service expectations?



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- Who answers the phones and what should the message be? Often the phones are answered by educators working on the floor because there is no one is but let me tell you this – having an answering machine setup with a clear and welcoming message then returning those calls as soon as possible is a far better option than a usually time poor parent hearing the phone be passed around to get to the right team member and children screaming or crying in the background (because yes, they will always call at the busy lunch and rest times because that is when they get a chance to use the phone on their own!!)
- If you work from home have you discussed with your family how to interact and communicate with you and the daycare children and parents when working?

Work hard to develop a brand that encompasses your vision, goals and philosophy.

When you want to be the first name every potential new enrolment mentions you need to have a **recognisable 'brand'**. This is a strategy that will help you stand out more effectively and also look more professional!

Creating a brand helps to build your reputation as it will highlight those promises you have been making and the experiences of other customers... so you better make sure **they match and are consistent** because your credibility quickly becomes part of your brand!



So how do you start the process of building a brand for yourself? I've got a few ideas for you below...

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8 Simple Ways to develop your brand for a Child Care Marketing strategy.



1. **Design a logo** that means something to you and reflects your service (or get one done for you online – places like [Fiverr](#) offer very cost effective design services). I wanted mine to reflect my love of outdoor play and nature.
2. **Use this logo on EVERYTHING.** See further below for **actual promotion ideas** and lots of ways you can get that logo and recognition of your brand out there!
3. **Create a tagline** that helps to explain your purpose, service and philosophy succinctly and is able to be **read quickly**. Keep it short – we don't want a story about you here!
4. **Choose 2-3 type fonts** that you aim to use on promotional and communication materials all of the time.
5. **Choose and stick to a basic colour theme** – try to keep it to 3-4 colours at the most.
6. **Think about ways you can inject some of your personality into your brand** (very important for family day care educators!) This might be through the newsletters or communication tools you use or perhaps the images and fonts you choose as part of your brand template. What message do you want to send out everytime you are promoting or communicating with others?
7. **Stick to one style of images** that will become synonymous with your brand – perhaps you always add your brand colours to label the photo or perhaps you always use photos, not clipart. You get the idea- think of ways that someone might look at your add, brochure or card and immediately connect and know who you are.
8. **Always review and evaluate whether your image and brand is consistent** across all marketing tools – your centre or home signage, logos, business name etc.

23 Promotional strategies to add to your marketing plan.

There are many tactics you can use to help get your brand out there and keep those new enrolments coming in. Some you can be doing **year round**, others you might choose to use at **special promotion times throughout the year**. My best tip (and the one that will save you time and worry about vacancies in the long run) is to **choose a few from each section to add to your marketing plan**. Try them out over a set time period then come back and decide whether to keep them or try something new.

- **Open/Fun or Themed Days** – advertise locally and open your centre or home on a weekend day for a few hours. Make sure to convey the freebies you will be offering to encourage families to attend and participate. Keep them simple like free children's craft activities, perhaps a BBQ or afternoon/morning tea, water play, make your own slime or playdough tables. Do up 'showbags' for them to take home with some of your promotional materials or a balloon with logo on it works well too. You can usually hire the helium cylinders from party places or I have also seen them to buy in Big W.
- **Recommendation Coupons** – these work really well. Create a simple coupon that current families can hand out to friends as a referral to your service. Add an incentive like a special activity pack for the children if they are happy to take a few to hand out for you.
- **Creative easy to read business cards** that showcase your brand – I like to put photos of my environment on one side and the contact information on the other. Check out **Moo** for some great options to create your own!



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Design your own Brochures/Posters

They don't need to be elaborate, just bright and easy to read. Try to include large text, dot points and lots of images to make them easy to read for busy parents.



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Clothing

– Have your logo or a brand image and contact number printed on rain suits, t shirts and/or hats for the children to wear to provide opportunities for visibility when on excursions or they are just out with their own family after pick up on care days. I also printed my logo on drink bottles I gave to the children as part of the enrolment pack which they loved and carried everywhere when out and about



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Use online services like **Vistaprint** to create your own signs and banners.

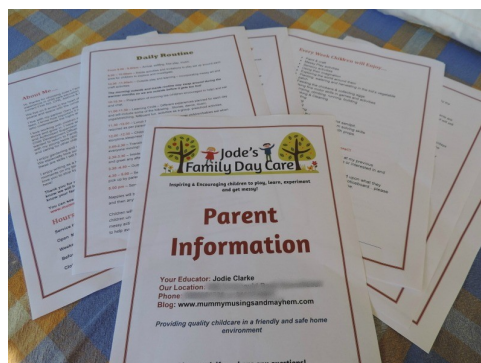
This might be on vinyl to temporarily hang on your fence (I liked this option so I could easily remove from my home as needed), fixed signs and magnetic car signs always work well. Just make sure to have them on your car when you park at the shopping centre and parks

I also had stickers made up for my information pack folders (given out at displays and talks) and carried my calico bag with logo whenever I happened to be taking my own children to the park or shopping. Make sure to always have some business cards on you because you will be asked and you will come across as more professional if you can immediately pass on contact details.



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- **Letterbox Drops** – this has always worked best for me when I need to do some targeted promotion in certain areas and times of the year. Simply print off some of your flyers or brochures, choose the area you want to target and then strap on those walking shoes people! Look for play equipment in the yards and other signs of children living in the houses to cut down on paper wastage.
- **Send press releases to local newspapers and community magazines** re any educator awards, new initiatives, events or community partnerships you want to highlight. Keep them brief, highlight a few key points and include 1 or 2 high resolution photos to make publishing your information more likely! Most papers have an online email address you can use to save time.
- **Local business networking** – get out in the community and chat to local businesses about their service and ask if they would be prepared for you to leave a few flyers in their store if you take a few of theirs and promote to your current families. You'll also get to know more about your local community while raising your profile.
- **Contact schools, community and parenting groups** to see if you can leave a brochure, some cards or perhaps give a free talk on something relevant to child development and other topics that might interest or be useful to parents. Try and offer something of value in return (talk, factsheet, pen) for community advertising in groups etc.
- **Create a simple website or at least a landing page** so prospective families can learn more about you and the services you offer before having to pick up the phone. Make sure to include contact details and lots of photos of your environment and play in action. Try not to be too wordy as they are usually in a hurry and most people scan quickly when they land on a website.
- **Look into educating yourself about the benefits and tools of online SEO** – this helps you to show up and display information about your service when people are searching. In this digital age you need to start investing in learning a little more about this area if you want to boost your marketing plan!
- **Experiment with Facebook advertising** and how to show ads to your perfect audience (more on this in an upcoming blog post).
- **Set up a Facebook Business Page** – you will need this if you want to run ads on Facebook!



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- **Engage on Facebook and other social media**– connect with local businesses and family orientated groups – don't just pop in and promote, join in and answer a question here or there when you can and become a valuable member. You want people to remember your name!
- **Connect and network with local real estate agents** – ask if they can keep your information on record or add a brochure to their welcome pack for new rentals or house buyers. Grab those families just new to the area!
- **Offer free community workshops presented by educators** for parents at times that suit working and non working parents. Make sure you have welcome and enrolment kits available.
- **Visit local markets and car boot sales** – set up a play space for children, add some balloons to giveaway and be prepared to chat, play and hand out a whole lot of promo materials to interested parents! You can also set up something very similar as a display at community events.
- **Collect Positive Feedback** – make sure to set up a system to regularly seek and collect quotes and other feedback that you can reuse in promotional materials, press releases and ads.
- **Design and order personalised pens** with your logo and a contact number – hand them out to friends, family and parents and I also left mine 'accidentally' in a few different places. Mugs, cups and drink bottles make great gifts for families!



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- **Donate new books** to local libraries, doctors surgeries, dentists, pediatricians, hairdressers – anywhere children might be in a waiting room or have a play area! Make sure to add a sticker inside the front cover with a 'donated by xyz Family Day Care Service' along with the town and a contact number.
- **Add a 'virtual tour' option on your website** if you have one so prospective parents can take a peek inside the doors and all that you have to offer – this gives you an advantage over those services that need to schedule an appointment before they can see inside.
- **Consider recording some short yet real life video testimonials** from other families to help highlight the reasons why your early learning service is the one to visit- just with a steady hold on a mobile phone is enough! Share them on your website and social media pages.



Now before you start telling me you don't have time to do all of the above take a step back, read through again and **pick out 3 you think you could start working on next week...then build from there.** You know your early learning service best, you know the budget, current skills and time you have to work with so you are holding the cards at the moment...which ones will you play?

If you have never thought of actually putting the 'advertising and promotion' actions you do into an actual well thought out marketing plan I really do encourage you to give it a try and watch those vacancies fill and remain filled throughout the year.

Hopefully you are now feeling empowered to try some new approaches and get proactive with your marketing and in turn create a more stable income! You can do this!

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Jodie Clarke

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