CampBusiness

Plugging In To Social-Media Marketing

Create the ultimate return on investment, engagement, and brand loyalty

By Jonathan Caflun

Summer-camp marketing has drastically changed over the last few years. When I was a camper, a DVD and a brochure were sent to a prospective family. Before that, it was probably just a brochure or a pamphlet. Local newspaper ads, word of mouth, billboards, and similar outlets all helped. In today's world, marketing is all around us all the time.

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YouTube, Facebook, Google, Amazon, and other social-media outlets embed paid advertising into their feeds based on specific algorithms that chart what people may want before they even know it, based on attributes and search history. Meanwhile, cookies live on in website searches that create banner ads on other websites visited.

With the rise of social media and email marketing, the amount of content, engagement, and competition for eyeballs poses an interesting challenge for summer camps. The camps also have four unique clientele groups that interact differently: campers, staff members, parents, and

(campers + staff members)

2. Off-season recruitment (parents + new families + alumni + staff members)
3. Springtime pre-camp excitement (campers, staff members, parents).

What To Post And When To Post

This is a challenge for any camp director, let alone a seasoned marketing strategist. How can one utilize the different elements of new marketing to engage, recruit, and create brand loyalty before, during, and after the summer season?

First, consider the ways in which campers engage with camps through digital lenses. We know that camp is a place where campers can become independent, make lifelong friends, learn new skills, gain incredible role models, etc. What is both exciting and scary is there are now an unlimited number of views and potential customers. Before, with only a brochure or DVD sent in the mail, one family would see it. Now, with YouTube, Instagram, etc., millions of

Begin in the summer with videos. The best way to capture a camp's story, vibe, energy, etc., is to begin in the summer. The days of 10-minute promotional videos are over. With the rise of Instagram, TikTok, and other short-spanned media, people's attention is limited. Beautiful photos are important, but now video is key! Filming 10- to 15-second small clips highlighting facilities, activities, or interviews, and compiling them into short clips that can be uploaded via social media, can go a long way. These "highlights" will remind campers, staff members, and parents during the cold winter months how special the warmth of their summer at camp was.

Know what tools to utilize and how to monetize if necessary. Online social-media and email marketing are not only mostly free, but easy to use. However, first understand your camp community and what forums they use. Learning where and how to market a message is important. For example, do campers use TikTok, Snapchat, or Instagram? Do you utilize an email server like Constant Contact or MailChimp? Are the parents on Facebook? What about alumni? Is Twitter or YouTube a good use of time? What are staff members (mainly Gen-Z and Millennials) using and spending their time on? It can seem daunting to be in so many different places at once, but utilizing the different tools at your disposal to create certain touchpoints can go a

Create a yearly social-media calendar. Utilizing social media to market a camp may seem a daunting task at first, but it's much easier when planned out. Creating a schedule will not only allow you to plan, but also to be more engaged. To begin, ask some questions:

- Does the camp have priority registration or early-bird sign-up?
- When does the camp begin recruiting new campers and new staff members?
- When do most campers sign up?
- Does the camp send out greetings on every holiday?

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Savvy Scheduling

There is so much content and noise on social media, so to break through, content must be strong and strategic. Working through a calendar and knowing what to include sets a camp up nicely for solid engagement and touchstones with the camp community. Here's a potential guide based on three different phases of camp marketing:

- In-person engagement during the summer (campers + staff members):

  When to post: Summertime, either every day that parents can watch.

- Off-season recruitment (parents + new families + alumni + staff members):

  When to post: Weekly at a minimum. A post only every month will not engage the larger community enough.

  What to post: Highlights and reminders of the summer; new videos/updates on projects at camp; staff welcomes; holiday wishes.

- Springtime pre-camp excitement (campers + staff members + parents):

  When to post: Daily/weekly: This is the time when parents are gearing up and new parents are getting nervous; help them ease their minds.

  What to post: Packing guides, helpful tips, goals for the summer.

One more tip: in 2019, my summer camp began posting "Staff Welcomes" every Friday. It was a fun way to showcase staff members in the hope that campers would want to return as well. WeAr didticlesn't anPoticdicpaastte iButs peor'ps ulGauriidtye. The posts

their counselors and camp.

Utilizing the tools at your disposal may be difficult, but as with every business, camps must adapt to thrive. Learning where your camp community *is* will allow you to figure out what the members want. Ultimately, using social media, video, and email marketing tools can be an incredible return on investment, engagement, and brand loyalty.

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