BRANDING WITH BRAINS

Use camp apparel to market camps

Regardless of whether a camp requires uniforms, campers love to show their spirit by wearing clothing with a camp logo. This establishes a pseudo-uniform policy, and serves as a great marketing tool. When kids wear camp clothing year-round at school and in their communities, it demonstrates tremendous pride in a camp. This clothing also helps with camper retention. Because camp clothing is a direct reflection on your brand, it must be managed efficiently and effectively.

Define The Brand

What is a brand? Essentially, it is the emotional connection people make with an organization. A brand comprises many elements—tangible and intangible—and is based on everything an organization says and does: its values and beliefs, the experiences it offers, and the messages it communicates. A strong brand inspires trust, loyalty, and a sense of excellence. As competition increases for enrollment, a strong brand can be the difference between failure and success.

Photos: Courtesy of Camp Wekeela and Melissa Weinberger

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Therefore, it's important to manage a brand/clothing by offering items that truly reflect a camp's identity. Some camps sell their own clothing while others work with a camp outfitter. Make sure an official outfitter has lifestyle camp merchandise. These products, both promotional and premium, should be hand-picked to truly capture the summer-camp experience. Summer camps may also want to offer the most unique merchandise—from hard goods to apparel—to camp families.

Recognize Dedication

So how does apparel correlate with retention? In addition to inviting family members to purchase the clothing, it's critical that camps reward their camp community for their loyalty. At an awards ceremony, for example, campers and staff members can be given camp clothing as a way of recognizing and saying "thank you" to those who have been with the organization for 3, 5, or 10 years. Campers and staff members appreciate being given a 3-year hoodie, a 5-year jacket, and a 10-year fleece. When a camper or staff member wears these special logo items, they stand out in the camp community. It's also a great way to market the camp by displaying the significance of the years at camp.

Take It Online

One of the best approaches to promote camp in a subtle and inexpensive way is to take advantage of social media. On sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, campers can be asked to wear their camp clothing during the school year on specific days. For example, dub Thursdays as "Throwback Thursdays" and invite the camp community to participate. Just remember to include yourself as well.

Recognize that camp clothing is a direct reflection on a brand and must be managed properly. Once people make that emotional connection, you've gained a camp family for life. CB

***Ephram A. Caflun** is the owner/director for Camp Wekeela for Boys and Girls in Ridgewood, N.J. Reach him at (201) 612-5125, or ephram@campwekeela.com.*

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Ed Schirick
Senior Vice President
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