



Professional Billiard Instructors Association Marketing Guide

Advice, suggestions, and ideas to help PBIA Instructors succeed

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Introduction

The PBIA Committee is providing this information guide to help individual instructors promote your services and gain new students. Use this information to help establish yourself as an individual who provides quality instruction, coaching, training, and general education about table billiards.

To help you gain a positive reputation for yourself as a PBIA instructor, the committee recommends that you know and understand:

- Game rules. Be familiar with official rules (regional, different leagues, and world standard) for all common games. This will include 9 Ball, 8 Ball, Straight 14-1, One Pocket, plus regionally popular games. PBIA also recommends you pass a basic referee's certification.
- How to analyze videos of students and point out areas that need improvement. Know the different angles from which to video tape the student.
- History. You should have some knowledge of the recent history of table billiards (at least back to the 1950's). Know the names of the various historical players and some information on their stories.
- Table and ball physics and geometry. Be knowledgeable about rail angles (affects of speed and spin), transfer of energy between balls, aiming techniques (at least two), cue ball draw and follow, ball control, etc.
- Physical fundamentals. Know about body positioning of feet, bridge, stick arm, elbow, balance, head, stroke, etc. Also be familiar with proper stroking and the various bridges.
- Playing concepts. Understand the basics of table analysis, position play, safety tactics, etc.
- Teaching basics. Be able to explain concepts with and without aids. Adjust the information presentation to fit the student's ability to understand (do not teach advanced material to a beginning player).
- How to develop teaching materials for your students including drills and practice techniques.



About marketing

Marketing yourself is necessary in order for you to gain students. As more and more individuals learn the benefits of your direct intervention into their playing career, your reputation as a teacher will improve. Few people, on their own, will actively seek out your services. Most of them need to be sold on the value you can provide, including improvements of skills and abilities.

Marketing is getting your name and services known to your target audience. As a PBIA Instructor, you want to promote your ability to help others improve, one on one and in small classes. Your overall target audience is all those who play pool. Promote your service by featuring your PBIA Instructor accreditation. Download and actively use the PBIA logo on your marketing and instructional materials.

People need to be convinced they will benefit from the information you provide. The promotional material will make them familiar with you, but it will take one-on-one salesmanship to convince them to become a real live student.

Your services

The very first thing to get started is to define the specific services you can provide. When first starting out, you will not be able to coach top players. Like all activities you have ever mastered, you have to start small and grow into mastery. Start with those still learning the fundamentals. As your reputation develops, players with intermediate skills will come to you.

When you first begin, work with individuals on a one-on-one basis. These students will probably be beginners who need a proper grounding in stance and stroke. As you gain experience in teaching and your students are satisfied with their progress, they will come back for lessons in specific skills and training at the intermediate level.

With several dozen hours of working with beginners, expand into offering small classes (up to four) that work on a set of skills. You will need a lesson plan for the each class which should include:

- An outline of the techniques and concepts to be presented.
- List of drills you will present.
- Handouts to be given to the student.

MS PowerPoint (or a similar presentation application) is excellent for creating both student handouts and teacher's notes (your talking points).

As you become more and more comfortable as an educator and instructor, you will work with individuals on helping them overcome specific problems. You will be focusing on resolving specific weaknesses. You will also be guiding the student's knowledge and understanding of tactics and strategies.

Your ability to work with students will depend heavily on your matching or exceeding their skill levels. You don't have to be superior, but you do have to be wiser. At whatever level, you need to specifically identify what services you are comfortable in delivering.

Document these services in detail. For example, if you are teaching a beginner – identify and write down the fundamentals needed to ensure the student learns. This will include body positioning basics, alignment basics, and aiming basics. Techniques will include using the aiming, kicking, banking, etc.

Determine the order in which you present the details. This will become a checklist to be used when working with a new student. By documenting your teaching processes and procedures, this material also becomes source material for your marketing plan. It also helps define who your target audience will be.

Do this for every type of teaching situation that you expect to encounter (i.e., teaching individual skills such as playing different types of difficult shots; controlling the cue ball with draw, follow and side spin; etc.). Write down what you will teach and how you will present the material. You can even take these details and present a new student with a learning schedule.

Your market audience

Ultimately, the people to whom you want to reach could be everyone in your community who plays pool at least several times a year. But also be practical. If a person doesn't want to learn, you are not going to convince him to spend his time or money with you. And don't waste your time with that population of people who play **only when adult beverages are consumed**.

To get started, break up the general market into individual market segments. These are separate groups of people who play regularly within a certain venue. Include places up to 20 miles around your home. Here is a short list:

- Pool halls
- Fraternal organizations (Elk, Moose, Optimists, Eagles, etc.)
- College student unions
- Senior centers
- Home table owners
- Bars (with league teams)

Any place that contains at least one table will have individuals who use it regularly. These are the individuals who are your target audience. Further divide the players into beginners, intermediates

and advanced players. Until you are established, almost all of your students will come from the beginners. The intermediate players will become interested when you have established a reputation.



Free or fee?

Giving a handful of free lessons can be acceptable if you only do so once in a while. It is better to offer lessons at a lowered rate, i.e., \$10/hour, than to give away lessons – even to family relations. People will place a certain value on your instructions based on its cost to them. If they get it free, you may actually hurt their playing career. After all, it can't be worth much, so there can't be any reason to practice what they learned. If there is some cost, the student tends to pay more attention.

The only time to consider giving free lessons is for the purposes of practicing your teaching techniques. Let your students know ahead of time this is the reason you are doing this. If they do find value, they know that the next time it will cost them something.

You might consider donating a multi-hour lesson package as a raffle or bidding item in a social or church event. This would give you some free publicity and public relations benefits. You can even value it as a top dollar donation (i.e., \$35/hour or more) to make it more valuable to the recipient.

Except for these two circumstances, at a minimum, charge at least \$10 to \$15 an hour for your time. Once people spread the word that your instructional guidance creates miracles of improved performance, gradually increase your rates to whatever the market will bear.



Promotional material

There are a number of means by which you can promote your services using printed materials.

Business cards

At the very least, you need a business card devoted strictly to your services as a table billiards instructor. The card appearance and design creates an impression of your abilities. At the least, it should not look bad.

Business cards are your handy promotion piece and a mini-flyer about your services. To those who are interested, they will carefully save the card. It costs only a little more to have a card printed on both sides. You might as well do so. If you are printing your own cards on an ink jet printer, print off a few at a time and as needed.

With a home color printer, you can create and print your own business cards using freeware software and business card stock (at office supply stores). There are a number of online printing services that use a business card wizard. Cards can be printed in color, with pictures, graphics, and formats from a number of pre-designed templates. You can order black & white, 1-color, 2-color, and full color process. Cards can be printed one sided, two sided, and even folded business cards (printed front, back, and inside).

If none of the business card templates in the software or from online services meet your expectations and you want something more sophisticated, use the services of a graphic designer. Because of the extra service, this can be very expensive. (This alternative should be considered only if the person has impressive examples that prove his skill – AND – is willing to take lessons in exchange for his services. Otherwise, use pre-designed templates. Printing on both sides requires more than a little thought. At the least, include the following:

FRONT

- Name (include nickname only if you are well-known)
- Title (BCA Instructor)
- Phone number

- Email address
- Web site URL (if you have it)
- Mailing/home address (optional)
- BCA logo

BACK

- Personal quote – if you have one (something pool or learning related)
- Services bullet points – one-on-one, classes, specialties
- Benefits bullet points - Improve, develop, master, control, etc.
- Email and phone number

Flyers

It is a good idea to create a basic flyer layout in three different sizes. This can be done on a computer using a variety of applications. The fliers can be created, and then printed out on a personal printer or taken to a copier/printer business to be printed:

- Quarter page (4-1/2" x 5-1/2") – personal hand-outs, by cash registers, etc. (2-sided)
- 8-1/2" x 11" - place on walls and leave on tables.
- 11" x 17" - wall posters.

The design should be simple with lots of white space. Use bright colors. Make the headlines large and easy to see. Include contact details. Do not provide too many details. The purpose is to get people to do something - so tell the reader to do something – show up, call you, etc.

Common elements in each size should be some graphic(s) related to pool, your name, instructor title, and contact information. You want it to be attractive so that the people look at it and a simple message can announce an activity (class or demonstration), or provide information about benefits.

The message in the flyers must be direct and immediate. Use a little hyperbole – such as, “Win at pool – a lot!”, “Teach your grandkids how to lose”, “Become a dangerous player”, or other straight forward message that can reach to them. Tailor the message to the audience.

Placement of these fliers is important. You want the maximum number of people to see it who will be interested in the information. If a program announces a class at a fraternal organization, you want 11x17 fliers mounted in the pool room, 8.5x11 fliers in the bar, and (if possible), quarter page fliers handed out or available at the cash register.



Marketing programs

You need several ongoing promotional programs that reach into all of the available market segments. Each market segment can require a slightly different approach.

Pushing each program requires that you be highly pro-active. Just handing out or posting fliers will not get satisfactory results. You must also put time into talking to a lot of people, telling them about how you can help and emphasize the benefits to be gained. It takes constant effort to make programs work, and some of the results may not become obvious for months.

Pool halls

Pool halls are a natural venue to promote your services as an instructor. Here individuals interested in the sport of table billiards come and play. You will find regulars who come in to play each other (can include the local hustlers), leagues that have many participants who are there for organized recreation, and tournament players who put up their entry fees in the hopes of finishing in the money.

All of these players are potential students; provided they can be convinced of a need for your guidance. To promote instructions in a pool hall, you need the active support of the owner/manager. He/she has a certain amount of gravitas and respect from players. The support can initially provide you with a number of students.

The very first step in this process is to develop a relationship with the room owner. Convince the person that it is in his/her best interests for you to be teaching the game of pool in his/ her room.

Programs that work well in pool halls are classes that players can sign up for by paying the hall's cashier. You can offer deals for league teams, players who buy memberships, or tournament entrants. Classes can focus around various offensive and defensive skills. There are always individuals who want to work on specific aspects of their game.

Fraternal organizations

This includes the Elks, Moose, Optimists, Eagles, etc. and other similar organizations. Every lodge, regardless of size will have at least one pool table. If not a member, promoting your services will require an introduction by a member and the approval of the organization's officers and/or trustees.

If you are (or can become) a member, determine if there is enough action that official approval would be required. You can go a long time, giving occasional lessons without official signoff. If you want to expand your student base, you can start by offering an occasional class. If you were to run a monthly tournament, it can help you gain additional students.

Some of these organizations have meetings at which speakers present a discussion of a topic of interest. A lively presentation of some of the topics in the *Introduction* section above can result in new students.

College student unions

With student unions, you need to be visible to all the regular players. Get an appointment with the person managing the union or managing the pool room. At the meeting, remember they are interested in improving student participation. Present your credentials and examples of the services and programs you can provide. Be ready to discuss various ways to help them get more players.

For example, run a monthly tournament, offer workshops or classes to help the players improve their game. Come by on a regular basis during their busier hours. Make yourself available to work with individual or small groups. These organizations often have funding available to provide prizes and publicity for events. They may even be able to pay you a small amount for being available.

Senior centers

Most seniors just like to bang balls around. Whatever skill level they are at, they are rarely interested in massive improvements in skills and abilities. With the support of the officer in charge of the center, you can offer beginner's classes. Sometimes they will have funds available for you to provide a regular class.

If you are not a regular player there, you will need to make yourself better known. Run a monthly tournament. Putting up sign-up fliers for the tournament will also allow you to promote your regular classes and the occasional private student. Just like the pool room owner, begin this process by setting up a meeting with the "activities" coordinator of the senior center and let him or her know about your background, qualifications and how your classes can be a benefit to the senior center community.

Home table owners

The best time to get these individuals as students is when they have just purchased the table. To reach these people, you should be on good terms with the local pool table retailer. The retailer can also refer requests for help to you.

You want to promote a package of lessons, with half up front. It should be a series of weekly one or two hour lessons. You can expand the package to include family members. It is important to get these people interested immediately upon purchase, while their interest level is high.

If the retailer is willing, he can offer a certain number of free lessons to buyers and pay you a reduced fee for your time. It will be necessary for you to sell an additional package of services after the free lesson package is completed. Holding clinics or classes at the retailers store increases 'feet on the floor', and customer purchases. This helps him make sales and exposes you to potential students.

Bars (with league teams)

You won't get many students from the players who are there for the purposes of drinking and who play only to pass the time. Your market segment is the teams who play weekly. They will have members who have more interest in getting better.

If you are not a regular at the bar, join one or more of the teams. Get the team together for some lessons to help each individual play better. It will help if you can get your team members to brag you up as the reason they improved so quickly.

Get in touch with the league operator. He can promote your ability to help players improve. When he sends out email to the team captains, he can include a blurb about offering team classes. He can also email announcements to all players about signing up for scheduled classes.



Email lists

Collect email addresses for all students, anyone who plays and provided their address, and all others by regular solicitation campaigns. Make sure you segment the list by the type of place that the individuals play (market segments). One of the easiest ways to get addresses is to simply say that you put out a newsletter with tips and occasionally have a learning deal and would like to send them an announcement. *(If you get the address easily, they have some interest. A little sales pitch later can convert him/her to a student.)*

Use these to send out reminders and announcements of various activities. You can turn this into a weekly or monthly newsletter. Provide tips and hints about playing better. Include links to useful web sites.



Web tools

Here are a few internet tools that you can use to promote your services. Solicit your students to provide reviews, feedback, and comments on your instructional skills:

- Create a web site with pictures of you and students. Google has free sites (<https://sites.google.com/>)
- Create a blog and promote it among those who receive your newsletter. (<http://www.blogger.com/>)
- Get on Facebook and some of the other personal social sites.
- Sign-up on LinkedIn, and provide detailed benefits, and make some good sales pitches. (<http://www.linkedin.com/>)
- Record yourself showing a student how to improve a skill. Put it up on YouTube or other video sites. <http://www.youtube.com/>
- Sign up on the local advertising groups: <http://www.merchantcircle.com/>, <http://local.yahoo.com/>



Summary

Your success is going to depend on a lot of reputation development. You have to become well-known, not only as a nice guy, but also as a shooter. You are going to constantly work on improving your own skills.

Your promotional efforts will have to be constant and consistent. Talk to players. Ask them what they want to improve. Develop a series of specials – couples lessons, 15 minute \$5 lessons, money back guarantees, etc. Be imaginative. Try the ideas out. Some won't have the expected responses, others will be continuously successful.

Talk with other instructors. There are the PBIA instructor's forums. Post questions, ask for advice, and contribute your experiences. Be active.



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