

# **“How to Turbo-Charge Your Profits From Hiring Inflatables” (Volume 1)**

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For members of the British Inflation Hirers Association (BIHA)



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The inflatable hire business can be a very profitable and enjoyable way of earning a good living. This report is a result of over 30 years combined experience of several hirers including myself. We have all made mistakes, and we have all had our successes. Read the ideas in this report, read them again. And then try and integrate the ideas you like the best into your own business. Not all the ideas will be relevant to you although it is hoped that some of the ideas and techniques will form a "springboard" for you to develop further or customise for your own business. You may not agree with all these ideas, or you may be doing something in a different way which you feel works better for you, or better suits your personality.

Some of these ideas have been repeated elsewhere, especially in the password protected sections of the BIHA website. However, this report contains the best ideas (and mistakes to avoid) in one place. This volume should be a continual source of reference for both the experienced hirer and the relative beginner. Just one good idea taken from this report and put into practice will repay your annual membership fees many times over!

Idea 1 It always amazes me how unprofessional some small companies can be when they answer the telephone to a prospective customer. Unfortunately, this also applies to some inflatable hire companies. In the mind of a customer their first impressions and initial opinions of a company they are thinking of dealing with is made in the first 5 seconds of the phone call. When my van needed a repair recently, the greetings I got from repairers when I rang them up ranged from "yep Steve here" to "Good Morning XYZ Van Repairs – David speaking, how can I help". I felt more at ease with David than I did with Steve, purely because his greeting was more friendly and more professional. David eventually got my business. When you answer the phone to customers be friendly, positive and professional. Enthusiasm also helps.

This follows on from idea 1. When I first started hiring inflatables way back in 1991. I made the following mistake. A potential customer would ring me up and ask me about prices etc. I would then look at my price list, and would tell the caller "parrot" fashion how much each size would cost. Not surprisingly, the caller would usually say something like. "I may get back to you", or "I'll think about it". After a few months, I realised that I was doing something seriously wrong, so I completely changed my approach. When I now get an enquiry, instead of reeling off a load of prices and hoping for the best. I ask the customer several questions such as: How old are the children, how many are you expecting, are you having the party indoors or outdoors etc etc. When they give me the answers I will then recommend a particular size of unit. This approach always results in more bookings as a ratio to enquiries. The reason for this is because the customer feels you are taking an interest in their children and the party, and more importantly you are developing a rapport with the customer. It is an established fact in sales that people buy people first. This means that before someone books an inflatable with yourself, (particularly a new customer) they have to like you and trust you first. The only way you can initially achieve this is by using idea 1 above, and secondly asking the caller leading questions. I cannot overemphasise the importance of this. You will get a lot more bookings if you follow this approach.

Idea 3 Sometimes when I've gone through the standard questions which I normally ask, when getting an enquiry for an inflatable, I get the following response: "I need to speak to my husband before I book anything", or "I need to speak to my work colleagues first". This reaction always slightly amuses me because most customers (you would have thought) would speak to their husband/work colleagues etc before making the initial phone call. I have a theory that the reason they say this is because there are still one or two doubts in their mind, whether or not they want to book with you or not, or that they are reluctant to pay the price which you have quoted. To get round this problem I sometimes say to the customer, "Would you like me to provisionally pencil your booking in the diary, then if your husband agrees to it I can turn it into a confirmed booking, if on the other hand he does not agree, ring me up tomorrow and I will cancel this provisional booking – no obligation. 70% of the time they agree to this and they rarely cancel afterwards.

Idea 4 Occasionally, I will give a hire price to a potential customer, and they will reply by saying "that it is too much, or too expensive. When they say this I could just say, "okay thanks for calling, goodbye". However, I rarely do, one thing I am always curious to know, is that if the customer thinks it's too much. How much too much?? £1, £5, £10, £20? I always try and find out, so that I can possibly hire them a smaller and cheaper inflatable.

Idea 5 Sometimes, it's a very good idea to use the deluxe approach to getting more business. When a customer phones to book an inflatable you have no real idea whether they are a multi-

millionaire or on income support, or somewhere in between. With the deluxe approach you can target the customer in relation to how much they want to spend on their inflatable, in a very subtle way. This approach works as follows: If a customer rings for a quote for say a 12 x 12 castle, you say to them: " would you like economy, standard or deluxe castle". They will then usually say what do you mean. You tell them that the economy unit is 3 years old. The standard units are 1 – 2 years old, (and are £5 more) and the deluxe units are under 1 year old (and £5 extra). Customers with a high disposable income will tend to book deluxe and standard units, whilst less well off customers will book the economy units. However, do remember that this is not always the case, children love inflatables so much that their parents will often make a big financial sacrifice to hire 2 or 3 inflatables for their child's birthday party. When using the deluxe approach to increase profits, you can use any combination of variables, not necessarily just based on age or condition of the inflatable..For example, you could say that with the deluxe service, they get the inflatable delivered the day before the party; with the standard service, it is the morning of the party, and with the economy service it is up to an hour before the party starts. Use your imagination with this deluxe approach, there are many different variations which you can try until you have found the one which you are most comfortable with.

Idea 6 About 6 years ago, I came up with a very simple idea which virtually doubled the size of my business, and the number of my customers increased beyond all expectations. For some time I had considered going to my local printers and getting some colour glossy brochures printed up to send to customers wanting more information. However the cost of doing this would have been at least £1000 + VAT. For about 250 brochures. Far more than I could afford at the time. Another problem, was if I bought any new inflatables at a later date. They would not be in the brochure. However, it suddenly occurred to me that a much less expensive alternative to brochures was to take some colour photographs of my inflatables, get a large number of reprints and send these off to prospective customers, with a covering letter and price list. The cost of getting 1000 photos developed was just under a £100. A saving of over £900! However, to my surprise there was an additional benefit which outweighed even the cost savings. I found out about this new benefit as a result of positive feedback from customers. I will try and explain this benefit as clearly as possible. When a customer receives a glossy colour brochure, they may be really impressed and love the colour images etc. However, the problem with a brochure is that it is impersonal, and many people just have a browse through, and then put it away for safe keeping. I am convinced that many people have been conditioned to admire the quality of a good brochure, but a relatively few number of people actually buy just from a brochure.

On the other hand, a photo or set of photos sent to a prospective customer, is breathtakingly personal. I've actually had customers phone me the day they received my photos, expressing their gratitude, and commenting on the good service. Some customers even think that I took the photos specifically for them, and book their inflatable immediately. Another reason, why more bookings usually result from photos as opposed to brochures, is because when people receive photos in the post e.g. from friends, it is usually of exciting events such as holidays and marriages. Importantly, these photos always get shown around the family, relatives and the neighbours etc. When you send your photos to customers, the same kind of thing can happen, albeit on a smaller scale.

When I send photos out to customers, I always make sure that that my company name and telephone number is on the back as well as the size of the inflatable on the photo. Try and use a good quality camera, you will get even more bookings if the print quality is excellent. If a potential customer rang me and didn't book an inflatable there and then, I would often ask them if they would be interested in receiving some photos and an information pack. 9 times out of 10, they said yes, and of the people who received the photos, 60% – 75% would book. (One other advantage in doing this is that you now have a potential customers' name and address – so that you can write to them again.). A useful way of reducing your costs still further is to photocopy some of your photos, and send a mixture of colour photos and black and white photocopies. Try and send colour photos of your best inflatables.

Idea 7 Sending photos (or brochures if you have lots of money to spend) should grow your business and improve profits quite quickly. However, there is another way of getting photos and brochures of your inflatables in front of potential customers much more cheaply, and considerably faster, almost instantly. I'm sure you've guessed it, the solution is to have your own website on

the internet. Imagine this scenario. A potential customer calls you, after seeing your advert in the yellow pages. She expresses an interest in several of your designs which you tell her about, but she is not sure which one her 6 year old daughter prefers. You then tell her she can see some colour images of your inflatables on the website. She then goes away, connects to your website, shows her daughter the different designs etc. Her daughter then chooses one and 10 minutes later is back on the phone to you to book the chosen castle. Just 5 years ago this scenario would have been impossible. The great thing about having a website is that you don't have to spend money on photographs, brochures envelopes, postage stamps etc. The website does all the work for you at a fraction of the cost. Secondly, and just as importantly, your customer can view colour pictures and relevant details of your inflatables instantly, without having to wait 24 hours or more to get something in the post.

In April 2000, I decided to have a website constructed for my own inflatable hire business. You can visit this site at [www.allstarsleisure.co.uk](http://www.allstarsleisure.co.uk) This site cost me around £300 which included registering the domain name, buying the web space, and paying the web master for designing and constructing the website. Amazingly, within 10 days of the site being up, it had already paid for itself. I had 7 bookings during these 10 days as a direct result of people looking at my website, and then phoning me to book their inflatable. The website did all the selling for me! I advertised my website address in my yellow pages advert. A major additional benefit of having your own website is that it is much easier for customers to communicate with you. They can email you from your site at any time of the day or night, whichever time is convenient for them. You simply pick up your emails in the morning, and then email or call them when its convenient.

If you are interested in having your own website built under the address:

[www.yourcompanyname.co.uk](http://www.yourcompanyname.co.uk) or other available personal domain, please contact Rob Graham at Art and Sole Design, [www.artandsole.org.uk](http://www.artandsole.org.uk) – email [rob@artandsole.org](mailto:rob@artandsole.org) If you are a BIHA member will only cost you 50% of what the normal commercial rates would be.

Idea 8 Every time I hire out an inflatable, I always hand out a dozen or so A5 or A6 sized leaflets, with my phone number on for the customer to hand out to their guests. These leaflets are just photocopies and usually work very well, they are cheap to produce. I usually get at least one booking for every batch of leaflets which I give out at a party.

Idea 9 An excellent idea of getting more business is to team up with other companies which are in a similar business. Examples are childrens entertainers, magicians, and companies which provide party related items e.g. barbeques and wedding equipment. If you have a reciprocal agreement with these companies, they refer business to you and in return for which you pass business onto them. The secret to making this idea work well is to develop good working relationships between the different companies.

Idea 10 Although the BIHA is concerned primarily with hiring inflatables, it is relatively easy to boost your profits by hiring out add-on support products, at the same time that you set up the inflatable at the customers' premises. The best examples of add-on support products which we have come across are: helium balloons, mini-marquees, party bags, and tables and chairs.

Trestle tables for the food and drink to go on are also very popular hire products.

Idea 11 The Dennis Emery Profit System: This superb idea is repeated later as a separate report. In a nutshell it is as follows: Many childrens parties have a theme to them e.g pirates, Barbie Doll, mermaids, animals etc etc. Imagine if you could supply your customers with a themed bouncy castle of their choice to match as closely as possible the theme of the party or the birthday child's favourite character. How much extra would your customers be prepared to pay to have the theme of their choice? £5, £10 or even £15? How many extra referrals would you get? Traditionally, the only way to do this was to go to the huge expense of buying a themed bouncy castle. However, the big disadvantage of doing this is that the theme may go out of fashion with children and you are then stuck with a castle which no-one wants to hire. The ingenious solution to this problem is to have detachable artwork panels which have Velcro attached to them, and so can be interchanged between different bouncy castles, to suit the relevant theme of the party. Each artwork panel is made from bouncy castle material, and is approx. 5ft high and 3 ft wide. They fit snugly around the two front pillars of the castle. The castle also has to have Velcro glued to the front pillars, in order for the artwork to be securely attached. I used to use heavy duty duct tape, to secure the 2 artwork panels. However, I found that this left a messy residue, and also in wet weather it would come off. If you are interested in buying some detachable artwork panels of the

theme of your choice, including the all important Velcro strips, please call me on 01344 485389 and I will put you in touch with the company which produces the artwork, the panels and the Velcro at very reasonable prices.

Idea 12 This next idea is astonishing in its simplicity, but can generate a huge amount of extra business. This involves writing to a few local playgroups, nurseries and schools and telling them that they can have a FREE bouncy castle or ballpond for the day if they promise to hand out your leaflets and give you some well deserved free publicity. The mums will see your inflatable and providing it is clean and in good condition, you should get quite a lot of referrals from it. Similarly, if you supply free of charge an inflatable for your local shopping centre, if its busy, you will get bookings and referrals from it. It certainly helps to have your phone number painted on the front of the unit, and you should always give lots of leaflets out.

Idea 13 This next idea is a new one but works very well if you are very well organised, in the running of your business. It involves running an Emergency Call Out Service. It is a well known fact that at the beginning of each summer, several "cowboy" bouncy castle hire companies set up in all the major towns with the intention of making a quick buck, during the peak season and then selling up in the winter. What separates them from established hirers, is that they rarely have P/L insurance, they often operate with worn-out and dirty inflatables, and perhaps most serious of all is that they sometimes forget (or just don't care) to deliver the castle to the customer. Last summer, I had about 50 calls from frantic people telling me that they had been let down as the castle had not arrived and the party was starting in 10 minutes! Because of the short notice involved, and also because it was often in the next town, I was rarely able to help. This concerned me deeply, because I felt that it would harm the entire reputation of the inflatable hire industry. "Cowboy companies ("Fly by Night") all too often only have one or two units, and in the busy summer period, get double booked with alarming frequency. When you advertise your inflatables for hire, have the words "Emergency Call Out Service Available". Also write it on your flyers which you hand out at parties. A word of warning: when word gets around that you can provide an emergency call out service to customers who have been let down by "cowboy" companies, you are likely to get very busy during the summer months, when the demand for inflatables far exceeds the supply. Make sure you have sufficient inflatables, transport and organisational ability to cope. Your emergency call out service will also get known by other hirers in the area, who may pass business onto you at the last minute. Last summer, another inflatable hirer operating in the same town as me, found to his dismay that his back axle had broken, half way through his deliveries at 10am on a Saturday morning. To make matters worse his spare van was being serviced. He was able to call me and a few other hirers to help him finish his deliveries.

Idea 14 This idea follows on from the last idea. The BIHA strongly recommend that inflatable hirers operating in the same town or vicinity should develop close working relationships. If this is achieved it means that leads are being shared out, especially if one hirer is fully booked, and can pass on leads and bookings to another reputable hirer, who is perhaps not so busy. I have come across hirers in some towns who will not pass the time of day if they bump into another hirer. I have also known of cases where rivalry between hirers in a town has been so intense, that rather than pass a booking to a competitor, a hirer has instead chosen to let down a prospective customer, even where they've known where a castle is available for hire. This is a very unprofessional and selfish business practice, and is not recommended. An important aim of the BIHA is to try and bring inflatable hirers together who are perhaps working in the same town. We believe that if leads are passed around, everyone will benefit, and every reputable company will become more profitable over the years.

Idea 15 A very good way of promoting your business completely for free, is to stick a magnetic sign on the sides and back of your van, or estate car, with the name of your company and the telephone company. We have further developed this idea in more detail and is the subject of a free report included at the end.

Idea 16 This excellent idea is very similar to idea no. 10 above, but uses a slightly different approach. It concerns the use of accessories to complement your bouncy castle bookings. Every time a customer books an inflatable, you have a golden opportunity whilst they are on the phone (after they have booked! ) to make additional money for very little extra work. Examples of accessories which you can offer your customers to make extra profits are: balloons, including helium balloons; face-painting, party-bags, mini-marquees, tables and chairs, crockery, magician

service, childrens' entertainer, trampolines, toy trains for children to ride on, quality toys to hire at parties etc etc. There are probably a lot more examples of accessories. Give customers a choice as to what they would like to hire in addition to the inflatable. If they cannot decide at the point they book the inflatable, ring them back a day or two later. If you provide a good service for your accessories you will also get a lot more referrals. It is strongly recommended that you firstly do some research to see what are the most popular types of accessories in your area. Also have a look at the competition. Perhaps you can strike up a deal with a competitor, i.e they give you bouncy castle bookings, and in return for which, you give them bookings for their "accessories". Spend some time doing some research, and ask your existing customers what they would be most interested in to hire, or buy to run alongside your inflatable.

Idea 17 This next idea is a very clever concept recently passed to us from an existing BIHA member. It addresses a very real problem when supplying a large inflatable to a public event. Traditionally, the inflatable is sited, and children (and adults!) pay anything from 50p to £2 to have a go. At the end of the event, the operator usually gives a percentage of the takings to the organisers of the event or a designated charity. Alternatively, the operator will be asked for a pitch fee, (e.g. at a car boot sale or a school fete) of at least £20. We have heard about hirers who have been asked for as much as £500 per day to site their inflatables at airshows. If the weather is favourable, and the public (and their kids!) turn up in their droves, it can be very profitable indeed. However, unfortunately this system is open to abuse and dishonesty by the person taking the money. Firstly, the operator may employ someone to take the money off the public. If you the operator are not present, how do you know for example, that the takings were only £750. They may have been £1000, but your employee dishonestly pocketed £250 of the takings. How can you make sure that you are not being ripped off, even though you are not present? Easy, when you know!! You buy a big book of raffle tickets, and you instruct your employee to hand a raffle ticket to every person that has a go on the inflatable. If they have more than one go they get more than one ticket. At the end of the event you draw a raffle ticket out of a hat, and the winner gets a quality prize which you bought beforehand. By handing out raffle tickets, there are several benefits. Firstly, more people are likely to want to go the inflatable in the first place, as there is a prize at the end. Secondly, you can keep tags as to who has been on the inflatable and who hasn't. Thirdly, and the biggest benefit of all is that you will know exactly how many raffle tickets have been given out, because every single ticket has a duplicate in the book. If your employee tries to fiddle you out of a few pounds, this will show up as the duplicate raffle tickets and will not reconcile with the monies taken. Its important to make it known to customers at the outset, that they will get free entry into the raffle, every time that they have a go of the inflatable. If it's a good prize you will make a lot more profits as well.

Idea 18 This idea has only just come in, and should save you many hundreds of pounds every year, if you act upon it. BP (British Petroleum) has recently started a discount scheme on their fuel, which can be enjoyed by all businesses, from the one man band right up to the multi-national company. It works like this: you apply for a BP Plus card, (which works a bit like a credit card). Once you have received your card, you can then fill up with petrol or diesel at any BP filling station in the UK, and you will be automatically be given a discount of around 2p to 3p per litre of fuel. This works out as being even cheaper than what the supermarkets sell fuel for. If you are interested in this please contact: Michaela Banks (Sales Co-ordinator) at Securicor Fuelserv on 01473 466650 or 01473 466666. She will then send you an application form. Please note that to enjoy these big savings on your fuel, there is no minimum spend required, there is no charge for the card and there is no contract needed. A valuable additional benefit, is that all fuel card usage is detailed weekly on comprehensive management reports, giving you the control you need to best manage your costs. If you operate with several vans you can have several fuel cards. Please note that these discounted fuel cards are not available to the general public. Please mention your membership of the British Inflatable Hirers Association when applying for these discounted fuel cards.

We hope that you like all these 18 ideas in "How to turbo-charge your profits from hiring inflatables – volume 1". We would like to express our appreciation to all members who kindly sent in their ideas to make this booklet possible. If you have any more ideas, hints and tips which we could include in volume 2, we urgently need to hear from you.

We are currently in the process of compiling a list of brief testimonials from members who have read these free reports. When you have finished reading them all, we would be very grateful if you could write a sentence or two about what you thought of the ideas mentioned in these free reports, and perhaps about the BIHA in general. You can either email your comments to us, leave a message on the answerphone 01344 485389 or write to us at the BIHA office address at 33 Ladybank, Birch Hill, Bracknell, Berkshire, RG12 7HA, United Kingdom. As a token of our appreciation to you for submitting a brief testimonial to us we will send you another free report: "How to get all the schools in your local area contacting you to book a bouncy castle, after you have sent them one letter or made one phone call". (This excellent idea has nothing to do with summer or Christmas school fetes).

#### The Dennis Emery Profit System:

This superb idea can be detailed as follows: Many childrens parties have a theme to them e.g pirates, action heros, cartoon characters, dolls, mermaids, animals, monsters etc. Imagine if you could supply your customers with a themed bouncy castle of their choice to match as closely as possible the theme of the party or the birthday child's favourite character. How much extra would your customers be prepared to pay to have the theme of their choice? £5, £10 or even £15? How many extra referrals would you get?

Traditionally, the only way to do this was to go to the huge expense of buying a themed bouncy castle. However, the big disadvantage of doing this is that the theme may go out of fashion with children and you are then stuck with a castle which no-one wants to hire.

The ingenious solution to this problem is to have detachable artwork panels which have Velcro attached to them, and so can be interchanged between different bouncy castles, to suit the relevant theme of the party. Each artwork panel is made from bouncy castle material, and is approx. 5ft high and 3 ft wide. They fit snugly around the two front pillars of the castle. The castle also has to have Velcro glued to the front pillars, in order for the artwork to be securely attached. I used to use heavy duty duct tape, to secure the 2 artwork panels. However, I found that this left a messy residue, and also in wet weather it would come off.

If you are interested in buying some detachable artwork panels of the theme of your choice, including the all important Velcro strips, please email me on [mark.jerram@ntlworld.com](mailto:mark.jerram@ntlworld.com) or call me on 01344 485389 or write to the BIHA office address. I will then put you in touch with the company which produces the artwork, the panels and the Velcro at very reasonable prices.

#### The explanations of the ideas, hints and tips mentioned in your original letter of invitation.

Q1) How to get so many bookings for your bouncy castles that you are turning customers away.

A1) Write a simple one page letter to all the schools, nurseries, playgroups etc in your local area. Tell them that you will lend them a free bouncy castle, if they hand out your leaflets and publicity material to the parents. Do make sure that your telephone number is clearly displayed on the castle as well.

Q2) A simple idea to increase the power of your electric fans by up to 25%. This takes just 5 minutes per fan and does not involve dismantling the fan or undertaking any electrical work.

A2) During normal use, whilst the impeller in the fan is spinning at high RPM, it builds up a strong static charge which has the unfortunate effect of picking up dust and dirt, insects and other debris and depositing it on the actual blades of the impellor, as if stuck by "glue". This gradual build up of debris reduces the efficiency of the impellor in the same way that the build up of ice on an aircraft's wing can reduce its aerodynamic lifting ability. When the impellors blades have become really clogged up over say an entire season, then the amount of air being blown out into the inflatable can be reduced by as much as 25%. This can mean that the inflatable is only partially inflated, which rapidly increases the wear on the unit, and causes a safety hazard. In order to remove this debris from the impellor blades I normally use a long thin metal tent peg, which I insert at the funnel end and then carefully clean the impellor getting as much of the debris off as possible. The removed debris will fall back into the blades, but when you switch the blower on, all the loose debris will shoot out, so be very careful of your eyes. After you have cleaned the impellor blades, you will notice an improvement in the force of air coming out.

Q3) How to make sure that adults don't bounce on your childrens bouncy castles and cause unnecessary damage.

A3) This is a slightly controversial idea, but it does work well, as I've actually done it. It involves painting in clear letters on the back wall of the castle. "NOT TO BE USED BY ADULTS". If an

adult jumps on to have a bounce, the children will often shout at the adult to get off, purely because of the notice.

Q4) A very simple idea to make sure that you still get paid, even if the weather has been extremely wet and the castle has hardly been used, that you still get paid.

A4) The solution to this problem came about before one of our members submitted the idea of how to beat the problem of wet weather. (Please see the attached mini-report). The original idea we used to use, if the weather was exceptionally bad, and the castle didn't get used, was to promise the customer that they could have the castle again on a dryer day, and only pay us £5 (which paid for our diesel). If the weather forecast is very grim, we always give the customer the opportunity to cancel before we deliver. We do not charge a cancellation fee for this.

Q5) How to clean your inflatables the lazy way – This will save you hours and hours of time.

A5) When I first started hiring inflatables way back in 1991, I would inflate my inflatables outside my house, and give them a good clean using diluted traffic film remover which I still use to this day. I quite enjoyed the cleaning, but I didn't like rolling up the inflatable afterwards, especially as it was still sometimes a bit wet. One day it occurred to me that I could make life much easier for myself if I delivered the inflatable to the customer say one hour earlier than normal and cleaned the inflatable in the customers garden. Virtually all customers were happy with this arrangement, but I always made a point of forewarning the customer that I would be cleaning the unit in their garden.

Q6) How to get access to dozens of new customers by creating cross-promotion deals, with other businesses.

A6) This idea is incredibly simple but very under-exploited by inflatable hire companies, and indeed by many other small businesses in the UK. This idea involves forging a working relationship with other businesses who are not direct competitors, but nevertheless operate in the childrens (and adults) entertainment market. Examples include childrens entertainers, magicians, puppeteers, and hirers of mini-marquees. I strongly recommend that you develop some close working relationships with wedding organisers, as they often need an inflatable to amuse the kids at the reception. In return for which keep an eye out for anyone you know who is getting married, and pass them onto to your wedding organiser friend.

Q7) How wet weather can actually boost your profits.

A7) If the weather forecast is for wet weather I sometimes suggest to the customer that they can hire a mini-marquee from me, at a discount of course. They often agree to this, so I get paid for delivering the inflatable and the mini-marquee as well!

Q8) Some ideas to help you reduce your business overheads.

A8) This is the subject of a major report which we are working on at the moment, especially for BIHA members.

Q9) How to reduce your household expenses.

A9) Again, this is the subject of a brand new report currently being worked on.

Q10) How to use add-on support products to delight your existing customers and attract brand new customers.

A10) There are a lot of other products which you can hire out or provide alongside your inflatables. The best ideas which we have come across are: balloons and helium balloons, face-painting, mini-marquees, tables and chairs, toy trains for children to ride on, and other quality toys for children to hire. If you operate your inflatable hire business on a husband and wife basis, the husband can tend to setting up the inflatable whilst the wife does the face painting, for example.

Q11) A unique and simple way to protect your inflatable against theft.

A11) We strongly recommend that all hirers write their name and telephone number inside the main inflation TUBE at the rear of the inflatable, using a permanent black marker pen. We are currently working on a national database of inflatables, which are owned by hirers in the BIHA. If it proves popular we will extend this idea nationally. There are a few problems with implementing this idea, if you have any suggestions please let us know at the BIHA Head Office.

Q12) How to use the deluxe approach to increase profits.

A12) Sometimes, it's a very good idea to use the deluxe approach to getting more business.

When a customer phones to book an inflatable you have no real idea whether they are a multi-millionaire or on income support, or somewhere in between. With the deluxe approach you can target the customer in relation to how much they want to spend on their inflatable, in a very subtle

way. This approach works as follows: If a customer rings for a quote for say a 12 x 12 castle, you say to them: " would you like economy, standard or deluxe castle". They will then usually say what do you mean. You tell them that the economy unit is 3 years old. The standard units are 1 – 2 years old, (and are £5 more) and the deluxe units are under 1 year old (and £5 extra). Customers with a high disposable income will tend to book deluxe and standard units, whilst less well off customers will book the economy units. However, do remember that this is not always the case, children love inflatables so much that their parents will often make a big financial sacrifice to hire 2 or even 3 inflatables for their child's birthday party. When using the deluxe approach to increase profits, you can use any combination of variables, not necessarily just based on age or condition of the inflatable..For example, you could say that with the deluxe service, they get the inflatable delivered the day before the party; with the standard service, it is the morning of the party, and with the economy service it is up to an hour before the party starts. Use your imagination with this deluxe approach, there are many different variations which you can try until you have found the one which you are most comfortable with.

Q13) How to reduce wear on the bed seams of the inflatable.

A13) There are several ways of making your bed seams stronger and less susceptible to wear. The best method is to get them webbed with a material very similar to car seatbelts. Another way of reducing wear on the seams is to put a slightly more powerful blower than you would normally use. I personally use a 1.5hp blower instead of a 0.75hp blower. I also find that the castle is a lot more bouncier, and the children enjoy it a lot more.

Q14) How to easily prevent rain-water from being sucked into the inflatable, through the blower when it is raining heavily.

A14) Very simple, place a plastic picnic table (approx. 4ft diameter) over the blower. You can remove 2 legs of the table to create a steep slope for the water to run down.

Q15) An essential tool which can repair your bouncy castle/inflatable in an emergency. e.g. at a customer's house. This method usually works well for small to medium repairs and is an alternative to using glue and patches at the customer's house. Although, after the booking, we always recommend that you have the repair professionally stitched or patched.

A15) Use a heavy duty stapler, it works wonders at achieving emergency temporary repairs. I've tried it and it works. Make sure you get the rip or tear properly repaired as soon as possible.

A new idea to beat the problem of wet weather.

One of the biggest problems with hiring bouncy castles in the UK is the unpredictable weather. One day it can be glorious sunshine and your phone doesn't stop ringing. The next day it can be torrential rain. Heavy rain causes all sorts of problems for hirers. When the bouncy castle gets very wet the children's enjoyment is reduced and often, especially if it has hardly been used, the customer expects a discount or even a refund. Most bouncy castles have rain-covers or shower covers, but in prolonged heavy rain these tend to be inadequate. How many times have you collected a castle after a very wet day, to find that not only is the raincover soaking wet, but so is the inflatable. It then becomes a nightmare to try and get as much water off it as possible (both inside and outside), and then to try and roll it up while it is still soaking wet. Yuk! Perhaps the biggest problem of all is trying to lift a soaking wet bouncy castle which weighs half a ton onto your sack trolley, and then trying to get it into your van, when it can be nearly double the normal weight because of all the rainwater inside.

Fortunately, there is a unique solution which goes a long way to solving this problem of wet weather. We will now look at this solution step-by-step.

Step 1 In very wet weather rainwater gets sucked into the electric or petrol fan, and then gets forced deep inside the castle, adding enormously to the weight of the unit when it is rolled up, and coming up through the bed seams, when the castle is being used, and causing bubbles and froth. To prevent this rainwater being sucked into the blower, buy a plastic picnic table (approx. 4ft diameter) from any good DIY shop. If you then place this table over the fan, when its raining, it will stop water coming in the side vent, but still allow the fan to suck air in.

Step 2 You will also need a heavy duty raincover, that is oversized. For my 12ft x 12ft castles I buy a large piece of heavy duty tarpauline (similar to what market traders use as a roof on their stalls) that measures about 25ft x 25ft. I then lay this cover over the deflated castle. I then get a helper, or even the customer to hold one side of the cover, while I hold the other side. The fan is

then switched on and as the castle inflates I make sure that the raincover is evenly distributed over the castle.

Step 3 Once the castle is fully inflated I then use string or twine to tie the raincover to the metal stakes at each corner. The cover has eyelets spaced at intervals all the way round. As the raincover is so oversized, it should seal up any gaps at the sides and back of the inflatable. (In windy weather you may need an extra person to help hold the raincover in place prior to it being tied down).

Step 4 At this stage the raincover should be securely attached to the castle, with no gaps showing. The front of the raincover should be hanging loosely downwards, obscuring the bed of the castle. At this point get two telescopic keepnet poles which you bought from your local fishing tackle shop, and press the sharp bit into the ground, about 7 feet in front of the castle and to the left. Repeat this procedure with the other pole, but this time put it 7 feet out from the castle, but on the opposite side . i.e. on the right.

Step 5 Now take hold of the front of the raincover, which is hanging downwards in a vertical position and move it outwards, so that it becomes about 45 degrees and forms an awning, which protrudes about 8 feet from the front of the castle. You then need to tie this "awning" to the two keepnet poles. Because the keepnet poles are adjustable you can alter the angle of the awning. I recommend a very steep angle in very heavy rain, so that up. Providing everything is securely tied, the children should be 99% dry when using the castle.

IMPORTANT: Always make sure that any exposed electrics e.g. plug sockets are fully protected by a waterproof bag, or better still, that you use waterproof connectors.

In October 2000, I had an ideal opportunity, to test this idea. To my amazement and delight it worked extremely well. I recommend you do the same. If your castles already have good raincovers, I strongly recommend that at the very least you carry out step 1. i.e. putting a picnic table over the fan.

Another excellent idea - The Free Advertising Method.

This idea has only just been received by the BIHA head office but we greatly admire it for its sheer audacity. When we first saw it our initial reaction was that it was too good to be true. Here it is in the same format as it arrived in the office last week.

"I take my newest and best bouncy castle I own to a busy road in my town which has a wide grass verge and is not located near any footpaths or pavements. I then use a petrol blower to inflate it. I make sure I park my van next to it, which has been signwritten with my company name and telephone number. Every time a vehicle drives by, the occupants stare at my castle in absolute amazement. I usually stay about 2 to 3 hours, by which time several thousand cars have driven by. I have permission from my local council, but they will not allow the castle to be displayed during the evening rush hour or after dark.. When I get home the answer phone is crammed full of messages from people who saw my castle by the roadside, and want to book it for their kid's party. Over the next few days I get a steady trickle of bookings. Apart from a phone call to the local council asking for permission, and a couple of hours of time. The cost is virtually zero, and brings in a lot of extra business"

Please note that this submitted idea is for information purposes only. We like it because it takes initiative and a lot of nerve. However, one problem we can see with it, is if children somehow manage to get onto the unit by the roadside. Also, we believe it may cause a distraction to drivers as they drive past the inflatable. We suggest another, possibly safer version of this idea. This involves asking permission to site the inflatable where there are a lots of people congregating, e.g. busy shopping centres on a Saturday afternoon, popular parks, the local zoo etc. Always get permission first.

26 Marketing ideas, hints and tips to increase profits.

- 1) Delivering leaflets through peoples letter boxes in your area.
- 2) Advertising in your local newspaper.
- 3) Have a FREE listing in your local Thomson Directory.
- 4) Advertise in your local Yellow Pages. (Highly recommended).
- 5) Advertise in the shop windows of local newsagents.
- 6) Advertise in the windows of Toy Shops.
- 7) Advertise in your local library.

- 8) Tell all your friends, neighbours, family and work colleagues what you do.
- 9) Advertise on the noticeboard of the local churches.
- 10) Advertise on the noticeboard of local supermarkets.
- 11) Have your phone number written on the top of your bouncy castle, everyone will see it.
- 12) If your town has a "Free-ads" newspaper or similar, you can advertise very cheaply.
- 13) Getting customer referrals by providing a good service.
- 14) Write to your local councils, for any council sponsored leisure events.
- 15) Advertise in doctors and dentist surgeries, and hospital waiting rooms if permitted.
- 16) Hand leaflets out at your local shopping center.
- 17) Advertise in your local wedding shop (the children at the wedding need to be entertained).
- 18) Advertise at childrens' playgroups and nurseries, and Mums and Toddler groups.
- 19) Advertise FREE on company noticeboards. Ask your friends, family and contacts to put up your leaflet on their noticeboard at work.
- 20) Lend your bouncy castle or inflatable to a charity event for FREE. All the money taken goes to the charity, but you get FREE publicity, (especially if you hand your leaflets) and if you are lucky, you will get a mention in the local press.
- 21) Contact hotels and guest houses. They often have private functions in their grounds, e.g. christening parties, wedding receptions, company do's etc which require a bouncy castle or similar to amuse the children.
- 22) Check up on all the local newspapers and free papers, to see which schools, churches, hospitals, community centers, local businesses etc are having fetes, fairs, open days, sports days, company fun days, jumble sales, car-boot sales etc. Ring them up to offer them the opportunity of hiring a bouncy castle from you. Do this regularly, you will pick up a lot of business from it.
- 23) Contact a broker who is involved in childrens entertainment. Tell them that you will pay them a commission for every bouncy castle booking which they get for you.
- 24) Contact all the pubs in your area, which have a public garden or a large car park. Tell them that if they hire a castle from you it will attract adults who have young children. Parents can have a drink, while watching their children having fun on the inflatable. Some pubs have family fun days in the summer. Make sure you let them know you can provide the inflatable.
- 25) You only need to use your imagination to find out some really great places where you can site your bouncy castle, and perhaps charge children 50p or one pound to have a go. Here are some examples: shopping centers, the village green, country shows, open air museums, zoos, the local park, a large retail outlet, e.g. a DIY shop or supermarket, etc.
- 26) You could hire your bouncy castle to the local childrens home or orphanage, perhaps offering a small discount.

#### Two words which will massively enhance your credibility to your customers

Two words to use to develop more trust and confidence with your customers. This important tip is all too often overlooked by hire companies, but can have a powerful effect on showing the customer that you are a reputable business. These two words are your name. If a customer phones me to enquire about hiring an inflatable but does not book one there and then, I will tell them my name - Mark Jerram, so if they do ring back they have a contact, and they know there is a real human being at the end of phone. Also, if your customers and people who enquire about your services know your name they are more likely to refer you to other people.

#### How to make your childrens' inflatable slides more slippery – instantly.

How to make your childrens inflatable slides more slippery, so that the children slide down easier. (and have more fun). Childrens inflatable slides are a great hire product, and are relatively new to the inflatable hire scene. For safety reasons, the slides are not very steep and as a result the children often slide down quite slowly. What I do to slightly speed them up is to spray a wax based furniture polish (Mr Sheene polish works very well) on to the sliding part of the slide, and then I thoroughly rub it into the material with a dry cloth. The children have more enjoyment, the customer is pleased and you are likely to get more referrals. This idea is only really suitable for childrens slides where there is an inflatable horizontal area at the bottom of the slide where the children slide into and come to a safe stop. This idea is not really suitable for much larger adult slides, which tend to be steeper than childrens slides.

#### How to get FREE crash mats.

How to get free crash mats. Many schools in the UK have large numbers of safety mats which they use for many purposes, such as gymnastics and martial arts. When these crash mats start to get slightly tatty or slightly damaged, the school usually has to dispose of them and buy brand new ones. Try contacting a local school in your area, and offer to take away their slightly damaged crash mats, in return for which you could offer a small donation to school funds, or even a free castle for the day. **IMPORTANT!!:** Please only contact the schools in your local area, if members are greedy with this idea and start contacting many different schools, not only in their town but in other towns as well, then there will be less crash mats to go round.

#### The 15 best FREE marketing Ideas

- a) Put your advert up in your local community centers, church halls or local schools. It is recommended that you get permission first.
- b) Put up your company advert and logo on the side of your van or car.
- c) Put your advert up on your staff notice-board.
- d) Take advantage of a free advert in your local Thompsons directory.
- e) You can benefit from a free advert on [www.biha.org.uk](http://www.biha.org.uk) if you are a member of the BIHA.
- f) You can have a free advert on [www.leisurescene.uk.com](http://www.leisurescene.uk.com) - if you are a member of the BIHA.
- g) You can have a free advert on [www.partypages.co.uk](http://www.partypages.co.uk)
- h) If you provide a small inflatable for free at your local playgroup or nursery, you will pick up lots of business.
- i) Provide a free castle for your local shopping center and get lots of potential customers.
- j) Every time you deliver your inflatable to a party, hand out your leaflets to the hosts and ask if you can put them in the party bags.
- k) Stand outside your local schools and hand out leaflets to the mums and dads as they arrive to collect their kids.
- l) Register your website with the various search engines – many of them will let you register for free.
- m) Set up reciprocal website links with other companies which are also in the leisure industry such as children's entertainers, marquee hirers, mobile DJ's etc.
- n) Some shops e.g. supermarkets and newsagents will allow you to display a postcard size advert either free of charge or for a small fee.
- o) If you donate an inflatable to a local high profile charity event, it is likely that the local press will be there. Send a press release to them, well before the event with a photo of the inflatable which you will be donating for the day.

#### Summing Up.

We hope that you like all these ideas, hints and tips. We would like to express our appreciation to all members who kindly sent in their ideas to make this possible. If you have any more ideas, hints and tips which we could include in another report, we urgently need to hear from you. We are currently in the process of compiling a list of brief testimonials from members who have read these free reports. When you have finished reading them all, we would be very grateful if you could write a sentence or two about what you thought of the ideas mentioned in these free reports, and perhaps about the BIHA in general. You can either email your comments to us at [mark.jerram@ntlworld.com](mailto:mark.jerram@ntlworld.com), leave a message on the answerphone 01344 485389 or write to us at the BIHA office address at 33 Ladybank, Birch Hill, Bracknell, Berkshire, RG12 7HA, United Kingdom. As a token of our appreciation to you for submitting a brief testimonial to us, we will send you another free report by email, show you another idea about how to increase your profits by hiring inflatables.