


Essential Marketing Strategies and Tools for a Successful Birth Business

 By Darlene MacAuley, CPC, HCHI, HCHD, BAICD

Marketing. Does the mere mention of this word make you want to crawl into a hole? Believe me, many people feel this way. When I started my own birth business, memories of corny jingles popped into mind from my college marketing classes and my hands started to sweat because all I could think of was that I hated sales, selling and being sold to. I mistakenly thought that marketing and sales were one and the same.

Then I took a marketing class and learned from my coach a definition of marketing that made sense and felt right to me—marketing is about creating relationships. It is the process of attracting and creating, developing and sustaining relationships with the people we would most like to work with, also known as our ideal clients. I see the birthing profession as one that is about connection—not only with our clients, but with ourselves and the sacred process of birth—so this definition of marketing is one that I hope other birth professionals can relate to.

Marketing strategies

Marketing is a continual process, one that requires thoughtful planning and consistent execution. When creating a marketing plan for your birth business, it is helpful to understand three basic marketing strategies and decide how each one will be implemented to promote your practice. Every business will incorporate these approaches to some extent to meet their goals to attract, acquire and retain clients.

OUTREACH—includes personal contact with your potential

clients and those who may refer business to you. Activities such as meeting directly with potential clients or attending networking events are two very effective methods to add to your outreach strategy.

CREDIBILITY—positions you as an expert in your field. Examples include writing articles for a local paper, being interviewed by a local news program, teaching a workshop or presenting a talk at a local baby store. Public involvement within your community is the second most important strategy to add to your marketing plan.

VISIBILITY—gives you exposure to a wide and varied audience without requiring personal interaction with potential clients. This could include an ad in a local publication, sponsorship of a birth-related event in your community, direct mail campaigns and other forms of advertising. While visibility tactics play a part in your marketing plan, they can be

cost-prohibitive and not as effective as outreach and credibility strategies. Birth professionals should consider implementing the above marketing strategies in this order:

- Direct outreach strategies that focus on personal connection with potential clients and referral partners
- Activities that promote credibility and expertise in one's field
- Implementing other forms of advertising to be visible within one's local community

Marketing tools

With an understanding of marketing strategies, you must now choose some tools to implement as part of your marketing plan. Here is a list of tools that have been successful for many birth professionals that will get you started. You will find that some tools can touch on multiple strategies.

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Essential Marketing Strategies

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Tools for your outreach strategy

WEB SITE AND/OR BLOG—Include your photo, your birth philosophy, the benefits of working with you, a newsletter subscription and a contact form. Think about web sites and blogs you like and why you like them. Determine if there are similar elements in these web sites and think about how you can include some of those features on your own site.

DIRECT CONTACT—Phone calls, personal messages by phone, mail or e-mail, free interviews and a booth at baby fairs. What gets you in front of people talking about your business and services, especially one-on-one?

FOLLOW UP—Newsletters, e-mails, calls, personal notes by mail and meetings. If time has passed since you have been in contact with potential clients, use a follow-up strategy to remind them about you, what you talked about and that you are available to help them. Following up with past clients with notes, birthday cards and newsletters can remind them how much they enjoyed working with you and could lead to referrals or repeat business.

NETWORKING—Local doula or birth network meetings, networking meetings with practitioners of all kinds, regional or national conferences, advanced trainings in your field, e-mails or phone calls to practitioners you would like to connect with, visiting businesses and offices and referring business to others—that's networking. Although you want other professionals to know what you do, it often helps to approach networking by thinking about how you can help others—not only the other practitioners but your clients. Actively go out of your way to learn what others do and you will find they will want to help you too.

CREATE YOUR REFERRAL

TRIBE—Through your networking efforts, create a list of active referral partners—those who help to promote your services and to whom you most refer. Exchange

promotional materials and share contacts with your partners and clients. Build even stronger relationships by finding ways to collaborate with other businesses—teach a class or present a workshop together, create an agreement to offer each others' clients a special discount or invite others to do a presentation for your classes.

SOCIAL MEDIA—The two most popular forms of social media are Facebook and Twitter. Of these, having a Facebook fan page and a Twitter presence can enhance your outreach strategy and help you connect with past, current and potential clients, as well as with your referral tribe.

Tools for your credibility strategy

CLAIM YOUR STATUS AS AN EXPERT—Write articles for your web site, blog, article banks such as ezinearticles.com or associatedcontent.com or local and national print publications. Create instructional videos and post them on YouTube. Serve as an expert on a panel at public events such as a film screening or at a health conference. Create a birth network or doula association in your community. Teach classes at your local baby store. Become a La Leche League, Attachment Parenting International or International Cesarean Awareness Network leader, to name a few. How can you showcase your knowledge to increase your clients' confidence in your ability to serve their needs?

PUBLIC SPEAKING—Baby and health fairs, events sponsored by baby stores, local birth or doula networking events, parenting group meetings, in-services for doctors, midwives or nurses or a 10-minute presentation at a networking event meeting. Find opportunities to speak to groups of people about what you do, whether it is speaking to potential clients or to other professionals.

TESTIMONIALS—Having your past clients share their stories and how

you helped them is priceless. Written testimonials can be shared on your web site and promotional materials. Audio and video testimonials on your web site and YouTube add another dimension of credibility. In-person testimonials given during classes, Meet the Doula Nights or Birth Circles can be incredibly powerful as well since your potential clients can interact with your past clients.

SHARE YOUR CREDENTIALS

Display your certifications, degrees and/or trainings on your web site, business cards and promotional materials. What knowledge do you have that would matter to your potential clients?

SOCIAL MEDIA—Facebook and Twitter are great venues to share information and resources. If you write articles or have videos uploaded on-line, your social media outlets are a great place for you to share links.

Tools for your visibility strategy

BABY FAIRS, HEALTH FAIRS AND OTHER EVENTS—Sponsoring, having a booth or speaking at such an event puts you in front of many potential clients and referral partners. Donating services or products for raffles and silent auctions are another way to put your name out in your community.

ADVERTISING—Ads in local publications or printed programs for local events that cater to expectant mothers and families, printed and on-line directories, Google Ads and search engines are ways to get your name out there. In most cases, choose free ad services because for many small service businesses, print ads are not very effective and can be expensive.

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Business cards, postcards, rack or tri-fold brochures, fliers and posters are other methods to get yourself known. Look for coffee houses, book stores, yoga studios or other businesses that have tables or bulletin boards where you can leave your materials. Some midwives, obstetricians and childbirth educators are willing to share brochures for related businesses in their welcome packets or in their classes. At the very least, get business cards and



Marketing is about creating relationships

make sure your web site address is on them. Inexpensive and good quality promotional materials can be purchased from Vistaprint on-line, and if you subscribe to the company's e-mails, you can qualify for discounts for many products and pay only the cost of shipping.

DIRECT MAIL—Mailing fliers, brochures, postcards or letters is another way to reach potential and past clients and referral partners. However, this method can be costly and the return is often small.

WEB SITE—Your web site serves as your on-line brochure. It will have the basic information about your business, the services you offer and your contact information. It can work harder for you if you implement features within the site that give people a variety of ways to interact with you (outreach) and see you as an expert (credibility).

SOCIAL MEDIA—Once again, social media is a great way to create visibility for you and your business. It is an effective method to market your services and classes, but it is also a good idea to create balance by sharing information and resources and by just being social. This shows others that you are human and are not just using social media to send out spam. Some social media experts suggest a 7-to-1 ratio, meaning that you advertise once for every seven times you post about other subjects.

Putting it all together

As you read through the strategies and tools above, ask yourself the following questions:

- What strategies are you currently using for marketing your practice?
- Do you find that one strategy over another works better for you?
- What tools do you currently use for marketing practice?
- What is working best for you?
- Are there any tools that you feel you should drop or do less of?
- Name three new tools that you would like to add to your marketing plan. Set a deadline for when they will be put in place and decide how you will determine whether these tools are working for you.

As you think about these questions, you must consider the climate of birth in your community, the way your ideal clients would prefer to interact with you and the resources (knowledge, time and money) available to you. The way a doula markets her business in a rural area that

has few doulas would likely be very different from one who lives in a busy metropolitan area where many doulas live and do business.

It often helps to do research. Talk to other doulas in your area or through on-line forums. Look at other doula web sites (in your town and beyond) and read about the unique services they offer and the fees they charge. Learn about marketing by seeking out classes, a coach or by reading books or articles on-line.

Marketing is a necessary function of any successful business and it is also one that never ends. In fact, your marketing plan evolves as your community's awareness of birth professionals and the demand for birth services grows and also as technology improves. As you begin to devote more time into marketing, you may find that the passion you have for your work actually makes marketing easy. Remember, marketing is about creating relationships. People want to do business with those they know, like and trust. Define your purpose for being in business, get clear on who it is you serve and how your clients will benefit from working with you and begin creating or updating your marketing plan using strategies and tools that help to authentically promote you and your birth business. 🐾

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SOURCE:

Noize, Veronika. "Strategies, Tactics and Tools." Inspired Marketing Success Workshop for Small Businesses, 2009. Print.

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