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The Little Gym Reinforces It’s Brand, Helps Franchisees Market Their Stores with Constant Contact

“Ok, I admit it. We initially didn’t sign on with Constant Contact® because we had specialized requirements and weren’t sure if Constant Contact could meet them,” explains Karen Gray, Director of Marketing for The Little Gym International. “We spent one very l-o-n-g year researching our options – because no one could meet our requirements at first.”

The Little Gym, the premier children’s motor skill development program, has been helping children and their parents for over 30 years. With over 260 locations in 16 countries, the success of The Little Gym programs are a direct reflection of founder Robin Wes’ genuine love for children.

Unlike other gym programs for children, The Little Gym offers professionally developed, non-competitive programs for infants and children from four months to 12 years that promote coordination, balance, rhythm, and flexibility, while enhancing listening, emotional, social, and intellectual skills.

In addition to parent/child classes and gymnastics, The Little Gym offers sports skill development, karate, dance, summer and holiday camps, and birthday parties.

The Little Gym considers itself to be part of their members’ families – and one way to build this relationship is by providing them with information about how The Little Gym program fits into their lives. “That’s where the value of email marketing comes into play,” reports Gray.

Constant Contact Meets The Little Gym’s Demanding Requirements

According to Gray, the company began searching for an email service provider (ESP) in July 2005. They met with representatives from various ESPs but couldn’t find anyone who could meet their needs.

Because the company wanted to protect its brand and provide consistency to franchise owners, Gray and her team wanted the corporate masthead and the first article in the monthly e-newsletter “locked” – meaning changes could not be made to the brand image.



Partner at a Glance

Company:
The Little Gym International, Inc.

Location: Scottsdale, AZ

Services Provided:
Gymnastics and motor skills
development for children ages
4 months to 12 years

In Business: 30 years

Number of Franchises: 300

More Information:
www.thelittlegym.com

Franchise Partner Since: July 2006

FCConstant Contact Accounts: 250



Constant Contact®
Connect. Inform. Grow.

The Little Gym

To date, almost 75% of The Little Gym owners have signed up for Constant Contact.

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The Little Gym also required their ESP partner to advise them on e-newsletter subject lines each month to help them get newsletters past spam filters.

As easy as it sounds, the ESPs they talked with couldn't lock the masthead or the article – or if they could, the cost was prohibitive.

“We also looked at writing and purchasing our own programs,” laughs Gray. “Did I already say it was a long year?” Both options proved costly, however. “What was funny,” she adds, “is that Constant Contact's competitors compared themselves to Constant Contact—so we started looking more carefully at what Constant Contact offered.”

During this year of research, Constant Contact continued to add functionality—while remaining low on cost—and in the end, proved they could meet The Little Gym's requirements.

Gray did find one company who promised to meet her masthead/article requirement, but they couldn't match Constant Contact on price or experience. “That's when we signed with Constant Contact,” states Gray. “The rest is history.”

Educating The Little Gym Owners about Email Marketing

The company kicked off its partnership with Constant Contact in July 2006 at a conference for franchise owners in Lake Tahoe, California.

A Constant Contact Business Partner representative attended the conference to help Gray and her team launch the email service in a major session. The Constant Contact rep also manned a booth in order to field questions from gym owners and to further demo the product.

“We ended up signing on 60 franchises that week,” says Gray. “Many of our franchise owners couldn't wait to get started.”

To date, almost 75% of The Little Gym owners have signed up for Constant Contact. To further educate those gym owners who haven't signed on—and to remind them they have Constant Contact—Gray sends out a periodic e-newsletter promoting the email service.

Gym owners can also learn more about Constant Contact on The Little Gym's corporate extranet. In a folder labeled “Constant Contact,” owners can find “how to's” for collecting email addresses, article ideas, sample newsletters, and testimonials from other gym owners.

“Constant Contact has a wonderful Business Partner Extranet which complements our own Extranet. While we developed much of our own material, we also direct our franchise owners to Constant Contact's extranet, which includes white papers, guides, email marketing educational material, and testimonials.”



The Little Gym

When The Little Gym announced the Constant Contact partnership at the July conference, Lax couldn't sign up fast enough. The results were dramatic – after sending out his first email that week, Lax registered 22 new members!

Gray's main goal with The Little Gym monthly e-newsletter is to help franchise owners educate their members. "Gym owners' naturally want to focus on selling versus educating members," she says. "In order to help members see the benefits of our program, we require owners to use the main article we provide each month—that article is an education/information piece for the entire company and helps us position ourselves and promote our brand."

Gray has realized her goal of having 75% of gym owners using Constant Contact. Those who haven't yet signed on either lack a list of email addresses or haven't yet had the time to fully explore the use of e-newsletters.

Email Marketing—Part of National Branding and Advertising Campaign

Constant Contact is one part of an overall marketing program The Little Gym conducts for its franchisees. The company builds a branded website for each franchise, conducts pay-per-click campaigns, uses print, television, and online advertising to get their message out.

Gym owners have access to information for all programs via the corporate extranet and information found in Gray's e-newsletter. The company also pays for the newsletter template each month—franchisees pay only a low monthly fee to use Constant Contact.

New York Franchisee Sees Instant Results with Constant Contact

"I made it a point, from day one, to get people's email address when they called inquiring about programs," reports Ythan Lax, an owner of two The Little Gym franchises, one in Perinton-Pittsford, New York and the other in Greece, New York. "In fact, I have a note taped to the phone that says, 'What is your email address?' to remind my staff to ask this question!"

An experienced corporate communicator in his past life, Lax knew the value of keeping in contact with prospects, members, and the media and pushed hard for a corporate email marketing program for franchise owners—especially since he was sending out hundreds of emails using Microsoft® Outlook.

"Oh! That was bad!" he says. Lax's server would shut down if he sent out more than 150 emails at a time. To prevent this, he typed his email addresses into a Microsoft® Word document, with the names segmented into blocks of 30 each.



The Little Gym

*“On the strength of this email alone, I had 27 people open the message by 9:00 a.m. When I came into work Monday morning, I had five sign-ups for the camp already.”
By the end of the two-week priority enrollment period, 277 members clicked on the schedule link and 239 had enrolled*

“I would cut and paste a block of names into the “bcc” field of Outlook. When I reached 150 names, I’d hit ‘send’ and then go have a cup of coffee or something. I had to wait 20 or so minutes before I could send the next batch,” he laughs. It ended up taking him over one and a half hours to send one email message to his list.

When The Little Gym announced the Constant Contact partnership at the July conference, Lax couldn’t sign up fast enough. In fact, he registered on the spot and was “ready to go” by the time he arrived back in New York a few days later. The results were dramatic – after sending out his first email that week, Lax registered 22 new members!

Lax sends a monthly e-newsletter to his members that includes the article provided by The Little Gym, as well as information on his in-store activities—holiday camps, parent/child programs, and birthday parties. Lax has found that sending the newsletter has made a great impact on his enrollment numbers, especially priority enrollments (available to members 8 to 10 weeks in advance of “walk-in” customers).

Lax recently sent out a newsletter about a holiday camp on a Saturday night. He uploaded the flyer of the upcoming holiday camp to his website, included a link to it in his newsletter and then sent it to members of both locations.

“I had yet to announce the camp in class or anywhere else,” he stated. “On the strength of this email alone, I had 27 people at my Perinton-Pittsford location open the message by 9:00 a.m. Sunday morning and 23 people open it from the Greece location. When I came into work Monday morning, I had five sign-ups for the camp already.”

By the end of the two-week priority enrollment period, 277 members from his Perinton-Pittsford location clicked on the schedule link and 239 had enrolled. At the Greece location, 99 members clicked on the link and 97 enrolled!

“This is really significant,” says Lax, “because my Greece gym is new and not all of my members understand ‘priority enrollment’ yet. At Perinton-Pittsford they do because I have 700 members – Priority enrollment is essential for ensuring they reserve class space.”

Sums up Lax, “Constant Contact and The Little Gym are perfect partners. The Little Gym is a first class act all the way. We don’t use cheesy, photocopied flyers—everything is professionally designed and printed, from in-store announcements to placards. With Constant Contact I can send a professionally designed e-newsletter that gets real results for my business. Plus, it now takes me only minutes to send something out!”