

Six Steps for Successful Cross Promotion

Emphasizing strong internal promotion among your staff is a decisive step toward the success of new services, special events and membership benefits your business offers.

By Amanda Vogel, MA

One of the fitness industry's hottest new workouts is coming to your facility. To prepare, you meet with fellow managers and arrange a preview event for members. After posting eye-catching promotional signs, you write a brief memo urging all staff to vigorously publicize the special event and new program.

A week later, you ask a membership consultant how her promotion of the event is going. She stares at you with a blank expression. "I haven't really given it much thought," she admits.

You thought you had prepared carefully, but something went wrong. What happened?

Successful programming requires strong internal promotion, especially when introducing new programs or

events for which members pay extra. Yet, many fitness programmers are stumped about how to increase cross promotion between club departments. The membership team seems to work hard at getting people in the door, but not at keeping them excited about other events and opportunities in the club. Busy front desk staff often gloss over memos that do not directly affect them. You can change these scenarios! Here, top programmers offer their suggestions for improving cross promotion.

Vary Your Communication Methods.

Communication is the cornerstone of successful cross promotion. You have to do more than simply circulate a memo. According to Debbie Nogawa-Wasman, group exercise director at the

Marketing Script for Staff

Here is one example of a practice script and pertinent marketing points you may distribute to staff. Ask staff to practice with each other before they actually begin marketing to members.

Who?: Group Exercise Department, Contact Person

What?: Specialty Yoga Classes for Older Adults

Where?: Group Exercise Studio B

When?: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30 AM to 10:30 AM, beginning November.

Preregistration begins August 15.

Why?: To diversify group exercise programming and attract new clients.

How?: There is no additional fee, but due to limited space, members must preregister by phone or in person at front desk.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Who is the instructor and what are his/her qualifications?

The instructor, NAME, has been teaching yoga for more than 20 years and leading older-adult fitness for 10. She is certified with XYZ organization.

2. I have never tried yoga before. Can I still do this class?

Yes. The classes are designed to accommodate a variety of levels, from beginners to more advanced participants. Before class, the instructor will introduce herself and probably want to find out a little bit about you so she can modify exercises for your level and needs.

Pacific Athletic Club in Redwood City, California, managers must share information in a variety of ways, including face-to-face contact when possible. Julie McNeney, the 1999 IDEA Program Director of the Year and vice president of marketing for The Fitness Group in Vancouver, British Columbia adds, "Everyone learns and is 'sparked' differently. The more ways you communicate the message, the better."

To be effective, communication must be ongoing. McNeney takes advantage of a weekly club newsletter, company voice mail and staff room bulletin boards to remind staff about upcoming programs. Nogawa-Wasman likes to check in with employees once a week leading up to an event. Michael Jenniex, MS, fitness director at the Wellness Centers of Cape Coral and Fort Myers in Florida, gives himself eight to 12 weeks lead time to properly communicate the details of an event and allow excitement to build.

McNeney also recommends planning programs well in advance. To make sure The Fitness Group staff are always on track with program promotion, everyone adheres to an eight-week marketing plan.

Make Information Easily Accessible.

When staff can easily access information about an event, they are more likely to promote it. Photocopy memos and post them in the staff washrooms and lunchroom, at the front desk and where group exercise instructors will see them. To guarantee that staff will at least come in contact with your memo, staple copies to their paychecks.

You also can supply them with a "script" that specifically outlines the who, what, where, when, why and how of the event or program. Jenniex recommends including answers to frequently asked questions, which staff then memorize and convey to members in their own words. "This way," he says, "everyone in the facility is on the same page about the event and what to tell members."

Arrange for Staff to Experience Programs Firsthand.

When employees lack confidence about their knowledge of a new program, they may feel uncomfortable promoting it, notes Peggy Cleland, program director for the Sports Clubs of Canada/Bally Total Fitness Canada in Toronto. Allowing staff to sample a program firsthand can dramatically improve cross promotion. "It is one thing to have a script, and another to experience the program," notes Jenniex, who recommends all staff—or at least the "key players" at a club—take part. "When staff go through it, they have a better appreciation of what is going on, and can tell members about it from the heart," he says. McNeney adds that members feel less apprehensive about trying something new after hearing staff recount their positive experiences.

When planning a one-time event that would be difficult to recreate just for staff, Jenniex suggests arranging a "mock run-through." For example, if you are organizing a special lecture about osteoporosis prevention for members, enlist a knowledgeable

An Eight-Week Marketing Plan

Here are some general strategies Julie McNeney uses to inform employees about—and simultaneously keep them busy promoting—upcoming programs. Notice that cross promotion begins in Week 7 and lasts until the time of the actual event.

Week 8

- Submit a specialty-program administration form outlining the event. Double check that the new program does not conflict with others.

Week 7

- Design flyers. Prep front desk staff.

Week 6

- Post signs and flyers. Disseminate information on Web site and in member newsletters and e-mails. Alert staff to the upcoming event through internal newsletter.

Week 5

- Distribute program flyers at the end of each group exercise class for the entire week. Update bulletin boards.

Week 4

- Assess the status of registration. Repeat pertinent information about the program in staff newsletters. Continue to promote event via bulletin boards, flyers, member newsletters, e-mails and faxes.

Week 3

- Continue to promote event via bulletin boards, flyers, member newsletters, e-mails and faxes.

Week 2

- Offer a gift certificate toward registration in other programs or events to those members who convince friends to register for the program.

Week 1

- Continue promotions until event has come and gone.

employee to prep staff for promotion with a mini-lecture on the topic.

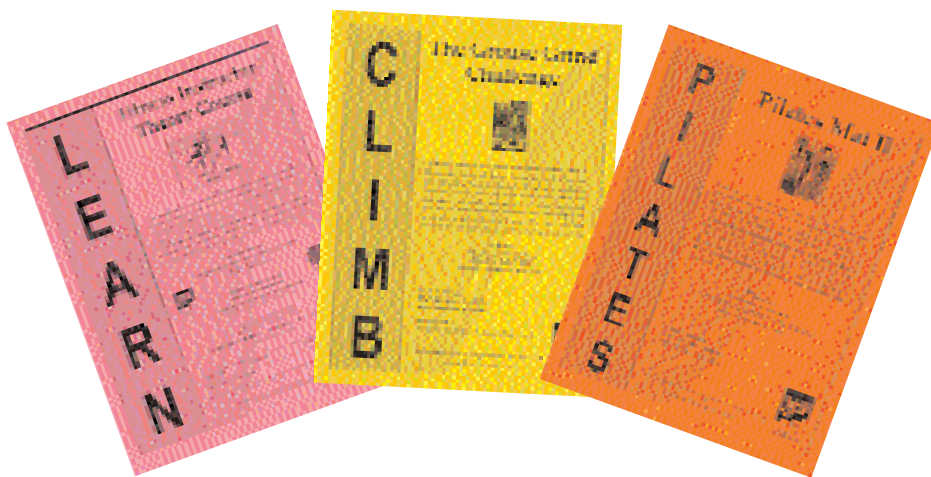
Consult With Front-Line Staff.

Cleland recommends holding regular managers' meetings to raise awareness about activities in various departments. Managers then disseminate this information to their respective staff.

Jenniex, however, goes one step further: To increase the effectiveness of cross promotion, managers should consult with front-line staff and encourage communication between all club employees, not just department heads. "Front desk staff may never get into a professional conversation with fitness or membership staff," he notes. Yet, points out Nogawa-Wasman, "in the eyes of many members, the front desk staff are expected to know everything about everything—that is a tough responsibility." According to Jenniex, it pays off to provide nonmanagement employees the opportunity to voice their opinions about which promotional strategies they think work best. "If people feel involved, they will take ownership," he says.

Create Incentives.

Cross promotion often depends on what employees perceive is in it for them. "Unfortunately," says Cleland, "staff members sometimes do not promote a program or event if it doesn't specifically benefit their department." According to Jenniex, managers must encourage staff to work together and focus on improving the facility as a whole rather than as individual parts. For example, he says, "show [the mem-



bership department] that people will want to join the facility based on the excitement of what is going on in the group exercise department." Club departments that work as one promotional team can share the wealth when the program generates profit, adds Cleland.

On the other hand, Cleland also acknowledges that you can stimulate a "little friendly rivalry" between departments with a contest. Nogawa-Wasman agrees: "If your front desk staff are told that the person who signs up the most members for next month's cycling camp receives a \$100 bonus, your employees will treat it like a game. That is definitely incentive."

At the Wellness Centers of Cape Coral and Fort Myers, Jenniex and other

managers routinely quiz staff about upcoming programs and new policies. When employees answer appropriately, they receive club money, which can be put toward a paid day off. "This is more valuable to most employees than just promoting a program," Jenniex says.

Promote Club Spirit.

"Allow your staff to let their hair down and have some fun with the members," advises Jenniex. Team spirit, or what he calls "club personality," goes a long way toward successful cross promotion. Club spirit motivates all staff and generates an internal buzz about current and future programming. Once this is in place, staff will be poised to promote your next big event—and beyond.

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Resources

For information on how to approach sponsors for staff prizes, refer to:

"Securing Company Donations" by Carrie Myers Smith, *IDEA Health and Fitness Source*, May 2001, pp 53-57.

"Sponsors and Partners: The Big Payoff" by Sandy Franco, *IDEA Fitness Manager*, July-August 2001.

To order either of these articles, call IDEA Member Services at (800) 999-4332, ext. 7.

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