

How to Open and Manage a
Martial Arts School



Established 1967

If you've finally earned a reputation in the martial arts community and you're thinking of opening your own school, you may be in for a rude awakening:

your skills on the mat may not translate to skill in business.

Strong martial arts knowledge, proper training and a respect for the history of the form are the foundation of any good martial arts school, but here we get to the root of the rash of sub-par dojos and fighter-factories. In short, it's easier to run a successful school with no real knowledge of the martial arts than it is to run a successful school with no real knowledge of business.

Luckily, your fighting instinct does carry right over from the sparring ring to business factors like marketing and negotiation. Learning to apply that instinct with the correct business education and help can turn a floundering dojo into a thriving martial arts academy. Before you can do that, though, you need to understand the nuts and bolts of building a martial arts school, how to approach it from the right perspective...



Start with a Business Model

A business model is sort of a short outline of the **"three act play"** that is your business. If you were a record producer, your model might look like this: hire top quality musicians, market their music as hip and edgy, use the profits to increase output. If you were running a small grocery store, it might look more like this: set up in an affluent neighborhood, buy only the freshest and best products, expand to other locations.

For a martial arts teacher starting their first school, your model probably looks something like: open a school, market to the local area, use income to expand marketing and improve school.

Although realistically, your business model should be a little more pragmatic. Your best bet is actually to look at successful martial arts schools in other areas and just do what they do. By borrowing someone else's business model, you have something of a road map, where starting from scratch leaves you exploring uncharted and often painful territory.

At the end of the day, they don't hand out awards for innovative business models in a martial arts school. The only reward in business is success, and if you can get there by borrowing ideas from other schools, then borrow ideas from other schools. This leads us into our next step...



Positioning

Positioning is a marketing concept that basically refers to just crafting an identity for your brand. A successful example of this would be Coca-Cola dominating the cola market to the point where you might say "Coke" even when referring to a Pepsi or a generic brand cola. You also see anti-positioning like 7Up, the Uncola, for instance, and you see niche positioning like Jones Soda, which began with a cola for people who didn't like the corn syrup in Coca-Cola and Pepsi. In a market with established leaders, your best bet is to position yourself in such a way that you're filling the gaps.

In other words, your business model should probably not be in direct competition with other schools in the area who have already taken their positions, so to speak. If there's already a kickboxing school, for instance, that markets themselves as a serious school for competitive martial artists, you're better off positioning yourself as a school for people of all ages looking to learn self defense.

Look in your area and see who's succeeding and who isn't. There's no one prescribed plan to success with any martial arts school in any community, so understanding your market is very important. Think of the market as a sparring opponent, capitalize on its weaknesses and avoid its strengths. If you study Karate, for instance, you wouldn't try to grapple a Brazilian Jujutsu expert, you'd try to keep them on their feet where you have the upper hand.

As an example, perhaps you notice that all of the schools in the area are geared towards more adult audiences. This leaves a piece of the market wide open for young students. You could see about putting on a demonstration at a local elementary school and passing out fliers or free buttons or some such as a recruitment initiative. Gear the school itself towards tournament participation and emphasize the importance of self discipline when talking to parents.

Many of the big schools get to feeling a little too big. You've probably attended at least one school in your training career where the instructor seemed a little too busy or distracted to give you proper attention. Marketing yourself as a smaller, more intimate school as an alternative to the bigger schools is another way to fill a gap. If the other dojos in your town focus on practical fighting arts, emphasize the importance of tradition and discipline in your form. If the other schools offer an intense workout and stock their cooler with Gatorade and Red Bull, try to attract older people looking for a way to stay active without all the intensity.

The golden formula here is essentially to look for a marketing position that has proven successful with other schools, and which is not yet established in your area. Which leads us into the final point to consider before you actually put any money into this dream...

Select the Right Location

They say location is everything in real estate. Well, it's pretty important if you're running a business, too. Your location goes a long way towards determining who your primary demographic will be, who your students are going to be.

If you can be picky about your location, be picky about your location. Some clear examples would be to set up near a school and offer an after-school Karate program, to rent some cheaper space and offer your class at competitive rates, or to set up in an affluent area and charge more for people to be part of smaller, more exclusive classes.

Building Your School

We've been placing a lot of emphasis on bringing the right attitude, the right practical thinking to running a business, but clearly, actually building the physical location is pretty important, too. To list a few of the items you're going to need in order to run a basic martial arts school...

- » Mats and padding for the floors
- » A heavy bag
- » Sparring gloves, helmets and equipment of various sizes
- » Ranked belts
- » A laptop or PC to run the business side of things
- » Patches, decals and other media with your logo
- » Bo staffs or other training weaponry (assuming you offer weapons courses)
- » Bright lights (better lit dojos will lead to fewer injuries)
- » Wall-mirror
- » Student contracts
- » Brochures, fliers or leaflets for prospects
- » Benches

There's a lot to it. The above list doesn't cover it all, it just gives you an idea of what you're going to be using to set up. A lot of this stuff you can find used by checking out gyms that are closing down or relocating, or you could even score some benches from a church that just got some money to refurbish. If you're starting out on a budget, smart shopping will be a big help right now.

Simply make sure that everything is up to regulation standards, that everything is safe to use and to train in, on and with, and from there, everything you do, the decor, the equipment you use, is dependent entirely on your school's style and approach to teaching.

Basically you will need take care of many tasks and wear many hats (marketing, billing, planning, scheduling, calling, advertising, teaching, etc) however others are doing it by managing their schools and lives better and smarter and so can you, if you know where to start and have a trusted roadmap to follow.

All of the above leads to one final step that is of vital importance whether you're managing your first school or you've been running a dojo for years...



Accept Help Wherever Available

This could mean giving reduced tuition fees for advanced students willing to help teach your younger classes, or from a business perspective, getting to know and using a service like Educational Funding Company (widely known as EFC to the industry) to run your school more efficiently and to maximize your earning potential.



What could you do better if you had more time to concentrate on things that matter most to you?

EFC offers a number of services to assist martial artists in setting up or expanding their schools. For instance, EFC's tuition billing program is structured to handle all of your student tuition matters for you. They make the calls when someone misses a payment and they do the collecting and tracking, so your relationship with your students is only about teaching. To put it shortly, they offer guidance and advice from professional martial artists and other experienced business professionals to help you avoid beginner's mistakes and finance and market your school without winding up with a lifetime of bad debt to show for it.

Beyond billing...

Beyond taking care of billing, EFC also helps you to find financing from lenders and creditors. They help you to get connected with your area's martial arts community so that you can arrange seminars and annual events, they help you learn the basic management skills you need to run a successful dojo, and EFC's advisors are always just a phone call away whenever you run into a tricky situation that needs more than just a quick fix.

EFC clients, like yourself, also benefit from a treasure-chest of premade winning-marketing materials, interviews from other successful school owners, annual summit events and a constant stream of audio/visual know-how provided by marketing and industry experts to help your business grow.

Things like marketing, organization and making friends in the industry are always a challenge for new business owners. EFC focuses on the notion of raising the standards of the martial art teaching community by giving serious martial artists the help and opportunities that allow them to run a successful school, and they can be a big help in getting over those beginner's hurdles and giving you more time to focus on teaching by taking care of a lot of the technical stuff for you.

Think of Educational Funding Company as the bridge between martial arts knowledge and business expertise. Right in the middle is where successful martial arts schools are founded.



About EFC

Being in business for yourself is a real challenge. There are numerous details that need to be addressed to develop a successful school. Training 10 to 15 years to be a top-notch Martial Artist makes one a star in the classroom, but leaves out the complexities of the front office. This is where we excel. Becoming a partner with the Educational Funding Company enables you to get expert guidance and helps in dealing with landlord leases, promotional campaigns, retention, staff training and most of all in generating a substantial contract amount. All of this lends a thriving body.

Effective student tuition billing and collections are an extremely important part of the big picture. EFC believes tuition billing and constructive consulting go hand-in-hand. Attention to student needs, staff training curriculum and class scheduling are areas that require all of the school owners' attention. Leaving the time consuming job of tuition collections to EFC guarantees maximum effectiveness by our daily monitoring of all student accounts and the joy of getting a substantial check each month by virtue of having us as your partner.

What will this cost?

That's the best part and also the reason why schools from small family owned schools to large multiple-location type operations are working with us as an indispensable part of their business tool-chest. Rather than discuss that here and give you a one size fits all model, just give us a call to learn more about our custom programs especially made for your individual needs.

How Soon Would You Like To Start Making Connections?

Please. Stop where you are. Take a deep breath and get ready to get connected to the one resource that will turn your business around, help you create lifelong relationships with other successful martial artists and help you raise the roof on your income.

- » Get Inspired
- » Become Efficient
- » Be Powered By EFC

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