



VOL. 02 · STUDIO EDITION

THE STUDIO OWNER'S GUIDE

Refer-a-Friend Programmes That Work

Turn happy parents into your best recruiters. The offer, the timing, the rewards and the scripts that bring new families through your door.

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WELCOME

Your quietest growth channel.

Every studio has a referral programme, whether they have written one down or not. This guide is about doing it on purpose.

Word of mouth is the channel most dance schools say they rely on, and the channel most dance schools never actively run. A parent recommends you in the playground. A grandmother forwards your timetable to a friend. A dancer brings her best friend to a trial. It happens, but it happens by accident, and accidents are difficult to scale.

Done well, a refer-a-friend programme is the cheapest, warmest, highest-converting channel you have. New families arrive already half-sold, primed by someone they trust. The maths is gentle but compounding. One referral a month per teacher quietly outgrows most paid advertising you could buy.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read it through with a cup of tea, then come back and work the worksheet at the end with your team. The scripts, formulas and reward ideas are designed to be used as-is or adapted to your studio. Tick the checklists, fill in the planner, and run your first proper referral push within thirty days.

WHO THIS IS FOR

- Studio owners who rely on word of mouth and want to grow it on purpose
- Principals planning a September or January enrolment push
- Studios with strong retention but slow new-family growth
- Anyone who has tried a referral offer once, and never quite ran it again

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PART ONE

The Case for Referrals

Before the posters and the QR codes. Why word of mouth quietly outperforms every channel you could pay for, and what an offer needs to do to be worth running.

Why word of mouth beats every other channel.

A parent who arrives because her best friend recommended you is already three-quarters enrolled.

Trust does the heavy lifting in a referral. The friend has already answered the questions a cold visitor brings to your website: are the teachers kind, is the studio welcoming, will my child fit in. By the time the new family lands on your trial form, the only decision left is the date.

4x

more likely to enrol when introduced by a friend

37%

higher first-year retention for referred families

£0

average cost to acquire a referred trial

WHY REFERRALS OUT-CONVERT EVERYTHING ELSE

- **Trust transfers.** The friend has already vouched for you. The new parent skips the doubt phase.
- **Self-selection.** Parents tend to recommend you to people like them. The fit is usually right.
- **Speed.** A referral often books within a week. Cold leads take a term.
- **Stickiness.** Friends who dance together stay together. Retention climbs.
- **Quality of relationship.** Referred parents are easier to deal with. They came in warm.

MINDSET SHIFT

Most studios think of referrals as something that happens to them. The studios that grow think of referrals as a channel they run, with a budget, a calendar and a measurable result.

Why parents actually recommend you.

Understanding the why behind a referral is the difference between a programme that drifts and one that compounds.

Parents do not recommend a dance school because of a £25 voucher. They recommend because something has happened that they want to share. The reward is permission, not motivation.

THE FIVE THINGS PARENTS SHARE

A confident child

"She used to hide behind my leg. Now she does cartwheels in Tesco." Visible change is the most shared story.

A teacher they trust

Specific, named, remembered. "Miss Sarah is brilliant with shy ones." That sentence travels.

A studio that feels safe

Parents notice the small things: how their child is greeted, whether they remember names, what happens at pickup.

An exam, a show, a moment

Milestones make natural conversations. "She just got her grade two distinction."

WHAT THIS MEANS

If you want more referrals, invest in the moments worth sharing. Confident children, named teachers, safe studios and well-staged milestones do more for word of mouth than any voucher.

The maths of a referral.

Before you set a reward, work out what a new family is actually worth to your studio.

Most owners underestimate the lifetime value of a dancer by a factor of five. A child who joins at six and stays until thirteen spends on classes, uniform, exam fees, costumes, summer school and shows for the best part of a decade. Your reward should scale accordingly.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

Termly fees

Two classes a week at £40 per term across 36 weeks. Roughly £1,440 per year.

Add-ons

Uniform, exam entries, costumes, shows and summer school add £250 to £400 per year.

Average tenure

Across a typical UK studio, dancers stay 3 to 5 years. Many stay longer.

Lifetime value

£5,000 to £8,000 over the time a referred dancer is with you.

WHAT THIS MEANS

If a new family is worth several thousand pounds, spending £20 to £50 to thank the parent who introduced them is not generous. It is sensible. Run your own numbers: termly fee × terms a typical dancer stays × add-on spend.

Designing the offer.

Strong referral offers share the same shape. Two-sided, specific, easy to explain in one sentence.

THE FORMULA THAT WORKS

01 Reward the referrer

Something the parent will actually value: a credit, a real gesture, a proper thank-you.

02 Reward the new family

A welcome bonus that lowers the risk of trying you. A free week, a uniform piece, a costume discount.

03 One sentence

"Refer a friend, you both get £25 off next term." If you cannot say it in one breath, parents will not pass it on.

04 A clear trigger

Reward arrives when the new dancer attends their second class, or pays for their first term. Not before.

05 A deadline (sometimes)

Open-ended programmes drift. A six-week push beats a permanent offer nobody remembers.

THREE EXAMPLE OFFERS

- **The starter.** "Bring a friend to a free trial. If they enrol, you both get £25 off next term."
- **The classic.** "Refer a friend. They get a free first week and a studio T-shirt. You get a month's fees credited when they reach their second term."
- **The ambitious.** "Refer three friends in our September push. Get a free summer school place worth £180, a costume credit, and your name on the studio recognition wall."

Rewards that actually motivate.

The right reward is not the most expensive one. It is the one that fits the relationship.



WHAT WORKS

Account credit

£25 to £50 off next term's fees. Flexible, easy to administer.

Free studio kit

T-shirt, hoodie or kit bag with your logo. Walking advertising, cheap in volume.

Costume or exam credit

Useful when families face a bigger bill. Reads as generous.

Experiential rewards

Masterclass, meet-the-teacher, front-row show seats. Memorable, low cash cost.

WHAT TO AVOID

- **Cash.** Feels transactional. Many parents find it awkward.
- **Vague rewards.** "A surprise gift" converts terribly. Be specific.
- **Slow payouts.** Recognise the referrer quickly. Momentum fades.
- **Anything that needs parent admin.** Forms and codes lose most of them.

PART TWO

Running the Programme

The day-to-day. When to ask, how to ask, the words to give parents, the assets to share, and the small details that quietly decide whether referrals trickle or pour in.

When and how to ask.

Timing matters more than wording. Ask a parent in the right moment and the referral practically writes itself.

THE FIVE HIGH-TRUST MOMENTS

01 After a great class

Their child comes out beaming. The parent is at their happiest. Ask now.

02 After an exam pass or show

Pride does the selling. A small card alongside the result is enough.

03 When they re-enrol

The decision to stay is the strongest signal. Pair re-enrolment with a nudge.

04 After a thank-you message

When a parent emails to say something kind, reply with thanks and a gentle ask.

05 On their first anniversary

"It's been a year with us" notes are charming and convert beautifully.

FROM THE STUDIO FLOOR

Train teachers to drop one warm sentence at pickup. "If you know anyone whose child might love this, send them our way; you both get £25 off next term." That single sentence outperforms a poster for a whole term.

Scripts parents can use.

Most parents would happily recommend you. They just do not know what to say. Give them the words.

THE WHATSAPP SCRIPT

"Hi! Eva does ballet at **[Studio Name]** and she absolutely loves it. They've got a refer-a-friend offer on, you both get £25 off your first term. Free trial here: **[studio-url]/trial**. Tell them we sent you."

THE SCHOOL-GATE SCRIPT

"Eva's been at **[Studio Name]** for a year and adores it. They do a free trial if you want to bring Lily down. If she signs up we both get a bit off our fees, but honestly I'd recommend them anyway."

THE FACEBOOK GROUP POST

"After a dance class for primary-age children in **[Town]**? We've been at **[Studio Name]** for a year and can't recommend them enough. Free trial on, plus a refer-a-friend offer. Tag me for info."

TIP

Send the scripts to parents in one end-of-term email: "Here is the wording, here is the link, here is the offer." Two-thirds of referral friction is not knowing how to start the conversation.

Graphics and assets to share.

If you want parents to share you, make it easy on the eye and easy on the thumb. A handful of branded assets does most of the work.

THE MINIMUM VIABLE KIT

- **One landscape image** for Facebook and WhatsApp link previews. 1200 × 630px, with your offer clearly visible.
- **One square graphic** for Instagram and class group chats. 1080 × 1080px.
- **One short vertical video**, 15 to 30 seconds, showing the studio in motion. Phone footage is fine.
- **A QR code poster** for the studio noticeboard, pinned by the changing rooms.
- **A trackable link** (e.g. *studio.co.uk/refer*) that goes to one focused page.

WHAT THE REFERRAL PAGE SHOULD CONTAIN

01 **A one-line summary of the offer**

Above the fold. Repeat it twice on the page. Make it the page title.

02 **Trial booking form**

Five fields, one button. Pre-fill any tracking codes.

03 **A short note for the new family**

"Tell us who sent you and we'll thank them too." One open field, optional, friendly tone.

04 **Photos of real classes**

Three or four, ideally of the age group the page targets.

05 **Two short quotes from existing parents**

First names, ages, specifics. Skip the generic five-star reviews.

Tracking and crediting referrals.

The single biggest reason referral programmes quietly die is admin. Build a process you can run in five minutes a week.

THE THREE THINGS TO TRACK

Who referred

Parent name, child's name, class. Captured the moment the new family enquires.

Who joined

New family name, trial date, enrolment date. Date their first class as the trigger for the reward.

Reward owed

What you promised, what's been paid, what's outstanding. Reconcile monthly.

A SIMPLE SYSTEM THAT WORKS

- **A trial form question.** "Did someone refer you to us? Who?" One field. Free text. Match it later.
- **A shared spreadsheet.** Five columns: referrer, new family, trial date, enrolment date, reward status. That is the whole system.
- **A monthly review.** First of every month, ten minutes, apply credits and send thank-you messages.
- **A close-the-loop note.** A short message to the referrer when their friend enrolls. "You did this. Thank you." This is the moment that turns a referrer into a repeat referrer.

Studio management software (Class Manager, iClassPro, DanceBiz and similar) usually has a referral field built in. Use it. It costs nothing and saves the spreadsheet stage entirely.

Welcoming a referred family well.

A referred family arrives with high expectations. The first two weeks decide whether the referrer's recommendation feels vindicated or quietly regretted.

THE REFERRED-FAMILY WELCOME (THE FIRST TWO WEEKS)

01 Acknowledge the referrer by name

"We hear you came through Sarah, who is brilliant." Two seconds of warmth, big lift in trust.

02 A short welcome message

From the principal, by email or WhatsApp, the day they book. Tone: warm, specific, signed by a real human.

03 Brief the teacher

The teacher should know the child's name before they walk in. "Hello Lily, we've been expecting you." Magic moment.

04 Day-after note to the referrer

"Lily came down today, she did beautifully. Thank you for sending her our way." Closes the loop. Builds the next referral.

05 Two-week check-in

A short message to the parent. "How is Lily settling? Anything we can do?" Care, made visible.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The single most powerful predictor of a second referral is the referrer feeling like their first referral was treated well. A great welcome for the new family is, indirectly, the most important reward you can give the parent who sent them.

Common pitfalls.

Most referral programmes fail in the same eight ways. Knowing them in advance is half the battle.

Nobody knows it exists

Mentioned once in September, then forgotten. Make it a quarterly drumbeat.

Reward feels small

£5 off feels like an insult. Match it to a new family's value.

Slow payouts

Rewards three months later kill momentum. Pay within a fortnight.

Too many conditions

More than two rules and parents will not pass it on.

No one tracks it

Without a record, you cannot thank the referrer.

Asking strangers

Generic posters rarely work. Ask existing parents, by name.

All carrot, no thanks

Parents refer because they like you. Thank them properly.

One push, then nothing

One push a year is not a programme. Build it into the year.

THE BIGGEST MISTAKE

Designing the perfect programme before launching. A modest programme that actually runs beats a perfect one that doesn't.

The annual referral push.

A standing offer is the foundation. A short, sharp annual push turns a slow trickle into a wave of enrolments.

THE SIX-WEEK STRUCTURE

- 01 Week 1 • Tease**
Newsletter and class group post. "Something coming for parents who help us grow."
- 02 Week 2 • Launch**
Posters, social posts, email with the scripts and link. Teachers mention it at pickup.
- 03 Week 3 • Story**
Spotlight a real referring family. A photo, two paragraphs. Powerful, free.
- 04 Week 4 • Nudge**
Mid-push reminder. New graphic, new angle, momentum. Show how many referrals are in.
- 05 Week 5 • Urgency**
"One week left." Specific deadlines double the response.
- 06 Week 6 • Thank-you**
Public recognition for everyone who referred. The reward for next year's pushers.

WHEN TO RUN IT

- **Late August into September.** The dominant enrolment window.
- **Spring half-term.** Optional third push focused on summer school and intensives.
- **January.** Catches families who couldn't commit in September.
- **Avoid May and June.** Show season eats every other priority.

PART THREE

Plan and Launch

The numbers to watch, the checks to run before you press send, and the worksheet to plan your first proper campaign.

Building a culture of recommendation.

The studios with the strongest word of mouth are not the ones with the best offers. They are the ones where recommending feels normal.

SMALL HABITS THAT COMPOUND

- **Name your top referrers.** Quietly recognise them at end-of-term events. "This year, Sarah brought four new dancers into our studio family."
- **A wall of welcome.** A simple board listing new dancers and who introduced them. Photographable, social-friendly, deeply motivating.
- **Always say who sent you.** A custom on every email reply, every welcome message. Refer-a-friend should be embedded in the language of the studio.
- **Recurring asks, not one-offs.** A line in every end-of-term newsletter. A note in every re-enrolment email. A reminder in every January push.
- **Make it a team value.** Teachers, admin, and the principal all know the offer, all mention it naturally, all close the loop on referrers.

THE LONG VIEW

A studio that runs referrals as a campaign sees a bump. A studio where recommending is part of the culture sees compounding. The aim is to make "who sent you?" the most natural question you ask.

Measuring what matters.

You do not need a dashboard. You need three numbers, reviewed once a month, written down somewhere your team can see them.

THE THREE NUMBERS

Referred trials

How many trial bookings came in with a referrer named, this month? Track it from the trial form.

Referral enrolment rate

Of those trials, how many enrolled? Compare to your cold trial rate. It should be noticeably higher.

Cost per enrolment

Total reward spend ÷ enrolled families. Compare to your paid advertising cost. The gap is usually startling.

WHAT HEALTHY LOOKS LIKE

- Referrals account for **20 to 40 percent** of new enrolments across the year
- **Half or more** of your referred trials convert to enrolment (versus 25 to 35 percent for cold trials)
- Your cost per referred enrolment is **under £50**
- At least **one in ten** of your existing families refers someone within a 12-month period
- **September** brings a clear spike from the annual push

QUARTERLY HABIT

Once a quarter, look at the three numbers and ask: what's working, what's drifting, what should we change? Decide one thing, then leave it alone for another quarter.

Pre-launch checklist.

Before you launch your next referral push, walk through this. Twenty minutes here saves a quarter of muddled messages later.

THE OFFER

- I can explain the whole offer in one sentence
- The reward is worth at least £25 to the parent who refers
- Both the referrer and the new family receive something
- There is a clear trigger for when the reward is paid
- Any deadline is specific ("by 30 September", not "this autumn")

THE ASSETS

- I have a dedicated landing page at one short, memorable URL
- I have a Facebook image, an Instagram square and a vertical video
- I have a poster with a QR code printed for the studio noticeboard
- I have three scripts ready to paste into an email to parents
- Trial form captures "who referred you" as a question

THE PROCESS

- Every teacher knows the offer and the one-line ask
- A named person owns weekly tracking and monthly reconciliation
- There is a thank-you message ready to send when a referral enrolls
- The reward is paid (or applied) within 14 days of enrolment
- I have a calendar reminder for the next push, not just this one

Referral campaign planner.

Plan your next push on one page. Fill it in with your team.

CAMPAIGN NAME AND DATES

THE OFFER IN ONE SENTENCE

REWARD (REFERRER AND NEW FAMILY)

Weeks 1 to 2 TEASE AND LAUNCH	One action <hr/>
Weeks 3 to 4 STORY AND NUDGE	One action <hr/>
Weeks 5 to 6 URGENCY AND THANKS	One action <hr/>

WE WILL KNOW IT WORKED BECAUSE



Want a website that does the asking for you?

Vector Web Design builds beautiful, hard-working websites exclusively for UK dance schools. We design referral pages, trial booking flows and the small details that quietly turn happy parents into your best recruiters.

[Book a free 30-minute consultation](#)

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