

Marketing 101

Learn how simple, inexpensive marketing techniques can boost your class numbers and elevate your career.

By Sage Rountree



Defining yourself as a teacher and sharing that definition through marketing can draw students who need exactly what you're offering. This, in turn, will expand your class numbers and increase your success. Here's how to begin your marketing campaign.

Think It Through

Start by outlining your own definition of success. Clara Hori, who works with yoga teachers through her Los Angeles-based company Yogi Incubator (www.yogiincubator.com), asks her clients, "Is success to have money, and what for? Is success being able to choose the classes that you want to teach? Is success being able to choose the themes of workshops without prioritizing what is most commercially appealing? To some people success is simply having a lot of time and flexibility. The very first thing is to really understand where you stand, and where you want to go."

Continue your own self-inquiry by considering exactly who you are as a yoga teacher. "Differentiation is important," explains Alón Sagee, who works with teachers and is known as the Yoga Business Coach (www.yogabusinesscoach.com). He suggests teachers choose a niche that they're comfortable with—a type of person or a type of lifestyle—and market and cater your offerings accordingly. That way, you'll attract people who are part of an affinity group—people that network together, that talk among each other.

Then, take active steps to reach your definition of success. Megan McDonough, who has worked on marketing with the Kripalu Center and Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy through her company Mindful Marketing (www.beyondclasses.com), says that many teachers take a passive approach to marketing. "Yoga teachers market most often through posters or flyers, word-of-mouth marketing, and advertising. These are passive ways of marketing. It feels safe to hang up a flyer and walk away. There's no rejection." Instead, McDonough suggests, try active marketing, "such as the simple act of talking to people. Active marketing feels more threatening because you directly face the possibility of rejection. Someone could say, 'No, I'm not interested in doing it.' Yet just like in a yoga pose, that edge is where change happens."

Lisa Black Avolio, a senior Baptiste Power Yoga teacher and owner of Shakti Vinyasa Yoga East and West in Seattle, agrees. "The best way to market yourself is to attend community events and [find] opportunities for meeting new people where you can share how much you love yoga," she says.

Make It Simple

As you prepare an active marketing campaign, collect some simple materials.

First, create a business card, ideally with an offer of a free or discounted first class. Cards can be created cheaply or even for free at online printers such as VistaPrint.com. Carry these with you and share them freely.

Second, begin collecting and organizing your students' contact information, including email addresses. This allows you to keep your clients advised of your schedule and upcoming events. Remember to consider students' privacy. "If people haven't asked to be in your newsletter or said that it's OK to use their emails, then you should not be sending them mass, unsolicited emails," Hori says.

Client bases of fewer than 50 names can be reached by sending a blind-carbon-copy email to the group. As your email list grows, however, a newsletter service such as iContact.com or Namaste Interactive makes it easy to manage. However you decide to manage this information, use it to make regular contact with your students. McDonough says, "You need a system that allows you to constantly stay in the forefront of your clients' minds."

A website is another useful marketing tool. You can work on your own, arrange a trade with or pay a Web designer, or use an online service such as WebFlexor.com. Look at other teachers' sites to get an idea of what can be done, then tailor your own to address your audience. Donia Robinson, owner of the Carrboro Yoga Company in Carrboro, North Carolina, suggests including plenty of pictures on the site, detailing your training, and describing yourself in a way that shows you are "relatable and personable."

Throughout your marketing campaign, specify in plain terms how your offering will benefit your clients. Beware of jargon, cautions McDonough: "*Transformational, pranayama, asana, blissful*—these words may mean absolutely nothing to potential students." Sagee's rule of thumb here: "Don't talk Sanskrit. Most yoga teachers make the mistake of talking to the yoga community when positioning their business." Instead, he advises, "Talk to the world at large. Bring people into the yoga community by telling them how beautiful yoga is for them, and what benefits and meaningful value it will have for their lives. You can't do that by confusing them."

Keep It Up

Be prepared to continue with your marketing campaign. The biggest problem with most teachers' marketing is that it's not done consistently, Sagee says, adding, "Picking something that works for you is half the equation; the other half is doing it every day."

McDonough agrees. "The number-one marketing tactic is the one you're going to do again and again and again," she says. "What are you going to do consistently and over time?" Thus, depending on your market, flyers may be useful. Often, however, they require weekly updating, so consider your time and investment. Avolio suggests, "Don't create very expensive, high-quality color postcards and leave stacks of them in coffee shops where they may get lost, buried under other information, or thrown out. Do create simple but professional business cards and class schedules that are easy and inexpensive to reproduce." Keeping these current and distributing them regularly is key.

Avoid Mistakes

Avolio also sees teachers make the mistake of being too shy to share about teaching yoga, or too uncomfortable about inviting people to attend their classes, for fear of being pushy. Remember, active marketing is effective, she says. "When appropriate in a conversation, ask, 'Have you ever tried yoga?' Invite people to attend your class for beginners by passing them a free class card," she suggests.

Another passive mistake is doing nothing at all. Hori warns against thinking that just because you love it and you're good at it, you don't have to do anything to get the word out—the universe will take care of you. "The universe does take care of you," she says, "but that includes giving you the opportunity to stand up!"

Finally, focus on substance over style. Black says, "While marketing is important to your success, I believe your personal passion and ability to communicate with others will be your true key to abundance. Speaking from my own experiences and sharing from my heart has been the best way to encourage people to try yoga."

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