

# Know Me or No Me – Finding Your Best Prospects for Enrollment

by Julie Wassom

For many of us, there has been a time when the saying, “It’s not what you

know, but who you know, that matters,” held some truth. However, in the case of finding the prospects best qualified to buy your early care and education services, what you know is essential to learning who those buyers are and where to best reach them with your marketing messages.

Whether your center is in a densely populated city or in a smaller

town, the challenge is still the same. How do you find enrollment prospects and communicate with them in a manner that leads them to inquire? The more you know about your prospects’ service preferences, quality expectations, and buying influencers, the greater your chances of knowing where and how to reach them with messages that cause them to take action to investigate you. Once they enroll, knowing their level of

satisfaction and expectation can help you keep them.

The answers to these three questions can help you target those prospects most qualified to become and remain your customers.

- What is it I need to know about them?
- Where do I find this information?
- How do I use the information once I have it?

## What do I need to know?

Market research professionals look at two types of profiles to target specific audiences. One, called *demographics*, indicates factual characteristics of a typical qualified buyer. Demographic characteristics include age, average number of children, income, occupation, geographical location, marital status, level of education, etc. Another profile, called *psychographics*, addresses lifestyle factors of target audiences. Media preferences, leisure time activities, shopping habits, and a preference for the types of early care and education they might buy are considered psychographics.

For example, a demographic study may show that in a neighborhood near you, the average adult is between 28 and 45, has two children, works at a professional level job, and is married. The psychographics of the same households might indicate they read *Parents Magazine*, spend a lot of time online, and begin to research infant programs shortly after they become pregnant.

Though demographics can give you a clear cut profile of your target prospects, psychographics can help you learn how to communicate with them. Knowing both can not only help you target your prospects, it can help you refine your marketing efforts to more effectively reach these potential enrollees.

Once you have prospects calling or visiting your center, you need to learn as much about them as they will tell you. Go beyond the basic profile of name, child’s name and age, and program desired. Ask what they expect from the early care and education their child receives. What concerns do they have about their child’s care or center-based care in general? What are the ways they found out about you? Learn the little things, too. Exactly how is their child’s name spelled? (I was recently introduced to a group of three small

Julie Wassom is president



of The Julian Group, Inc., a training

and consulting firm with a specialty in marketing and enrollment building in the early care and education industry. She is author of The Enrollment Building Success Library of print and audio learning programs, and the monthly e-zine Wassom’s Child Care Marketing Wisdom. Julie can be reached at (303) 693-2306, by e-mail at [julie@juliewassom.com](mailto:julie@juliewassom.com), or [www.juliewassom.com](http://www.juliewassom.com).

children whose names were Tajisha, Alyssa, and Jared. These may be listed in the book of baby names, but they rarely show up on a traditional spelling test!) When is his or her birthday? How was their previous experience with early care and education?

## Where do I find this information?

Three easily-accessible sources for target market information:

- market research firms
- your own customer base
- inquiry profiles

Market research firms gather and sell demographic and psychographic information compiled into profiles per the information categories you select. Many of these firms also provide comprehensive mailing services.

Your own customer base will reveal valuable information that profiles the target groups you currently serve. What kind of analyses have you done lately through parent surveys, focus groups of current customers, or record updates? Remember, with each new month your customers have a choice to stay with you or go elsewhere. In a way, they are always *prospects* for your services. You are continuously re-enrolling them informally, not with conversion skills, but with program delivery and customer service. Finding out what satisfies them and what else they expect can help you know them better and deliver to their needs and desires.

Completing inquiry profiles as you talk with prospects on the phone and in your center allows you to both log this information for use in follow-up contacts and to compile it with information gathered on other profiles. Within the

compilation, patterns will emerge that will be useful in creating a picture of your typical qualified prospects and where they go to learn about your services. Whether you note inquiring prospect information in a contact management program on your computer or by hand on inquiry cards, this data can be invaluable in understanding your target prospects and in converting them into enrollments.

## How do I use the information once I have it?

One of the primary uses for good information about your most qualified prospects and loyal customers is to help you develop meaningful marketing messages. The more you know about what matters to your prospects, the more your marketing messages can speak their language and call them to action.

It will also help you determine avenues for reaching target audiences with your messages. Until you know where they go to get the kind of information they need to research early care and education options and to make buying decisions, your efforts to reach them will only be hit and miss. Would you get more prospects to inquire by placing a series of ads in a local city publication, by having an interactive web site, by initiating an active customer referral incentive program, or by sponsoring a community ball team that puts your company name and tagline on programs, t-shirts, and radio announcements? The answer is probably some combination of the above, along with other layered marketing communications efforts. The more information you have on the prospects and customers you want to serve, the more targeted and effective you can make your marketing message and the methods you choose to deliver it.

Think in the prospect's perspective. In their view, the choices are many. The companies and center managers who understand their primary target prospects, deliver messages that cause them to inquire, practice good conversion skills, provide the quality of service they expect, and continually offer meaningful customer service will capture more enrollments and will keep the lion's share of their customers' loyalty. Those who don't will lose them to the competition. When it comes to finding, converting, and keeping your best prospects, the words that hold the most truth might just be, "*Know me, or no me.*"