

## Cooking up a marketing plan

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**How can our school use its current facilities and learning resources to attract prospective clients without the need for large outlay costs? As a marketing director, I was trying to create a marketing opportunity that would be successful, practical, achievable and affordable.**

### **The origin of *Early Years***

Whilst lying in bed one night, a number of thoughts collided to give birth to the concept of Avondale School's *Early Years* program. Parents want their 2–5 year olds to participate in engaging, age-appropriate learning activities, and are willing to pay for these opportunities. I know that if parents associate positive experiences with a school, they are more likely to enrol their child at that school. There is no better time to develop a positive relationship with prospective clients than *before* they begin school. It then hit me—Avondale School already has the facilities and resources needed to offer such programs.

### **The *Early Years* program**

Avondale School's *Early Years* program offers a variety of fun, educational opportunities throughout the school year. Classes—which include cooking, dance, kinder gym, science, art, computer, music and library—run once a week for six weeks during each school term.

Each lesson starts with half an hour of free play at Avondale Early Learning Centre. The *Early Years* participants make use of the play equipment at the Early Learning Centre whilst the children there have inside activities. Part of the philosophy of *Early Years* is to encourage children to try new things and that includes food. The school canteen prepares a healthy morning tea platter full of tempting delights from apples and carrots to olives, capsicum and dates, along with mini sandwiches or crackers.

All *Early Years* classes are hands on: in cooking, children break the eggs, chop the vegetables and knead the dough; during science, each child does their own experiments; and art classes require old clothes, as the children fully experience the materials they work with. At the end of many of the classes, the child is given something as a reminder of their experience, for example, a recipe book with pictures of themselves cooking, or their large art

canvas. These mementos serve as a reminder of the fun that was had and the learning that took place.

Each of the classes utilises existing school facilities that would not otherwise be used at that time of day, for example, multi purpose centre, cooking facilities, school library, music room, art room, and computer room.

### **Advertising *Early Years***

*Early Years* no longer needs to pay for expensive newspaper advertising. Promotion by word of mouth has enabled the program to grow from 10 children in 2007 to 70 children in 2009. Some classes require booking up to 12 months in advance.

At the end of the year, an *Early Years* Christmas party is held. Everyone who has attended one of the *Early Years* classes is invited and is encouraged to bring a friend. This is another way to make new contacts. Places for the following year's classes are open for bookings at the Christmas party.

### **The marketing benefits of *Early Years***

*Early Years* has changed the way Avondale School markets to the community. Due to involvement in these classes, parents are on our campus before their children are old enough to start school. They interact with many of the facilities Avondale School has to offer and develop a sense of familiarity with the campus. Parents are told of the school's successes and have an opportunity to meet some of the staff at Avondale School. *Early Years* engenders positive experiences and builds a relationship between Avondale School and the community.

The friendships that parents and children make when they attend *Early Years* are also of benefit to the school. Friendship groups may influence choice of school as parents endeavour to place their child in a school where the child will have friends.

Avondale School's *Early Years* program has enabled the school to open its doors to the community in a non-threatening way. Whilst the participation of children is the centre of the *Early Years* program, the marketing benefits make the program a real success. When parents come to *Early Years* classes, they can't help but tell others about Avondale School. It is impossible to put a dollar figure on this positive word of mouth advertising. **TEACH**

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