

Norm Cates'

CLUB INSIDER

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Maria Gonzalez and ClubFitness *Inspiring and Empowering!*



AUGUST 2024

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Maria Gonzalez and ClubFitness *Inspiring and Empowering!*

By: Justin Cates

It is easy to take for granted the things we are born with. That could be physical ability, linguistic capability, financial means above the average... you name it. True character is built outside one's comfort zone. How do we react to being challenged? Do we give up, or do we rise up, striving to be better? This story is about the latter, rising up and striving to be better!

Maria Gonzalez, CEO of Club Fitness, is a native of Colombia. In 1998, speaking limited English, Maria and her husband, **Carlos**, immigrated to the United States. Like all of us before her, the United States was a beacon, and the people came. The fabric of cultures, languages and life

experiences this has brought together has created a beautiful quilt of humanity that is unmatched anywhere in the world.

Maria's story once she arrived in the United States is equally as beautiful, culminating so far as the **CEO of ClubFitness** and **Board Member of the HFA (formerly IHRSA)**. I invite you to read on to learn all about it. You will be inspired, and it will empower.

An Interview With Maria Gonzalez, CEO of ClubFitness

Club Insider (C.I.) - Please tell us about your early years.

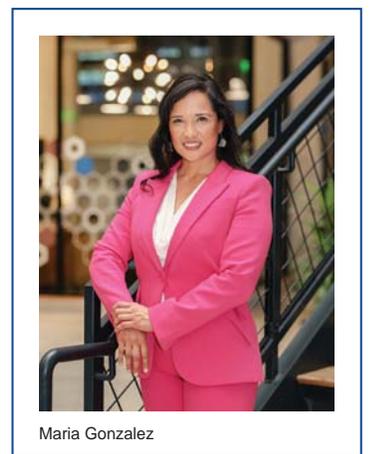
Maria Gonzalez (MG) - I was born and raised in Medellin, Colombia, where I studied accounting. Sports have always

been a significant part of my life. I started swimming at the age of three or four, and by the time I was five, I was competing year-round. At 15, I transitioned from competitive swimming to playing water polo, eventually making it to Colombia's National Team.

Sports have been in my daily routine from a young age, with practices before and after school becoming as natural as eating and showering. Exercise has always been an essential part of my life.

C.I. - When and how did you become involved in the health and fitness club industry?

MG - My initial connection was when I was in college in Colombia. One of my swim coaches asked me if I could help him
(See Maria Gonzalez Page 8)



Maria Gonzalez

Crunch Celebrates Momentous Year at Annual Franchise Convention; Announces Appointment of Molly Long to Chief Operating Officer

NEW YORK, N.Y. - *Crunch Fitness*, a leading high-value, low-price gym, has wrapped its global *Franchise Convention* in Arizona, where executives reflected on the momentous year with approximately 600 attendees and laid out plans to further fuel Crunch's continuous growth. The convention's theme, "*Feel the Good*," represented the spirit and inclusive values of Crunch and featured dynamic content, such as leadership development, strategic discussions, beneficial training courses and the introduction of new initiatives for



the brand.

2024 has been a significant milestone year for Crunch, with the
(See Crunch Page 6)

Blink Fitness Takes Action to Position Business for Future

NEW YORK, N.Y. - *Blink Fitness* ("Blink" or the "Company"), the affordable fitness brand known for its commitment to an all-inclusive and inviting environment, announces that the Company has made the strategic decision to execute an efficient and value-maximizing sale process to optimize its footprint and position the business for long-term success. To facilitate the sale process, Blink has voluntarily filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code in the District of Delaware.

Throughout its sale process, Blink intends to continue to provide



members with the high-quality fitness experience they have come to expect. The Company remains committed to its recently announced strategic initiatives to reinvigorate its most popular gyms, elevate
(See Blink Fitness Page 6)

Inside the Insider: Edition #368

- Elevating Accountability and Morale: A Blueprint for Independent Gym Owners - **By:** Jim Thomas
- My Insurance Aviator Program: An Entry into the Reimbursement System - **By:** Eric Durak, MSc
- How to Approach the Pursuit of New Revenue Streams - **By:** Chris Stevenson
- Marrying PR With Social Media is a Winning Blend For Your Wellness Business - **By:** Nancy Trent
- Crush or Be Crushed: Five Variables of Group Fitness Performance - **By:** Jeffrey Pinkerton
- Equinox Appoints Marc Mastronardi as President
- And, of Course, Norm's Notes

Norm's Notes

■ **Hello Everybody!** This is your **Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993** checking in with our **368th monthly edition of this 31+ year running club business publication** I refer to as: **A Labor of Love!** I'm very thankful that you've tuned in again for this iteration of **Norm's Notes**, as I proceed on my keyboard with my longtime habit of **"Telling-It-Like-It-Is!"** I'm really happy that you're reading this edition, and I want to **THANK YOU ALL** for sticking with us every month! As usual, we have a bunch of health and fitness club business news, **so please read on!**

■ **Is AMERICA a GREAT COUNTRY, or WHAT!?** Hmm... hmm... hmm! And, as usual, let me start these **Norm's Notes** with my normal monthly salutation to you all: **GOD BLESS AMERICA and GOD BLESS YOU, YOUR FAMILY and YOUR BUSINESS!!!**

■ This is one of my favorite Notes to write each year: **COLLEGE FOOTBALL SEASON IS HERE!!! GO N.C. State Wolfpack and Georgia Bulldogs!!!**

■ Thanks to my friend, **MIKE MANNING**, as he told me that our friend, **BILL HUBNER**,

celebrated his **90th Birthday** on July 25th. Mike says Bill told him that his 90th Birthday was a fantastic day, and he spent it with children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. At this point, the best I can do is wish our friend, Bill Hubner, a belated **"HAPPY 90th BIRTHDAY BILL!"** I also want to say **"THANKS MIKE"** for sharing this *special news* about Bill's 90th Birthday with all of us!

■ Our friends and *Club Insider Advertisers*, **Crunch**, has wrapped up their *Annual Franchise Convention*, sharing continued plans for expansion and honoring many in their system. They also announced the promotion of **MOLLY LONG** to *Chief Operating Officer*. She was formerly *Chief Experiential Officer*. Check out the **Crunch Ad** and **Press Release** on **Pages #2 and 3**.

■ In preparation for sale, *Blink Fitness* has filed for *Chapter 11* bankruptcy protection. Check out the **Press Release** on **Page #3**, and **STAY TUNED!**

■ This news from *Atlanta's Journal Constitution* newspaper on this Thursday, August 15: *The world's largest racquet*

sports facility will be built in Raleigh, North Carolina. By the way, Raleigh is the home of my Alma Mater, *N.C. State University!* The Team developing and building this facility announced that it will be named *Swing Racquet + Paddle*, having broken ground on the massive 44-acre sports and entertainment complex with over 70 sports courts. The \$125 million project is expected to open in 2026. Located in Raleigh's Briar Creek community, the complex will be home to 28 tennis courts, 25 pickleball courts, 15 padel courts, four beach tennis and beach volleyball courts and a ping-pong lounge, with a health care partner on site. The *Raleigh News and Observer* newspaper reported that the city had agreed to lease the property to Swing in 2018 and approved a \$10 million grant for the project earlier this year. **ROB AUTRY**, *Founder and CEO of Swing Racquet + Paddle*, has a goal that this flagship facility, which he says will have a 5,000-seat stadium, will host several tournaments and events every year. Credit to The Raleigh News and Observer for sharing this information. **STAY TUNED!**

■ *Pickleball Kingdom* continues expansion in Tennessee and in Alabama, with new clubs coming to Chattanooga and



Norm Cates

Memphis (Tennessee) and Huntsville (Alabama). The Huntsville location will be led by franchisees **BAPPA MUKHERJI, ANJALI MUKHERJI DORIA and JAKE DORIA**, who are passionate about creating community and growing the sport of pickleball. "We're thrilled to bring Pickleball Kingdom to Alabama. This new location is another testament of our commitment to making pickleball accessible and enjoyable (See *Norm's Notes* Page 7)

About Club Insider

CELEBRATING 30+ YEARS OF TRUST

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Thanks and Appreciation

At *Club Insider*, we are excited to be in our **31st Year** of this home-based health and fitness club trade publication! The thought that this publication was *founded to serve an industry I truly love*, and so that *I could become a Mister Mom for my son, Justin*, is still *intriguing and amazing* to us. So, I wish to extend my most sincere **Thanks and Appreciation** to everyone who has made this amazing 30+ year run possible.

Very sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* go to **Rick Caro**, the **late Dr. Gerry Faust** and the **Faust Executive Roundtable #1** for helping me decide in 1993 what my home-based business would be. *Thanks and Appreciation* to my long-time friends, **Ron Hudspeth** and **Cathy Miller**, formerly of *Atlanta's Hudspeth Report* for the tremendous assistance they provided. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of the folks at **Walton Press** in Monroe, Georgia. They did an absolutely excellent job for us all these years and printed every one of our monthly printed editions! And, of course, *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **United States Postal Service** for sending those editions to our readers!

Now, as we have gone all digital, *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **READERS**. Sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to our **Club Insider Advertisers**, past and present, for their kind and dedicated support of this publication. *Thanks and Appreciation* to all of our **Club Insider Contributing Authors**, past and present. *Thanks and Appreciation* to the **Health & Fitness Association** for all it does for all of us. And, sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to my son, **Justin**, our *Publisher*, who is a truly great business partner. You name it and Justin does it each and every month!

Last, but surely not least, this writer who refused to fear failure when many told him he didn't have a chance of surviving the publishing business for even a year did survive. And, he would like to give his sincere *Thanks and Appreciation* to the power that made that survival happen: **God**.

Very sincerely, with love in my heart for you all,

Norm Cates, Jr.



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Equinox Appoints Marc Mastronardi as President

NEW YORK, N.Y. - *Equinox*, an authority in high-performance luxury living, announces that they have appointed **Marc Mastronardi** as *President of Equinox*. Together with the executive leadership team, Marc will develop organizational strategies to drive Equinox's continued success, profitability and future growth. He will be responsible for leading operational excellence, employee and member experience, financial performance and innovation across all

club offerings.

Mastronardi assumed the position of President on Monday, August 12th and reports to **Harvey Spevak**, *Executive Chairman and Managing Partner of Equinox Group*.

"Equinox is an iconic global brand with a robust pipeline of new club openings ahead," says Spevak. "Marc's strong leadership and operating experience at scale will drive a culture of continued

success as we accelerate towards our next phase of growth."

Equinox currently operates over 107 clubs globally and has over 25 new locations planned in the coming years. The company also continues to explore additional opportunities in new and existing markets, both domestically and internationally.

"I am looking forward to using my experience to build on the incredible

EQUINOX

momentum that Harvey and the talented Equinox team have created," said Mastronardi. "Through innovation and a commitment to delivering an unrivaled member experience, Equinox is well-positioned for the future as the authority in high-performance luxury living."

...Crunch

continued from page 3

brand celebrating its 35th anniversary; strengthening its leadership team with strategic hires, including **Chequan Lewis** as *President* and **John Kersh** as *Managing Director of International Development*, and landing the #1 fitness spot in *Entrepreneur's Franchise 500* list.

"We've had an incredibly successful year at Crunch, and bringing our franchisees together is always an extraordinary experience. Averaging more than one new club opening every week, our expansion shows no signs of slowing down," said **Jim Rowley**, *CEO of Crunch Fitness*. "Our franchisees and members are the cornerstone of Crunch, and we're excited to forge ahead on this remarkable journey."

Awards and Recognition: The convention honored outstanding achievements within the Crunch franchise network, including awards for *Revenue Champions*, *Outstanding Partnership* and *Brand Builder*. Winners included:

2023 Revenue Champions:

1. *Fitness Management Enterprises, LLC* - Bellmore, N.Y.;
2. *Undefeated Tribe, LLC* - League City, TX;
3. *CR Fitness Holdings, LLC* - St. Petersburg, FL (Northeast).

Outstanding Partnership: *Fitness Ventures, LLC;*

2023 - 2024 Brand Builder: *Undefeated Tribe, LLC;*

Upswing Award: *Affordable Fitness Group, LLC;*

2024 No Limits: *CR Fitness Holdings, LLC and Harman Fitness, LLC.*

2024 5-Star Brand Excellence:

1. *Red Brick Fitness, LLC* - *Crunch Swansea;*
2. *Bay Area Crunchers, LLC* - *Crunch Fairfield;*
3. *Fitness Ventures, LLC* - *Crunch Urbandale.*

Crunch Cares Initiative: Aligned with the "Feel the Good" theme, this year's convention featured an Olympic-style

charity event benefiting *Future for KIDS*, a local organization providing mentor-driven after-school programs. Teams competed in a relay race, with the winning teams donating 75 sports bags filled with athletic gear to support youth in need.



NEW YORK, N.Y. - *Crunch Fitness*, a leading high-value, low-price gym, announces the appointment of **Molly Long**, its *Chief Experience Officer*, as the company's new *Chief Operating Officer (COO)*, effective August 12, 2024.

Since 2023, Long has played a pivotal role in enhancing the member experience by driving club innovation and redefining the entire member journey. Bringing 14 years of experience between her time at Crunch and 7-Eleven, Long has a proven track record for leading transformational change and championing the member experience for large organizations.

"We are thrilled to appoint Molly as our new Chief Operating Officer," said **Jim Rowley**, *CEO of Crunch Fitness*. "We're looking forward to Molly bringing her profound expertise, enthusiasm and drive to this new role as she looks to enhance the company's daily operations, support our franchise network and greatly impact Crunch's greater strategic goals. Molly's dedication to the Crunch brand has been instrumental, and we believe that she is uniquely qualified to step into this role."

In Long's new role as COO, she will be responsible for driving operational excellence, delivering high-quality experiences to members, and supporting the company's growth and long-term vision.

"Molly is a seasoned veteran who has made a remarkable impact and deepened our commitment to growth and operational excellence," said **Chequan Lewis**, *President of Crunch Fitness*. "She arrived with a mission to enhance the member experience and improve the entire member journey. In her relentless pursuit of excellence, Molly has engaged franchise partners, turned ideas into tangible products and enhanced the experience of our members. With this wealth of experience, we are confident that Molly is ready to help

lead Crunch into our next growth phase as COO."

This appointment marks a significant step in Crunch Fitness' ongoing commitment to driving growth, promoting excellence and prioritizing innovation while delivering value to its members, team members and franchisees.

"I am honored to step into the role of Chief Operating Officer and further support the team as we forge ahead in the fitness space," said **Molly Long**, *COO of Crunch Fitness*. "In driving day-to-day business objectives across our business and in partnership with our franchisees

while supporting long-term growth strategies, I'm excited about what's ahead at Crunch."

Crunch recently celebrated a milestone year at its global Franchise Convention, where the team celebrated its 35th anniversary, its #1 fitness spot in *Entrepreneur's Franchise 500* list, and the achievements of its exceptional franchise network. This appointment of Long comes as Crunch continues to lay a path for significant growth and expansion.

Check out the **Crunch Ad on Page #2**.

...Blink Fitness

continued from page 3

its member experience and deepen its community connections, with a continued focus on democratizing fitness for all.

Blink has demonstrated continuous improvement in its financial performance over the past two years with revenue increasing by nearly 40%. In 2024, the Company expects to build on this momentum and deliver the best top-and bottom-line performance over the last five years.

"Over the last several months, we have been focused on strengthening Blink's financial foundation and positioning the business for long-term success," said **Guy Harkless**, *President and Chief Executive Officer of Blink Fitness*. "After evaluating our options, the Board and management team determined that using the court-supervised process to optimize the Company's footprint and effectuate a sale of the business is the best path forward for Blink and will help ensure Blink remains the destination for all people seeking an inclusive, community-focused gym. We thank our entire corporate and gym team for their continued dedication to our members, as well as our vendors and partners for their ongoing support. We look

forward to emerging from this process as an even stronger business."

In connection with the court-supervised process, Blink has received a commitment of \$21 million in new debtor-in-possession financing from its existing lenders. Once approved by the Court, this new financing, combined with cash generated from the Company's ongoing operations, will support the business during this process.

Blink Fitness has filed certain customary motions with the Court seeking approval to continue to support its operations during the court-supervised process, including paying employee wages and benefits without interruption. The Company intends to pay vendors and suppliers in full under normal terms for goods and services provided on or after the filing date.

Additional information regarding the Company's court-supervised process is available at Blink's restructuring website, www.BlinkFitnessFuture.com.

Blink Fitness is represented by *Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, LLP* as legal advisor, *Moelis & Company* as financial advisor and *Portage Point Partners* as restructuring advisor, with **Steven Shenker** serving as *Chief Restructuring Officer*.

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...Norm's Notes

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for everyone," said **ACE RODRIGUES**, Founder and CEO of Pickleball Kingdom. "Bappa, Anjali and Jake are devoted to pickleball, and their leadership will ensure that this new location becomes a go-to destination for players of all skill levels. **STAY TUNED!**

■ This news from **AUDREY LEE**: *Former Cleveland Browns' Wide Receiver Intervenes in YMCA Locker Room Attack.* **MALIK ALI SMITH** has been charged with assault with intent to murder after attacking a fellow patron in a Farmington Hills, Michigan YMCA locker room.

Smith allegedly attacked an elderly man after the two got into a disagreement over the volume of the music. Smith pushed the elderly man, who ultimately fell on the floor. A good Samaritan stepped in before Smith could do any more damage. Smith fled the YMCA and was later caught.

That good Samaritan was none other than **BRAYLON EDWARDS**, former Cleveland Browns wide receiver and Michigan Wolverine's alum.

"The noise escalates, and then you can hear some pushing and shoving. You know what fighting sounds like, but once I heard a thud, that's when I got up

and turned around," said Edwards.

Medical staff at the hospital reported that the elderly man was in critical condition. They said that, if Edwards had not stepped in, he may have died from the attack.

"I see the guy reaching for what I was thinking was a phone underneath the victim, but he grabs the back of the victim's head by the hair, and he was about to slam it down on the counter," Edwards said.

Smith has been held on a \$250,000 bond since March. He now faces life in prison if convicted of his crimes.

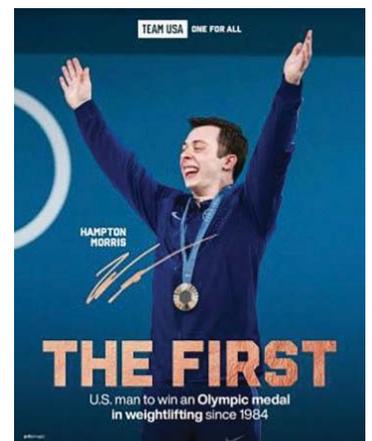
"This was a vicious, senseless attack," *Oakland County Prosecutor, Karen McDonald*, told *Fox 2 Detroit*. "I commend the witness who intervened, and we will seek justice for this victim." **Good On Ya Braylon Edwards!**

■ Young **HAMPTON MORRIS** has a story that's really hard to believe. Morris is a 20-year-old from Marietta, Georgia, my hometown. *Pope High School* graduate, Hampton Morris, became the first U.S. men's weightlifter to take home a medal at the Olympic Games in four decades! Morris won bronze in the men's 61-kilogram division. Morris was in fifth place in the weightlifting competition after his *snatch lift*. But, he jumped into the medal position thanks to his second lift of the competition,

the *clean and jerk*, where he's the reigning world record holder in his weight class. Between the two lifts, Morris, who weighs just 135 pounds, hoisted a combined weight of **298 kilograms** which is **657 POUNDS!** Morris dropped to third place after failing on a world-record attempt on the clean and jerk on his final lift. **CONGRATULATIONS to our hometown boy, Hampton Morris! WE'RE VERY PROUD OF YOU!** When Hampton Morris stood upon the Olympic weightlifting podium in Paris Thursday to accept a bronze medal, he was making a piece of history.

■ **JUSTIN** and I want to **THANK YOU** for reading **Club Insider!** We appreciate you being with us. And, in particular, **WE VERY SINCERELY APPRECIATE ANY and ALL SUPPORT OF OUR ESTEEMED Club Insider ADVERTISERS! PLEASE DO BUSINESS WITH THEM and WHEN YOU DO, PLEASE TELL 'EM Club Insider SENT YOU! THANK YOU ALL!**

■ **God bless our troops, airmen and sailors worldwide and keep them safe. Thank you, Congratulations and Welcome Home to all of our troops who have served around the world. God bless America's Policemen and women and Firemen and women; keep them safe. Finally, God bless you, your family,**



your club(s) and your members. God Bless America! Laus Deo!

(Norm Cates, Jr. is a 50-year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. He is the Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 of Club Insider, now in its 31st year of monthly publication. In 1981, he was IHRSA's First President, and a Co-Founder of the Association with Rick Caro and five others. In 2001, he was honored by IHRSA with its DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award, one of its highest honors. And, in 2017, he was honored with Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award. You can reach Norm by phone at 770-635-7578 or email at Norm@clubinsideronline.com.)

...Maria Gonzalez

continued from page 3

with the swim lessons he provided. At that point, I didn't know if I had the patience for teaching, but he said, 'Maria, please help me out.' I said, 'Okay, you're in a bind, I will help this one time.' Well, that was the beginning 30 years ago, and I have not stopped since! I started with swim lessons, and it has evolved ever since.

Even early on, when I was around 11 years old, I had my first gym membership. I loved dancing and aerobics, and I was part of some exhibition teams. Then, during college, my accounting classes were in the early morning, so during the day, I had time to work. I built a private program that offered communities and organizations aerobics, as well as dancing and swimming classes to different age groups. I went from one location to another and grew my program. Eventually, I started hiring people who were attending the same school as me but studying Physical Education and Sports Science. So, that's how my journey in the health and fitness industry started.

C.I. - When did your family immigrate to the United States?

MG - I came to the United States in 1998 with my husband, **Carlos**.

C.I. - Please take us through the next part of your journey.

MG - When we moved to the United States, the first city we lived in was Miami, and I was connected from Colombia to a swim school called Swim Gym at a JCC in South Florida. The owner was **Robert Strauss**, a former Olympian from Mexico, and I trained with him. I did not speak English that well, but I pushed through. I studied and studied, worked on the language and went through a certification course. After I went through the course, he said, 'Maria, I would love to offer you a job. You are a very persistent woman and don't take NO for an answer. I

believe you will do great.' He was the first person who really opened the door for me.

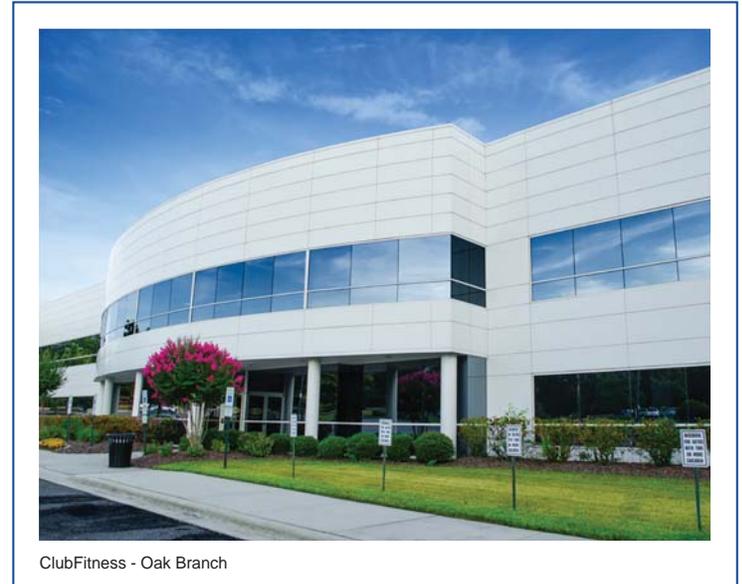
I worked under his leadership for 2-1/2 years while I was in Miami. I was also trying to learn English and going to school at the same time. Miami is a city that has a huge population of people who speak Spanish, so it was extremely hard to be 'forced' to speak English because I was not totally immersed in it.

After 2-1/2 years, we had to make the tough decision to look for a new place. My husband and I determined that, if we didn't move, it would take us a long time to really learn English. A friend of his was here in Greensboro, North Carolina. We really did not know much about North Carolina, so we came to visit. In some ways, it reminded us of home because of the greenery, the hills, the mountains, etc. It seemed like a nice place, so we applied for an apartment. A month later, we were living in Greensboro. That was in 2001. It has been a great place to live, to grow as an individual, and to raise a family. Our son, **Isaac**, was born here, so our roots are definitely here.

C.I. - Oh yes, Appalachia is a beautiful place to settle down! When and how did you get started at *ClubFitness*?

MG: When we first arrived, I searched the newspaper for job opportunities. At that time, *ClubFitness* was known as *Pyramids Wellness Center*, and they were hiring for all positions. Although my English was limited back then, I knew I could teach anyone to swim, regardless of the language they spoke. I had developed a strong ability to communicate non-verbally through body language, combined with a big smile and a caring attitude that transcends any language barrier. I was very comfortable with hands-on teaching, and I made sure everyone felt safe and comfortable in the water.

So, I put my resume together, sharing all the experience I had over



ClubFitness - Oak Branch

the years as a competitive athlete and swim instructor. I also included all the certifications and courses I had completed. And, they gave me a chance! I started as a lifeguard, and a few months after that, they gave me the opportunity to teach one class. It has just scaled up from there, one step at a time.

I continued to take English classes and do things to push me out of my comfort zone. I am a very outgoing person, so when you aren't able to communicate with people as you would like, it is almost like having your arms tied and tape over your mouth. It was very hard, but it gave me a deep appreciation for communication and for what others might be going through.

Fast forward four years to 2005, and I was offered the position of *Aquatics Director*. I was given the opportunity to lead a team in an area that had excelled for many years, and I got to work alongside other great leaders and directors. Having grown up in Colombia, I never imagined I would find myself sitting at a table with 14 or so Directors who were all incredibly talented in another country. Sometimes, I would question myself... Where am I? What am I doing here? Do I belong?

I was still adjusting to the culture, learning the language and staying curious, which I continue to do even after 26 years in this country. Every family, every group, every community has its own way of doing things, right? We all come from different places with our own biases, but in the end, there are so many common things that connect us.

But, I knew there was a reason for



CLUBFITNESS

everything. There are no coincidences in life. Whether it was a small job or a big job, I always gave it my all, and that dedication got me to where I am today.

C.I. - That is beautiful and truly inspiring! Please take us through your journey from *Aquatics Director* to *CEO of ClubFitness*...

MG - Of course, it was not a straight shot... It was a 23-year career in the making. A year or two after becoming *Aquatics Director*, I joined the *Operations Team*, a group of three Directors responsible for managing the club's daily operations. This role gave me a deeper understanding of what it takes to run a club. Then, two years later, I was offered the opportunity to manage one of our clubs, and I became the *Club Manager* of our Oak Branch location.

I served as a Club Manager for about eight years before being offered the *Executive Director* role for both locations. In this role, I was very hands-on with Operations, working directly with about 17 Directors and the two Club Managers. This was a unique challenge, as it involved coordinating different people, positions and styles to work together. Additionally, it was the first time someone had overseen both locations, so I had to be mindful not to favor one over the other. I made it a point to be inclusive, rotating meetings and locations to ensure that everyone at each site felt equally important to the organization.

After eight years as *Executive Director*, I was named *CEO*. It has been quite the journey, moving through different roles that allowed me to engage with various departments and teams, learning the diverse modalities and programs we offer and can potentially offer. And, it's a never-ending learning curve, staying relevant and ensuring that we continue to be a special place for the community.

C.I. - Please tell us about your two clubs, (See *Maria Gonzalez* Page 10)



ClubFitness - Green Valley

IHRSA is now the HEALTH & FITNESS ASSOCIATION

After two years of discussion and planning, IHRSA has made the next move in our evolution—we've rebranded as the Health & Fitness Association!

Our new name more readily reflects the amazing community of health and fitness leaders that we represent worldwide.

We will be transitioning to the new name during the next several months, so watch our website as we transition our url, social media platforms, newsletters, and more.

healthandfitness.org



...Maria Gonzalez

continued from page 8

Green Valley and Oak Branch (Acreage, square footage, amenities, services, etc).

MG - Our Oak Branch location is a 60,000 square-foot facility situated on 5.5 acres. It features a 10-lane pool, steam room, sauna, hot tub, laser hair removal services, hair salon, Pilates Reformer classes, the *Parisi Speed School*, *Alloy Personal Training*, the *Michael Phelps Swimming Program*, group exercise classes, cardio and strength equipment, pickleball courts and summer camps.

Our Green Valley location is a 40,000 square-foot facility on 2.5 acres. This club offers a 4-lane pool, steam room, sauna, hot tub, spin classes, racquetball courts, a boxing studio, *Alloy Personal Training*, group exercise classes, barre classes and cardio and strength equipment.

C.I. - What are your price points/membership levels?

MG - Our individual price point for a 12-month commitment membership is **\$70/month**, or a month-to-month membership for **\$80/month**. We also offer a young adult membership for **\$40/month** and a family membership for **\$129/month** (2 adults/2 children under 18 years of age).

C.I. - How many members do you now serve?

MG - Right now, we have around 3,300 members.

C.I. - Who are your Key Staff Members? (Name, role, tenure)

MG - Every staff member is essential to our team. Each person plays a vital role in our organization, and I'm grateful to work alongside every one of them. However, I'd like to highlight our Management Team:

Elizabeth Johannesen, *General Manager*, 34 years;

Josh Hughes, *CFO*, 23 years; and,

Gary Castellano, *COO*, 10 years.

We've all navigated both great and challenging times together, and we know we can count on each other not just professionally, but personally as well.

C.I. - What do you consider your Key Market Differentiators?

MG - For me, personally, and like the vision of our owner, **Don Linder**, a retired anesthesiologist, he wanted to create a club that was welcoming to everyone, regardless of their fitness level. He wanted it to be a non-intimidating place to work out. The Oak Branch location was built from the ground up for this purpose. When we talk about where we are today and think about wellness and the holistic approach to health, that was his vision 25 years ago.

As I mentioned, Justin, the club was originally named Pyramids Wellness Center. Interestingly, about 15 years ago, we brought in a consultant who suggested we drop the word 'Wellness' from the name because, at that time, 'Wellness' was associated with being sick people!

C.I. - WHAT!?

MG - Fascinating, right? Looking back, Don was ahead of his time in his approach to health, wellbeing and wellness. So, we rebranded the club as *ClubFitness*. Despite the name change, our differentiator remains the same: creating a welcoming, non-intimidating environment where people can not only work out but also socialize. We want our members to find a supportive community here. Some might say that offering a wide range of services can be a disadvantage, but we see it as a strength. By providing many different programs and offerings, we attract a diverse group of people who, in turn, interact and build connections in various ways.

C.I. - Speaking of creating community, what do you do to be involved with/give back to



Alloy PT at ClubFitness

the communities you serve?

MG - Personally, I serve on several boards of various nonprofit organizations here in Greensboro, which keeps me deeply involved in the local community. Through these connections and by being active in the area, I often have opportunities to collaborate with nonprofits even if I'm not on their board. For example, the YWCA here doesn't have a pool, but they want to offer swim lessons and water safety classes to their participants and their children, so we partner with them and provide those classes at our facility.

Additionally, we've offered free exercise and dance classes in local parks, making it easy for people to come out and enjoy a free, healthy activity. We collaborate with nonprofit *Greensboro Downtown Parks* that manages two of the downtown parks, and I organize an event there every month. This event is incredibly popular, sometimes drawing over 1,000 attendees during the event. It's been amazing to see the community come together to dance, laugh and enjoy a fun, friendly family time.

Finally, we're always happy to support local organizations in their fundraising efforts by hosting events at our facility.

We believe that connecting with the community is key. We are part of this community, and personally, I believe you can't just stay within your four walls... You have to go out, get involved and help out. The community has been great to us, and we want to give back. It's also wonderful for our members to see us supporting these causes and places.

C.I. - Well said. Speaking of service, thank you for your *HFA* (formerly *IHRSA*) Board Service. Please tell us about that experience so far. Please also tell us about your experience/work with *IHRSA* before Board service.

MG - Over the years, I've attended many *IHRSA* (now *HFA*) Conventions, and I also participated in the *IHRSA Institute*. I'm a lifelong learner, and I consider myself someone who is always seeking out new knowledge, both to improve myself and to pass that knowledge on to others. As a leader, I believe it's crucial to continuously seek out new ideas, insights and connections. *HFA* has been an incredible organization to help me do that, whether through their research, events or educational platforms, including the Institute. That's where my initial connection with the Association began.

As I mentioned earlier, I've served on several boards locally, and I was involved in a leadership program through the *Chamber of Commerce* here in Greensboro that brought together leaders from various industries. After gaining so much from those experiences, I began asking myself, 'What now? How can I give back and use my talents to make a broader impact, not just in my community, but in the industry that has given me so much?' I realized I wasn't yet doing enough to contribute to the fitness industry itself. That's when I felt the call to apply for a position on the *HFA* Board. I put my name forward, and I was honored to be elected as one of the Board Members.

The experience so far has been fantastic. It's been enlightening to learn from a different perspective, specifically, how an Association like *HFA* operates. I've gained insight into *HFA's Mission, Vision and Impact*. Learning from the incredible leaders on our Board and examining together the current challenges

(See *Maria Gonzalez* Page 11)



L to R - Gary Castellano, COO; Elizabeth Johannesen, GM; Maria Gonzalez, CEO; and Josh Hughes, CFO



CLUBFITNESS



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...Maria Gonzalez

continued from page 10

and opportunities our industry faces has been invaluable. And, together, we are looking for ways to keep moving forward. This year, I have the privilege of *Chairing the Nominations Committee*, which is a tremendous honor. I see it as the first of many opportunities to leave a meaningful impact on the Association.

C.I. - Looking to the future, what does that look like in the next 3 - 5 years? For you, for ClubFitness, for the industry.

MG - I'm deeply committed to bridging the gap between the healthcare sector, the fitness industry and our community. By working together, I believe we can adopt a more preventive approach to fostering a healthier community. Locally, I serve on the *Board of Trustees for Cone Health*, one of our area's largest health systems. I'm also involved with a *Health Equity Initiative* that collaborates with the *Public School System*, the *City of Greensboro* and several other local organizations.

Our focus has been on addressing health disparities within our community, and now, we're taking actionable steps to make a tangible difference in people's lives. It's about developing programs and services that meet the specific needs of different

areas within our community. For me, this is both a personal mission and a goal for the organization I work for... to continue serving as a liaison and collaborator with organizations and individuals who share these goals.

The fitness industry is moving in the right direction, but we still have a lot of work to do. One of the biggest challenges is engaging the 80% of people who aren't currently working out. We need to rethink our strategies and find new ways to reach them. What we've done in the past isn't enough; we need to innovate.

These next three to five years are going to be incredibly busy! Like many others, I can't sit still. I'm always searching for those key players to connect with and considering what initiatives we should start or join to make a real impact. The future is about collaboration, innovation, and making a lasting difference in our community and industry.

C.I. - Again, well said. It's the Holy Grail industry. I know I have been writing about it for almost 20 years, and the topic is older than that. Every year, we make more and more progress. One day, I hope that it becomes the snowball that makes it all the way down the mountain! To close this interview, what key lessons and pieces of advice do you have for our readers?

MG - If we truly want to move the needle toward a healthier world, we need to meet people where they are. As I mentioned earlier, it's about bridging and connecting the dots across all aspects of a person's life: community, fitness facilities, schools, healthcare systems, local organizations and businesses. We all need to work together to ensure access to healthy food, good physical and mental health services, gyms and nonprofit fitness facilities, and youth sports. I believe that, by collaborating and taking a more preventive approach, we can foster healthier communities, and ultimately, a healthier world.



Thank you to **Maria Gonzalez** for sharing her incredibly inspiring story! We hope it was empowering for you to read. Like the fabric of cultures, languages

and life experiences that already make this country great, leaders like Maria will continue to make this industry greater! Thank you, **Maria**, for your service. Thank you all for reading! Happy Fall.

(Justin Cates is the Publisher of Club Insider. Having been born into a club business family in 1985, Justin grew up in the health and fitness club industry. He has lived and breathed this industry for 38 years, since his own day one, and he loves it dearly. Graduating from the Terry College of Business at The University of Georgia in 2007, Justin has run day-to-day operations of Club Insider for 15+ years. Justin became Publisher of Club Insider in April of 2020. Justin's Dad, Norm Cates, continues to serve as Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993. You can reach Justin by phone at 863-999-2677 or email at Justin@clubinsideronline.com.)

Make It Fun!

Elevating Accountability and Morale: A Blueprint for Independent Gym Owners

By: **Jim Thomas**

In the competitive world of independent gyms, boutique studios and personal training businesses, the fine balance between holding staff accountable and maintaining high morale is a crucial factor that can make or break your success. Accountability is not just about meeting sales targets or showing up on time, it's about fostering a culture of excellence where every team member feels responsible for the gym's success. Yet, it's equally important to keep your staff motivated, happy, and enthusiastic about their roles. Here's how you can strike that balance effectively:

1. Set Clear Expectations from Day One - Accountability starts with clear, unambiguous expectations. When your team knows exactly what's expected of them, they are more likely to perform to those standards. This involves:

Defining Roles and Responsibilities: Ensure that every staff member understands their specific role within the gym, from personal trainers to front desk staff. This clarity minimizes confusion and ensures everyone knows where they fit in the broader business goals.

Setting Measurable Goals: Develop KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) that are **SMART**: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. Whether it's sales targets, client retention rates or class attendance, having clear metrics helps staff understand how their work contributes to the gym's success.

2. Incorporate Regular Check-Ins and Feedback - Frequent communication is essential to maintaining accountability and motivation.

Weekly Check-Ins: Hold brief, weekly meetings to review progress, address challenges and celebrate wins. These sessions should be constructive, focusing on what's working well and what needs improvement without veering into micromanagement.

Constructive Feedback: Provide feedback that is specific and actionable. Instead of simply pointing out what's wrong, offer solutions and encouragement. For instance, if an instructor's class attendance is dropping, discuss ways to improve their class offerings or marketing efforts rather than just highlighting the decline.

3. Cultivate a Culture of Recognition - Acknowledging good work is one of the most effective ways to boost morale and reinforce positive behaviors.

Catch Them Doing Something Right: Make it a point to notice and commend staff when they go above and beyond. Whether it's a trainer who stayed late to help a client or a front desk member who handled a difficult situation with grace, public recognition can go a long way.

Implement a Rewards System: Consider creating a formal recognition program where staff can earn rewards for meeting certain milestones or demonstrating exceptional work. Rewards don't always have to be monetary; they can be as simple as an extra day off, a gift card or a shoutout on your gym's social media channels.

4. Foster a Collaborative Environment - A team that works well together is more likely to hold each other accountable and stay motivated.

Team-Building Activities: Organize regular team-building exercises that are fun and engaging. This can range from group workouts to offsite activities. These events help to build camaraderie and a sense of shared purpose among your staff.

Open Communication Channels: Encourage an open-door policy where staff feel comfortable bringing up issues, sharing ideas or seeking advice. When staff feel heard and valued, they are more likely to stay committed and motivated.

5. Provide Opportunities for Growth - Staff members who see a clear path for advancement within your gym are more likely to stay engaged and accountable.

Professional Development: Invest in your team's development by offering training and certification opportunities. This not only enhances their skills but also shows that you are invested in their future.

Career Progression: Clearly outline potential career paths within your gym. Whether it's moving from a trainer to a lead trainer or transitioning into management, showing that there's room for growth can be a significant motivator.

6. Lead by Example - Your leadership style sets the tone for your entire gym.

Demonstrate Accountability: Hold yourself to the same standards you set for your

staff. Be punctual, meet your own goals and admit when you've made a mistake. This sets a powerful example for your team and establishes a culture of mutual respect.

Positive Attitude: Maintain a positive attitude, even in challenging times. Your approach to setbacks and challenges will influence how your team responds to their own hurdles.

7. Utilize Technology to Track Progress - Leveraging technology can streamline the accountability process and make it easier for both you and your staff to stay on track.

Performance Tracking Software: Implement software that tracks sales, client engagement and other key metrics. This allows you and your staff to monitor progress in real-time and make adjustments as needed.

Communication Platforms: Use platforms like *Slack* or *Microsoft Teams* to facilitate ongoing communication and collaboration among your staff. These tools can also be used to share updates, celebrate successes and provide feedback.

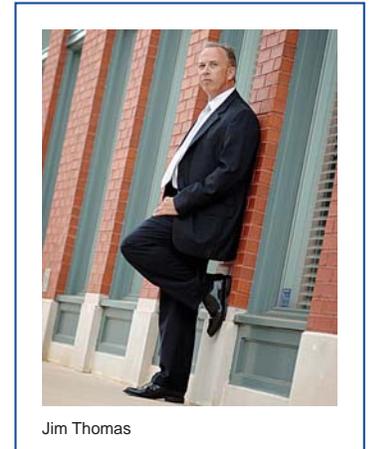
8. Celebrate Milestones and Successes - Celebration is a powerful motivator and helps to build a positive work environment.

Monthly Recognition Events: Host monthly or quarterly events where you highlight the achievements of your staff. These can be casual get-togethers where you share successes, hand out awards and reinforce the sense of community within your gym.

Client Feedback Integration: Share positive client feedback with your staff. Knowing that their efforts are appreciated by clients can be incredibly motivating and reinforce the value of their work.

Conclusion: Balancing Accountability with a Positive Work Environment

Creating a culture of accountability in your gym doesn't mean sacrificing morale or motivation. By setting clear expectations,



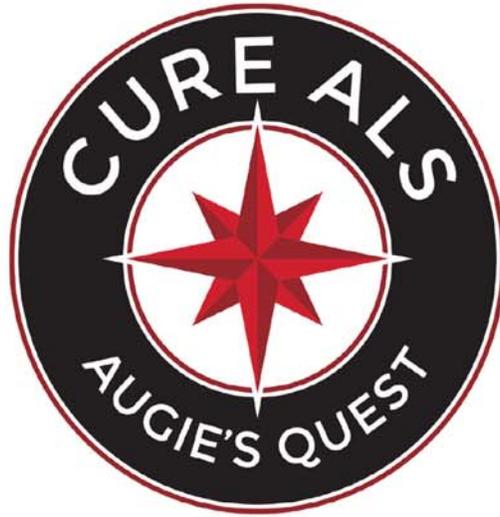
Jim Thomas

providing regular feedback, recognizing good work and fostering a supportive environment, you can ensure that your team remains engaged, motivated and aligned with your gym's goals. Remember, when your staff feels valued and empowered, they are more likely to hold themselves accountable, leading to better performance, higher client satisfaction, and ultimately, a more successful gym.

By implementing these strategies, you not only enhance the accountability of your team but also create a thriving, positive work environment where everyone is motivated to contribute to the success of your gym.

(An Outsourced CEO, Turnaround Expert and Author, Jim Thomas is the Founder and President of FMC USA Inc., a management consulting, turnaround, financing and brokerage firm specializing in the leisure services industry. With more than 25 years of experience owning, operating and managing facilities of all sizes, Thomas lectures and delivers seminars, webinars and workshops across the globe on the practical skills required to successfully overcome obscurity, improve gym sales, build teamwork and market fitness programs and products. Learn more at www.fmconsulting.net or www.youtube.com/gymconsultant.)

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My Insurance Aviator Program: An Entry into the Reimbursement System

By: **Eric Durak, MSc**

Over the past 30 years, professionals in the exercise field have been interested in receiving reimbursement dollars for specific types of fitness services. The only bona fide service that started receiving insurance money was cardiac rehab, which in the mid-1980s received reimbursement for up to 35 cardiac visits. This meant that patients who needed exercise could get phase 3 programs for up to 3.5 months post-surgery. No other types of clinical exercise --obesity, hypertension, diabetes management, etc.-- received reimbursement dollars. This has led to reimbursement being considered the Holy Grail for the industry.

The Reimbursement System Over the Past 25 years

Other types of "wellness" services, such as massage therapy and nutrition advice also had a difficult time receiving third party payments. Even though these services are essential and could be argued to be "medically necessary," they usually didn't receive money, with the exception of a few creative therapists along with their physicians or health systems.

In the early 1990s, the *Silver Sneakers* program, which provided free health club memberships to senior citizens through their Medicare programs, became a "thing" in the U.S. The program spread to over 10,000 clubs, and millions of eligible seniors could sign up. It became a great

deal for Silver Sneakers, but some clubs argued that the program didn't pay much to them, and when enough seniors DID sign up for the program, clubs actually lost money.

As health clubs closed during COVID, they felt helpless to cater to their members, and even though data came out to prove that clubs were safe, and those who trained in fitness had much better COVID outcomes, the issue became: "How can clubs become essential?" Part of this answer may come from using insurance benefits to pay for specific health club programs.

How Insurance Can Affect Health Clubs

Health insurance is a contract between a consumer and a company. Many companies have employer-based programs that include "perks" within such a contract. These may include types of health club programs. The issue then becomes that most consumers have no idea what types of components their health plans actually pay for. This is where the *Health Aviator* comes in. Essentially, a type of consumer coaching program, the Aviator will assist the consumer with elements of their plan and guide them as to what types of programs and aspects of their plan that may be covered under their current policy.

Part of this navigation would include specific types of programs in health clubs that may be covered under their overall health plan, their Health Savings Account (or HSA plan) or employer-sponsored HRA

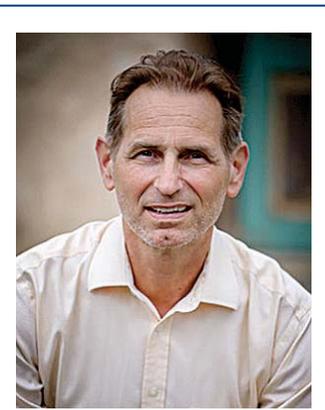
insurance. These programs may include a specific number of personal training sessions for something such as weight loss programs, nutrition guidance or massage therapy for general pain management.

My Insurance Aviator Program is actually a good deal for clubs, as the small charge for consumers costs nothing for the health club. Clubs may receive a referral fee from the Aviator Program for each person who signs up or who may be entitled to a policy change that reflects the use of health club services.

What do clubs need to know?

Health clubs should be doing everything they can in order to attract new members, retain current members and develop additional revenue streams. My Insurance Aviator may be a critical revenue stream in that it may allow a large percentage of current health club members to have programs paid for by insurance, thus saving them money and adding potential revenue streams to the club they otherwise may not have attained.

Health club members always have questions about insurance. According to *Life Core Group*, almost half of consumers don't ask about plans because they are confused by the complexity. The Aviator Program solves all of these problems and improves the odds of having insurance pay for what consumers WANT from their health plans, preventive and proactive programs that improve health and save money. The goal for the Aviator Program is



Eric Durak, MSc

to be in every health club in the U.S. within the next two years.

Who you gonna call?

You can contact a Life Core Group Representative for more information by calling (602) 235 - 2800, Ext. 13. Or, email contact@lifecoregroup.com. Additional information can be found at www.lifecoregroup.com/membership.

(Eric Durak, MSc is the President and Founder of Medical Health and Fitness. He is a 35-year veteran of the health club industry. His company performs clinical outcomes and consults on medical fitness. He can be reached at edurak@medhealthfit.com.)

How to Approach the Pursuit of New Revenue Streams

By: **Chris Stevenson**

Generating revenue and being profitable in the fitness industry can be a challenge. Margins can be tight, competition is fierce, and there are always new trends and fads to consider. While the primary revenue source is often membership dues, most facilities need other revenue streams to be profitable and reach their full potential.

Adding these ancillary services can't be done haphazardly. Various factors must be considered when determining what products and services will provide the best ROI and be worth adding to a facility's arsenal. Here are some things to consider when exploring new revenue streams for fitness clubs:

1. Know Your Demographics: Before exploring new revenue streams, you

must understand your organization's demographics. Examine who your current members are and decipher their needs and interests. Conduct surveys and focus groups to gather feedback on what members might want. Why guess when you can ask? At our club, we had the opportunity to add a *Silver Sneakers* program. It seemed like a no-brainer, but it flopped. We thought we knew our demographics but didn't read the room correctly. Although our primary members were slightly older, they tended to be far more "fit" than their peers. As a result, they had no interest in "age-appropriate" programming. Some were even slightly offended that we suggested the program to them. Had we done some surveying, we would have found that while Silver Sneakers is a great program, it wasn't for our members. The bottom line is that the more a club understands its demographics,

the more likely it is to be able to add ancillary services that will be successful.

2. Keep an Eye on Trends: It is essential to watch industry fads to understand what is trending upward and what is headed in the opposite direction. Several organizations provide fantastic resources focused on industry trends. Not only can understanding trends allow an organization to add appropriate ancillary services, but it also helps to attract new members, retain current members and differentiate from the competition. A few years ago, obstacle course racing began taking off, including *Tough Mudders* and *Spartan Races*. We saw this trend and became one of the first facilities to offer specialized training programs for people who wanted to train for OCR. Because we paid attention to trends and took advantage of this, we created a



Chris Stevenson

program that was a great source of ancillary (See *Chris Stevenson Page 16*)



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Marrying PR With Social Media is a Winning Blend For Your Wellness Business

By: **Nancy Trent**

Social media is an essential tool for wellness businesses such as gyms and fitness equipment companies. While social media platforms like *Instagram*, *Facebook* and *TikTok* allow these businesses to connect directly with their audience, the role of Public Relations (PR) should not be overlooked. PR can significantly amplify social media efforts, ensuring a more robust, credible and impactful online presence. Here's how PR supports social media and tips on leveraging this synergy for wellness-based businesses.

Building Credibility and Trust

Third-Party Endorsements: PR efforts result in media coverage, expert endorsements and influencer partnerships. These third-party endorsements can significantly enhance a brand's credibility, making social media promotions more trustworthy.

Reputation Management: PR strategies include managing a brand's reputation, addressing negative comments and promoting positive stories. This helps maintain a positive image across social media platforms.

Creating Compelling Content

Storytelling: PR professionals are experts in storytelling. They craft compelling narratives that resonate with audiences, which can be repurposed for social media content.

News and Updates: Regular press releases and news updates provide a steady stream of fresh content that can be shared on social media, keeping the audience informed and engaged.

Enhancing Engagement

Interactive Campaigns: PR campaigns often include interactive elements like

contests, challenges and events. These can be integrated into social media strategies to boost engagement.

Influencer Collaborations: PR can facilitate collaborations with influencers who can promote the brand on social media, expanding reach and engagement.

Driving Traffic and Sales

Media Coverage: Positive media coverage can drive traffic to social media profiles and websites, leading to increased sales and conversions.

Cross-Promotion: PR campaigns can be cross-promoted on social media, creating a cohesive marketing strategy that drives better results.

Tips for Wellness-Based Businesses

Leverage Media Coverage: Share articles, interviews and news features about your



Nancy Trent

gym or fitness equipment on social media. Highlight the credibility that media mentions bring to your brand. **Example:** If your gym is featured in a health magazine, share the article on your social media platforms (See *Nancy Trent* Page 17)

Crush or Be Crushed: Five Variables of Group Fitness Performance

By: Jeffrey Pinkerton

Group fitness can and should be the shining star of your facility. Few experiences under your roof create the same energy and excitement, camaraderie and community as a well-managed, well-organized program. And, to maximize its impact, your goal should be to make your group fitness rooms as full as possible, as often as possible. Imagine your favorite restaurant: the crowd is lively, the patrons are diverse, the energy is palpable, the vibe is cool, the staff is professional and passionate, and everything on the menu is high-quality. If this doesn't sound like the group fitness experience at your club, it's time to take a hard look at these five variables of group fitness performance: the programming, the place, the people, the playlist and the promotion. Get these right, focus on them with intention and energy, and you'll *Crush It* in group. Get these wrong, get distracted by flashy fads and terminable trends, or just be satisfied with a sinking status quo, and you're likely to *Get Crushed*.

P1: The Programming - What's on your menu?

We are all in the business of

...Chris Stevenson

continued from page 14

revenue and gave us a huge differentiator. Combining demographic research with knowledge of trends gives an organization a more precise picture when deciding what ancillary programming to add.

3. Start Small When Possible: When adding new ancillary services, starting small and testing the waters is ideal. Investing a lot of time, money and effort into a new program or service that doesn't work is disheartening. Consider starting with a trial period to gauge interest and gather feedback from your members. You might also consider partnering with local businesses or instructors to offer new classes or programs without taking on the entire financial risk. Years ago, we debated adding Small Group Training (SGT) to our list of services. It wasn't the popular program it is today, so we weren't sure it would work. Our Personal Training team also feared that it would cannibalize the one-on-one personal training business. Ultimately, we decided to start small. Instead of launching a full-blown offering, we tried just one group twice a week. Incidentally, we had one of

selling exercise. And, ultimately, your customers need to choose your facility as the best place for them to push, pull, squat, lift, shift, run, jump, curl and press. These are the "ingredients" we all work with. The question is, how well can your team put these ingredients together to create "great tasting" workouts (the physiology and psychology of program design), that have mass appeal (every member feels welcome in every workout), and that keep your customers coming back for more (members feel as successful as possible as soon as possible).

Crush It: To stay relevant and broad reaching, the workouts on your group fitness menu need to be innovative, inclusive and inviting.

P2: The Place (and the Paraphernalia) - What's the vibe?

Your group fitness room design (or lack thereof) impacts participation. Again, consider the restaurant analogy, but this time, imagine that you are searching for a restaurant online. Do you look at the photos first or the menu? Do you make a judgement about the experience based on the aesthetics and decor? In **Theodore Kinni's** book on Disney, *Be*

our trainers run it. It was a huge success and led to us creating a full-blown SGT department outside of membership and one-on-one personal training. It was our third-largest revenue stream. It also didn't cannibalize one-on-one personal training; it became a feeder for it. We started small and tested the waters with the members and the personal training staff. It is important to note that starting certain things in small ways can be challenging but not impossible. If you were thinking about adding massage chairs, which would enable you to charge an additional fee from members, perhaps ask a sales rep if the facility could try one for a few weeks. When considering new things, always try to find ways to start small if you can.

4. Diversify Your Offerings: One of the most significant mistakes facilities make when adding new revenue streams is focusing too much on one area. While it's essential to have core offerings --memberships, group exercise classes and personal training-- diversifying your offerings can help you attract new members, keep current members engaged and generate ancillary revenue. It also prevents you from putting all your eggs in

Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service, he discusses the importance of the environment and its effects on the customer. He teaches us that the setting and all its elements, either intentionally or unintentionally, send messages to your members about the perceived quality, the level of service expected and even the price they are willing to pay.

Crush It: If your group fitness room is dated, consumers may assume that your programs are, too. To attract more members (and to compete with and beat the boutiques), you need a group fitness space that is a gender-neutral, up-to-date training space, not an old, over-mirrored, outdated aerobics room. You need strength training equipment that can help draw in men and women (we prefer barbells over bands and balls), and you need a great sound system and stage to enhance and elevate the experience.

P3: The People - How dynamic and diverse is your team?

There is no shortage of research on the importance of your people. And, in the service business of our industry, your group fitness instructors are the people who bring the workouts to life. They are

one basket, which is good general business practice. Our facility offered all the typical services associated with a regular gym. When looking to attract more members, we decided to try a Run Club, which turned out to be a huge hit. We had members who joined solely for that and never stepped foot (no pun intended) into the gym. They just met for the weekly outdoor runs.

Conversely, we had people join the Run Club who had never worked out inside a gym but subsequently gave it a shot and loved it. On the trend side, facilities are adding more mind-body offerings, such as meditation and mental health services, as well as technology offerings, such as digital training and fitness tracking. Think outside the box, strategically, as to what various products or services you could add that could attract a new demographic, differentiate your facility and reinvigorate/encourage current members to spend more money.

■ ■ ■

Adding ancillary services requires careful consideration of various factors to determine the best ROI, and thus, which products and services are worth



Jeffrey Pinkerton

the coaches and motivators. They are your first-time member meeters and early morning greeters. They are the connectors and community builders. And, they need to be your best influencers and brand ambassadors on social media and out in your community.

Crush It: You need a diverse, energetic, engaging, exclusive team. Diversity on your team ensures that you can attract a wide audience into the room. If you want
(See **Jeffrey Pinkerton** Page 18)

adding. Knowing your demographics, understanding trends, taking a small-steps approach and diversifying your strategy are four great ways to increase the chances that what you add will succeed dramatically. Additional factors must be explored: overall market demand, feasibility, cost, resources and impact on member experience. By taking a thoughtful and strategic approach, fitness clubs can successfully add new revenue streams to increase overall revenue and profitability.

(Chris Stevenson, former Power Ranger stuntman, is the Founder of The Empower Group, a full-service consulting firm with services ranging from staff training, workshops, full facility management and more. Stevenson has over 20 years of experience in many aspects of the health and fitness industry. In addition, he is an international speaker who regularly presents at IHRSA, Athletic Business, Club Industry and many other fitness and business events. From health and wellness to business strategies. Chris can be reached by phone at 818-519-6038 or email at chris@stevensonempowers.com.)

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...Nancy Trent

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and encourage your followers to read and share it.

Engage with Influencers and Experts: Partner with fitness influencers and wellness experts to create authentic content. Their endorsements can build trust and attract a wider audience. **Example:** Collaborate with a well-known fitness trainer to host a live workout session on Instagram or Facebook.

Create Newsworthy Content: Regularly share updates about new classes, equipment launches or wellness programs. Use press releases and blog posts to create content that can be shared on social media. **Example:** Announce the launch of a new fitness class through a press release and promote it with a series of posts and stories on social media.

Host Virtual Events: Organize virtual wellness events, such as fitness challenges, webinars and Q&A sessions. Use PR to promote these events and encourage participation on social media. **Example:** Host a month-long fitness challenge and use PR to get media coverage, while promoting daily updates and participant

stories on social media.

Address Negative Feedback Proactively: Use PR strategies to manage any negative feedback or crises. Respond promptly and professionally on social media, showing your commitment to customer satisfaction. **Example:** If a customer posts a negative review about your gym, address their concerns publicly on social media and offer a solution to resolve the issue.

Utilize User-Generated Content (UGC): Encourage your customers to share their experiences and tag your business. Share UGC on your social media platforms to build a community and increase authenticity. **Example:** Create a hashtag for your gym and ask members to share their workout photos. Feature the best posts on your official social media accounts.



Integrating PR with social media is a powerful strategy for wellness-based businesses. By building credibility, creating compelling content, enhancing engagement and driving traffic, PR can significantly strengthen your social media presence. For gyms and fitness equipment companies, leveraging PR not only amplifies their reach but also builds

a loyal and engaged community. Embrace the synergy between PR and social media to elevate your brand and achieve greater success in the wellness industry.

(Nancy Trent is a writer and speaker, a lifelong wellness activist, a globe-trotting trend watcher and the Founder and President of Trent & Company, a leading wellness PR firm. Trent & Company, which launched many health and beauty brands, grew out of Nancy's personal and passionate commitment to helping

people live longer and healthier lives. A former journalist for New York Magazine, Nancy has written seven books on healthy lifestyles, serves on the editorial boards of several magazines and travels around the world speaking at conferences and trade shows on trends in the marketplace. She is a recognized expert in PR with more than 30 years of experience creating and managing highly successful campaigns. Learn more at www.trentandcompany.com or contact Nancy at nancy@trentandcompany.com.)

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...Jeffrey Pinkerton

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to attract more Millennials, you need more Millennials on your team. If you want to attract more Gen Y'ers or Gen Z'ers, you need more of them on your team. And, if you want to attract more men, you need more men on your team.

Crush It: Your instructors are the face of your brand in your building, online and in the community. Find people who are passionate about your brand first and foremost, and then teach and train them to deliver the experience. Don't share them with the competition. They are one of your most important assets, and when committed to your facility, they'll deliver both the member experience and your marketing message.

P4: The Playlist - Does the music have reach and range?

The power of music and the performance gains from synchronized, coordinated movement to music (a phenomena known as "social motion") gives the group fitness experience a massive advantage over working out

alone. In addition to the science of editing and engineering and matching music and movement, the art of selecting music is critical in calculating who will be attracted to group fitness. Too often, music playlists are based on the instructor's personal musical preference (often age-based) and his or her preferred genre. The problem? It's rarely broad reaching or inclusive, and it certainly isn't inviting.

Crush It: If you want to attract a broad audience, you need multi-generational and multi-genre musical playlists. We recommend that you use music engineered to drive the experience, and if you send me an email (jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net), I'll send you some of the science and specifics on that (and how we do it).

P5: The Promotion - What are you actually selling?

A lot of businesses struggle to articulate what makes them unique over their competitors, and the fitness industry is not immune. In fact, many websites and Facebook pages I visit are still "selling" the old and obvious list of things: state-of-the-art machines, "great" group fitness classes,

free weights, such-and-such machines and a free so-and-so with all new memberships. It's the features without the benefits. And, the focus is on what they *have*, instead of what someone will actually *do*.

In addition to your message, you need to consider the medium. The most effective marketing customizes the ad to the audience and then delivers that ad through a channel where that audience is most likely to see it. (Want to reach younger members? You'll find them on Instagram and TikTok.)

Crush It: If you want to reach a broad audience of new members, you need to market through a broad spectrum of channels and formats – images, videos, reels, and social stories delivered through Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. If your marketing is a one-type, one-channel approach, your membership will be as well.

Crush It or Be Crushed.

It takes work and effort, but the work is worth it. An investment in group fitness will pay dividends to create members that have higher retention rates, refer more friends and are less price sensitive than

those people working out on machines alone (yes, literally alone). By investing and building a thoughtful menu of workouts, delivered in a great room, brought to life by a diverse and energetic team, driven by wide-reaching playlist of music, you'll discover that what you are actually selling is a combination of fitness and friendship, of accomplishment and accountability, and your sales conversations will be less about the expense and more about the experience.



Whether you're crushing it (that's awesome; we want to hear about it) or feeling a little more crushed with every competitor's arrival, get in touch with us! MOSSA delivers a solution to ditch the sinking status quo and get to work on all five variables (and then some). Let's fill your rooms, retain or reclaim your members and uncover your group fitness program's shine.

(Jeffrey Pinkerton is the Business Development Manager for MOSSA. Jeffrey can be reached by phone at 770-989-4737 or email at jeffreypinkerton@mossa.net.)

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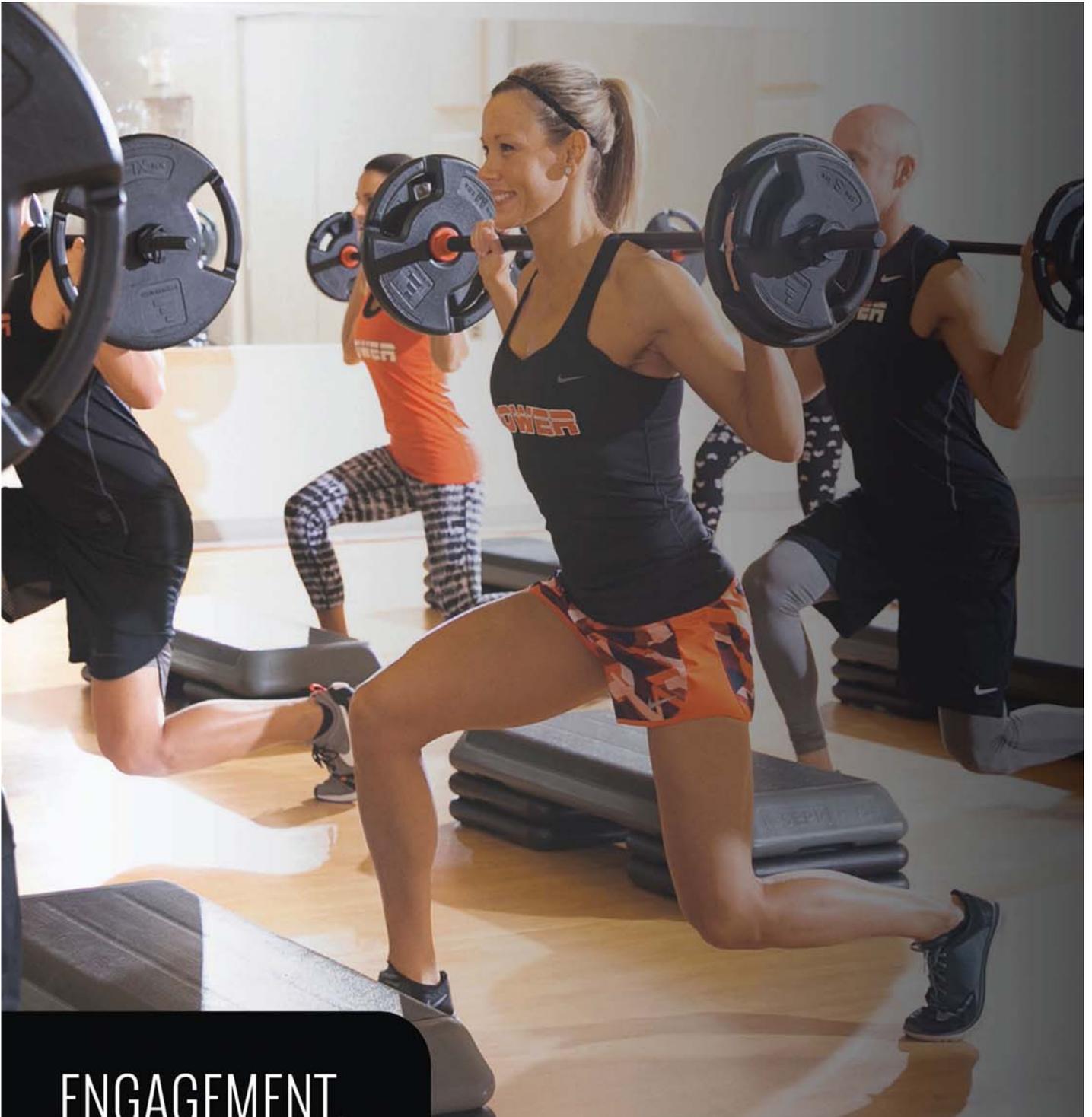


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