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It's a growth business – why some nurseries are thriving in the downturn

In the midst of difficult economic times, with businesses across all sectors struggling to compete, what makes any nursery owner think they can support a second nursery? In June 2009 three of our returning customers have taken significant steps towards opening their second nurseries. So we thought we'd find out more about this newfound optimism

According to Kaya Hope, Head Teacher of Hope Montessori Nursery School in London, there will always be a demand for good childcare provision. Their school creates an active learning environment in which children are encouraged to develop language and literacy skills, as well as sensory perception and growing self sufficiency skills. After just two terms, they've decided to open a second school to widen their service coverage.

Kaya says, "A good teaching philosophy is central to our success. But there's more to it than that. Parents only get enthused about what we're doing, because we're enthused by it too. They speak to our team and really get a sense of our passion for the Montessori Method."

Hope Montessori is not alone. First time nursery owners up and down the country are grasping the nettle and opening second nurseries. Les Enfants Nursery in Inverness operates in a relatively small part of Scotland, but there too, they've enjoyed such success with one nursery, that a second became an imperative.

The new golden age

Of course there's no shortage of competition for nursery owners looking to expand their operation. And it's not just quantity; there are a lot of really good nurseries out there. The interface between nurseries and parents is getting more instinctive, so that childcare in the UK is really starting to reflect parents' requirements better than ever. Parents want a safe, stimulating environment for their children, and a nourishing educational base, and, increasingly, that's what they're getting.

So, it's not just a good time for parents; it's a great time for the industry too. It

pushes the best childcare providers even harder. It means they have to find even stronger differentiators. The Tinsaurus Nursery in Hove near Brighton is a good example. They're on the verge of opening the bigger Megasaurus in the next few months. Like all the cited nurseries, they've been keen to embrace technology as a differentiator. In particular, utilising CCTV cameras from NurseryCam, has allowed parents to monitor their child's activities during the day. And it's won them lots of plaudits for their security.

For Hope Montessori too, demonstrating to parents their commitment by investing in both education and security continues to be a key differentiator. "For example, parents love our webcams – it emphasises our commitment to maximum safety. And it also means they'll never miss a stage in their child's development. Watching their children on camera is really something for our parents. It's part of the whole package that wins them round – the facility, the teaching standards, the security and the enthusiasm of our team – all rolled into one enjoyable (and productive) environment for their children."

The secret is...

Nursery owners looking to learn from the successes of these three nurseries can look to their willingness to put themselves in their customers' shoes. Even with their own distinct methodologies and approaches, they've all enjoyed similar success because they've given parents what they want – from better menus, to money back for holidays, to enthusiastic service level improvements and more...

Of course growth on this scale is never without risk. But in these cases, each of the nurseries has significantly enhanced



their chances of success by doing things better than other nurseries, and by doing things other nurseries don't. Each point of differentiation is a distinction.

Kaya Hope summarises: "With most of our business coming through recommendations, it really pays to be flexible; to show parents that we repay their faith in us with significant and ongoing investment in their children's futures." ■

- For more information contact Hope Montessori School on 0203 075 0170 or visit their website at www.hopemontessorischool.co.uk



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