

STORIES / COMMUNITY / WORD OF MOUTH

Share your story.

A short playbook for marketing a pickleball club.
For franchise owners, independents and investors
who want full courts that stay full.

WHERE ARE YOU? START HERE

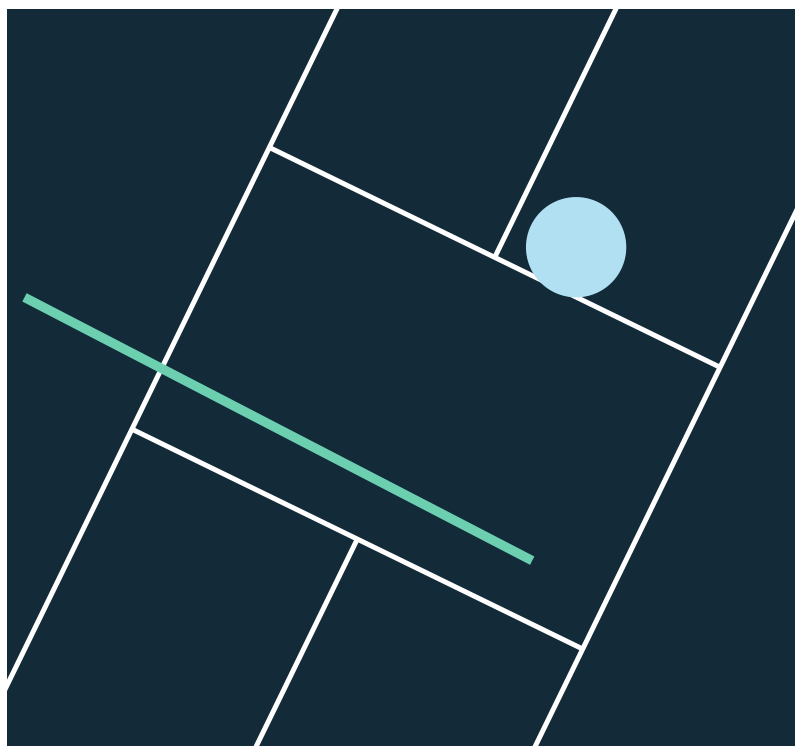
Thinking about opening a club	Playbook 03: Before you sign the lease
Open, and want more regulars	Playbook 01: Give players a reason to return
Need more new players	Playbook 04: Share your story
Thinking about what's next	Playbook 02: Beyond the numbers
Under pressure right now	Playbook 01: Section 10, then Playbook 04

MIRROR, NOT MEGAPHONE.

Find your stories.
Share them everywhere.
Keep the promise.

LISA & DUSTIN DEMERITT

Lessons from building Pickles.



00

START HERE

You can't buy belonging.

For franchise owners, independents, investors and whoever runs the club day to day.

We were normal people who got there early, listened hard and kept getting back up. We'd never owned a club, and we weren't great players. Plenty of people said it would fail.

So we paid attention. We listened to why people came and helped them find their place. That gave us something real to market, and we shared it with anyone who'd listen.



Ads rent attention. Stories earn it.

PUSH: YOU GO TO THEM

- ☐ Ads and boosted posts
- ☐ Emails and texts
- ☐ Showing up in town
- ☐ Sponsors and press pitches

PULL: THEY COME TO YOU

- ☐ Players telling friends
- ☐ Reviews and real stories
- ☐ A first visit worth talking about
- ☐ Staff who know names

Most new clubs only push, and pay for it every month. Build pull first, then push to make it travel. Start with the health check, fix your two lowest scores, then use the 90-day plan in section 07. This shares what worked for us. It isn't legal or financial advice.

HEALTH CHECK

Score each line 1 (not yet) to 5 (nailed it). Start with your two lowest.

YOUR MARKETING TODAY	SCORE	GO TO
More new players come from people talking than from ads.		00
I can say our promise in one sentence, and a first visit proves it.		02
I know why players really come, because I've asked.		02
We keep a bank of real player stories.		03
One good story gets shared in several places.		04
Someone from our club shows up in town every month.		05
We reply to every review, and players bring friends.		06
I know which sources bring players who stay.		07

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

No line under α 3.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Ask three regulars to score this too.
Compare.

02 YOUR PROMISE

Make a promise. Keep it.

Courts and clinics are what you offer. Your promise is why people pick you, and come back.

OUR PROMISE, IN ONE SENTENCE

WHAT WE DO THAT THE CLUB DOWN THE ROAD DOESN'T

IF YOUR MARKETING SAYS...

THE FIRST VISIT HAS TO SHOW IT

"Everyone belongs."	Someone greets first-timers by name and gets them into a game.
"Beginners welcome."	A beginner session this week, with a patient coach.
"Easy to start."	Booking takes three taps, not a tour of your calendar.
"There's a next step."	They leave with it booked.

TRY THIS

Book a first visit at your own club, on your phone, as a nervous beginner. Every confusing moment is ad money leaking. Then ask every new player, **"What brought you in?"** Their answers are your marketing.

WHAT WE GOT WRONG

Early on, our marketing talked to people who already played. Our biggest group turned out to be people who'd never picked up a paddle. Market to the players you could have, not only the ones you pictured. Franchise owners: the logo is national, but your promise is local.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A first visit feels exactly like your marketing says it will.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Secret-shop your own first visit. Fix the first thing that felt off.

03

FIND YOUR STORIES

Your best stories are already inside.

Every club has a cast of characters. Their stories sell better than anything you could write.

AT PICKLES

Our real marketing department was the personalities inside our four walls: the Banger, the Dinker, the Gab Guru, the First Timer, the Old Timer. Players saw themselves, and their friends, in every one. We loved them so much they became the characters behind DinkyBalls.



YOUR CAST	WHO IT IS AT YOUR CLUB	THEIR STORY IN ONE LINE
The First Timer		
The Comeback		
The Connector		
The One Everyone Knows		

Capture it within a day: a photo, a quote and their permission. Firsts, comebacks, friendships and milestones make the best stories. Keep them in one folder called Story Bank.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Ten real stories in your bank, each with a photo, a quote and a yes.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Ask your desk who everyone should know. Get that story.

04

SHARE IT EVERYWHERE

One story, shared six ways.

Don't make more content. Share one great story everywhere.

BEFORE → THE TURN → AFTER

AN EXAMPLE

Before: Carol had just moved to town and knew no one. **The turn:** a neighbor talked her into a Tuesday beginner clinic. **After:** she plays four mornings a week and hosts her crew's holiday party.

WAY	HOW CAROL'S STORY SHOWS UP
In person	Your desk tells it to nervous first-timers.
Print	A poster by the door. A card at the coffee shop.
Website	On your "start here" page.
Social	Her photo and one line, in her words.
Email	In the welcome note every new beginner gets.
Direct	A handwritten card to Carol, plus one for a friend.

TRY THIS

Specific beats general. "All ages welcome" is a claim. Carol is proof. End every version with one clear next step.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

One real story a month, in at least four places.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Write one story as before, the turn, after. Use it three ways.

05

SHOW UP IN TOWN

Take your story outside your walls.

The people you need most aren't looking for you yet. Go to them.

AT PICKLES

We shared our story anywhere: one person in line for coffee, a hundred people at a town event. We still do. Nothing builds trust like an owner who shows up and listens.

OUR STORY IN 30 SECONDS

OUR STORY IN 2 MINUTES

WHERE TO SHOW UP

- ☐ Town fairs and farmers markets
- ☐ Rotary and chamber groups
- ☐ Senior centers and schools
- ☐ Company lunches, with paddles

WHO TO KNOW

- ☐ A local reporter
- ☐ Gyms and physical therapists
- ☐ Employers planning team events
- ☐ Businesses that could sponsor

Can't be you? Name the person who is the face of your club, and give them the time.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Someone shows up in town every month and comes back with names.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Book one talk or pop-up in the next 30 days.

06

FOUND AND RECOMMENDED

Easy to find. Easy to recommend.

People read reviews before they visit, and ask a friend before they commit.

WHAT WE'RE SEEING NATIONALLY

41%

always read reviews before
choosing a local business

74%

want reviews from the last three
months

80%

prefer businesses that reply to
every review

Source: BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026, 1,002 U.S. adults.

REVIEWS

- ☐ Ask after a happy moment
- ☐ QR code at the desk
- ☐ Reply to every one, in your voice
- ☐ Real local faces in your photos

WORD OF MOUTH

- ☐ A monthly bring-a-friend night
- ☐ A free first clinic for any guest
- ☐ Ask at a high point, not at checkout
- ☐ Thank the people who bring people

AT PICKLES

Word of mouth was our biggest engine. Everyone was a member, with no fee to join, so it was easy to say "just come with me."

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Strangers find you fast, and regulars bring friends
without being asked twice.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Ask your ten most connected players to
bring a friend this month.

07

MEASURE AND PLAN

Measure what becomes business.

Likes are nice. Players who stay are the business.

TRACK MONTHLY	NUMBER
New first-timers, by how they heard about you	
Of those, how many came back within 14 days	
Guests brought by players	
Ad spend per new player who stayed	

YOUR NEXT 90 DAYS

MONTH	DO THIS	DONE
1	Write your promise. Secret-shop your first visit. Ask how every new player heard about you.	
2	Start your story bank. Write your 30-second story. Launch bring-a-friend night.	
3	Share one story six ways. Show up at one town event. Then decide what's worth paying to push.	

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

You know which sources bring players who stay, and you do more of that.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Add "How'd you hear about us?" to check-in today.

08

KEEP GOING

Your club already has a story.



It's in every first-timer who came back and every player who said "just come with me."

We weren't experts. We were normal people who listened, stayed honest and kept getting back up. The club took on a life of its own. We steered the ship and kept sharing the story. You can too.

Be YOU. Play your way. See ya' on the courts.

Lisa & Dustin DeMeritt

THANK YOU

To David Johnson and the IAPPF, the International Association of Pickleball and Padel Facilities: much of the industry thinking in these pages grew out of conversations with David and his deep knowledge of the sport, the business and the people who run clubs. More for facility owners at iappf.org.

All four playbooks and our story: openplaybook.club

Sources: BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026.