

Promoting Languages at your School

How to make a case for Languages to students, parents, and school leaders



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1. Introduction - Why promoting Languages is necessary

Working as a language teacher is, arguably, an ongoing exercise in marketing and selling. After students have completed the compulsory years of learning a language, it becomes necessary for us to more actively reach out and “sell” our courses to them. Course selection is, in a sense, a competitive marketplace where our “product” is vying with others for students’ consideration. Without a plan to retain more of our students, we risk at best a tiny upper-level class, and at worst a dying off of elements of our programme. Looking at language programme retention as an exercise in marketing allows us to tackle the problem from a different perspective. As creative teachers, we work daily to develop exciting and innovative activities for our students. We believe in our ability to deliver, and we believe in the value of continuing our programmes. In short, we believe in our “product”. Without promotion and marketing, however, even the best product will not succeed.

Marketing is an essential part of increasing our numbers and strengthening our programme. Without marketing and promotion, programmes get lost in all the choices students have to make. At some schools, specialised or with extensive options, we must be even more competitive in order to attract students. Without a plan to “sell” our programme, we will see our class sizes steadily decrease at upper levels. In this booklet, we have gathered ideas on how to apply simple marketing techniques to the idea of retaining students in language programmes. I hope these ideas and resources will inspire you and help you to develop your own plan. We have included space for notes and reflection, and a template for your final version.

2. Elements of a good 'marketing' plan



There are many aspects of your plan to consider as you decide how to market your programme. The most important aspect, and a logical beginning, is to know your audience. Who are you “selling” to? In the case of a language programme, there are three separate audiences to think about. The most obvious one is the students. However, we must also make our programme known to parents, as their support is crucial as we develop. Lastly, we must “sell” our programme to our colleagues and school leaders, whose support and resources we will require. These three groups require different approaches, which are outlined in later sections of this booklet.

A marketing plan can include as many or as few elements as you are prepared to develop. Some are more easily implemented than others. As we have worked to market our own programmes, we have relied on the following:

- **online presence** – an easy reference point for enquiries, easy to refer people to, and a way to keep everyone up to date;
- **literature** – pamphlets and information sheets for distribution at parents’ evenings and events;
- **visibility** – displays, participation in assemblies and school events, submissions in the school newspaper, contests and class presentations at lunchtime;
- **word of mouth** – recruiting key personnel (i.e. career adviser, librarian...) to promote programmes with students.

Each element is adapted for various audiences. On the following pages, we’ve offered examples and suggestions for each area.

Online presence

Many of us are overwhelmed by the idea of creating a website. There are several tools and resources available to help you in this project, from software that can be purchased to free online tools. Hosting the site can be done through your own Internet Service Provider, and some local authorities offer hosting and development resources to teachers. If all else fails, find a student to develop a site for you, or ask your IT technician for help. It is a fantastic marketing tool and worth the time and effort. Even if you are uncomfortable with technology, it is possible for you to create a site for your department. Alternatively, or in addition, you may want to consider having an account on a social media platform.

Things to consider:

- Purchase a domain name that is easy to remember, such as www.frenchatyourschoolname.com. You can check to see if names are available and complete your purchase online.
- Make your site simple to navigate. Have a separate page for each course taught. It may be a good idea to link the course pages to pages just for students, where they can find copies of handouts from class.
- Include a way for parents and others to send you a question or a message. You can simply list an e-mail address, or include a link or a form for receiving messages. Make sure this part of your site is linked to every other page of the website.
- Create an account on a social media platform where you can keep students and parents up to date with the homework set, revision tips, fun content in the target language and more.