Long-term studies show that the right approach during economic uncertainty is to increase marketing activity, not to decrease it. COVID-19’s impact on your customers behaviours and attitudes cannot be understated.

While you don't want to continue with the same old marketing campaigns as though nothing has changed, you also don't want to inundate customers with repetitive messages and political material.

As your marketing and the market, itself has changed; it’s important to analyse the success of your approach for existing customers. You should also follow up with your new customers to find out how they heard about you and why they choose you.

**1) Preparing**

Before communicating with parents and potential customers make sure all your staff are consulted and supported with the changes in the workplace that have taken place as a result of Covid 19.

Visual communication is as powerful as the words we use. It’s important to think about the messages and images you at this present time so evaluate the images and language you use.

Keep people informed, but don’t add to the panic. Be mindful of overly dramatic language, as well as any additional information you’re sharing (credibly sourced news articles or tips).

***Key topics at staff meetings are likely include:***

* Planning and preparing
* Cleaning duties
* Reassurances
* Staff recruitment (there may be more suitable people available on the jobs market)
* Explaining the Track and Trace system – i.e. only time the setting should close due to COVID19 is when Public Health England has confirmed.
* SEND system
* EYFS – assessments from September
* Ofsted inspections – not starting until January 2021 (regulatory bodies)
* Thinking what other pressures are put on vulnerable families (food and clothing) - (Food vouchers / EYPP / finances)
* Supporting all staff to understand and be able to communicate effectively and provide the necessary reassurances to customers.

**2) Reassure your customers**

Show your customers compassion during this tumultuous time. As your customers deal with financial, emotional and mental stressors, offer empathy and communicate messages in a way that shows you truly care.

The first priority should be to retain your existing customers via a variety of communication channels. Remember to:

* Send out regular email updates
* Post regularly on social media

***You might consider the following topics***

* Questionnaire for parents (finding out about childcare needs)
* Follow up conversations with families (you might use a secure video platform so the parents can see you)
* Sharing risk assessments with families
* Information online (guidance documents for parents for children returning DfE)
* Promoting outside space and outside play (how this is developed – Beach Schools and Forest Schools)
* Children’s routines (washing song / visual timetable)
* Visual guidance in the settings (Covid Secure)
* Home learning tips
* Consider sharing employee generated content (for example, what staff are doing to keep fit, hobbies, gardening tips, pets)
* Promoting help with the cost of childcare
* Tax Free Childcare / 30 hours childcare / childcare vouchers
* 2-year funding / 3 and 4 early old funding

**3) Get Creative**

When considering attracting new customers, it is not the time to fall back on your old marketing techniques.

Now is a time to focus on your web presence, making sure your Suffolk InfoLink record is up to date and that you are engaging positively on social media channels.

Don't waste an email sharing your updated hours for the third time; provide tips on fun ways to practice the alphabet while preparing dinner or other information that will be of direct interest to your customer base.

***You might consider the following:***

* Improve your online presence (update websites, and use social media daily to communicate)
* Build relationships virtually (especially with prospective and new customers)
* Engage in online communities and forums
* Comment on audience posts and adjust upcoming posts based on the current sentiment and feedback
* Signposting to quality sources of information that can help your customers (home learning ideas, financial and community-based support)
* Adapting your email campaigns and adding value to them that will add value and pull your customers in towards you
* Digital marketing your webpage as this is a good opportunity to reach your families visually ‘google analytics’ track how your customers are using the website.
* Ensure that your website works on differing devices as this makes it accessible.
* Review webpage content and share across social media channels
* Search engine optimisation – for example use Google to search for your setting to see where your website appears on a list of search results if at all.

**How to improve search engine optimisation:**

<https://www.wikihow.com/Improve-Search-Engine-Optimization>

**How to set up a Facebook page**

<https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-marketing-tips/>

Many of the places where you would normally display publicity material will not be open or will be attended by far fewer people. Some venues have withdrawn leaflets and handouts altogether.

***You may like to:***

* Approach local businesses or shops that are open asking if you can place a poster.
* Speak to the local district, borough, or town council to request a physical presence at a local market to engage with the public and prospective customers.

Any activities that involve face to face contact with the public, or where you are handing out information or freebies should be fully risk assessed (including for the Covid-19 virus).

***Other areas you might like to send out information to customers about could include for example:***

***Childcare funding help:***

* Securing your place in September
* Marketing to 2-year old who could access their early years funding entitlement when they turn three.
* Late claims (children can start and claim at another time before October half term – make parents aware this is the case).
* Making sure parents are aware of all the funding entitlements for 2, 3 and 4-year-olds.

**Arrival and departure:**

* Clean set of clothes every day (EYPP explore how to use this – for example could you provide the family with an all in one suit)
* Preparing child for changes <https://www.suffolklearning.co.uk/early-years/covid-19/transitions>
* Local lockdown - make sure you are able to communicate to customers what happens (if you need to close) – DfE guidance

**COVID19 Information for Providers**

**Resources:**

**Early Years Alliance resources**

**Marketing and Social Media for the Early Years**  two CPD-accredited online training courses delivered from [EduCare](https://www.educare.co.uk/) for £18.50 (excl VAT) Early Years Alliance members can buy the course for £13.50 (excl VAT) [Read more about the course](https://www.myeducare.com/shop/product/marketing-and-social-media-for-the-early-years/)

— Further guidance on improving the long-term success and sustainability of your setting through regular marketing and publicity can be found in Alliance publication [*Effective Marketing and Publicity for Early Years Settings*](http://shop.pre-school.org.uk/A075).

— [*Website Development and Design*](http://shop.pre-school.org.uk/A095) gives guidance on the various steps involved in developing a website for your setting, including content and design which are important when considering your marketing strategy.

**Free publications to members**

T204 Welcome back: Supporting practitioners, children and families to return to your setting

T205 Welcome back: Preparing your premises and the early years environment

T206 Welcome back: Meeting the needs of children from day one

T207 Welcome back Childminders

**Book**

A128 Recruiting Early Years Staff

**NDNA Website** <https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/Knowledge_Hub/Coronavirus_for_nurseries_early_years.aspx>

**Pacey Business Smart Resources:**

<https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/business-smart/ideas-and-inspiration/marketing-your-business/>

<https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/business-smart/marketing/>