

BLACK BELT **MARKETING**

MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

The Upside of a Mixed Martial Arts Program: Attract a Better Student Clientele That Pays On Time

When I introduced a mixed martial arts program at my school, I discovered that its greatest benefit was the exceptional qualities of the prospective students that inquired about my program. Initially, that was my biggest concern: If I offered MMA or grappling, then what kind of prospects would I attract and would their values match mine? Once I started marketing, most of my inquiries were from polite, respectful people; and those that became students were professionals with good careers.

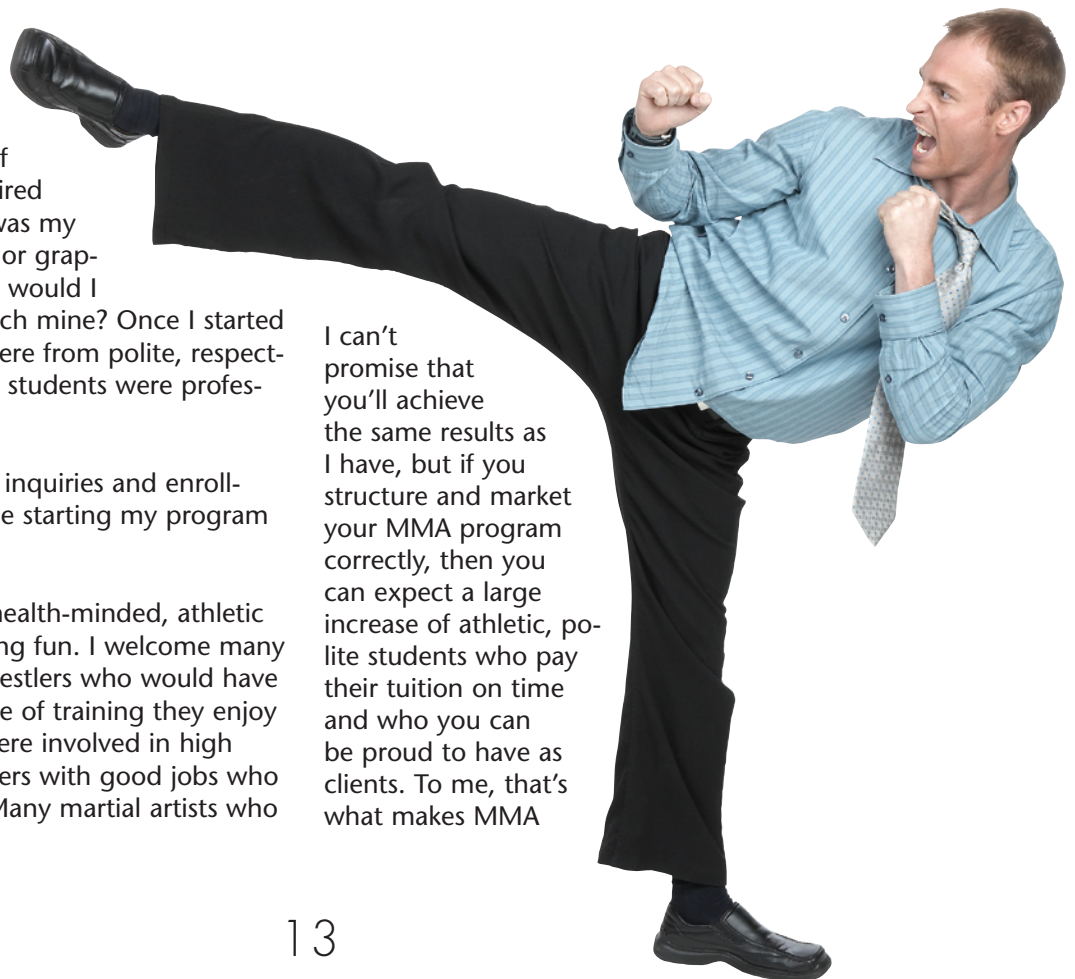
That trend continues today, as my inquiries and enrollments have increased six-fold, since starting my program in July 2006.

My MMA program attracts more health-minded, athletic clients who want to learn something fun. I welcome many former high school and college wrestlers who would have nowhere else to go to find the type of training they enjoy at my school. Most people who were involved in high school or college sports are achievers with good jobs who can pay, and I'm okay with that! Many martial artists who

previously trained in other striking styles, but want to learn something new, have also enrolled in my MMA classes.

Approximately 70% of my new inquiries have previous athletic experience. I find this rather amazing because I have not had a single person with a bad attitude, as I expected. None of my MMA students want to climb into the ring and compete, however. Some compete in some very well run jiu-jitsu tournaments, and that's it. If any of my students decided to compete in MMA, then I would certainly be there to train and coach them.

I can't promise that you'll achieve the same results as I have, but if you structure and market your MMA program correctly, then you can expect a large increase of athletic, polite students who pay their tuition on time and who you can be proud to have as clients. To me, that's what makes MMA



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such a beneficial, alternative profit center for many martial arts schools.

Mixed Martial Arts Is Here To Stay

Years ago, as a young instructor, I watched my first mixed martial arts competition on TV. The host organization (UFC) pitted style against style in a full-contact competition with very few rules, including no weight classes. Being an accomplished striker, I was very curious to see which style would dominate. After watching this incredibly graphic display of fighting, I remember thinking how much better certain fighters would have been had they possessed some of the skills exhibited by other fighters in the competition. It seemed as if they all had some weaknesses, due to mastering only one style, thus limiting their fighting skills and their competitive edge.

As MMA continued to expand, the competitions drew even tougher martial arts fighters as well as street fighters. This resulted in two significant facts about the sport at that time. First, the fights became bloodier and much more dangerous. Second, many politicians, lawmakers and the concerned public were gathering support to stop the competitions, due to what they felt was overly graphic violence. Cable and pay-per-view television networks were also shying away from relationships with the fight circuit.

Fast forward several years and this embattled, formerly fighting-against-overwhelming-odds sport is now one of the biggest in America—and still gaining in popularity! How can this be? After all, government regulators tried to ban it and TV networks distanced themselves from broadcasting it. What changed were a new open-mindedness, a willingness to adapt, determination and exceptional creative networking, which are essential qualities of any business or organization that wants growth and longevity.

UFC became open-minded and listened to those who credibly wanted regulation of the sport or have it banned. UFC management paid close attention to this criticism and adapted to this new reality by creating safety rules for the fighters. They also had the sport sanctioned by the Nevada State Athletic Commission, which resulted in many other states following suit. Through determination

and creative networking, UFC made solid agreements with a major cable TV network and pay-per-view outlets to create reality TV shows about the sport.



Studies show mixed martial arts is the #1 sport for men, 18 to 34 years of age, and is overtaking other mainstream sports rapidly. What an incredible success story! What a positive evolution for our industry! Some of you may be wondering how MMA became popular so quickly, since you don't teach mixed martial arts. Open your eyes and your minds, people! Not since the release of the movies, *Enter the Dragon* and *The Karate Kid*, has the public been so overwhelmingly exposed to the positive message of the martial arts. Think about it. MMA is big, and it looks as if it's here to stay. The sport is called mixed MARTIAL ARTS! Don't you teach martial arts? Something very positive is happening in our industry. Evolve with it now, and you can take advantage of its many opportunities before your competitors.

Be Proactive and the Popularity of MMA Could Benefit You and Your School

Allow me to share with you the effect MMA has had on me; and how I am using it to create the martial arts school of my dreams. First, I am a big fan of Bruce Lee, as I am sure many of you are. Didn't Bruce Lee believe in taking the best of all fighting disciplines to develop martial artists with a complete fighting ability? That is the heart of mixed martial arts. That is why I invite martial artists of one style to adapt and enjoy the benefits of mixed martial arts' exploding popularity.

My path to benefiting from the teaching of mixed martial arts began when I formally opened a stand-alone school in 2003. I had been offering eclectic karate and fitness kickboxing and was attracting a larger fitness base than martial arts. I love fitness, but I love the arts more, so I flip-flopped my market in 2005. I wanted to follow this strategy because I enjoy teaching to hardcore martial artists who want to learn and because the lifetime value of a martial artist is greater than a fitness member. Flip-flopping my market was challenging, due to fairly strong competition and the hard work needed to penetrate the market with my new unique selling feature. My martial arts student base grew slowly during 2005 and the first quarter of 2006; and then the market started sending me signals of what I should do.

I began to receive inquiries from prospective students who wanted me to teach them striking to complement their grappling skills, which I was eager to do because these were the serious clients I wanted. I then started receiving more and more inquiries about grappling and mixed martial arts. Next, grapplers came to the school, asking to rent mat time because their jiu-jitsu school was a good distance away. I declined those offers because I wasn't interested in allowing grapplers I didn't know to use my facilities to practice skills that I wasn't qualified to supervise.

Almost all of those grapplers were training with Eduardo de Lima, who owns Gracie Barra Tampa, a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu academy in Clearwater, Florida. As I mentioned above, this was when I started to notice that those people

who were inquiring about these types of programs were all very polite, courteous and seemed to be well educated. That's my kind of student! I also quickly noticed that I was receiving constant inquiries about a program that I was not even marketing or offering. It was time for action!

My best friend, Kevin Walker of the Project Action Foundation, had been training with Mr. de Lima for years, so I called Kevin and asked him about Mr. de Lima and his jiu-jitsu training. Kevin gave me rave reviews of Mr. de Lima and the sport, so I called Mr. de Lima to schedule a meeting. His school and mine are not geographically competitive, so why not? We had a great meeting, which resulted in a win-win situation. He teaches one class a week at my school and is compensated on a percentage basis. I now offer mixed martial arts, karate, Gracie Barra Brazilian jiu-jitsu and kickboxing.

A Small Change in Your Class Offerings Can Make a Big Change in Your Revenues

The changes I made in the classes I offer were easy and didn't really change my school that much—BUT they did make a big change in my enrollments and revenues. My eclectic karate program covers virtually any type of effective striking imaginable, from stand-up to ground striking. My sparring style is continuous kickboxing, so



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my school is more than equipped to instruct striking for MMA. The only classes that I had to add for this program was a class called "MMA Striking A-Z" on Wednesdays, which is open to our MMA students and Black Belt Club only. I also added a Gracie Jiu-Jitsu class on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

I also allow my MMA students to attend my sparring class now open to Black Belt Club and Mixed Martial Arts students. In a nutshell, I added one class to the schedule that my instructors are responsible for teaching and two that Mr. de Lima and another jiu-jitsu instructor teach. This caused no disruption to my current operation and is attracting the most active enrollment market I have seen since my teaching career began. The tuition for my MMA program is one and a half times my Karate program and only requires teaching two striking type classes; and one of them already existed. The rest of my operation remains the same.

A quick marketing tip: Many martial arts marketing experts recommend that your ads and other marketing materials should not contain descriptions of your rank, style, fighting record, etc. The public doesn't understand what any of that means and how it benefits them. In other words, promote the benefits of martial arts to the public instead of your ego. I have discovered, however, that marketing mixed martial arts works better when you do describe the professional credentials of the experts who will be teaching the classes. Students who want to learn grappling want to be taught by a grappling expert.



If you are a striker, then open your mind, adapt and connect with a grappling instructor. If you are a grappler, then connect with a striking instructor. If you already have both, then you should already be going for it! If you are a traditional striking stylist and need information about freeform striking, then there is much information produced by NAPMA and other sources to help you sharpen your kickboxing and free-form striking skills. NAPMA members have been receiving the exclusive "Edge Mixed Martial Arts" free on the monthly *NAPMA Innovations DVD*. That program is now available in three-lesson packages from the NAPMA Pro Shop. The packages include video instruction, printed curriculum outlines and a number of complete marketing programs. Other NAPMA representatives and I are available to answer your questions and coach you through the introduction of this very popular program.

Conclusion

If you are a striking-arts school, as most are, then please realize that you have skills valuable to the rapidly growing mixed martial arts market. This sport is probably here to stay and is a positive milestone for our industry. There is much to learn from UFC and especially its evolution with MMA. If you take advantage of this opportunity and start now with a concept of open-mindedness, a willingness to adapt, determination and exceptional creative networking, then you can also introduce mixed martial arts into your school and benefit financially. I would like to thank Dana White, president of UFC, for putting our industry back in the spotlight, in an enduring way.

NAPMA member Phil Beatty owns and operates Elite Training Center™ in St. Petersburg, Florida. He is a 3rd-Degree Black Belt in Freestyle Karate, a Level III F.A.S.T. Defense Instructor, and a Combat Sports and Conditioning Coach. He is also an All Children's Hospital KidShapers™ fitness and goal attainment coach. Mr. Beatty is also the creator of the instructor DVD series, MMA Striking A-Z. He can be reached NAPMA at 1-800-973-6734, or at Elite Training Center at 727-576-2100 or by email at pbeatty@napma.com.