



School's Out!

It's time to start
thinking about.

BACK TO SCHOOL!

When everyone else is planning vacations, we're planning our Back-To-School strategy. Actually we should be planning two of them.

The first should concentrate on Back-To-College or Off-ToCollege for those graduating high school seniors. College students will be returning to campus in August so NOW is when they will need your help. Returning college seniors may need new eyewear for upcoming job or grad school interviews. A targeted mailer reminding them to schedule an eye exam needs to hit those mailboxes before the end of July. Perhaps a discount on a year's supply of contact lenses or a new pair of eyeglasses, sunglasses or sports glasses would be just the push they need to pick up the phone.

Having seen two children off to college for the first time, I can tell you that they will pack everything they own and then some of your stuff as well. Don't worry, most of it will come back at Thanksgiving. What they won't remember are the very practical things, like enough contact lenses and solutions, an unbroken pair of eyeglasses or sunglasses and the name of an eyecare professional near campus...just in case. Do those stressed-out parents a favor; package up the whole thing and make them an offer they can't refuse.

Now about that other Back-To-School strategy. This is the tougher one. Beginning in mid-July, every retailer in America is going to begin courting those pint-sized dollars. Like it or not, you must have a plan to keep your voice separate from the others.

For those of you who don't think that kid's eyewear is something worth pursuing, how about this. From www.marketingresearch.com, you can pick up the *Children's and Teen Retail Report Card 2007: Annual and Back to School Shopping Consumer Behaviors and Attitudes* for the low, low cost of \$3,750.00 or *Marketing to Kids and Tweens — US* for a measly \$3,995.00. In them you'll find out that kids and tweens have about \$51 billion in spending power and discover what makes them choose one retailer over another. Kids under 3 years old represent \$20 billion of that very significant number.

WCCO-TV in St. Paul, Minnesota visited 3, 4 and 5 year-olds at a local day care center and showed them flash cards of corporate logos. The tots recognized the Target bulls-eye, the McDonalds's M, SpongeBob SquarePants and Dora the Explorer. They didn't know the Nike swoosh, but they knew it was shoes and soccer. They recognized Starbucks, KFC, Pizza Hut and Pepsi.

According to www.newamericandream.org:

- American children, 12 to 17 will ask their parents for products they have seen advertised an average of NINE times until the parents give in.
- More than 10% of 12 to 13 year olds admit to asking parents more than 50 (FIFTY!) times for products they have seen advertised.
- According to Ann Hulbert, a leading expert on branding, 80% of all global brands now deploy a "tween strategy."

Still don't think you need a kid's strategy? Check out www.schoolfamilymedia.com. They are in the business of linking product brands with schools and parents through event planning with the local PTA/PTO.

The only thing these organizations can't do is reach out and touch your patient base with the level of trust and confidence you have created.

A well thought out Back-To-School promotion:

- Educates your patients on the need for yearly eye exams and the impact that good vision has on learning.
- Assures your patients that the eyewear you provide is the finest quality and durability.
- Reminds your patients that you care about them, not the sale.

If you haven't included children in your preferred patient base or designated a children's area in your dispensary, you've got some work to do and fast!

Use your own kids and your staff's children as a built-in focus group. Find out what they like, what's hot and hip AND what's not! Order frames and POP now, so that it's in place before your mailer is out. If you are going to offer packages, determine what they will contain and how they will be priced.

Do some footwork. Visit the guidance and health offices in local schools and leave them with information on children's vision and sports vision. Let them know you're available for questions, concerns and referrals. Offer yourself or another staff member as a speaker for both parent and faculty meetings.

Among the more popular promotions are percentage off second pair sales, discounts on sports eyewear and discounts on contact lenses and supplies. You might consider a "family" discount when the entire family is examined and purchases eyewear and/or contact lenses.

The whole idea is to nurture the understanding that no other entity will care for their family's eyecare needs like your practice will.

Time's a-wasting! School may be out now, but it will be in again, sooner than you can blink! ■

Email any comments to: editor@ECPmag.com

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