

Open Your House To Families

As marketing is almost always a topic of interest to private-practice audiologists, there are many resources offering information on how to retain current patients and attract new ones. However, marketing pediatric audiology services—primarily to parents and referring professionals—isn't a common topic, and it can be difficult to find effective promotional ideas and activities for this specialized audience.

Because the target audience is smaller, the promotion of pediatric services offers a potentially lower return on investment of your marketing dollar. Yet it may be critically important for parents, medical professionals and even your fellow audiologists on the other side of town to be reminded or made better aware of your knowledge and expertise with children as well as adults.

Recently I had the pleasure of brainstorming on the topic of pediatric marketing with two old friends of mine, a husband-and-wife team with a thriving private practice in a moderate-size city. They are looking to create a pediatric marketing event, with the goal of moving their practice's image and recognition by local educational audiologists and referral sources "up a notch." They want to position themselves as a center with valuable pediatric experience and to showcase their capabilities for children and families. The concept of a pediatric-focused "open house" seems like the perfect opportunity to achieve these goals.

Rather than targeting families with young children, my friends think the families of teens and pre-teens might be more receptive to learning about advances in hearing aid, FM and implantable technologies and how to connect hearing aids to today's consumer electronics (topics that are also of great interest

THIS COLUMN is a regular feature in **ADVANCE for Audiologists**.

to local educational audiologists). Planned activities could include a discussion on self advocacy and getting a part-time job, perhaps moderated by a young adult with hearing loss who's "been there" and an adjustment counselor knowledgeable about issues relating to hearing loss and teens. This session would be planned as a separate track only for teens and pre-teens, while their parents, educational audiologists and itinerant teachers of the hearing-impaired could participate in a simultaneous discussion about how the kids can move on into college and the workplace. A possible follow-up discussion might involve inviting the parent of a successful college student or recent grad and a local vocational rehab counselor.

Other activities could include a discussion and demonstration of a hand-held OAE screener, likely to be of great interest to school nurses and those working in pediatric offices and clinics. The local otologist also could be invited as a guest speaker. As in a traditional open house, the office staff can offer hands-on demonstrations of assistive and new hearing aid technologies. These demos could be promoted as optional activities before the day's presentation/workshop segments.

My friends have already discussed the idea with their local educational audiologists, who are eager to attend and have offered to disseminate flyers for the event to the appropriate children and families. In addition to consumers, audiologists and nurses, my friends plan to invite local pediatricians and family practice physicians. We're discussing how to provide CEUs and possibly CMEs (with the otologist's help) to further entice local professionals to participate.

Of course, the event will have to be held on a Saturday, with people encouraged to RSVP, and attendance will be limited to the number of people the office can accommodate (fortunately they have a few conference rooms). Avoiding summer holidays and other observances, my friends have picked a Saturday in early fall. With a well-thought-out plan for topics and external speakers, the next steps are the same as you would take for any marketing or open house event: plan it, name it, publicize it, network with professionals, and gather your materials (see Jody Norwood's "Promote Hearing Conservation Through Community Activities," pgs. 56-59, March/April 2008 *ADVANCE for Audiologists*).

My friends have high enthusiasm and high expectations for their pediatric open house—a fun and educational event. I'm looking forward to attending it and reporting back on their success in a future column. \$

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