



GIGI'S PLAYHOUSE RALEIGH COMMUNICATION AUDIT



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Background

Overview

GiGi's Playhouse Inc. is a nonprofit organization that offers resources, spaces, and services to individuals with Down syndrome and their families. GiGi's Playhouse was founded in 2003 by Nancy Gianni after her daughter, GiGi, was born with Down syndrome. The Gianni family realized that there were few available resources, spaces, or opportunities to learn more about Down syndrome. The limited areas for GiGi, and other individuals with Down syndrome to learn, grow and play, led Gianni to establish the first GiGi's Playhouse location. The first playhouse opened in Illinois and created a space for individuals with Down syndrome and their families to come together to celebrate and learn. Described as "Down syndrome Achievement Centers," GiGi's Playhouse offers free services such as literacy, math & school tutoring, speech and language, fitness, health, cooking, life skills, as well as college and career prep.

Audience

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh officially opened its doors on June 18th, 2016, at 2887 Jones Franklin Rd., Raleigh, NC 27606. However, with growing students and volunteers, GiGi's was expanding and needed a larger space. GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh moved to 370 S. Walker St., Suite 122, Cary, NC 27511 in February 2023. At this location, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh serves the greater Triangle area of North Carolina and creates a safe space for many individuals and families. GiGi's Playhouse offers its completely free programs to individuals of all ages ranging from infants to adults.

Leadership

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh is currently run by a board of directors including President Michelle Pfeiffer, Vice President Michelle Schwab, Secretary Rachel Geer, as well as many other members. Additionally, this is a nonprofit organization that relies on volunteers, sponsorships, and partnerships to keep it up and running. GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh is setting up an endowment, or an investment in the organization, to sustain funding for these free programs and keep the nonprofit open and accessible for as long as possible. A future endowment in the nonprofit, volunteers and partnerships allow GiGi's Playhouse to be free and accessible to all community members. With over 60 locations nationwide and 300,000 volunteer hours put towards the nonprofit, it is evident that GiGi's Playhouse has been an impactful and valuable resource in many communities all over the United States.

Mission & Values

GiGi's Playhouse Inc. general mission is "To change the way the world views Down syndrome and to send a global message of acceptance for all." Additionally, the GiGi's Playhouse vision is "To see a world where individuals with Down syndrome are accepted and embraced in their families, schools and communities."

Programs & Services

GiGi's Playhouse is a nonprofit organization that fully relies on community support, volunteers, and donations to keep the programs up and running. The GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh location is currently in the process of setting up an endowment to keep

funding for the programs for as long as possible. Establishing an endowment, or an investment fund, will let GiGi's Playhouse keep all its programs free and accessible.

Its programs include "Destination Discovery" which supports the "development of fine motor skills, gross motor skills, social skills and language through purposeful play and peer to peer interaction in a casual and fun setting" (GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh). Additionally, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh offers other daily programs such as speech language, dance, literacy, math, yoga, open play, art classes, family speakers, cheer programs. GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh also offers annual programs such as GiGiFIT, a fitness program, GiGi's Kitchen, a series of cooking classes and the GiGi Prep Program, which is a career development program.

Partnerships

For the month of October, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh partnered with local Dairy Queen franchises in the Triangle to collaborate for Down Syndrome Awareness Month. For October, five Dairy Queen locations in North Carolina donated some of its revenue to GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh. This was done through its "Round Up" program, where customers could round up their total order to help benefit the nonprofit. This partnership brought social awareness through its social media and website, brand awareness, and helped benefit both GiGi's Playhouse and Dairy Queen.

Events & Initiatives

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh celebrates its participants through annual events such as the "i have a Voice Gala" and "Acceptance Challenge." The national gala occurs once a year to help "celebrate the incredible impact and growth of GiGi's Playhouse," and "honors our participants with Down syndrome. Our Gala promises a night of elegance and excitement, including a sit-down dinner, open bar, live auction, raffle baskets, special guests, and live music & dancing" (GiGi's Playhouse).

Community Engagement

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh has partnered with many other businesses, schools, and people in the community to expand its engagement outside of the playhouse. One partnership with North Carolina State University football team allows players and GiGi's Playhouse members to hang out together during practices for an event called "Snack with the Pack" additionally, once a year the N.C. State football team has a "Victory Day" with GiGi's Playhouse members where they celebrate on the field, run out of the tunnel at Carter-Finley Stadium, and even run a touchdown in. Additionally, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh partners with the North Carolina Central University speech language pathology program to allow students to come in and teach literacy and speaking skills to GiGi's Playhouse members. These partnerships expand GiGi's Playhouse's impact on the broader community and bring more people into the nonprofit.

Contact Information

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh is currently led by a board of directors including President Michelle Pfeiffer, Vice President Michelle Schwab, and Secretary Rachel Geer. GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh president can be reached at mpfeiffer@gigisplayhouse.org or 919-307-3952. For more general information, contact GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh, at 919-307-3952 or raleigh@gigisplayhouse.org.

Current Communication Mix

Overview

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's current communication mix is surrounded upon empowering individuals with Down syndrome through educational and therapeutic programs and creating a community around them. The mix involves a multi-channel approach to its audience, which includes outreach, personalized engagement, storytelling, awareness, and sustainability. GiGi's has a personal connection with its audience, building a foundation for sustainability.

Social Media

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's leading channel is social media marketing. GiGi's use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn to share updates, promote events and engage with its community. Content usually includes success stories, innovative programs, highlights, volunteer spotlights, event announcements and educational awareness content. GiGi's engagement online fosters its community, increases visibility, and provides a timely manner to programs and events. Social media marketing provides GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh traffic on its pages and website, reaches new donors, and advocates, and builds themselves a brand and platform online. This tactic is useful for setting goals, reaching new people every day, analyzing results and staying up to date with trends and building a name for itself in the new digital age.

Partnership

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's partnerships are vital and close-knit to its core values as a non-profit organization. By collaborating with businesses and universities, the organization can amplify its reach and create an impact. GiGi's has partnered with Dairy Queen for the Down Syndrome Awareness Month in October. This was a round up change campaign, anyone can go to any of the Triangle Dairy Queen locations to donate their change to GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh. This allowed GiGi's to connect with diverse audiences across the Triangle all while supporting and raising awareness for Down syndrome. GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh also has a great relationship with NC State University. This partnership with NC State is called Victory Days, that takes place at the start of the football season. During NC State's football training season, our participants are paired with a player and do many activities. From running plays and getting touchdowns, the relationships developed through this partnership are truly a special experience. Partnerships like these foster innovation and community engagement, allowing GiGi's to build strong relationships and ensuring that it contributes to creating a more sustainable future.

Website

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's website serves as a hub for information, communication, engagement, and education, displaying everything you might need to get involved. The website also reflects its central mission, values, and niche. It provides an accessible platform for individuals, families, donors, and volunteers to learn about programs, events, and advocacy. GiGi's communicates ways to donate, volunteer, promote and contribute to raising awareness. GiGi's serves its community with up-to-date calendar events, spotlight stories, in-depth program details and volunteer opportunities.

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's website is more than just a tool to find information—it is a site that presents all that the organization stands for and more. By providing great resources, promoting its mission, representing such a wonderful cause, the website ensures involvement in every way possible. This communication strategy gives GiGi's the ability to voice its mission effectively and inspire action on behalf of the awareness of Down syndrome. Through this tool, GiGi's strengthens its mission of education, advocacy, acceptance, and inclusion. GiGi's Playhouse's website is an intertwined community where everyone can contribute meaningfully to create a more aware and understanding world for all individuals.

Situational Analysis

Strengths

Overall, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh has a strong internal brand identity, accounted for by the fact that it is a chapter of the nationally recognized GiGi's Playhouse organization. This communicates a certain trustworthiness to local citizens. Its mission of supporting individuals with Down syndrome and their families resonates well with target audiences, allowing communications efforts to align easily with the organization's values and objectives. Active involvement with local families, donors, and partners, like the partnership with Nugget furniture, reinforces community support and loyalty. The inclusion of personal storytelling from individuals and families impacted by the work GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh is doing via blog posts creates a compelling emotional connection that draws audience attention.

The webpages for GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh are very informational while maintaining a joyful tone. The website includes numerous subpages to clearly outline all aspects of the organization in a user-friendly way. GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's program offerings stem from the nationally curated GiGi's Playhouse curriculum for individuals with Down syndrome, which has proven to be effective in the education and empowerment of participants, creating a loyal audience.

Furthermore, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's leadership is deeply passionate about Down syndrome education and awareness, fostering a space where growth is sought after and celebrated. GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's two main annual fundraising events, the "I have a voice" gala and the "GiGiFIT Acceptance Challenge," are consistently well-attended and lucrative fundraisers, securing much-needed funding to continue operating. Since moving to its new facility in Cary, North Carolina, in 2023, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh has been able to expand and support multiple programs occurring simultaneously, allowing for a diversified selection of programming and the ability to serve more families.

Weaknesses

In 2023, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh moved its location from Raleigh, North Carolina, to the heart of downtown Cary, North Carolina. As a result, the organization does not have a long-standing history within the Cary community. Like most nonprofit organizations, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh relies on donations and fundraising to continue providing programming for participants. Fundraising yields, which can vary from year to year, can create budget and program offering limitations. The leadership team at GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh is almost entirely composed of volunteers, including those handling communications and outreach. This reliance on volunteers can make maintaining a unified voice across different platforms and materials challenging.

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh currently receives limited local media coverage, mostly focused on large events like its annual gala. Additionally, the organization's inconsistent digital presence, including irregular social media and blog posting schedules and a lack of coherent themes across platforms, can overwhelm audiences. For example, multiple posts a day followed by periods of no activity can hinder meaningful connections with both existing and potential new communities. Finally, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh is not active on all major social media platforms, such as Tik Tok, which limits its reach, particularly to younger generations. The content on the social media accounts is primarily informative, such as still-photo infographics and advertisements, rather than interactive media. This limits audience engagement and creates a lack of variety on its profile pages.

Opportunities

There are numerous opportunities for GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh to expand its communications efforts. Strengthening its presence in Cary by deepening partnerships with locally owned businesses like Nugget furniture and Ruckus Pizza, Pasta, and Spirits can cement its place in the community. This approach could attract new audiences and potential supporters to the GiGi's Playhouse network. On a broader scale, society's increasing emphasis on diversity and inclusivity offers a favourable social climate for promoting the national GiGi's Playhouse mission and reaching wider audiences.

Additionally, establishing a diverse and consistent posting schedule across all digital and social media platforms can create an organized digital presence that informs without overwhelming users. Developing a cohesive theme, rooted in the national organization's brand standards, will enhance GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's digital identity, making messaging more effective and easier to understand. Engaging younger generations through expanded use of social media platforms like Instagram Reels and Tik Tok, as well as participation in appropriate trends, could help attract volunteers and donors while building a long-term support base.

Threats

With plentiful opportunities come potential threats that could hinder GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's growth and operations. Fluctuating economic factors may impact fundraising efforts and volunteer availability, as individuals and corporations are typically more generous during times of favorable economic conditions. Rapidly evolving and changing communication trends can make it challenging to stay relevant in the social sphere, while social media algorithms may limit the visibility of posts. This can reduce GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's reach and engagement on social media and digital platforms unless the organization invests in paid advertisements. Finally, other nonprofits in the area, particularly those focused on disability support, may compete for similar funding and community support.

General Analysis

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh has a solid foundation in local community engagement among those impacted by Down syndrome in the Raleigh area, benefiting from being a chapter of the nationally recognized organization. However, it faces challenges related to limited resources and media visibility. By shifting the use of social media to become more interactive and share personal content, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh can broaden its reach to all citizens of the greater Raleigh area while remaining mindful of its largely volunteer-based support system. Overall, the website is communicative and informational

while remaining true to the national brand identity. Finding that same blend of information and personalization on social media sites would elevate its communication efforts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh benefits from a solid foundation as part of a nationally recognized organization. However, leveraging its specific location in Cary presents an excellent opportunity to enhance its physical and digital presence. In focusing on building stronger connections within its new Cary community, GiGi's can broaden its reach, foster deeper engagement, and attract new supporters, strengthening its overall impact.

In the previous location GiGi's had powerful sense of community and support, so we want to ensure that carries over into the new location in Cary while remaining accessible to the entire Triangle. While the current website formatting highlights the new location, here are opportunities to strengthen it. The webpages for GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh are user-friendly and clearly outline all aspects of the organization. However, we suggest considering updates to the site's logo and site link to reflect "Cary, NC" rather than "Raleigh, NC". This could help maintain consistency while ensuring the messaging remain inclusive of the broader Triangle community.

To enhance GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's communication efforts, we recommend focusing on expanding its social media presence across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to engage a broader audience. Posting more interactive, personal content, such as behind-the-scenes, real-time event coverage, and participant stories, will create a deeper emotional connection with the community. Secondly, we suggest developing a consistent posting schedule to help ensure regular engagement. Finally, continuing to leverage partnerships with local businesses can increase visibility and drive support. By implementing these strategies, GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh can strengthen its community ties, improve visibility, and better support its mission of inclusion and empowerment.

Appendix

Items Used

Reports and information were gathered and developed through discussions with the team at GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh, classmates, and Professor Marshale Carter, and through an assessment of the client's current communication materials and vehicles.

This includes several meetings with GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh President Michelle Pfeiffer over the course of 5 months ranging from August through December. Through both individual and group meetings and discussions, President Pfeiffer shared important insights, data, and firsthand experiences that helped shape the communication audit. Additionally, with meetings with GiGi's Playhouse Social Media Coordinator, Grace Denenny. Denenny shared additional information about social performance, growth, and ideas. Additional data was gathered through in-person tours and volunteering at the GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh location.

Most of the data was gathered through online research and interviews conducted on GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh website as well as the national GiGi's Playhouse Inc. Website. Deep research and online exploration helped our team gather the important data needed for an in-depth SWOT analysis. Through a comprehensive analysis our team was able to better understand GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh's strengths like its mission and core values, weaknesses like funding, opportunities, such as future partnerships and events, and threats such as poor economic conditions and low volunteer numbers.

Sources

<https://gigisplayhouse.org/raleigh/>
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