WHEELHOUSE

A WHITE PAPER FOR YOUTH ENRICHMENT FRANCHISORS

The Neighborhood Advantage

Why local marketing out-earns digital-only lead generation — and how franchisors can get every franchisee to actually do it.

PREPARED BY WHEELHOUSE   CHOOSEWHEELHOUSE.COM   2026 EDITION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The growth lever hiding in plain sight

Demand for children’s programs has never been stronger, but the cheapest way to capture it is the one most emerging franchisors under-use: consistent local marketing at the franchisee level.

Across youth enrichment — sports, music, swim, STEM, arts, and tutoring — the economics are shifting in two directions at once. The cost of buying a customer through digital advertising keeps climbing, while the way families actually choose programs remains stubbornly, decisively local. Parents enroll their children based on proximity, on a coach or instructor they trust, and on the recommendation of another parent in their community. None of those are things a national digital campaign can manufacture.

This paper makes the case that franchisors who treat local marketing as a deployable system — not an optional extra they hope franchisees will get around to — win on the three metrics that matter most: enrollment, unit-level profitability, and franchisee retention. It also addresses the real reason most franchisees don't market locally, and why that's a system problem the franchisor is uniquely positioned to solve.

$40B+

spent by U.S. families on youth sports each year — more than the entire U.S. box office[1,7]

~60%

rise in customer acquisition cost across digital channels over the past five years[10]

70%

of parents with kids in extracurriculars choose sports, with music, dance & art close behind[4]

SECTION 01

The digital treadmill is speeding up

It is easy to understand why a young franchisor leans on digital advertising. It is measurable, it scales from headquarters, and it produces a dashboard full of leads that looks like progress. For a brand still building density, paid search and paid social feel like the fastest path from zero to enrollments. And they do work — up to a point.

The problem is the trajectory. Paid acquisition behaves like a treadmill that quietly increases its speed every year, so running in place costs more each season. Industry analyses estimate that customer acquisition costs have climbed roughly 60% over the past five years, a pace that outstrips general inflation as more advertisers compete for the same finite attention.[10] On Google's search network, the average cost per lead reached about $70 in 2025, and costs rose for the large majority of industries that year rather than a worried few.[8] Entering 2026, the average cost per click jumped another 12% year over year — the steepest annual increase since 2021.[9]

The cost of a paid lead keeps climbing

AVERAGE GOOGLE ADS COST PER LEAD, U.S. (DIRECTIONAL)

Source: WordStream / LocaliQ, 2025 Google Ads Benchmarks.[8] 2023–2024 values derived from reported year-over-year changes (a ~25% rise into 2024, then +5.1% to $70.11 in 2025); shown directionally.

There is a second, subtler cost to a digital-only posture. Paid leads are rented, not owned. The moment the budget pauses, the pipeline stops — there is no compounding asset left behind. A parent who clicks a search ad has no relationship with the brand and no reason to choose it over the next result. Contrast that with a parent who hears about your program from a neighbor at school pickup: that lead arrives pre-trusted, converts faster, and costs the franchisee almost nothing.

The ground beneath paid digital is also shifting in ways that make a single-channel bet riskier than it looks. Privacy changes across browsers and mobile operating systems have eroded the precise targeting that once made paid social efficient, so more of every dollar is spent reaching the wrong people before finding the right ones. At the same time, AI-generated answers are absorbing more of the search results page, compressing the organic visibility brands once earned for free and pushing even more demand into the paid auction. The effect is structural, not cyclical: the channel that feels most controllable is the one a franchisor controls least, because its price and its rules are set by a handful of platforms whose incentives are not aligned with any single brand's unit economics. A growth model anchored to that channel inherits all of its volatility.

None of this means digital advertising is a mistake. It means digital advertising is a poor *foundation*. When it is the entire growth engine, every franchisee is exposed to the same rising tide of costs with none of the local moat that makes those costs survivable. The franchisors who thrive over the next decade will be the ones who treat paid digital as an accelerant on top of a local engine — not as a substitute for one.

SECTION 02

How parents actually choose a program

A family enrolling a child in a swim class or a music program does not behave like a shopper buying a commodity online. The decision is local, social, and trust-driven from the first moment.

Start with discovery. Local intent dominates how people search: roughly 46% of all Google searches have local intent, and Americans run an estimated 1.5 billion "near me" searches every month.[11] These are high-intent, action-oriented moments — about three-quarters of people who run a "near me" search visit a related business within a day.[11] For a youth enrichment brand, the parent typing "kids swim lessons near me" is not browsing; they are ready to enroll, and the only question is whether your franchisee's location is the one that shows up, looks complete, and looks trusted.

Then comes the filter most franchisors underestimate: other parents. Recommendation is the currency of the children's-activity market. In the Aspen Institute's national survey, more than half of parents said a trustworthy, well-trained coach would make them more likely to commit their child long-term, to recommend the activity to other parents, and to enroll their child in additional activities.[2] That single finding captures the entire local flywheel: quality experience → parent advocacy → new enrollments → retention. It is generated at the unit, by the franchisee, in the community — not in an ad account.

> "Parents don't buy a children's program the way they buy a phone case. They buy proximity, a person they trust, and the word of another parent."

Reviews are where that word-of-mouth becomes visible and scalable. Around 84% of consumers say they weigh online reviews as heavily as a personal recommendation from a friend or family member, and the overwhelming majority read reviews before choosing a local business.[13] A complete, well-reviewed Google Business Profile is not a vanity asset — Google's own data shows customers are about 70% more likely to visit a business whose profile is complete.[12] For a franchise location, the profile and its reviews are often the single most important piece of local marketing real estate, and they are entirely within the franchisee's control.

Underlying all of this is a gap that paid digital structurally cannot close: the trust gap. A parent is not choosing a pair of sneakers; they are choosing who spends an hour a week with their child. That decision carries an emotional weight no ad impression can satisfy. It is reassured by a coach's name a neighbor mentioned, by a wall of recent five-star reviews from families down the street, by having seen the program's booth at the school fair. Each of these is a local proof point, accumulated over time by a real person in a real community. A national campaign can make a parent aware that your brand exists; only the local franchisee can make that parent feel safe enough to enroll. That is the work digital cannot do — and the reason the unit, not the ad account, is where trust and therefore enrollment are built.

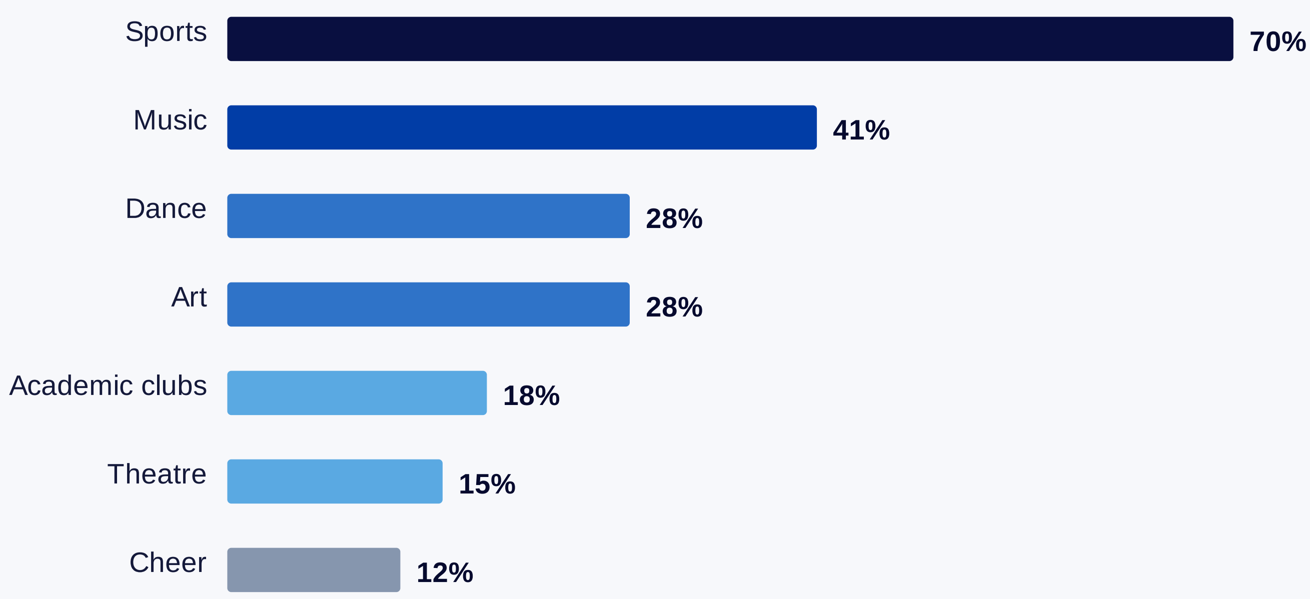
Finally, consider how broad the category really is. Youth enrichment is not just sports. In a national survey of parents, sports led at 70% of children's extracurriculars, but music followed at 41%, with dance and art tied at 28%, plus meaningful share for academic clubs, theatre, and cheer.[4]

Whatever vertical your brand occupies, the same local dynamics apply: a parent within a few miles, choosing on trust, influenced by other parents nearby.

Two features of this market sharpen the local advantage further. The first is proximity as a hard constraint. A children's program is something a parent commits to driving to, often several times a week, for months. That logistical reality caps the realistic catchment area around any location and makes “the convenient option nearby” a powerful default — one that a franchisee earns by being visible and credible in exactly that radius. The second is the enrollment calendar. Demand for enrichment is seasonal and spiky, clustering around the back-to-school window, the new year, and the run-up to summer. Local presence lets a franchisee meet families precisely when they are deciding — a spring demo class at a nearby school, a summer-camp table at a community festival, a fall partnership with a PTA — in a way that an always-on national ad campaign, blind to the local rhythm, simply cannot time.

Where families enroll their children

SHARE OF PARENTS WHOSE CHILD PARTICIPATES, BY ACTIVITY



Source: LendingTree survey of 2,000 U.S. consumers, 2023.[4] Dance and art tied at 28%.

SECTION 03

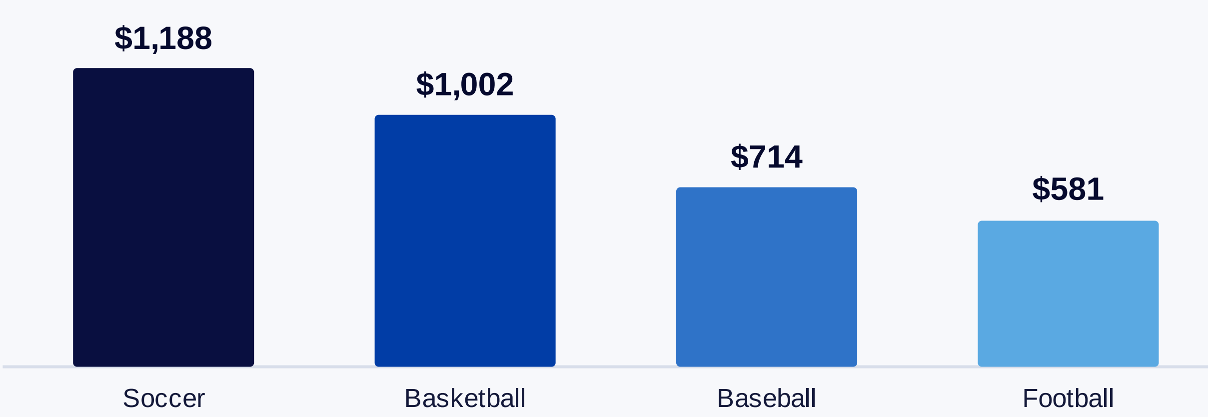
A big market, won one neighborhood at a time

The opportunity is enormous, durable, and recurring. There are roughly 74 million children under 18 in the United States, a number projected to keep edging upward through the end of the decade.[14] Families spend heavily and willingly on those children's development. Parents with kids in extracurriculars spend an average of $731 per child per year, and that figure climbs sharply with income — 86% of households earning six figures report a child in a competitive activity.[4]

In youth sports alone, the Aspen Institute estimates families now spend more than $40 billion annually — an economic engine larger than the entire U.S. box office.[1,7] The broader youth sports industry, including facilities, programming, and technology, is valued at roughly $40 billion and growing 8–10% per year, a trajectory now attracting serious private-equity consolidation.[5] Spending per family keeps rising too: the average family spent $1,016 on a child's primary sport in 2024, up 46% in just five years.[1]

Families spend real money — per child, every season

AVERAGE ANNUAL SPEND ON A CHILD'S PRIMARY SPORT, 2024



Source: Aspen Institute, Project Play — National Youth Sports Parent Survey, 2024–25 (with Utah State University & Louisiana Tech University).[1]

Here is the strategic point: a $40 billion national market is not captured nationally. It is captured one ZIP code at a time, by the location families can reach, recognize, and trust. The total addressable market for any single franchisee is the set of families within a short drive of their door — and within that radius, the franchisee holds advantages headquarters never will. They can show up at the school fair. They can sponsor the local league. They can answer a parent's question by name. A national ad fund cannot do any of that, which is precisely why the unit, not the brand, is where this market is won.

Two demographic tailwinds make the prize even more attractive. First, while the overall youth population is roughly flat, the affluent slice of it — the households most willing to spend on enrichment — has been growing far faster, and these are the families most likely to enroll a child in a competitive activity in the first place.[4] Second, this is durable, recession-resistant demand. Parents treat their children's development as close to non-negotiable: spending on activities kept rising through the pandemic, and many families take on debt rather than cut it.[4] For a franchise system, that combination — rising spend, concentrated among reachable local families, on a purchase parents protect even in downturns — is about as favorable as consumer demand gets. The only question is which location captures it.

THE FRANCHISOR'S REAL ASSET

A youth enrichment franchise system is, at its core, a network of local trust-builders. The brand's job is to give each of them a repeatable way to build that trust — and to make the easy path the local one. The franchisors who do this convert a fragmented, neighborhood-by-neighborhood market into a coordinated growth machine.

SECTION 04

Why franchisees resist — and why it's fixable

If local marketing is so effective, why do so many franchisees avoid it? The honest answer is not laziness. It is a predictable set of frictions, and naming them is the first step to designing them away.

It feels like effort with invisible payoff. A franchisee opened a children's program to teach kids, not to run a marketing department. Posting a flyer at a pediatrician's office or setting up a booth at a community festival takes time, and the results are diffuse — a new family might walk in three months later and never mention the booth. Compared with a digital dashboard that shows leads today, local work feels like shouting into a void.

They assume headquarters has it handled. When a brand runs national digital campaigns, franchisees reasonably conclude that "marketing" is taken care of. They don't see the gap between brand awareness and neighborhood enrollment — the gap only the local owner can close.

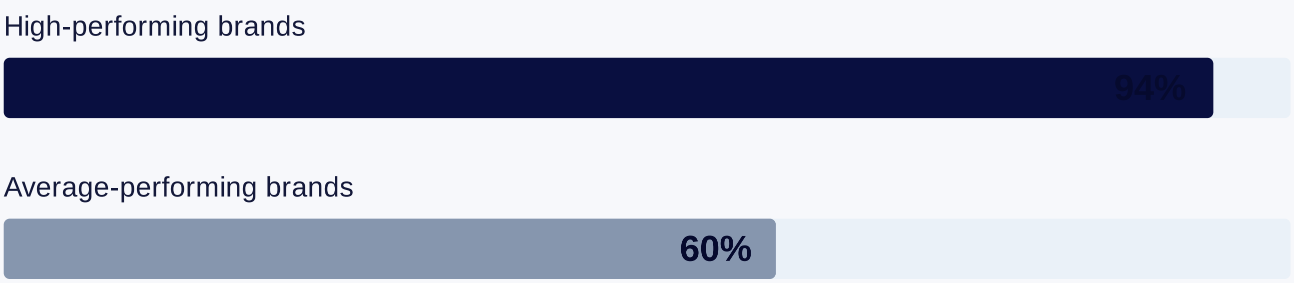
They don't know exactly what to do. "Do more local marketing" is not an instruction; it is a wish. Without a concrete, sequenced playbook — this week, do this; here is the email template; here is the partner list — even motivated franchisees stall.

And the ad fund can quietly let everyone off the hook. Most franchise systems collect a brand or marketing fund — commonly a small percentage of gross sales — that headquarters deploys on system-wide campaigns. That structure is valuable, but it creates a subtle moral hazard: a franchisee who contributes to the fund can reasonably feel they have already "paid for marketing" and that local effort is therefore optional or even redundant. Unless the franchisor draws a clear line between what the national fund does (build awareness) and what only the franchisee can do (convert local awareness into enrollment), the fund becomes a reason not to act rather than a foundation to build on.

The data shows just how large this execution gap is across industries. While 94% of high-performing brands operate a dedicated local marketing strategy, only 60% of average-performing brands do.[12] The single clearest difference between brands that win locally and brands that don't is not budget or talent — it is whether a deliberate local system exists at all.

The local-marketing gap between winners and the rest

SHARE OF BRANDS WITH A DEDICATED LOCAL MARKETING STRATEGY



Source: Brand Beacon Report, 2024, via BrightLocal.[12]

This reframes the entire problem. Franchisee resistance is not a character flaw to be coached away one owner at a time; it is a design failure to be solved once, at the system level. When the franchisor removes the friction — by making local marketing concrete, low-effort, partly done-for-you, and tied to visible results — participation stops being a battle of willpower and becomes the default. The next section lays out what that system looks like.

SECTION 05

The local marketing system franchisors can deploy

The goal is not to turn franchisees into marketers. It is to hand them a system so clear and so supported that doing the local work is easier than not doing it.

Effective franchise local marketing rests on four pillars. Each one is high-impact, each is mostly within the franchisee's control, and — critically — each can be packaged by headquarters into templates, checklists, and automation so the franchisee's job is execution, not invention.

Pillar 1 — The local listing & review engine

This is the highest-leverage, lowest-cost work in the entire system, and it is where most resistance evaporates because the effort is small and the payoff is visible. Every location needs a complete, accurate Google Business Profile and a simple, repeatable habit of requesting reviews from happy parents. The numbers justify the priority: complete profiles drive roughly 70% more visits, reviews are weighted like personal recommendations, and a steady stream of recent, positive reviews is what tips a searching parent toward your door.[12,13] Some industry analyses link a healthy review volume to a large lead advantage — one estimate puts businesses with 50+ reviews at more than double the leads of those with fewer than ten.[15]

Pillar 2 — Community presence

This is the pillar that builds the trust digital can't buy. Sponsoring a local team, running a free demo class at a school, partnering with nearby pediatricians or PTAs, and showing up at community events put the franchisee — a real, recognizable person — in front of exactly the families they want to enroll. It is slower than a click, but it compounds, and it produces the parent-to-parent recommendations that drive the category.

Pillar 3 — The referral engine

Because recommendation is the currency of this market, a structured referral program turns satisfied parents into a renewable acquisition channel. The mechanics are simple — an incentive for the referring family, a clear ask at the moment of peak satisfaction (a recital, a belt test, a end-of-season celebration), and an easy way to share. The franchisor's role is to supply the program design and the materials so every location runs the same proven motion.

Pillar 4 — Hyper-local paid digital, as an accelerant

Digital still belongs in the mix — but as a sharp, geographically tight supplement layered on top of the first three pillars, not as the foundation. Tightly geofenced paid social and search, pointed at families within the franchisee’s real catchment area and reinforced by strong reviews and local proof, convert far better and cost less than broad campaigns aimed at strangers.

The pillars are not a menu to pick from; they are a flywheel that reinforces itself. Community presence creates the experiences that earn reviews and referrals. Strong reviews make every hyper-local ad work harder and every “near me” search end at your door. Referrals deliver families who are predisposed to leave a review and refer the next one. Run together, the four pillars compound: each turn of the wheel lowers the cost of the next enrollment and raises its value. Run in isolation, any one of them underperforms — which is why the franchisor’s job is to deploy the whole system, not to hand franchisees a list of disconnected tactics.

What separates a system from a suggestion is the division of labor. The franchisor industrializes everything that can be centralized; the franchisee executes the handful of things that must be local. That split is what makes participation realistic:

PILLAR	FRANCHISOR PROVIDES (CENTRALIZED)	FRANCHISEE DOES (LOCAL)
Listings & reviews	Profile setup, optimization standards, review-request automation & templates	Ask happy parents, respond to reviews, keep hours/photos current
Community presence	Partner playbook, sponsorship kits, branded event materials, demo-class format	Show up, build relationships, run the events locally
Referrals	Program design, incentives, share assets, tracking	Make the ask at the right moment, deliver a great experience
Hyper-local digital	Ad templates, geo-targeting setup, budget guidance, landing pages	Approve local spend, supply local photos & stories

Making the system stick: driving adoption

A playbook no one opens changes nothing. The difference between a system that works and a binder that gathers dust is how deliberately the franchisor drives adoption — and the most effective levers are structural, not motivational. Build the essentials into onboarding so that completing the local-listing setup and launching the review habit is part of opening a location, not an afterthought months later. Where the brand’s standards permit, make the foundational pillars part of the operating expectations rather than purely voluntary, so local marketing carries the same weight as any other unit standard. Give every franchisee a simple monthly scorecard — profile completeness, review count and rating, referrals generated, local events run — so progress is visible and comparable, and so headquarters can spot a struggling location before a slow quarter arrives. Pair that visibility with recognition: celebrate the franchisees climbing the maturity ladder, and turn their tactics into shareable case studies the rest of the network can copy. Adoption compounds when owners can see peers like them winning with moves they could make tomorrow.

Finally, give franchisees a way to see where they stand. A simple maturity model turns an abstract goal into a ladder — every owner knows their current rung and the next move, and the franchisor can spot which locations need support before a slow quarter shows up in the numbers.

The local marketing maturity model

A SHARED LADDER FROM AD-HOC EFFORT TO A SELF-REINFORCING LOCAL ENGINE

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
Ad-hoc	**Foundational**	**Active**	**Self-reinforcing**
Sporadic posts, incomplete profile, no reviews habit. Relies on HQ digital.	Complete profile, steady reviews, basic local presence. The essentials are running.	Community partnerships, a working referral program, geo-targeted paid support.	Parent advocacy compounds. Referrals and reviews drive most new enrollments.

A franchisor's objective is to move every unit toward Stage 4, where acquisition cost falls and growth becomes durable.

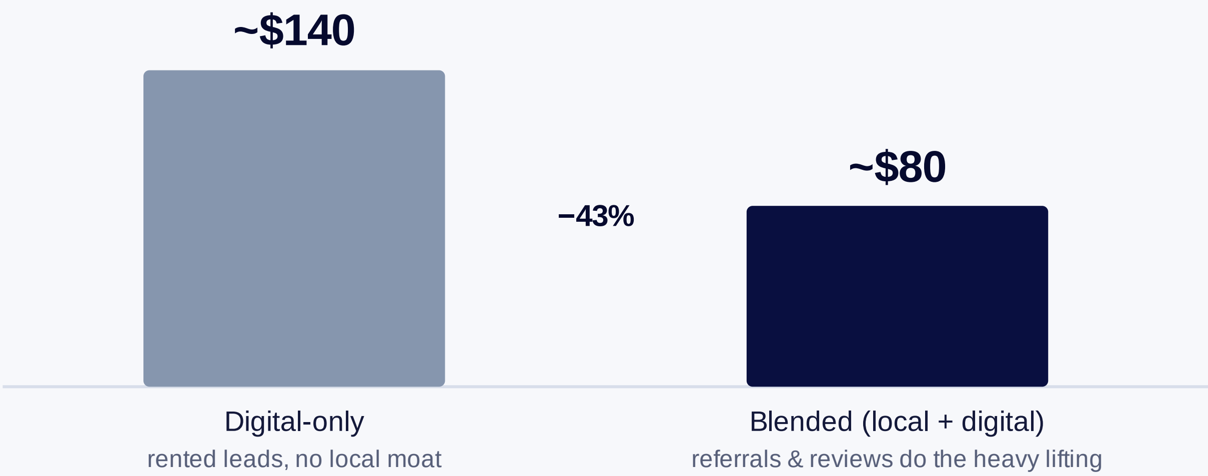
SECTION 06

What it’s worth: a unit-economics view

The case for local marketing ultimately lives in the unit economics. Consider two franchise locations in comparable markets. One relies almost entirely on paid digital to fill classes. The other runs the four-pillar local system, using paid digital only as an accelerant. The illustrative model below shows how their cost to acquire a single enrollment can diverge.

Cost to acquire one enrollment: digital-only vs. blended

ILLUSTRATIVE MODEL



Illustrative model for explanatory purposes; figures are hypothetical, not measured results, and will vary by brand, market, and price point. Directional inputs are grounded in cited cost-per-lead trends[8] and the lower cost of referral- and review-driven acquisition.

Why does the blended location pull ahead? Its digital spend is smaller and sharper, aimed only at nearby families. But the larger share of its enrollments arrives through channels that cost almost nothing per acquisition — a parent's referral, a five-star review that converts a searcher, a family met at a school demo. As the local engine matures, an ever-greater portion of new enrollments comes from these compounding, owned channels, and the blended cost per enrollment keeps falling even as the digital-only location's cost climbs with the market.

Acquisition cost is only half the equation, and the smaller half. The same channels that lower the blended location's cost per enrollment also raise the value of each enrollment. A family that arrives through a parent's recommendation already trusts the program, which means they tend to start sooner, stay enrolled longer, and refer the next family — each of which lifts lifetime value. Consider the arithmetic at its simplest: if a trusted, locally acquired family stays even a few months longer than a cold digital lead and refers just one additional family over its tenure, the effective return on that single acquisition can be several times that of the paid click — before counting the lower cost to acquire it in the first place. Lower cost in, higher value out: the two effects multiply, and the gap between a blended location and a digital-only one widens with every season the local engine runs.

The advantage doesn't stop at acquisition cost. Families who arrive through a trusted recommendation tend to stay longer and refer more, which lifts lifetime value on top of lowering acquisition cost — a compounding effect that widens the gap between the two locations every season. And there is a second-order benefit that matters enormously to a franchisor: franchisees whose units are healthier and less dependent on an expensive, volatile ad spend are more profitable, more satisfied, and more likely to renew and reinvest. Local marketing, done as a system, is a franchisee-retention strategy disguised as a customer-acquisition strategy.

SECTION 07

A 90-day rollout for franchisors

You do not need to overhaul everything at once. A focused first quarter establishes the foundation that does the most work, proves the model with early wins, and earns the network's buy-in for the rest.

Days 1–30 — Build the foundation

Start where the effort is smallest and the payoff is most visible: the local listing and review engine. Audit every location's Google Business Profile for completeness and accuracy, standardize the profile setup, and stand up a simple review-request system with ready-made templates so franchisees can ask happy parents without inventing anything. Assemble the core playbook — the partner list, the event formats, the email and referral templates — into one place every owner can reach. The aim of the first month is not breadth; it is to get every location to the "foundational" rung of the maturity model.

Days 31–60 — Activate the community pillars

With the foundation in place, layer on the relationship-driven work. Launch the referral program network-wide with its incentives and share assets, and equip franchisees with the sponsorship kits and demo-class format they need to show up locally. Identify a small set of pilot locations — ideally enthusiastic owners in different market types — and support them closely as they run their first community partnerships and events. These pilots become your proof points and your case studies.

Days 61–90 — Measure, recognize, and scale

Turn on the monthly scorecard so every owner can see their profile health, review trajectory, referrals, and local activity. Surface the early wins from your pilot locations, translate them into simple how-to stories, and share them across the network so adoption spreads through peer proof rather than top-down mandate. Use the scorecard to find the locations that need a hand and the ones ready to push toward the self-reinforcing stage. By the end of the first quarter, local marketing has shifted from an aspiration to a measured, supported, repeatable part of how every unit grows.

THE SHIFT IN ONE SENTENCE

Stop asking franchisees to *want* to market locally, and start making the local path the easiest, best-supported, most visibly rewarded one available — then the participation problem solves itself.

ABOUT WHEELHOUSE

Built for youth enrichment franchisors

Wheelhouse helps emerging youth enrichment brands grow. We specialize in franchises focused on creative and educational growth for children — partnering with franchise leaders to scale operations, strengthen unit economics, and extend their positive impact on the communities they serve.

Every youth enrichment franchise is different, so our consulting is built around your specific business and mission. We work across the four areas that decide whether an emerging brand scales successfully:

Franchise development

Scalable growth, market expansion, and new revenue streams for emerging brands.

Finance

Cash performance, projections, and the financial clarity a growing system needs.

Marketing

Brand awareness, franchisee attraction, and differentiation in a competitive market.

Operations

Opening new locations and supporting franchisees through the critical first 180 days.

Justin Nihiser

MANAGING PARTNER

Former CEO of Code Ninjas, COO of Brain Balance Achievement Centers, and VP of International Operations & Development at School of Rock. Private equity experience with Sterling Partners, Crane Street Capital, and Eagle Merchant Partners.

Matt Rogers

MARKETING

Seasoned marketing executive with leadership roles at BYJU'S, Anheuser-Busch, and Code Ninjas, focused on full-stack marketing and brand development. Private equity experience across the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Edison Partners, Sequoia Capital, and BlackRock.

Barry Gibson

FINANCE & OPERATIONS

More than 20 years of financial leadership across three continents with companies including Heineken, Accenture, and Aggreko. Private equity experience with American Industrial Partners, TDR, I Squared, and EMP.

WORK WITH WHEELHOUSE

Turn local marketing into a system, not a hope

The brands that win the next decade of youth enrichment won't be the ones that out-spend on ads. They'll be the ones whose franchisees own their neighborhoods. Wheelhouse helps you build that local engine — and get every franchisee to run it.

SCHEDULE A CONSULTATION

Wheelhouse · choosewheelhouse.com

APPENDIX

Sources & references

1. **Aspen Institute, Project Play.** "Project Play survey: Family spending on youth sports rises 46% over five years" (2025) — $1,016 average spend per child on primary sport in 2024; +46% since 2019; estimated $40B+ in annual U.S. family youth-sports spend; ~50M children ages 6–17; sport-by-sport spend. projectplay.org

2. **Aspen Institute, Project Play.** State of Play 2024 (with SFIA & National Survey of Children's Health data) — majority of parents say a trustworthy, trained coach increases their likelihood to commit long-term, recommend the activity to other parents, and enroll in more activities; average of 1.63 sports per child (down 13% since 2019). projectplay.org

3. **Aspen Institute, Project Play.** State of Play 2025 — participation rebound to 55.4% of youth ages 6–17; costs of play up 46% since 2019. projectplay.org

4. **LendingTree.** "What Parents Spend on Kids' Extracurriculars" (survey of 2,000 U.S. consumers, 2023) — 71% of parents have a child in extracurriculars; sports 70%, music 41%, dance & art 28% each; $731 average annual spend per child; 86% of $100K+ earners report a child in a competitive activity. lendingtree.com

5. **White & Case LLP.** "Private equity's expanding role in youth sports" (2026) — U.S. youth sports estimated at ~$40B annually, growing 8–10% per year. whitecase.com

6. **Sportico.** "Youth Sports Was 2025's Breakout M&A Theme" (2025) — youth sports as a $40B+ economic engine serving ~27M kids ages 6–17. sportico.com

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8. **WordStream / LocaliQ.** 2025 Google Ads Benchmarks — average cost per lead ~$70.11 in 2025 (+5.1%); cost per click rose for the large majority of industries year over year. wordstream.com

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10 **Paddle / industry analysis** (compiled by Genesys Growth, 2026). “Customer Acquisition Cost Benchmarks” — customer acquisition costs up ~60% over the past five years across B2B and B2C. genesysgrowth.com

11 **Backlinko.** “Local SEO Statistics” (2025) — ~46% of Google searches have local intent (orig. Search Engine Roundtable); ~1.5B “near me” searches monthly; ~76% of “near me” searchers visit a related business within a day (Google). backlinko.com

12 **BrightLocal.** “Local SEO Statistics” (2026), incl. Brand Beacon Report 2024 — 94% of high-performing brands have a dedicated local marketing strategy vs. 60% of average performers; customers ~70% more likely to visit a business with a complete Google Business Profile (Google). brightlocal.com

13 **BrightLocal.** Local Consumer Review Survey — ~84% of consumers weigh online reviews as heavily as a personal recommendation; large majority read reviews before choosing a local business. brightlocal.com

14 **U.S. Census Bureau / Forum on Child and Family Statistics** (via FranchiseOpportunities.com) — ~74M U.S. children under age 18, projected to rise toward 76M by 2029. franchiseopportunities.com

15 **On The Map Marketing.** “Local SEO Statistics” (2026) — businesses with 50+ Google reviews associated with materially more leads than those with fewer than 10; ~78% of local mobile searches lead to an offline purchase. onthemap.com

A note on sources & method. Every figure in this paper is drawn from publicly available, independently published research and is cited above; this paper does not rely on any confidential or proprietary third-party material. Where the strongest available data is youth-*sports*-specific (notably the Aspen Institute’s Project Play research), it is used as the best available proxy for the broader youth-*enrichment* category, which spans music, swim, STEM, arts, and tutoring; category-wide figures (e.g., LendingTree’s extracurricular data) are used wherever available.

A small number of multi-year cost trends are shown *directionally*, derived from reported year-over-year changes where a continuous published series was not available; these are labeled at the point of use. The cost-per-enrollment comparison in Section 6 is an explicitly **illustrative model** — the values are hypothetical and intended to demonstrate the mechanics of blended vs. digital-only acquisition, not to report measured results.