

10 BILLION DOLLARS WORTH OF FREE ADVERTISING

By Chuck Ford, Co-Owner of Gymnastics Training Center of Simsbury and Owner of Innovative Inflatables

What would you say if I told you that gym club owners could use over 10 BILLION DOLLARS worth of advertisements to help promote your classes and birthday parties? No! I'm not crazy, just a little mad that I didn't see this sooner.

Let me educate you to some facts that I recently learned. Check your knowledge of what is important to your clients by answering the following questions. You'll find the answers in the paragraphs that follow.

Question 1: What is the number one licensed character in America?

Question 2: How much income did this character generate last year?

Question 3: What is the total amount spent on the top 10 licensed products last year?

Question 4: Who is the reigning pop phenomenon?

Question 5: What is the number 1 "PRESCHOOL" show?

If you've ever been to Disney, you can't help but notice how many stores sell Disney licensed products. Who has been able to leave Disney without buying something, not just for your kids but for everyone else you know? Companies like Disney, Nickelodeon, Marvel, Comic, Universal, Looney Tunes and 20th Century Fox spend billions of dollars on advertising their products and consumers like us spend billions of dollars buying their products. Last year the top 10 licensed products brought in over 10 billion dollars in revenue with the number 1 licensed product being Winnie the Pooh with 2.2 billion dollars in sales. Now that's a lot of Honey!

So what, you say! How does that help me? Right now it doesn't, but read on and you just may figure it out.

In the sport of gymnastics, we spend a lot of time trying to remain current on the latest techniques in training our gymnasts. It is only recently, however, that we have started to spend time trying to learn the business end of our industry and almost no time has been spent on understanding the current trends of our clients. Most of what we do in our preschool classes is outdated and irrelevant to our students. Oh sure, we do our little theme weeks but are they really exciting for our students? When was the last time you watched a Saturday morning cartoon show? Unless you have young kids, you wouldn't know that Sponge Bob Squarepants is the most watched animated series in the history of television. Or that he has 54.4 million viewers per month and 25% of them are adults. Do you even know who "Dora the Explorer" is? She happens to be the number 1 preschool show

with her own live tour. Have you ever watched these shows to see what your students are learning? How then are you able to relate your lessons to your students?

So! Have you figured out some of the ways you can use this 10 billion dollars of advertising to your advantage? Well, here are some ideas that will help you promote your programs and get a small piece of that revenue pie.



1 .Try and stay relevant to your students by incorporating themes they enjoy into your program. How about a "Dora the Explorer" lesson plan! Make the entire class one big adventure and throw in a coloring page.

2 .Did you know that Sponge Bob is coming out with a movie next year? Take advantage of the millions of dollars being spent on promotions by getting him involved in your lessons. After all, he does have square pants that can only help with square hips. How about a Sponge Bob lunge or split. With all of the creative individuals in our industry, we should have no problem getting "Bob" and his friends involved in our program. Think about it. When the movie comes out have a "Sponge Bob" play day, with a "make your own Sponge Bob" as a craft. Add in some inflatables, trampolines, games, and his new movie and you have a winner.

3 .Develop more themes built around some of the characters your students love. Winnie, Mickey, Spiderman, Nimo, Rugrats, Jimmy Neutron, Lilo & Stitch and many others. Have coloring contests and give out theme prizes.

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4 .Offer theme paper products to your birthday parties and a theme inflatable when possible. Birthday party products can be purchased on line and you can even make a profit selling these items to your clients. You can find everything from "Finding Nimo" hats to "Disney Princess" goody bags.

5 .Last, but by no means least, know what your students are watching. You can use many of the lessons from movies like "Finding Nimo" or "Monsters Inc." to relate to your students. Have you seen "Finding Nimo"? I have and it had a great lesson for both parent and child. How many of us have parents afraid to let go of their child for fear of their child getting hurt. There is a time as a parent you have to let go and as a child you have to explore.

Take the time to make your programs relevant and fun and you will insure a happy clientele who can't wait until next week's class. It also wouldn't hurt if you learned Sponge Bob's theme song! All together now-- Oh!! Who lives in a pineapple under the sea? SPONGE BOB SQUAREPANTS ...

To hear more about this topic, attend Congress 2004 in Anaheim, June 24-26. Chuck Ford will give a lecture presentation on *10 Billion Dollars Worth of FREE Advertising* and explore this topic in more depth. ■

