



Marketing your Early Years Music Group on a Budget

CASE STUDIES

Lessons and observations from the founder of BabyJazz, Ruby Barker

Introduction

When you start out as an Early Years Music Practitioner and set up your first class, most of your energy and time is rightfully focused on creativity and honing your skills as a practitioner. It can be hard to find the time and resources to market your project effectively. This case study shares some of the knowledge and experience I have gained over the last two years of running my parent and baby music group, *BabyJazz*.

I am going to make a broad assumption that you like me, are an Early Years Practitioner starting out in a drop-in environment, with no (or limited) budget and experience for marketing, and little time.

I am not a marketing expert. However, parents seem to respond well to what they describe as the 'creative' way I promote *BabyJazz*, and feel that the classes and the brand are a 'good fit'. I have seen for myself the benefits of getting it right, and investing time, effort and money in marketing is worthwhile.

Who are you?

Take your time to get the right name and think about your brand. It helps if you develop a good idea about what's special or unique about your group and try to reflect this in your name and brand marketing. The diagram below captures the different elements that make up a brand.



It could be that you are the brand. If you are comfortable with that then put yourself centre stage. *Jenny's Jam* is a North London group run by a guitar playing music therapist and mum of two. Alternatively you might choose a character name, *Melody Monkey* or *Amelia Boo*

Stories – led by another mum of two and dramatherapist. You may choose a name that describes what you do, for example *Movers and Shakers*, *Music and Movement for 0-3's* or *BabyJazz*. Another successful, if a little controversial, approach is to choose a name that links your brand to something very well-known and prestigious thus gaining from the positive association, for example *Bach to Baby* or *Mini Mozarts*.

Ideally you want a name that's original, catchy and easy to remember. Think about how easily it will work in social media context, for example with a domain name, or Twitter account. If you are stuck, do a brain-storming exercise and write down anything and everything you can think of that reflects what you want your group to be about and ask friends, family, or colleagues what they think and keep refining it until you are comfortable. Once you have your name do a quick online check to make sure no-one else uses it. You can do a basic online search of the name as well as checking [Companies House](#) and the [Charities Commission](#).

How can marketing help?

Asking what you want to achieve with your marketing activities can help decide the best approach.

The most obvious reason is because you want the project to be successful. You want to attract parents and babies to your class and to build awareness of your group. It is also worth thinking of ways you can stand out from the competition and build a positive reputation.

The reality is that the baby class marketplace is competitive. As an independent music practitioner you are competing against well-resourced and profit-driven franchises. Parents are often unaware of the distinction, they will see if a group "looks like it's good" and is well marketed or not. Hopefully once the parents have experienced your group they will appreciate the differences in quality and engagement, but first you must attract them and secondly you may need to put some effort into explaining how unique and special your class is in comparison to alternative classes.

By using a mix of print and social media you can share information about your activities to a wide audience.



Inspiration

You can get a good idea of what marketing materials you need and how best to promote your group by taking a look around at what other practitioners are doing in your area.

Don't dismiss the way franchises market themselves on the grounds that they have lots of money. Yes, the Franchises will have a budget but their approach to promotion is effective; by highlighting positive feedback and the educational and developmental benefits they appeal to new customers on different levels.

Learn from those that you like and try to identify:

- What makes this flyer/poster/website effective?
- Think of yourself as the recipient and ask "How does this appeal to me?"
- Who do you think is their target audience?
- How and where are local music groups distributing their marketing material?

By building this picture you should develop a good idea as to whether it is worth paying for your poster to go on local library or toy shop notice boards. Will local cafés or shops display your flyers or posters for free?

The power of word of mouth and the personal touch

A personal recommendation from another parent or a fellow practitioner is an invaluable marketing tool. Once your group is up and running, take the time to talk to your parents and find out what they like about your group. Ask them what makes it special and how it compares to others they have attended. Capture those thoughts and feelings to use in your marketing material. Do a short questionnaire, get quotes, ask permission to use them and don't be afraid to share the good ones. Nobody will think you are being big-headed and everyone likes a 'feel good' quote or story.

By talking to parents you will build an idea of how they heard about your group and how best to communicate with them in the future.

Keep up to date

However you choose to market your project it is really important that you keep everything as up to date as possible. On social media it is essential! It can be time consuming but out of date information is not helpful to anyone; it will confuse parents and cause you unnecessary problems.

Best Investments!

Logo and graphic design

The one thing you should definitely invest some money in is a logo. It is really worth finding an experienced illustrator or graphic designer to do this. A good logo will make your group instantly stand out from the crowd and can be used to inform the rest of graphic design you might need. You might find it useful to write a brief for the designer; this is not the same as designing the logo. The brief could set out a few key requirements such as name, what you do or sell, your target audience, emotions or feelings you want to evoke, examples of images you would like to emulate, a colour palette, and font ideas.

Photography and video

Once you are up and running professional photographs of you and your class in action are really worth the investment. Remember to get parents' consent; you can find basic consent or release forms online and adapt to your needs. Great photos work across all types of media, especially online.

Short video clips of quality are the biggest winner for pulling in Facebook and website visits but again you will need written permission for anyone you feature, and also remember that the shorter the better attention spans are very short!



Online presence and social media

Facebook is an extremely good way of engaging parents. It is free to use and really accessible. You will need to have a personal Facebook account to create or access a group – be prepared to give an address, which could be a setting you run your class in. It provides opportunities to attract new parents and to actively engage parents who are already coming to your classes, and this builds a sense of community.

You can add details of all your classes by scheduling events, keep parents up to date with regular posts and if you wish share information about resources, music or anything you feel is relevant, they can 'Like' and 'Follow' your page for further updates

A Facebook business page also has a review option so parents can rate and comment on how great your class is. Getting parents to leave a review and a star rating requires quite a bit of encouragement, but even one or two reviews looks good and gives your project authenticity. You can also pay for additional services (such as advertising) if you think it will help.

A Twitter profile is also worthwhile. It is a free platform that enables you to share small bits of information like a class or event. It's possible to link your Facebook posts to your Twitter account so that all your Facebook page posts are automatically fed into your Twitter feed. Although Twitter may be less used by parents it is certainly good for staying in touch with wider networks of musicians, arts organisations, Local Authorities, Music Educations Hubs, etc.

YouTube is one of the biggest social media platforms and is a great way to make videos accessible. It is free to join and you can upload YouTube video directly to your website or Facebook page.

Website

A website has become very much a badge of authenticity. If you get it right it's a great shop window for your classes and services. There are quite a few options, from employing a web designer to build your site from scratch (which can be really expensive), to adapting or using an existing template such as either [WordPress](#) – which is free - or subscription-based platform [SquareSpace](#).

If you have limited money it's important to ensure that you are able to update the site yourself, edit text, and add photos and news. This makes your site much more inviting for visitors.

Whatever you chose, a website is likely to be your biggest single investment but if you are aiming to grow your project into a full time business it is invaluable. My advice is not to go for second best; a bad website that looks amateur and is difficult to navigate is definitely worse than no website at all.

If you are unfamiliar with the Internet and website design, make use of the web to find free 'How To' marketing advice guides and resources. Even understanding a little bit about how it all works, such as what 'web hosting' is, what 'domain names' are, and even 'search engine optimisation'. It may even save you a bit of money! Again it's worth looking around and identifying sites you like, thinking carefully about how you would like it to function, commonly described as 'functionality'.

Flyers and Posters

The most common print materials are flyers and posters.

Increasingly there are also one-stop online services like [Vista Print](#) or graphic design sites like [Canva](#) that produce high quality, professional looking materials for free or low cost. Some high street printers also offer basic graphic design and printing packages.

With regard to flyers I would recommend keeping the details on them as generic as possible, as most high street and online printers will give you a better price for larger quantities and thus products will have a longer life.



With posters I find the opposite is true and that it's best to be specific as possible, I try to have a venue-specific poster in each of the spaces I run my *BabyJazz* drop-in classes. Good design counts for a lot.

Be resourceful

Make use of free or subsidised training or resources. If you are a member of [Musicians' Union](#) you should know that they offer useful e-courses and resources. The [Federation of Entertainment Unions Training](#) and other membership organisations can also help with one-day courses which are often free or at subsidised rates.

Friends & Family

Approaching friends and family with certain marketing and graphic design skills can be a great way to get things started. My advice is to think carefully how best they can help you and what you actually want. Working with friends and/or family 'experts' who are doing things for free or cheaply can be great, but it can also be tricky and take longer to complete. If someone is doing something for free, it can quite understandably be a lower priority for them than their paid work. You may also find that it is harder to get the exact end-product you envisaged. It can also be harder to say you don't like something, or ask for it to be changed when the producer is someone you know and love!

Top Tips

- A well designed logo and graphics is a very worthwhile investment.
- Quick social media wins: set up a Facebook business page; it's free and a great way to engage most parents. Other options are a normal Facebook page and/or creating or joining a Facebook group.
- A website acts like a badge of authenticity.
- Print media, flyers and posters are useful and most parents do expect it. Keep details generic and leave a space for a label to be able to update key details, such as venue and price.
- Be observant and reflective about your marketing strategy – what do you think works well and ask yourself why?
- Ask parents to give feedback on your classes and use positive responses in your marketing material.
- Keep all marketing and promotional material as up to date as possible, especially social media.
- Approach friends and family with relevant expertise to help and/or advise, but remember to use careful negotiation and be clear what your expectations are at the outset.

- Build your knowledge base through free resources on the web and/or through short courses.