

Be Calm, Assertive and Focused on Making the Phone Ring

Even during the best of times, it is not unusual for many instructors and school owners to find themselves in what they perceive as a desperate situation: their marketing is not attracting prospects, the phone is not ringing, and new students and revenue are not walking through the front door.

This desperation only increases during challenging economic times; so being frozen into inaction because you feel desperate is not the answer, taking action is. This report presents the steps you can take to mobilize your staff and students, and focus your abilities and assets to generate a renewed interest in your school and its training by the citizens—and the media—of your community.

In other words, don't just sit there and hope something will happen—Make it happen!

Step #1: Begin immediately to invest two hours every day to promote your school.

During those two hours, think, plan and implement various strategies to obtain media publicity for your school; increase your school's exposure in your community; and, ultimately, welcome, enroll and upgrade new students walking through the front door.

- Spend more time reading and studying your monthly NAPMA Basic Tool Kit. Growing schools need an independent source of ideas and support. See more below. Too many members treat the contents of the NAPMA Tool Kit as the end-all, be-all. Yes, use the Kit's materials, if they work for your school, but use them specifically to stimulate your thinking. Those concepts are like a musical composition that can be played in a variety of ways and with different instruments. There may be nothing wrong with the concepts; they just must be presented in a different way—and you are the conductor. You know your community best. Develop variations on the NAPMA marketing concepts that are more focused on your universe of prospects.

- Network with fellow school owners.

You are not alone. There are many school owners faced with exactly the same challenge as you—AND, more importantly, there are many school owners who have conquered the exact same challenge, and can help you overcome it too.

Learn more about the NAPMA Inner Circle and Peak Performers groups, which are just the kind of mastermind environments that can help you thrive during the recession, and be ready for even greater success once it has ended. Visit NAPMAInnerCircle.com.

Some may think it is an admission of failure, if you share your school's problems with another instructor. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the admission of a professional that he is committed to being a vital member of his community, offering a service that is really needed. It is an admission that you will do almost anything to maintain and grow the great opportunity you've been given—and given to very few. It is an admission that you want to learn, and that makes you a professional, a leader and a role model to your students.

Maybe the most important reason to network with other school owners is that it is highly likely one of them has the answer you seek. Someone has experienced exactly what you are experiencing and he knows the actions you must take to reactivate and rejuvenate your enrollment/upgrade process.

- Spend a significant portion of those two hours in conference with the right and left halves of your brain—just the three of you. This is a classic skull session; just you in a quiet room, maybe some soft music if that helps, no phone calls or interruptions. At first, just you and the left half of your brain will talk with each other. That is the organizational, logical half of your brain. The left half will help you focus your mind to state clearly and specifically your prospect-generating problems.

“Are not enough prospects responding?”

“How qualified are the prospects that do respond?”

“Do I have a problem with my closing ratio? My marketing generates plenty of interest, but I don’t seem to enroll enough of them?”

Write the questions or problems on a sheet of paper in front of your (or your computer screen).

Now, you can invite the right half of your brain to join the conversation. As the creative half, it should help you develop the concepts, ideas and actions that could solve your problems. Your creative half thrives on stimulation, which is why it is recommended above to study the NAPMA monthly materials more carefully, and confer with fellow martial artists. With all due respect to the right half of your brain, it doesn’t have all the answers, but thoughts from other instructors’ right brains just might generate a spark in yours.

Step #2: Call a meeting to mobilize your student body and parents.

Management (and, more importantly, leadership) is defined as “accomplishing tasks through the efforts of others.” One of the best and least expensive methods to generate new enrollments is to mobilize the support of your students and their parents. They are your most immediate source of referrals.

- Promote the meeting as a positive event, such as the launch of a new referral and promotions campaign, a school rally or a special school forum. You don’t want anyone to think that your school is having financial trouble, or is otherwise in jeopardy of closing.
- Thoroughly plan and organize the meeting to give it credibility and excitement. Name your event; make a banner and/or posters; create a flyer, special guest passes, referral cards, etc.; write a letter to parents; plan a demonstration to energize the event; etc.
- Create guest passes and prepare envelopes (See below). Make sure there are chairs for parents. Tell your instructors to announce the meeting (or event) during every class for two weeks. Make courtesy calls to all students prior to the event to promote strong attendance. Remember to schedule a convenient meeting time, and serve refreshments, if appropriate.

- If you already have a referral program, then make your meeting a referral rally. Discuss the importance of referrals you’ve received; ask students or parents who have provided successful referrals to explain how easy they were to do; present a role-playing session: the parent of a student tells another parent how beneficial martial arts has been for his son, and recommends that the parent’s child should join his son; etc.
- Schedule the meeting after your last class of the evening in a PTA-type format; or it could coincide with a belt exam or other special events.
- Don’t hesitate to emphasize the same message during two or three days of classes.
- Once again, asking for help is not a sign of weakness or admission of failure. If you plan and conduct a positive, proactive mobilization of your students and their parents, then no one will perceive it as a negative reflection of you or your school. In fact, it should be perceived as an outstanding example of leadership. Emphasize the following positive points to help rally everyone to support the school.
- Explain that a healthy martial arts school requires a constant flow of new students because their enthusiasm and energy create a great learning environment. New students stimulate instructors to reach for higher levels of teaching excellence. New students create the need for new programs and events that benefit all students. New students increase the parent-support network.

Working together and supporting each other is a primary component of the martial arts tradition. It is also a tradition of martial arts schools to be a family-like environment, instead of a business environment. Instructors do whatever they can to help students beyond the classroom. Parents support each other to bring the lessons of the martial arts classroom into the home to help stabilize family life. Students help other practice and prepare for belt exams. Students and parents can also help instructors with referrals and their suggestions to improve the school’s operations.

Any martial arts school has limited resources, and a portion of those resources must be allocated to advertise and promote the school to attract more students. It could utilize more of its operating budget for instructor education and equipment to improve its

BLACK BELT **MARKETING**

MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

program and bring more benefits to its students—IF students and parents help promote the school and make referrals.

- Explain that the goal is very easy: Each current student refers a new, enrolled student during the next 90 days. You may want to create a referral contest or make the referral part of the students' advancement to their next belt levels. Create a stripe for their belt or a patch that signifies them as a "referral leader" or a "school support leader."
- Ask students and parents to suggest any opportunities, of which they may be aware, to give demonstrations, address community groups, install booths or kiosks in public venues, provide group or company passes, etc. Tell them you welcome all ideas.
- Distribute envelopes to each current student and parent, which contains 10 one-free-month guest passes and 10 free introductory-course passes.

Step #3: Create a media contact list.

Stories in the local media are worth the equivalent of thousands of dollars in advertising. Make a list of every media outlet in your community. Send of each them a new press release twice a month for the next year. Your long-term goal is to develop a friendly, professional relationship with all media contacts in your community.

Every monthly Tool Kit includes a press release, often tied to a community or social issue. You can ask a community organization to be your partner. This increases the likelihood of a media outlet running your stories.

When you implement programs, such as NAPMA's Random Acts of Kindness character development program, it becomes a powerful story about your school. Not only is it great lesson material for the classroom, but also its message creates media attention, parental support and community goodwill.

- **Television and Radio Stations.** Know all reporters' names, office addresses, phone and fax numbers and e-mail addresses. Be sure to include AM talk-radio hosts.
- **Newspapers.** Study your local newspapers (dailies, weeklies and monthlies) thoroughly. Make a list

of each newspaper section that could offer an opportunity for publicity. Obtain the contact information, and start and maintain regular communications with the editor and reporters for each section. Send press release releases to the city editors as well. Ask to whom to send a particular story and how it should be delivered (fax, e-mail or telephone).

- **Other Print Media.** Obtain similar contact information, and communicate regularly with all other community publications: Slick, four-color magazines; parents', senior citizens', women's, children's and athletic publications; alternative press, etc.
- **The Internet.** Add your school to your community's information Web site, if it has one, or exchange links with it and other community resources.

Step #4: Develop a special events and community activities calendar.

- Contact the Chamber of Commerce and the offices of every public and private school in your community, and obtain information about every special event scheduled for your community during the next year. You'll want to know about every fair, assembly, parade, lecture and trade show, regardless of its size.
- Create a special calendar with all of this information and then determine which events are likely to provide you with the best opportunities to participate (as an expert speaker, student demonstrations, a booth, distributing guest passes, etc.).

Step #5: Distribute flyers.

- Consider trading some students (especially those whose families find it difficult to pay your tuition) martial arts training for their time to distribute 250 flyers a week throughout your community.
- Make sure you know the public solicitation statutes in your community. Always respect others property and privacy.
- Ask a major grocery store or retailer to allow you to distribute flyers to their customers in exchange for a demonstration inside or outside their stores to attract customers. Some stores may allow their

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MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

cashiers to stuff customers' bags with your flyer. In return, give the owner and/or manager and his staff and their families a free 90-day course at your school. You can also offer to distribute the retailers' flyers and coupons at your school.

Step #6: Distribute 1,000 one-month-free guest passes.

Create a "one-month-free" guest pass and distribute a minimum of 1,000. (Most NAPMA Basic Tool Kits contain guest pass art that you can customize. You can also find them on the NAPMA Print Marketing Store, which you can access through the NAPMA Web site at NAPMA.com.)

- Distribute the guest passes at the community events outlined in Step #4 above.
- Partner with a local entertainment venue, such as a skate or water park, to create guest passes that appear to come from the park. Print "A Gift from the Management" on them and include the park's logo. Distribute the passes to the park's next 500 customers.
- Contact the office and/or human resources managers of local businesses with at least 50 employees. Offer your guest passes as an employee benefit, and give them five guest passes for each employee and his or her family.

Conclusion

Ninety percent of promoting your school is planning. Ten percent is recognizing an immediate promotional opportunity and seizing the moment. Thorough, advanced planning is your best strategy to avoid "desperate situations" at your school. You should never find yourself in this position.

You need to plan, at the very least, three months of advertising and promotions in advance. During the next three months, there will be a minimum of twelve weekends, and as many weeks. Each weekend is an opportunity to finish a week's worth of promotional activities with a bang.

The job of promotion can seem as overwhelming to a struggling school owner as a Black Belt test is to a White Belt. Take it one step at a time, but tackle each step in a proactive way, with planning. Your promotional campaign will, in most cases, be anchored by one or more forms of paid advertising and a dozen or more of low-cost and no-cost promotional tactics, such as referrals, flyers, press releases and demonstrations.