

# BLACK BELT PROMOTIONS

PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE OWNER AND INSTRUCTOR

## Birthday Parties As Lead Generators

By Manny Cabrera II



Birthday parties are a favorite activity at many martial arts schools. They are opportunities to build relationships, improve retention and simply have fun. Many schools view birthday parties as one-at-a-time, income-generating events.

Utilizing birthday parties in this manner can be difficult because you must compete with Chuck-e-Cheese™, the local water park or skating rink or similar businesses that cater to the children's birthday market, even though a birthday party at a martial arts school does offer some attractive elements.

We've taken a different approach at our school, however. We've developed birthday parties as excellent lead gen-

erators, which often provide us with 50 to 100 new leads from one event.

We schedule one large party on the first weekend of the month for all students with birthdays during that month—and it's free! (We do charge for private birthday parties.) Because our party is free, we can compete with the specialty pizza restaurants, skating rink, etc.

Each student with a birthday during the month may invite as many as 20 of his or her friends. Each student provides us with a list of the friends' names, addresses and phone numbers, so WE send them an invitation to the party. Parents of the birthday boy or girl appreciate this because it makes less work for them.

The math is rather simple: Five students with birthdays can result in 50 to 100 guests or leads.

To be competitive and convert as many of those leads into new students, your birthday party must be awesome! It must be complete with balloons, decorations, pizza, beverages, and, of course, plenty of martial arts entertainment. We provide all of this at our expense because we know that enrolling just one new student is worth the cost of the party.

More math:

- 30 leads generates 10 appointments, resulting in five enrollments
- One student = \$1,300 per year X 5 new enrollments = \$6,500 in added tuition

### Suggested Activities for Your Birthday Parties

Once most of the guests arrive, ask the children to sit in the middle of the floor. Show them how to sit like a Black Belt (back straight, eyes on the instructor, legs crossed, etc.).

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Introduce yourself and tell them how glad you are to meet them. Thank them for coming to your special event, which is the birthday party for the students with birthdays that month.

Announce the name of each birthday boy or girl, so they feel special and that everyone is there to celebrate their birthdays. Ask the birthday boys and girls to come to the front of the group and tie a Black Belt on each of them, declaring that they will be special honorary Black Belt helpers during the party. Take the opportunity to explain the significance of Black Belt, why these students are working so hard to achieve it, etc. Ask the birthday boys and girls to explain in their words why a Black Belt is so important.

Explain why the martial arts is a very good activity for children and adults. Emphasize that they will have plenty of fun during the party and opportunities to learn some martial arts, if they listen to the instructor and try to do their best.

Organize and start your first game or activity. We usually play martial arts dodge ball. All the students and guests stand in front of one wall and instructors and maybe a parent throw a soft-foam ball at the children. They must assume a guard stance and use side-to-side footwork to avoid the ball. Our next activity is learning some martial arts moves. We teach them a basic punch and side kick. We let them hit pads or similar training devices to experience the feel of a punch and kick. During the big finish of the martial arts lesson, each birthday boy and girl breaks a board, using the side kick. All of their friends and family sign their boards as a memento of the occasion.

Following the last activity, we serve pizza and beverages, present the cake and distribute the birthday presents. We purposely divide the guests into separate groups, according to which student invited them, to receive and open presents. This reduces confusion and makes sure that no one's feelings are hurt. We emphasize that everyone should show respect and appreciation for each gift. We receive regular compliments from parents about the respect and orderliness during the opening of presents. They have commented that that is one of the primary reasons they allow their children to attend the party.

At the end of the party, we thank everyone for participating, retrieve the Black Belts from the birthday boys and girls and give everyone a special gift. We explain our special enrollment offer and distribute a guest pass or other materials that explain our school, its programs and the benefits of martial arts training.



We send all guests a Thank-You card the following Monday, which reiterates the special enrollment. Make sure you send a Thank-You card to the birthday boy and girls' brothers and sisters, as well. We then call each guest on the following Thursday, assuming that they're ready to set an appointment and take advantage of your offer. Create a database of your lead activity and follow-up your leads continuously.

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