

TOT Golden Triangle Research Paper

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History and Background:

Teams of Tomorrow (TOT) Golden Triangle is a preschool program that focuses on developing beginner motor skills, academic concepts, and social skills through basketball and other manipulative activities. TOT originated out of West Monroe, Louisiana and began franchising in 2008. According to Teams of Tomorrow's official website, TOT has 79 locations in the United States as of 2020 (Teams of Tomorrow, n.d.). Natalie Jolly is the franchise owner of TOT Golden Triangle and manages TOT programs in Starkville, West Point, Columbus, and Louisville, Mississippi. Jolly describes TOT as a family-friendly program that anyone can join. Her goal is to provide a safe and educational environment for children to gain skills that will help them later in life (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

TOT Golden Triangle runs its program in 6-week semesters, from September to May, with free sample classes in August. TOT classes are once a week and last 45 minutes and occur in the mornings, afternoons, or both, depending on location. Jolly teaches her classes in the morning due to scheduling conflicts within centers. Classes involve teaching various ball handling techniques, introducing academic concepts, and using manipulative tools such as scarves, wands, or tennis balls. Jolly said prices are "comparable to dance, karate, and gymnastic classes" (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Throughout the program, parents receive a progress sheet to show what skills their children have learned. At the end of the program, TOT students are able to show off their developed skills in a halftime performance at a local basketball game, and Jolly takes her TOT students to Mississippi State University's Humphrey Basketball Coliseum (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

TOT is located in many areas, especially Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. TOT brings classes into existing schools and daycares, and each area is managed by a franchisee. There is no need for prior business experience to own a franchise. Jolly began her career with TOT as an instructor, and when her boss decided to sell the franchise, Jolly took the reins (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021). In order to follow TOT policies, first year leaders must go through a weeklong training in order to be properly prepared for the program. Training provides all the knowledge and all of the tools that are needed, such as balls, t-shirts, a 6-week curriculum, marketing flyers, and more. After leaders have undergone their first training, they are only required to return for a shorter training every three years. Jolly enjoys going to training because it improves her leadership skills, provides her with innovative ways to improve her company, and showcases creative activities for the children (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Jolly enjoys the work that she does for TOT Golden Triangle, and the culture of the program is very appealing for families to join (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021). TOT's mission is to "enhance the lives of children, families, and communities... with your help!" (Teams of Tomorrow, n.d.). The website is designed in a bold and simplistic structure to provide easy visual effects for parents, leaders, and schools to navigate. The material, marketing ads, and TOT balls are also designed to be eye catching for the target audience. Jolly appreciates the corporate material and training given to her by TOT's headquarters because they allow her to manage and run her franchise with structure and ease (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Target Publics:

Jolly emphasized many important publics that TOT Golden Triangle strives to reach. According to Jolly, the most important public is directors within childcare facilities in the Golden Triangle. TOT Golden Triangle's services are offered inside of existing centers, so Jolly must gain the support of the director of each possible facility (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Directors of childcare centers are generally college educated individuals with a passion for seeing children thrive in their environments (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Generally, directors respond negatively to bringing TOT Golden Triangle into their childcare facility for multiple reasons, including concerns over participation and issues with scheduling. Directors tend to like the idea of TOT but struggle with the logistics. As a primary public, directors of childcare centers are vital to the success of TOT Golden Triangle, and it is important that Jolly keeps a positive working relationship with these individuals (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Another important primary public for TOT Golden Triangle is toddlers within the area. Once a director allows TOT into their center, Jolly is responsible for appealing to the children within the facility. Children are the primary way that Jolly gains enrollment for her classes. Jolly explained that the toddlers commonly react with excitement and positivity to the idea of being involved in TOT; however, it can be difficult insuring that children convey their desire to participate to their parents. As a primary public, if children do not show interest in TOT classes, Jolly may not have enough participation to continue conducting classes at a center (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

An important secondary public for TOT Golden Triangle is parents of children ages birth to 5 in the tri-county area. Parents cannot directly begin a TOT class, but they can be an

important factor to the implementation of classes within a childcare facility. Jolly says that parents of children often respond to marketing and advertising positively, and consequently, they are more likely to express interest in the program to the director of their child's childcare facility. As a secondary public, parents are an indirect link between Jolly and childcare center directors. According to Jolly, parents also encourage other parents to enroll their children in TOT classes, which gives Jolly an opportunity to reach a broader range of children. By appealing to parents, TOT Golden Triangle helps to boost opportunities to host classes and to grow enrollment numbers (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

A possible secondary public for TOT Golden Triangle is basketball programs within the area. Basketball programs for older children, teens, and adults draw in potential clients through advertising, halftime programs, and even testimonials from previous and current TOT kids. Jolly offered that one of her biggest recruitment events is TOT's performance at a Mississippi State University basketball game (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Jolly could capitalize on this fact by expanding marketing to local basketball programs within high schools, churches, and communities.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

- TOT is convenient for parents. Because TOT is offered within existing facilities during normal operating hours, parents do not have to stress over investing extra time and money into transportation. Parents are more likely to enroll their children in a program that is fun for their children but not stressful for them.
- TOT trains employees extremely well. Jolly stated that she believes that TOT's training program for franchisees is its biggest strength. Because TOT provides top notch training,

franchises are able to thrive and expand (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

- TOT provides professional and ample materials to franchisees and teachers. These include promotional materials, graphics for social media, and all classroom materials. These materials help ensure that TOT staff are prepared for marketing and classes in a professional and fun manner (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).
- TOT classes engage the mind and body of participants. Each class, children learn hand-eye coordination, motor skills, and academic concepts. These features of TOT classes encourage the development of toddlers and appeal to childcare providers and parents (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).
- TOT's pricing is similar to other extracurricular activities such as dance, gymnastics, or karate, which encourages parents to enroll their children in classes (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Weaknesses:

- TOT teachers do not always receive the same quality of training. This can result in lower quality instruction within the classroom (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).
- TOT Golden Triangle faces a shortage of teachers. Jolly currently teaches all 8 classes, which makes it difficult to provide quality instruction consistently. This also causes Jolly to be unable to add more classes to her schedule (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).
- TOT Golden Triangle lacks a prominent presence on social media. Currently, TOT Golden Triangle is only accessible on Facebook. Posting on this platform is inconsistent.

- TOT does not offer any different curriculum for children who have already participated in the program. Children who finish TOT's curriculum have no way to advance within TOT even though they are still offered classes (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

Opportunities:

- TOT Golden Triangle could write to receive a grant to allow more children to be able to participate in TOT without incurring any financial burden. This would increase enrollment without causing financial loss on the part of the company (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).
- TOT Golden Triangle could increase the frequency of posting on social media and increase engagement on posts. This would help TOT to reach a larger audience and to keep its current audience informed.
- TOT could formulate curriculum that advances in skill. This would provide children who have completed a TOT program the opportunity to continue participating. This would increase customer retention.
- TOT Golden Triangle could look into hiring more staff members. Adding staff members to the TOT team would help to improve the quality of instruction, attitudes of teachers, and would allow for more classes to be offered.

Threats:

- Childcare center directors are often unwilling to implement another program within their facility due to concerns over TOT's cost. Directors tend to only offer programs that are accessible to every student, and cost can prevent some students from participating (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

- Childcare center directors sometimes deny offering TOT to their clients due to the issue of adding another responsibility to their stressful job (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).
- COVID-19 has caused some schools to block TOT from coming into centers. Without the vessel of childcare centers, TOT cannot perform its classes (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).
- Other extracurricular activities, such as dance, gymnastics, baseball, and karate, are more common and accessible within the area.

Public Relations Analysis:

Currently, TOT's use of public relations has remained limited to public demonstrations, such as the Mississippi State basketball halftime show, and Facebook posts. The halftime show serves the dual-purpose of encouraging parents to enroll their children into the program by also allowing current students to show the skills formed while attending TOT. These two goals work hand-in-hand with one another and the ability to perform in front of such a large gathering of a target public works to the advantage of TOT (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021).

TOT Golden Triangle's franchise owner, Natalie Jolly, has expressed interest in expanding her use of social media to other platforms. Jolly runs the TOT Facebook, which is the franchise's only social media page at the moment (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021). Through the entirety of 2020, only 20 posts were made, severely limiting the franchise's ability to connect with its target publics. Of these posts, five were posted on the same day in December showing that the frequency of posting is worse than what was initially apparent

(TOT Golden Triangle, Mississippi, n.d.). To increase outreach to target publics it is recommended that the Golden Triangle TOT franchise increase its post frequency on Facebook.

In addition to TOTs use of Facebook, other social media platforms must be utilized. Instagram is a great opportunity to reach younger parents both through social media posts and advertising. The lack of outreach is the franchise's biggest public relations issue at the moment. Ensuring that target publics are aware of TOT will have a direct impact on the franchise's success within elementary schools.

Another issue facing franchise owners is their ability to convince directors to allow the program within their grounds. After speaking with Jolly, the prominent issue some principals have with the program is its inability to be available to all students due to its cost. Although grants may be available to alleviate this issue, another solution may be possible (N. Jolly, personal communication, January 26, 2021). If outreach to target publics were to increase, principals may change their mind due to pressure by the community to include the program. As more parents become aware of the program, more will be likely to request its addition within the schools.

References

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