



Creating Consistent, Memorable Experiences [marketing solution]

by Cathy Spencer-Browning

Problem: According to a study performed by American Sports Data¹, 63 percent of Americans are already convinced of the virtues of fitness and are ready to join health clubs. However, many of these people are still restricted by their unhealthiness, unathleticism and/or self-consciousness. How can health clubs make fitness more appealing to these consumers to encourage them to join?

Solution: By following the lead of successful corporations, such as Starbucks, the health club industry could engage more consumers through consistent, memorable experiences. Starbucks has capitalized on consumer behavior by turning a cup of coffee into an experience. Consumers find comfort in the consistency of the experience, from the famous white cup to the sounds of the expansive music collection. Memorable experiences are created through conversations with the barista, or server, interactions with other clientele and the overall atmosphere of the coffee house.

Similarly, group fitness can provide consistent, memorable experiences that will change fitness behavior, thereby enabling clubs to attract a much larger part of the 63 percent of the population. In order to make fitness more appealing, health clubs must focus on the three essential group fitness elements: instructors, programming and environment.

Instructors.

Exercise retention is as much about psychology as it is about physiology. *Enhancing Exercise Motivation*, by Dr. James J. Annesi, noted that even though individuals might initially join a health club for fitness and lifestyle gains, they stay because of the relationships they develop. Over time, fitness has been over intellectualized to the point where relationships with individuals have become secondary to complicated exercises.

Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*, stated, "People are not your most important asset. The right people are." Instructors are

an integral part of creating relationships and consistent, memorable experiences. They ensure participants' success and enjoyment through effective instruction, communication and performance. By recruiting, training and investing in instructor teams, health clubs are able to increase member satisfaction and retention. In addition, by recruiting instructors from other departments, such as sales, personal training and front desk staff, the club staff becomes more integrated, knowledgeable and profitable.

Programming.

Programming must be simple, fun and effective to deliver consistent, memorable experiences. Too often, programming is too complicated for the average participant. Therefore, it only appeals to a limited audience. In order to widen the appeal of fitness, programming must include simple movements and self-regulated progression, such as adding more weight to a barbell, increasing the height of the step or increasing the resistance on an indoor cycle. This enables participants to control intensity and achieve greater results at their own pace.

Group fitness allows exercise to be social and motivational because of the instructor, the participants and the music. Len Kravitz, Ph.D., author of the article, *The Effects of Music on Exercise*, stated "...Therefore, music may directly improve a person's enjoyment and fulfillment of the physical activity, leading to greater exercise compliance..."

Finally, programming has to be effective to deliver results. Whether the results are physical or psychological, effectiveness is determined by the participant. Some people exercise to feel stronger, some want to feel empowered and others just want to feel like they belong.

Environment (The Room).

The group fitness room is the "theatre" in which these consistent, memorable experiences occur. It must be built to enhance the experience. Stage placement, lighting, wall space and sound are critical components for creating the

ambiance in a group fitness room.

- Most people are visual learners. Therefore, seeing the instructor on an elevated stage is essential for their success. In addition, elevation allows instructors to see the participants more clearly and communicate more effectively.
- By using adjustable lighting, clubs can create different moods for either high-energy or mind-body programs.
- When participants are self-conscious about their bodies, mirrors can be intimidating and counterproductive. By placing mirrors on two or less walls, participants are given the option to escape their reflection.
- Given the proven impact of music on exercise, it is important to have the sound system in a group fitness room evaluated by a professional. For example, wall-to-wall mirrors create a poor environment for sound because of their hard surface.

Starbucks is able to deliver consistent, memorable experiences because of the time, energy and resources invested in their baristas, coffee and atmosphere. Similarly, by investing in the right group fitness instructors, programming and environment, health clubs can attract and retain more of the "untapped" 63 percent of the population with consistent, memorable experiences.

(Footnotes)

¹ *A Comprehensive Study of American Attitudes Toward Fitness and Health Clubs*; CBI Magazine, August 2003.

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