

8 cool ways health clubs are thinking outside the box, shrinking waistlines

Health club memberships in the U.S. have leveled out over the last 20-years while the obesity epidemic has ballooned. In light of this disparity, many health clubs are increasingly adopting unconventional programs to bolster their membership base and better motivate the marketplace to get fit, trim and healthy.

“Amid the growing rate of obesity in the U.S., health clubs are continually challenged to drive new memberships and inspire current members to visit their facilities for workouts with some regularity to get, and keep, them on a healthy track,” notes Kelli Calabrese, international fitness, nutrition and lifestyle specialist twice named “Personal Trainer of the Year.” “I applaud the health club community for integrating new, exciting and innovative ways to attract and engage members to keep their fitness lifestyle fresh, fun and frequent...and even profitable!”

1. Whole-Life Training. Health club facilities are now looking beyond just the exercise component of fostering a healthy lifestyle. In addition to personal training staff, today’s progressive health clubs are boasting on-site nutritionists and other allied healthcare professionals like physical therapists and even psychologists. These value added services holistically address all areas of a member’s life that impact their overall well-being, health and happiness. Engaging and assisting members in this comprehensive way maximizes member results, retention and referrals.

2. Kicking Members Out. For outdoor fitness, that is. Some health clubs are utilizing their external real estate to promote fitness activities al fresco. Club owners are realizing

that many people get bored with the indoor offerings—even depressed or deterred—so they are offering running and cycling clubs, parking lot boot camps and spin classes, and more.

3. Weight Loss Wagering. Diet contests and weight loss betting programs, like that offered by HealthyWage.com, are exploding in popularity as both individuals and employee groups from coast to coast “diet for dollars.” More than 4,500 health clubs nationwide now serve as “weigh in locations” for HealthyWage.com contest participants, with many opting to also purchase a club membership as they shed pounds with their eye on the \$10,000 team prize. This financial weight loss incentive approach is so effective, Fortune 500 companies nationwide have integrated such a program into their corporate wellness initiatives to benefit both employee groups and their own bottom line.

4. Clubs Go Retro. Nostalgia evokes emotion and emotion drives action. With this in mind throw-back 80’s fitness classes, in which participants dress in period-inspired spandex and leg warmers and do aerobics to music by Michael Jackson, George Michael, and the like, are bringing the neon headband sporting, leotard-wearing enthusiasts to health clubs in droves. Originating in hipster ‘hoods like LA and NYC, this 80’s fitness craze is sweeping the nation, proving to be a fun, creative and, like, totally awesome way to attract new members – and keep current members coming back for more.

5. Social Media Stimulation. From small boutique gyms to large national chains, health clubs are tapping the social mediasphere in

innovative ways to stay connected with current and prospective members. Informative and engaging Facebook fan pages rife with workout strategies, success stories and special product offers; up-to-the-minute Twitter announcements, training tips and topical tweet feeds; online virtual fitness coaching; un-lockable specials on Foursquare; VLOGs (video blogs) and a myriad of other social networking strategies are helping health club purveyors better connect with the marketplace—informing, motivating and helping them thwart those momentary chocolate cravings like never before.

6. Patriotism Personified. While military discounts are nothing new in the business landscape, full-scale, week-long national programs offering completely free benefits to any and all active, reserve and retired military members, and their families, throughout the U.S. is wonderfully above and beyond the norm. This is exactly what one large national change is doing, for five consecutive years having provided complimentary week-long

(Continued on page 17)

club access to America’s extensive number of active, inactive and retired military personnel—and dependents—in observance of Veterans Day. This same sentiment-oriented national health club chain also celebrates “Active Aging Week” by offering free week-long workouts for older adults age 50 or above.

7. Club Crawl. In an effort to get members integrated to all areas of the health club and its services, at the time of registration some



clubs are giving new members a card with goals to complete for a prize. The goals can include trying fitness classes, completing a personal training session, meeting certain staff members and using specific areas of the fitness center. This gives members the opportunity to experience all the club has to offer before getting pigeon-holed into only one or two areas like nautilus machines or heading right for the spin bike studio. The idea is that the more people the member meet and services they experience first hand, the more connected they will feel to the club and more likely they will be to try—or at least tell friends about—all of the club's offerings. Video gamers take note: one private gym in Mountain View, California, Overtime Fitness Inc., has tailored its offerings to teenagers in a novel approach to address childhood obesity. This facility boasts an arcade filled with physical video games that require dancing, boxing, and jumping. Riders race against each other on station-

ary bikes networked to a server! Teen fitness has never been so fun – or effective at making health clubbing “cool!” “While our nation's obesity epidemic was top-of-mind at this month's ‘Weight of the Nation’ Conference in Washington D.C. sponsored by the CDC, much of the dialogue proffered nothing new,” said David Roddenberry, HealthyWage.com co-founder. “Even in the report released by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) ‘Accelerat-

ing Process in Obesity Prevention’ cited strategies that, while sound, have been proposed in years past as obesity continued to run rampant. It's time for fresh approaches, innovative thinking and even risk taking to trim America's collective waistline. Novel health club programs can tactically and effectively address obesity in new and compelling ways on the front line.”



EIGHT COOL things about health clubs include the fact that now clubs incorporate more than exercise into the experience. Patrons can get tips and guidance on food, vitamins, supplements and overall nutrition.