



Tapping Into Technology To Maintain Relationships

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Few transactional relationships are more relational than those between health club employees and their members. Club owners, group exercise instructors and personal trainers have the opportunity to help their clients stay motivated by supporting them both inside and outside their fitness facilities. Most of your members are over programmed and time impoverished. Maintaining member relationships away from your club can be a huge differentiator. Consider this statistic: a current customer is eight to 10 times more likely to buy again from you than a new customer.

Touching members using technology does not mean purchasing sophisticated point-of-contact (or sales) software, although these can be a highly leveraged way of managing individual relationships. Providing support can be as simple as using an e-mail system that can be tracked and used in a systematic manner. Here are a few examples of the programs that I've found to be highly effective through research at FitAdvisor.

1. **Create e-mail follow-up guidelines** for personal trainers, group exercise instructors, dieticians or physical therapists to stay in touch with clients between club visits. All you need is Internet access for your employee and the ability to capture a member's e-mail address. It's critical that you provide guidelines on the frequency of the e-mails and type of information that can and should be included in the messages.

Few of us are good writers, so you would be doing your employees a favor by creating a template for their correspondence and training them in how and when to use the technology. Make using "technology touch" a non-negotiable for all your customer contact employees. Check with them on a regular basis to make sure that they are delivering follow up consistently. If you want to know whether or not this contact is working, then track your retention numbers and your referrals.

2. **Contact infrequent-use members in actionable ways.** This can be done by creating a series of "scripts" that relate to the membership status of an individual who has not been in your club regularly. These are not simply "we miss you" blast e-mails. This type of contact should include personal information including goals, past challenges or work schedule issues so members know your club understands their needs. You can also include short messages about family members and friends who might be within the circle of influence of your members.
3. **Develop a consultation system** within your current member sign-up process that prompts sales consultants to ask not only about goals, but also to inquire about foreseeable challenges including travel, job changes and family responsibilities. This can be used in conjunction with a current electronic sales contact system.
4. **Create and use a client profile card.** Each salesperson should rotate these cards monthly on an ongoing basis to contact their customers all year long. The profiles are entered into a point-of-sale system when a new customer purchases a product. These profile cards include personal information from customer goals, family members and their needs, products purchased and a time frame for service, and interest in special events.

The foundation of a system that uses technology at any level needs to be easy for employees to execute and track clients. The less sophisticated, the better — at least when beginning an electronic member program. Of course, to do this, you must know why you want to reach out to your members and set goals for the outreach. You must also determine how these clients prefer to be contacted and obtain permission to contact them if you're planning on sending them an e-mail message or giving them a call.

Most importantly, you must ensure that not all the contacts you make with your members are sales oriented. It's fine to provide pricing for special programs, but the majority of these messages should be motivational and programmatic. Otherwise, members will begin deleting them without reading them.

We must stay in contact with our customers when they are away from our businesses. They live complicated lives making it necessary to exercise and stay healthy while traveling or at home. Simple technology allows you to add value in a more comprehensive manner. Missing this opportunity can cost you in many ways — goal attainability, meaningful retention and keeping good customers from finding another means to become and stay healthy and fit.

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