



The Uniquely Abled Academy® Replication Guide

Element 3: Recruiting, Assessing and Selecting Students, Marketing & Communications

Element 3.2 - Marketing and Public Relations for the UAA

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This section is oriented to marketing and PR for a UAA itself, as opposed to recruiting students and marketing and PR for a particular cohort, which is covered in Element 3.3. It is recommended that marketing and PR for a UAA be a continual year-round activity.

See:

[Exhibit 3.11 - Recruiting UAA Students - Edited Transcript](#)

[Exhibit 3.12 - Guide for Attracting A Diverse Population](#)

1. Marketing and PR

Marketing is “the action or business of promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising”.

Public Relations is “the professional maintenance of a favorable public image by a company or other organization.”

The purpose of marketing is to have people be favorably disposed to the products and services of the organization, and the purpose of PR is to have people be favorably disposed to the organization itself.

The Uniquely Abled Project™ (UAP) plans a Marketing and PR system which can help individual UA Academies. In addition to general information about the UAP, each Uniquely Abled Academy should consider having a webpage and/or a link to a webpage about the UAA on the UAP website.

A multi-pronged approach to marketing and public relations is recommended. The purpose of these efforts is to increase public awareness and acceptance about the capabilities of people with autism via the success of the program and its students, and the positive impact on the students’ lives and employment prospects. Additionally, use marketing and public relations efforts to build the credibility and familiarity of the Uniquely Abled Academy “brand” to gain a committed following of interested parties, including parents, potential employers, and potential sponsors and donors.



The components of a marketing and public relations effort can include such elements as:

- A press kit
- A DVD about the program.
- Presentations designed to gain rational and emotional “buy in.”
- Tours and Open houses that enable visitors to see the program and its positive impact.

For a new program, it may be difficult to get exposure through traditional media and it can be quite expensive. Some ways to create exposure, include:

- Establishing a presence on the web and personal contacts are important in being able to attract the interest and attention of national and local newspapers, television and radio stations.
- Press releases can be utilized throughout the year in support of the aforementioned goals and fundraising goals.
- Featuring twice monthly newsworthy events focused on student achievements and activities, the releases are sent via the internet to hundreds of media outlets for publication.
- Utilizing the PR function is helpful in raising awareness about the Uniquely Abled Academy to potential donors, employers and potential students.

Traditional media, i.e., newspapers and other periodicals, should not be ignored. We have found a Uniquely Abled Academy is a desirable topic for a local newspaper.¹ Examples to do so include:

- Invite local media to Open Houses and other UAA activities.
- Send out articles on the accomplishments of the uniquely abled (see the UAP website for available articles), articles about successful employment, and quotes from employers and employees.
- Develop a pitch, a theme – it’s all about headlines.

The general marketing efforts, especially in general publications like the Los Angeles Times, should also be designed to attract employers. Appeals to employers can also be included in special needs publications.

UAA students and successful graduates, who in turn share about their experiences within their own social circle, can be major forces for spreading the word and having the UAA be well-known.

Using social media and web-based public relations has the advantage of being more interactive, readily available to anyone with a computer and/or smart phone, and

¹ “GCC’s new program for adults with autism matches potential with skills” by Kelly Corrigan
<http://www.latimes.com/socal/glendale-news-press/news/tn-gnp-gccs-new-program-for-adults-with-autism-matches-potential-with-skills-20160507-story.html>



affordable. Typically, the Uniquely Abled Academy's website can be an important means of education about the program and the accomplishments of the students and graduates. It is important to maintain it regularly to keep it fresh and of the highest quality with connectivity to Pay Pal for donations, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and others.

While building and enhancing the Uniquely Abled Academy's brand is a huge and ongoing effort, approach it with long-term results in mind. It takes years of persistent effort to create a presence in media, and in the minds of the public. New programs must balance their needs in this area with the need for efficiency to make the best use of a limited budget in their initial years.

Web-based public relations, local journalists, public service announcements, human interest stories, functions within the industry, and family get-togethers begin this process, as well as having an ongoing important place in creating the "face" of the Uniquely Abled Academy. Sustained success in this area over the long term is dependent on continuing, persistent, and diversified efforts conveying fresh, positive perspectives by telling personally compelling, dynamic stories that create lasting interest and excitement in the general public, the entertainment and autism communities.

Work with the UAP's Communications and Outreach Coordinator to have stories about UAA trainees and graduates included in the periodic UAP communications, such as the UAP Newsletter and social media.

2. Establish connections with high schools and local school districts

High schools are increasingly having programs for their uniquely abled students. Connections may include:

- Presentations at the high school on manufacturing, CNC operation, and the UAA
- A small program: e.g., 1/day a week. Possibly dual enrollment in high school and community college. An issue may be that the instructor may need to be qualified to teach in both institutions.
- Speaking opportunities at professional development conferences, link to the professionals of local high school district.
- Establish relationship with district personnel who are accountable for special needs population, e.g., Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) organizations in California.
- High schools – public and private



It may also be possible to offer a mini program to high schools, e.g., 1 day per week. The program would teach CNC programming, etc. to generate interest and to help students determine if the career is for them.

3. Memberships in local business associations

Consider joining, attending, and/or building relationships with local business associations, e.g., Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Corporations, and NTMA (National Tooling and Machinery Association). Seek to publish articles in their newsletters and make presentations.