

Protrack Marketing Plan – Original Vision

Marketing Goals

The first step in creating an effective campaign for marketing this new branch is to ask ourselves a few important questions. These questions will help us both focus on what the heart of the campaign is and generate ideas from there. It will guide us through the next phases of the plan, help us stay on task, and on mission and help us make decisions when this campaign comes to an end.

In the following pages, I've created a multi-phase campaign that may seem like overkill, grandiose, etc. And it's true, my excitement may have me dreaming big. But this is our best chance to create momentum. Newton knew what he was talking about, an object in motion stays in motion. So, by exploding onto the scene, we are enrolling our first class of students, as well as pique interest for years to come. Also, it takes the average consumer encountering an idea in 7 different ways before they act on it. As I continue to research, there may be newer, better ideas that we can substitute to be more effective at netting the right people.

Environmental Analysis

Strengths

We have amazing market saturation in Evanston. An extremely loyal base. A financially solid and successful business that can take a big leap like this and know that we can still pay our bills. We also have an amazing circus community in Chicago. It's a hub of activity that will help support artists who chose to come to us here.

Weaknesses

Credibility and Visibility - A protrack program is a completely new project for us. Anyone who gets involved is taking a big risk. We need to build visibility and more importantly credibility. We may know that we are a great opportunity, but most likely, most of our prospective students have never heard of us. So, we need to show them, rather than tell them. "On the web, you are what you publish." So, we need to show all our followers, those who know us and those who don't yet, who we are through what we've done and can do.

Retention – this still seems to be an issue. One that could sink a new program. I think there needs to be an in-depth analysis of what the issues are and an institution of fixes in the sessions before the pro track starts. If the issues are still around, whatever they are, when the program launches, they could sink it.

Opportunities

There are so many opportunities inherent in this new program. We should try to capitalize on them as much as possible. To this end, do we know any publicists? Maybe one might work with us pro bono for this or the 20th anniversary year. The excitement, momentum, and opportunities that this will present could dramatically increase our visibility in the right hands.

Along those lines, the City of Chicago Treasurer's Office has a Small Business Plan Contest, an Email Marketing & Social Media Contest, and an Elevator Pitch Contest. If we are eligible, we should consider taking part. When Redmoon added their Entertainment for Hire program, they

submitted their business plan to the National Business Plan Competition for Nonprofit Organizations, a project of the Yale School of Management-The Goldman Sachs Foundation Partnership on Nonprofit Ventures and won. The visibility they gained from this was instrumental in their initial success.

We have an amazing marketing asset in Anne Weber. How can we bring her in without exhausting her? Being integral may help her feel a sense of ownership or it may make her feel overextended.

So many performers in various disciplines go through rigorous training to graduate and have no business skills to make themselves successful. Folding in basic workshops on taxes, contracts, how to protect yourself, insurance, would help them be successful and give our program and advantage. Even just offering mentoring opportunities within the greater Chicago circus community would be a great opportunity for our students and a way to positively tie us to the larger community.

Continuing that theme, we have an amazing asset in the great Chicago community. By being inclusive and hiring teachers from all over, across organizations, we take ourselves from being seen as a threat to be a partner.

This new program can also help with the programs we already have established. I imagine that as the students advance in their skills, opportunities for them to work as assistants to birthday parties, environmental entertainment and off-site teachers will arise.

Threats

Other organizations thinking of this as war

Code of conduct or other rules and conditions they should sign

Marketing Tactics

Phase One

Determine the Who - Audience and Segmentation

Having a buyer profile helps us figure out what it is they are looking for when they encounter our marketing and better serve them. By asking ourselves what that specific profile is looking for, we can maximize our time with specific campaigns instead of a “throw it at the wall and see what sticks” approach.

1. Build buyer profiles/personas for students, circus organizations, etc.

- What are the requirements for auditions? Maybe a video Letter of Intent asking why they wish to enroll, dreams, goals, ambitions, inspiration, etc. Deciding these elements may help us answer important questions such as
 - Create a mood board
 - Create a mailing list for them to join. House it on a website page created for this. Send a press release announcing the mailing list, create a banner for the webpage, include in an eblast.
 - Create a list of circus organizations to both email and mail to

- Hold focus groups. Ask each group what they would type into Google to try to find an organization like us. How they would spread the word. What connections/relationships do they have? Anecdotally ask the question so as not to lead the answers. Test out program names on them. Groups to host: perspective students, Summer Intensive students – to understand what they got out of it and to gather testimonials to use in our messaging, our faculty, board members, who else?
- Host a Pro Track Open House and publicize it. It gives us a chance to meet the people we will be marketing to and for them to see if our facility is what they are looking for. Needs to be a good fit all around.
- I'd also like to implement a plan I've had for a while called Coffee and Conversation. An opportunity once a month for me to catch up with whoever would like to attend. An informal opportunity for them to engage with us, ask questions. I would be able to get a first-hand understanding of what matters to our students, what language they use, their stories, and how they are affected.
- By the end of this phase we should be able to answer the following questions:
 - Who is our audience?
 - How old are they?
 - Do they live or work in certain places?
 - Is income or education level relevant?
 - How do they spend their time?
 - Where are they, and what are they doing there from 9-5 or on weekends?
 - What is their family status?
 - Does this group have strong likes or dislikes?

2. Research Their Needs and Their Practices

Based on the feedback we get from our focus groups, we can look at what media they rely on for answers to their problems, how we can reach them, what words and phrases do they use, what images and multimedia appeal to them, do they attend conferences and seminars, what publications and websites do they frequent. Once we've determined those, we can assess which of those fit our organization as well and promote the new program through them.

Phase Two

Craft the Messaging

What do we want them to believe about us and how to show it to them? The research we've done in Phase One will then go into crafting the message, connecting our strengths to what their needs are. We will know which sites to publicize on, which events to attend and which answers to post on our sites before the questions can be asked and how to phrase them. We also must ask questions of ourselves. Why us? What do we have that's unique to offer? Why do we exist? Who do we serve? Why should they apply to AG and not NECCA?

1. Craft the message at an organization-wide level.

- Create a logo, program name, tagline, vision/mission/value statements, boilerplate, elevator pitch, lexicon, SEO Title, Meta description, Program abbreviation. Examples: The Actors Gymnasium Professional Circus Training Program | Intensive study in Circus, Aerial, Dance & Physical Theatre, The Actors Gymnasium Professional Circus Training

Program | Intensive study in Circus, Aerial, Dance & Physical Theatre | Chicago & Evanston, IL

- We'll need to update our mission to reflect the addition of the program.
- Ask ourselves, if we started The Actors Gymnasium today, knowing what the organization has grown to 20 years later, what would we name it? Use that to inform our decisions. Use information from page 96.
- Ask ourselves what I call The Silly Questions. The why of them will help us figure out the personality that the program will have.
 - If this program had a theme song or anthem, what would it be? Why?
 - If this program had a mascot or "power animal" what would it be? Why?
 - If this organization were a car, what type and color would it be? Why?
- Keep an eye on the topics of conversation at circus festivals and events. See what matters to our community and make sure we are talking about it and relating it to our services.
- Message possibilities:
 - Chicago is becoming a circus hub. Career opportunities here. Connect with the community
 - The Actors Gymnasium was formed by professionals looking for a place where they could hone their craft. Join us as we write the next chapter of that vision.

2. Create content

Show our credibility through a general video about AG as an organization

Continue to build credibility through two additional video campaigns:

- Weekly stretch videos – low budget one-minute videos of Sylvia showing prospective students a stretch they can use as they prepare for their auditions. It can be filmed in 1-day maximum.
- Faculty videos – a short video introducing us to each teacher who will be on staff.
 - Larry – Talk about Larry as a storyteller. Who inspires him? Why does he tell stories the way he does? What is different about his storytelling?"
 - Sylvia – Can possibly use footage from John Klein's documentary, Chicago Circus Festival, Monthly Visit footage. This is also an opportunity to answer some of the FAQs before there are formally asked.
 - Additional faculty – an overview of who they are, why they teach circus, how they got started and other questions gleaned through our buyer profile research.
- Photos - we need to choose one image to be **the image**. It's possible that we already have it in our stock.
 - We may also want to consider doing a shoot at the two upcoming Master Classes, or to have a photoshoot specifically for this purpose.
 - The most effective images convey an emotion and have the individual looking straight into the camera. This is why Charlie Blackburn's photo is so effective.
 - Other opportunity – several photographers and videographers are buying Go Pros and drone cameras and looking for projects to try them out on. The pairing of those abilities with our unique use of movement, height, and dramatic movement could be stunning. Since most of them are still in the playing stage, it could be done just for the time and effort it takes to coordinate.

- Website segmentation– we need to segment the website to better target our students. Moving Summer Intensive and Workshops under the Protrack heading, separating Early Childhood classes, renaming adult classes to recreational adult offerings, etc. will make sure that we engage the right audience at the first click.
- Specific FAQ pages – right now we have one FAQ page where everything is lumped in. Parents of early childhood students don't have the same questions as pro track students. We will use the questions we've received in focus groups, Open Houses, and a list that Kei will track to create a page that helps answer the questions in an easy to reach spot. As Kei said the other day, for every student who calls in and asks, how many don't bother? We will also create FAQ Friday, where we share one FAQ a week, pro track, and otherwise as well as asking people to submit questions. This will put the answers out into the world and start a dialogue. Possible questions include:
 - Is there a dorm I will live in?
 - Where can I buy gear?
 - Where can I buy clothing/outfits?
 - Do I get a certificate or a degree?
 - How will the tuition work? Pay in advance, by month, quarters? Get a discount if they pay for everything in advance?
- Gather testimonials from respected circus industry connections. We can use this in various sources, and they will continue to promote our credibility.

3. Examine what the user experience is from beginning to end

Make sure that there aren't potholes along the way to lose people into.

Phase Three

1. Reach Them

There are already several go-to strategies that we employ that we can use here in addition to what we've learned from our buyer profiles.

Email

- Send email to age and level eligible students through ASAP.
- Spotlight a pro track faculty member in our April Artist Spotlight
- Announce each video series, special discounts, attendance at events, etc.

Social Media

- Weekly Stretch Videos
- Friday FAQ's
- Faculty Videos
- Facebook ads targeted to our buyer profiles but nationwide.
- Sylvia AMA on Twitter
- Promotion and tie ins on special circus-related holidays found in Chase's Calendar of Events

Press Releases

- Announcing the program and asking to join the mailing list
- Announcing the open house dates
- Announcing staff with faculty videos
- Announcing audition dates

- Announcing the weekly video series
- Announcing the roster of the first class of students
- Announcing the ribbon-cutting ceremony with the mayor, aldermen, local chambers, Chicago North Shore Visitors Bureau, and the first class of students in attendance. Great photo opportunity
- Use follow up phone calls to engage reporters. Offer the unique ability to be behind the scenes and cover the first exciting year in a new program.
- Research circus bloggers, Evanston bloggers, Chicago bloggers, people whose following we want to connect with.
- Create a media kit (including a fact sheet, see example) to make it easy for them to do a story on us. House it on the website. Use page 28 of The Non-Profit Marketing Guide as reference material.

Networking

- Send posters or other paper marketing to circus organizations
- Attend local circus events and spread the word. We need to engage the local circus community. Reach out to El Circo Cheapo, Midnight Circus, Chicago Circus Festival, MSA, Aloft Loft, TSNY, CircEsteem, The Runaway Circus, Aerial Dance Chicago, Acrofabulous, Gamma Phi Circus, Le Vorris and Vox, etc.

Website

- Banners in the slideshow, using our one branded image, for each of the above announcements.
- Use the information we gleaned from our focus groups to breakdown the pages of the program in the way that our buyers are looking for it, i.e. How to Apply, Tuition, Schedule, etc.
- Have a pdf brochure on the website – Use Circus Warehouse as an example
- Create a website under the pro track name that directs to the general website

Word of Mouth/Discounts

- Offer a unique discount.
- Let it be known that if we receive a certain number of auditions submissions by a certain date, we will take a certain percentage off everyone's tuition. This incentivizes those who are interested to make sure the program is a success.
- Have an Early Bird discount for the Feb deadline? This will help front-load our submissions and see if we need to keep pushing.
- If you take two class sessions (Winter II & Spring or Spring and Summer) or a certain number of classes in the same session and then join pro-track, you receive a discount. This lets prospective students try before they buy and gives us a chance to hook them.
- If you take additional AG classes/workshops on top of pro track schedule, getting them at a deep discount

Brochure

- Include in a brochure

Online

- Create our Wikipedia page

Google AdWords

- Using the keywords, we learned from focus groups and the Google Keyword Generator (see examples) create an additional campaign specifically for pro track

Gleaned from other circus Schools

- Set up partnerships so that students could take classes outside of AG that will help them improve in their craft. Ensures that our students are well rounded and helps make friends with organizations we could use support from. Can have a website page under protrack just for these partnerships and the discounts they offer. This would also help our SEO.
- Examples include: yoga, pilates (Sylvia's connection), tumbling, wheel (Wolfgang), dance (Foster Dance), trampoline, springboard diving, belly dancing (Hip Circle), Alexander technique, Feldenkrais, cheerleading, gymnastics, any form of martial arts (Fonseca), performance, drama and acting classes (Piven), nutritionist, etc.

2. Reassess

Once we see who has applied, we can see where we are at. Do we need to do another push? Is the caliber of submissions what we were looking for that is lacking? At this point, we reassess the campaign and put it all out there again with the knowledge that we've learned.

3. Building the Future

If we are building marketing opportunities into the program, we will help create interest, increase awareness, and continue the momentum going with a minimum of effort from our small staff.

- Scholarship Student as Ambassador – If we offer a full scholarship or even a substantial scholarship, it is fair to ask those students to act as advocates for us. They most likely will want to. Part of their ambassadorship would be to post weekly videos of their journey through the program to a special YouTube page. This will generate great footage of the program in action, capture real moments that future students can connect to as well as testimonial we can use in grants. This shifts the marketing momentum into an easy to maintain avenue and it provides the student with a chance to brand themselves. The footage can help launch their career as well as advertise our program. Another possibility of creating a work-study program where they act as an intern in the office or to Sylvia or Larry.
- Graduate spotlights – a few professional circus schools have recently started doing photo, video, or text spotlights on each of the graduates at the end of the course. It's a brilliant way to let the work speak for itself.

Budget and Staffing

staff support

Strategy Metrics

Questions

How does it fit in our line of continuity?

What's the 1-year goal? 3? 5? 10?