INTRODUCTION

Every summer camp director knows there are no days off. While you may manage a seasonal operation, planning is year-round. From programming, staffing, solidifying facilities and vendors, registration, and answering inquiries, your team is busy gearing up for a summer camp experience children and parents will love.

But how do you bounce back after a pandemic has dampened camp enrollment and revenue? As a camp manager, you’re eager and maybe even nervous to reopen doors.

Will loyal families return? Will new families give camp a try? Will you be fully staffed or forced to downsize offerings? Will you recover financially and meet your revenue goals?

In today’s climate, these questions are sure to arise. And your camp’s response lies in the details of one important and sometimes underutilized, or forgotten, operation—marketing.

Promoting your camp should start months before registration begins. In fact, marketing never ends. It’s never too early to market your summer camp. However, it can be too late. Once camp is over, it’s time to spring right back into action.

Whether your camp includes a full-service marketing and communications team or a few seasonal gurus, mapping out and executing an effective marketing strategy will help increase camper enrollment and meet your organization’s goals.
REMEMBER YOUR ABCs

As your team sits down to discuss marketing efforts for the upcoming enrollment cycle, always consider four major elements: audience, budget, and channels, or the ABCs.

**AUDIENCE**

Appealing to the right audience is vital to successfully marketing your camp. Identifying your target audience allows for meaningful communication and engagement with parents and campers. It also strengthens your brand’s visibility in the community and online for larger audience reach.

Ensure your team is strengthening brand awareness by marketing to and building relationships with:

- Parents
- Returning campers
- Prospective campers
- Local organizations
- Potential talent/staff

While word of mouth will always be a marketing frontrunner, it’s imperative you connect with the right audiences to increase camper enrollment, hire qualified staff and leverage community support and partnerships.

**BUDGET**

Promoting your camp comes with a cost. That’s why it’s vital that your camp, no matter its size or mission, include marketing in annual budget projections. Word of mouth is the #1 camp promoter but it can’t be your only means to attract parents and campers. No matter the scale of your operations or existing resources, to grow your camp’s visibility, your budget should be allocated for one or more of the following:

- Print and digital materials
- Advertisements
- Marketing software
- Paid social media
• Branded merchandise
• Additional staff

CHANNELS
What marketing channels—email campaigns, social media, ads, or newsletters—have been most effective for your camp? The answer will help your team build a consistent, winning formula to attract new and returning campers. Again, understanding not all camps or camp families are the same, your marketing team should review data from past years to identify the communication avenues that yielded favorable enrollment results.

Recognizing audience behavior empowers camp marketers to leverage the appropriate resources to reach the ideal camper. Ask these additional questions to further determine what fits your camp style and audience. In doing so, you can be more intentional with communications.

1. What communication method generated the most and least enrollments?
2. What social media platforms appealed to parents? Which to campers?
3. What social media platforms align with your camp brand? Are you willing to try new platforms?
4. Is there a notable, former attendee or staff member who can serve as a camp ambassador?

COMMUNICATE OFTEN
Keeping your camp at the forefront of parents and campers is an effective marketing strategy. One that should be executed all year round.

While campers may not be thinking of summer plans in October, parents are. Make sure you build campaign schedules for your communications that steadily build interest and excitement with parents and campers.

Frequently communicating with your community means your camp doesn’t become an afterthought. Avoid this by keeping everyone abreast of important news, registration dates,
community activities, announcements and initiatives every chance you get. You can even use newsletters and social media posts to tell your camp’s story to prospective families, so they are well-informed of your organization and its mission.

SEGMENTED COMMUNICATIONS

Another key to effective marketing is leveraging your camp management solution to send segmented or targeted communications.

Segmented marketing campaigns ensure your communications are tailored to the right audience. Imagine a parent’s confusion when they receive an email about camp programs for high schoolers when their child is a rising fifth grader.

Craft and distribute communications based on camper age, location, and interest and watch your audience engagement and enrollment grow.

Your returning and new camp families want to feel valued and part of a larger cause. Your decision to keep them informed and engaged during and after the camp season is critical to building genuine relationships and success.
OFFER INCENTIVES

When it comes to supporting your favorite brand, who doesn’t enjoy a discount? Offering incentives to returning and new camp families is a promising strategy to entice attendees.

Consider running an early bird promotion that rewards eager families at the start of the registration cycle.

If your camp has multiple locations, or is launching a new site, generate interest and attendance by offering a discount incentive.

Solidifying campers early on helps you track your enrollment goals, determine which programs or sites are in high demand, as well as provide insight on staffing needs.

Another incentive to honor your returning families is with a referral discount. It encourages new camper recruitment and shows you value their loyalty and influence on other camp families.

PRE AND POST-PROMOTION PLANNING

Announce your discount promotions in email campaigns, social media posts, printed mailers, and on a website banner. When crafting your messages, use urgent calls to action like “Register today!”, “Don’t miss this deal!”, or “Space is limited!” to create a buzz and encourage parents to
act quickly.

Camp promotions impact many, if not all organization’s operations. Recruit your accounting, IT, and registration teams to guarantee discount codes work properly for families at the time of registration and behind the scenes in your camp management system for proper billing.

Lastly, remember, parents are busy, discount loving individuals. Ensure your staff is prepared to handle any influx in applications and communications near or on the last day of your promotion(s).

Discount incentives are an effective marketing initiative that are sure to garner interest and action from parents and campers. Their response will position your camp to make meaningful decisions during the current camp season and further down the road.

ELEVATE ONLINE VISIBILITY

In today’s digitally driven landscape, your organization’s online presence, or lack thereof, tells parents and campers everything they need to know before the first day of summer arrives.

When searching for a reputable summer camp, parents and campers want a brand that’s relevant, accessible, informative, and responsive. From camp website to social media platforms to registration processes, how RAIR is your camp?

RAIR QUESTIONNAIRE

One way to increase camp enrollment and engagement is to identify your current online marketing avenues and registration processes. Then, conduct an audit using web analytics,
audience engagement and enrollment tools to determine success rate. Here are some questions to get you started:

**WEBSITE**

1. Do you have a customized, branded website? When was it last updated?
2. What pages are visited most and least?
3. How much time does your audience spend on your website?
4. Do images and language on the website depict your target audience?
5. On a scale of 1-10, how intuitive and user-friendly is your website?

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

6. What social media platforms do you have?
7. What platforms are used the most? The least?
8. What are the demographics of your followers on each platform?
9. What type of content do you share? How frequent?
10. How often do you respond or engage with your audience on posts?

**ONLINE REGISTRATION**

11. Can camp registration be completed online? On average, how long does it take?
12. Can families submit payment and/or set up payment plans online?
13. Is the application mobile responsive?
14. Can immunization records, waivers, and other forms be submitted electronically?
15. Do families receive registration confirmations and subsequent details automatically? What communication is manually sent by staff?

In assessing current online presence and registration processes, you can identify gaps and revamp platforms and operations to meet the needs of your camp community.
NEXT STEPS TO A RAIR TRANSFORMATION

If your camp has a dated or nonexistent website and online registration process, invest in camp management software equipped with pre-built, configurable digital tools and a responsive team of experts. Eliminate hours of website building and camper management whether you have a team of five or fifty.

WEBSITE

While some families will continue to thumb through paper catalogs and pieces of snail mail, many want their information and communication digitized and easily accessible via web or mobile device. Appeal to your community with a website that’s relevant and current. Camp goers are more inclined to attend your camp and share their positive experience with friends when they see people who look just like them in marketing materials and onsite.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Always post content that’s relevant to new and returning campers and families. Consistently share content and engage with your audience. Recruit staff and former camp attendees to serve as camp ambassadors on your social media platforms. Encourage them to share written or video testimonials of their camp experience. Increasing your camp’s social media presence promotes the fun and human side of camp and builds connections organically.

ONLINE REGISTRATION

Streamlining the registration process shows families your camp knows how to do business with efficiency. All, if not most aspects of your camp registration—applications, immunization records, waivers, payments, etc.—should be web accessible, mobile responsive and user-friendly.
Using a cloud-based camp management system allows you to simplify the application cycle end-to-end, reduce data entry, error rates, and processing time. The transition to a more digital experience will thrust your organization forward and in clear view of families ready to sign up for summer camp.

As you implement marketing strategies that improve your camp’s online presence, consider creating a marketing wish list for future initiatives. Utilize feedback from family and staff at the end of the camp season and embrace new ideas that foster organic growth in digital spaces and operations.

**PROMOTE BRAND MERCHANDISE**

Camp pride can go a long way during and after camp season. Using your camp’s name and image on branded merchandise is an effective means for campers, families and staff to represent your camp wherever they go. Like one’s favorite sports team or musician, it serves as a talking point for those familiar with the brand and those looking to find a new, reputable camp.

Find a vendor that can produce quality merchandise that meets your budget and satisfaction. Branded materials can include:

- Apparel: t-shirts, hoodies, and hats
- Supplies: pens, pencils, and spiral notebooks
- Face masks
- Water bottles and travel mugs
- Keychains and lanyards
- Drawstring backpacks, totes, or fanny packs
- Fleece blankets
- Frisbees, stickers, cell phone ring stands

Branded merchandise can be sold onsite in the summer, sent to local, prospective campers, and available for purchase on your website, generating interest and revenue throughout the year.
COLLABORATE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Partnering with local organizations to expand your camper reach is beneficial to your community. Not only are you building relationships with campers and their families but with like-minded, mission-driven businesses.

Consider contacting schools, churches, extracurricular programs, sports leagues and facilities, and parks and recreation departments that work closely with your camp’s audience.

You can then ask your community partners to assist with your marketing initiatives. Here are a few ways you can work together and effectively connect with prospective campers and families:

- Newsletter feature
- Social media post or guest contribution
- Printed brochures and fliers
- Event sponsorship
- Email listserv
- Referral program

Fostering relationships with directors, coaches, clergy, instructors and tutors allows you to utilize your network and not bombard the same families with communications. It’s also a good way to identify underrepresented campers and improve your camp programs and offerings.

No matter how you decide to collaborate with local organizations, the ask should be genuine and advance the community. As families recognize partnerships amongst their favorite organizations, they will feel more connected and eager to support your camp.
CONCLUSION

Building a notable, successful summer camp takes planning and execution. It also takes strategic marketing initiatives that will help your camp stand out from the crowd. When it comes to finding a camp that will cater to their camper's interests, personalities, and goals, families want an organization that's visible and supported by their community. With effective marketing tools, your organization can take the reins as best summer camp while connecting with your ideal camp families, meeting goals and growing the camp community year after year.

LEVERAGE DIGITAL MARKETING TOOLS WITH CIRCUITREE CAMP MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE AND GROW YOUR OPERATIONS AND CAMP COMMUNITY.

Learn how CIRCUITREE’s camp management software can scale operations and skyrocket your camp to the top of everyone’s list.

Contact us today to schedule a demo.