

New Year's Marketing

N e w Y e a r , N e w O p p o r t u n i t i e s

The beginning of the New Year is an ideal time to create an environment for business success that can take a personal trainer all the way through the third quarter, if not the entire year, with a full schedule. The advantage trainers have over other service businesses is that each New Year represents a commitment renaissance for many Americans looking to modify their midline and improve their health. A virtual bounty of willingness to exercise and change unhealthy behaviors occur in people from January to mid-February. The hardest step in the transtheoretical model of change is accomplished with the New Year's resolution and people move from contemplation to action. Trainers prepared to harvest this opportunity can add dramatic growth to their business.

Where many people go wrong is that although business opportunity knocks, they are not prepared to handle the state of affairs presented to them. Successful business growth should reflect a strategy to obtain the most from the viable market and manage the opportunity to draw out its full potential. Having a growth and development plan will allow for maximum profitability. The first step is checking the foundation of your business to see if it can handle the added growth and development. This suggests reviewing your current strategies including pricing, marketing, current growth and development as well as risk management.

Revisiting your pricing strategy is a three step process. 1) Research the current market and identify what the market will bear. Take some time to inquire about going rates for similar services to the ones you offer in your area. Look to see if there are any socioeconomic factors which may justify increases in prices. Be sure to remain competitive; too cheap can be a turn off, but pricing yourself out of a market is not wise either. 2) Analyze your current pricing structure to see if it still matches your intended income goals. There is nothing wrong with raising rates and the New Year is an opportune

time. You may also want to restructure the way you bill for services. Many trainers have found success with offering different rate options, including bundling services, half-hour training sessions, and discounts for pre-paying and excellent attendance records 3) Analyze your resume to see if it warrants pricing changes. This is where you decide if you are a Ferrari, a Mustang, or a Capri. Some markets want a high priced high performance trainer; others want something in the middle of the road; while a third is mainly price conscious. Your resume should reflect your pricing category, suggesting your experience and proof of competency. This should assist in validating your costs.

Marketing strategies are a little more complicated than pricing strategies, but the basics still hold true. Interestingly the first step in marketing is not coming up with a creative campaign or slogan, but rather analyzing if you are currently marketable in the present environment. If you do not pass the marketability test you had better get to work quickly. Some relatively rapid marketability changes include your presentation – how you look, sell, and present yourself.

The days of the hyper-cheerleader, drill sergeant or muscle head trainers are gone. Consumers are looking for fit, articulate, knowledgeable professionals that can listen and provide viable answers. It may behoove you to put some extra effort into your personal fitness – people believe trainers wear their knowledge and personal commitment on their sleeve – it is hard to be inspired to work for fitness improvements by an unfit looking person that does not practice what they preach. This is not to suggest that trainers need to look like a body builder or fitness model, but look vibrant and healthy to set a good example.

While you are evaluating your physical aesthetics be sure to look at your material's attractiveness and style. Your business cards, service literature and presentation ancillaries

should reflect a professional image. Budgeting some money for this area is important. People believe the value of the product can be identified by its outward appearance or packaging. Kinkos, Office Depot, and local printers can do wonders for your presentation materials. This step should be well thought out. Take your time to make sure your packaging reflects your intended image.

The final step in this category is to get your sales pitch down. There is a reason large companies invest millions in sales training. You only get one shot, so be sure it's your best. Get your sales summary down on paper and perfect it before putting it in front of the target audience. Be sure each key point you want to make is clearly articulated, back your facts with references, and always keep a positive spin while directing the consumer's thoughts to the benefits of your program. Practicing on a friend or family member may enhance your comfort in a sales situation.

When a business or individual plans on expanding their current operation it is important to consider how the growth and development will affect the business. Managing growth requires foresight, as an incorrect prediction can lead to poor customer service or worse, cash flow problems. Taking on a new or elevated workload and managing additional clients should be worked out in a pre-meditated plan. Very few people are successful by using emergency management. When the growth of current operations are expected or intended for the business, a plan should reflect the increase in workload. The growth and development strategy is an operational outline which accounts for variables the business or professional will encounter with the added workload. Some common areas to plan for include customer service, operational hours, new employees or expanded workloads, costs of doing business (marketing, equipment ect.), and cash flow.

A prudent analysis of what possible needs will come from business expansion should assist in creating an outline to work with. Following the development of this outline, a complete investigation into each area of concern should be completed to draw up a plan with contingencies for possible pitfalls. The most common pitfalls are related to growth without adequate work coverage and cash flow, particularly if the business is hiring new employees. Another concern is not dropping the current level of service, which may be the reason the business has the opportunity to expand. Planning and monitoring growth in stages is one effective method. Within this strategy it is wise to plan to evaluate the changes.

If the expansion is creating negative feedback the problems should be addressed swiftly and in a professional manner.

Risk management is another area which should be addressed on a fairly regular basis. When new business opportunities arise it is important to ensure the activity will be covered for possible liability. The larger a business the greater the risk it is exposed to. Some common relatively easy areas to consider are checking your credential to make sure it is current and valid, checking your insurance coverage to make sure it has not expired and the coverage amount is appropriate for your current risk level, updating files so that each client has all of their appropriate paper work and that none of their information has changed, and

reviewing your current operational procedures to see if your practice is up-to-date with what is expected from a fitness professional.

If all of the business areas are operating and appropriately organized to your satisfaction than it is time to take on new opportunity. Turning potential clients into paying clients requires getting the word out that you have services to offer. During the first quarter, particularly January and February, people are in a fitness buying cycle. To grab your market share it is important to market your services. As mentioned earlier in the article people are in a contemplation or action phase of behavior change in late

December. Letting people know your services are what they need while in this stage of behavior change is extremely opportunistic. There are numerous ways to grab the Holiday/New Years Market. Listed below are some ideas you can implement with success.

Start Now Before the New Year – offering your services at a discount or on a trial period before the New Year's resolution, can get eager consumers ready for change and works on those individuals worried about holiday weight gain. Using the selling point that they can be ahead of their friends, not experience the normal holiday weight gain, and be physically ready for the New Year are all perceivable options. Attempt a discounted pre-New Year package and grab clients before they are approached by another trainer.

Discounted Pre-sale can also be used to secure your clientele without starting the training until after the New Year. Fitness clubs have, for years, pre-sold memberships at a savings before the gym actually opened to secure members and enhance cash flow. There is no reason why you can't do the same thing.

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Coupons/Gifts – Sometimes it is all in the packaging. On your home PC or at the local printer you can create coupons or training vouchers. For instance, create a fake dollar bill that can only be used for Personal Training from you – you can even put your picture on the bill. You can make vouchers the same value as a training session or create a higher price package voucher including full evaluation and program services. This allows people to give the gift of fitness for Christmas or Hanukkah and provides a tangible present to place in a card or they can gift wrap it.

If you are new to training and feel you can not command training vouchers for money you can still use the idea to offer free evaluations and/or consultations to potential clients. Hand them out to your clients to give to friends or if you are new to the profession, hand them out as gifts yourself or to people you meet at parties or in the gym. A tangible object with a free offering is hard for anyone to pass up.

New Years packages are another popular idea that can secure you a client for a period of time while they try your services. Discount a five or ten session package with a complete evaluation as a teaser to get people on board to your service offerings. Offer two for one intro programs or bring a friend for three visits to existing clients. Particularly during the holidays people find any reason to make a situation more social.

Party droppers – start a conversation about the expected weight gain experienced in the holidays or casually recommend healthy tips to new acquaintances at parties or social gatherings. This does not suggest acting as an obnoxious health police officer, but rather to encourage health or fitness dialogue when appropriate. In most cases once a group of people find out you are a trainer they will have a number of questions. If you have a marketable group of people you can also offer a Holiday recommendation handout which describes healthy tips to follow during the holidays. Make sure it is professionally presented in appearance and style. Be sure to put your contact information on the handout so people know how to contact you if they are interested. You can probably find success with a holiday tip handout at almost any location people congregate. As long as it provides more information than advertising, most stores may let you leave a stack at the counter as an added gift to their consumers.

If these ideas do not entice the number of clients you are looking for, you can follow more conventional approaches. Placing strategic ads in low cost publications, presenting discount flyers in corporate buildings or giving free assistance at your fitness facility can work in your favor. Putting some work in now can pay larger dividends later. So be sure you have a plan and follow it to success. ●