

Blake Laphorn Tarlo Lyons' nursery and childcare news

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using PR to manage your brand

Many nursery operators probably do not consider that they have a noticeable brand in the same way as household names such as Coca Cola and BMW for example. However, the "good name" and reputation of a nursery are very important for their ability to attract parents and staff, and they contribute to the value of the goodwill of a setting when it comes to a sale of the business.

Public Relations (PR) relates directly to the management of a business's brand. An effective brand can take years to build but can easily become fragile. Having and following a PR plan can therefore pay dividends. Highlighting the impact that PR has, Microsoft's Bill Gates once said: "If I was down to my last dollar, I'd spend it on PR."

PR is a sophisticated, subtle way of communicating a business's brand and services to the outside world. There is a clear distinction between advertising and PR. Advertising relies on purchased space, but PR proactively creates news. By highlighting newsworthy services and key developments and events for the business, PR ensures that a business's brand maintains a steady presence in its chosen media and among its audiences. Not only do PR activities such as news about achievements by staff, events that the setting is holding, and charities supported by the setting say much more than a two-line 'ad blurb' about a brand, news also carries more credibility than paid-for-space. PR not only publicises the ethos and culture to potential staff and parents of children who may attend the setting, it can generate a "feel-good" factor for current staff and parents and gives a sense of belonging.

Most nursery operators do not have vast resources of time or money to operate an extensive PR programme but that should not prevent you from planning and implementing something simple.

Consider your business targets and objectives and the type of audiences you are seeking to reach. Your PR objectives should support these. Identify the media through whom you want to make your communications - a local paper (paid for or free), a local business

magazine or a parish magazine for example. Identify the types of events that you can use as the subjects of your PR - events supporting local or national charities, sponsored events, themed events (Mothers Day, Easter etc), Concentrate on making regular communications with your chosen media, preferably accompanied by photography of children or staff at the setting taking part in the activity in question. (Don't forget to get parents' consent if children are to be named or photographed.)

An effectively managed PR programme can:

- enhance your setting's image
- create awareness of the setting, which can lead directly to staff recruitment and enrolling children
- develop long-term business relationships for you
- improve staff recruitment and retention

action points:

- Identify your target audiences and decide on your key messages
- Identify your chosen media and aim for regular coverage
- Evaluate successes and failures
- Don't be disheartened if not all your approaches to the media are taken up. Talk to the relevant editor and find out what may be of interest to them



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