



CHAPTER 12: MARKETING YOUR SERVICES

Objectives

After completing this section, the health and fitness professional will be able to:

- Understand the basics of effective marketing strategies.
- Understand the four P's of marketing.
- Understand the three important pillars of building customer relationships in fitness.
- Develop and implement a marketing plan for weight management.

Introduction

As many have said in the past, “knowledge is power.” However, knowledge without application won’t do anyone any good. With the previous chapters of information already learned, now is the time to put the knowledge into practice by beginning to market in the profitable niches of weight management. With the prevalence of obesity at alarming levels, it is the responsibility of health and fitness professionals to educate the general public on services that are available to assist individuals toward permanent weight loss.

Marketing 101

Marketing has been unfairly pigeonholed as solely sales and advertising. Although these two are a part

of the marketing mix, there is a necessary addition to the recipe, which is *satisfying customer needs*. The technical definition of marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging value with others (1). In other words, marketing involves building and managing profitable relationships with people. In fitness, this exchange is imperative to building business with clients. Without marketing, health and fitness professionals won’t be able to get their message out, and the result would be fewer clients and more frustration.

Marketing oneself and one’s services properly in fitness should follow a simple four-step process: 1) understand what consumers want, 2) design marketing strategy around what customers want, 3) build a program to deliver superior value, and 4) build strong and profitable relationships with consumers, working to exceed their expectations. These four steps can help a professional build and retain a strong customer base (2).

With the understanding of these steps, focusing on a niche such as weight management can help you deliver a customer-driven marketing strategy that targets the consumer you are looking to engage.

■ Step 1: Understanding what consumers want

In health and fitness, the common denominator among all clients is the desire for results. They would not come to a health and fitness professional if their focus was not on trying to obtain their vision of who they want to be physically. Although this understanding is universal, the danger is the simplicity with which it is approached. What clients want is intangible — they cannot see, touch, or taste it — they can only imagine it. Therefore, although health and fitness professionals have an overall idea of what clients want, it is the *details* of their desires that need to be understood and met by fitness professionals. Focusing on the desires of the customer base should form the foundation of the marketing strategy. Do you want to obtain weight loss clients? If so, what does a weight loss client truly want from the services? Beyond the basic answer of “results,” fitness professionals should identify two or three other

potential desires from the client base they are trying to attract. For instance, many weight loss clients want improved health, to be able to play with their children, and to appear attractive to their significant others. Identify common desires among weight loss clients, and begin to form a plan of how to attract clients through sales and advertising, always remembering the end goal of satisfying customer needs.

START HERE

- Write down a list of desires the target consumer would want from the services.
- Underneath each item on the list, write down a way the services can meet the needs of clients.

With an understanding of the consumer base, the health and fitness professional can build a strategy and then form a marketing plan (Example 12.1).

■ Step 2: Design your marketing strategy around what customers want

This step is often termed a customer-driven marketing strategy. The first step is determining who the health and fitness professional wants to serve. The second step is positioning in the target market. In the fitness industry, there are segments of consumers — those who desire weight loss, weight gain, youth, seniors, etc. These segments are who the health and fitness professional will target and focus marketing strategies on. For example, given knowledge of the weight loss market, the segment a health and fitness professional might want to focus on is female weight loss consumers who have only 30 minutes a day to train. These types of consumers will be the focus, and marketing efforts will try to position services specifically to them. Given the focus, there are two other important questions to answer: how to serve the target market, and how the services will differentiate and position the health and fitness professional in the marketplace. This is where the fitness professional determines value proposition. A value proposition is the set of benefits or values the professional promises to deliver to consumers to satisfy their needs. The value proposition should

Example 12.1

Who do I want to work with (target consumer)?

Weight loss clients

Potential desires of the consumer base:

- Better health
- To feel more energized
- To lose excess body fat
- To feel more attractive

Ways my service can meet their needs:

1. Using the OPT™ model of progression, I can deliver nutritional and programming advice that can create an energy deficit beyond what other service providers can and do so with reduced chances of injury.
2. By working and encouraging my client with my strong motivational capabilities and exercises, I can help my client feel empowered and energized.
3. Using a system that builds strength from the inside out, my service allows my client to gain strength and stability, truly creating a strong individual.
4. My services have been shown to deliver results. By using my previous clients as referrals and before-and-after photos, my service can help my clients reach the aesthetics they desire to achieve.

answer the question of *why* consumers should buy your services and not someone else's. For example, the value proposition might focus on the time challenge female weight loss consumers have and promise to “maximize results in 30 minutes a day.” Or the focus might be on consumers who hate the gym but want to lose weight. The value proposition could be “outdoor training that delivers weight loss without the hassle of a gym.”

Health and fitness professionals should take the time to determine the customers they want to serve and then decide on the specific value proposition to that target market (Example 12.2).

Example 12.2

Focus: my target market is female weight loss clients who don't have time to train.

1. **Who are the customers I want to serve?** I want to serve female weight loss clients who need quick exercise solutions to weight loss.
2. **How will I serve that customer base?** I will create easy and short sessions that can be done at their home or office to help them fit workouts into their busy schedules.
3. **How will I differentiate myself from other trainers?** I will create 30-minute sessions that can be done 3-5 days a week to help kick-start weight loss. I will position myself in the market as a trainer who will travel to your home or office and deliver the weight loss solution to you.
4. **What is my value proposition?** My value proposition will be easy-to-implement weight loss in 30 minutes a day. “Thirty minutes a day to blast the fat away.”

■ Step 3: Prepare a marketing plan and program

The first two steps determined the needs of the consumer base the health and fitness professional wants to attract and how the professional will serve these consumers. The value proposition is set, and now it is time to determine the action to take to market the services — this is the development of the

marketing program. This means focusing on what is termed the four P's of marketing: product, price, place, and promotion. The health and fitness professional determined the **product** by deciding what service to provide. Now the focus should be on how to price services, where services can be garnered (place), and lastly, how to promote services to the target market.

PRICE

A fitness professional working in an established health club or fitness facility might have price determined by the owners or managers of the club. For independent trainers, this next step is extremely important and should be created based on a few simple questions:

1. **What are my overhead costs?** Session prices should collectively cover overhead costs, such as equipment, insurance, marketing/advertising costs, rent, leases, or building costs (electrical, water, gas, etc.). Take every cost into account, and determine the session rates. How many sessions per day and week at the determined rate will be needed to cover costs and afford a profit?
2. **What will the market bear?** Prices should reflect the consumers and the household income of the area in order to be competitive. Prices that are deemed too high or too low might deter the target market. For instance, if the median household income is \$40,000 a year, session prices that reach \$75 or higher might not be feasible for the market. Health and fitness professionals should check the income status of the neighborhood or city they choose to train in and look at the median household income. They should determine prices based on what they think potential buyers and their business can afford. Often data on household and disposable income for the area is available through the city chamber of commerce.

PLACE

Place is where services will be rendered. For health and fitness professionals who work for a health club facility, are there any special needs for clients to obtain services? In other words, will potential

clients need to buy a membership to the gym if the professionals market outside of the gym? If so, are there alternatives for those who do not want a permanent membership? Fitness professionals need to determine the environment or driving limits on where services can be obtained. For independent trainers who perform in-home training, what is the service area? For outdoor fitness training, what parks or outdoor facilities will work? Potential clients will need to know where they can find the services. In addition, this step will help the fitness professional move forward with the next step, which is promotion.

PROMOTION

Promotion communicates the benefits of the product (personal training) and persuades a client to purchase services. This is the creative side of marketing, using forms of advertising and networking to inform potential clients of the fitness professional and services. There are several ways to promote services. Here are a few:

Disperse business cards. Always carry business cards to hand out. Include phone number, professional e-mail address, and website address if applicable.

Develop a website or a social media page dedicated to the business. Developing a professional website is an inexpensive tool to showcase qualifications, experience, and testimonials. Independent graphic designers usually can design a website for a nominal fee. For health and fitness professionals who use social media for business, be sure to keep personal information to a minimum. Fitness professionals should use the opportunity to promote their business and allow clients to connect with them.

Design fliers. A professionally designed flyer that summarizes qualifications, experience, and testimonials is another inexpensive tool that can be posted or handed out to potential clients and for current clients to pass along to coworkers, family members, and friends.

Use testimonials. Health and fitness professionals should not be afraid to ask current and past clients to provide testimonials that support their contribution to the clients' success. Provide them with a template, such as what the goal was, how long it took, and what they liked about training. This will help the fitness professional capture information to market without a lot of thought from the client.

Become a part of the allied health community. This will take significant effort, but it can result in valuable referrals. By getting to know local general practitioners, plastic surgeons, OB-GYNs, bariatric surgeons, chiropractors, registered dietitians, physical therapists, and massage therapists, health and fitness professionals will have people to refer their clients to in the allied health community if need be, but there is a potential to gain clients directly from members of the allied health community, and from referrals of clients to you. Remember, ask for referrals, but also refer out when appropriate.

Make contact with the weight loss centers. Creating a referral service between the health and fitness professional and the center can generate a lucrative source of clientele. Remember that the best weight loss solution is a combined effort of nutrition and exercise.

Join the chamber of commerce and a business networking group in the city chosen to work in. Taking advantage of local business groups can help health and fitness professionals network and advertise their services to a larger audience. Although joining these business groups will cost a fee, being a part of a professional business organization can help members appear more professional and legitimize their services to potential clients.

Get involved in community settings. These settings include community events, churches, work sites, and clinical settings. The local chamber of commerce will have a list of upcoming community events, and this can be an opportunity for fitness professionals to showcase their business. Health and fitness professionals can

contact charitable organizations and offer a free session as a door prize or a silent auction item for fund-raising events. Contact the human resources department of local businesses and offer to do a series of weekly “lunch-and-learn” events. Some insurance companies will offer a discount to businesses that provide regular information that promotes healthy lifestyles. This can also lead to generating clients from the local businesses or even a contract as a corporate trainer.

■ Step 4: Building Customer Relationships

This step is often termed “customer relationship management” and focuses on building and maintaining customer relationships through delivering outstanding customer service and satisfaction. Although this step might seem easier than others, this is the most important step for fitness professionals. Customer service skills can “make or break” the ability to attain and retain clients. Building customer relationships in fitness requires three important skills: effective and open communication, superior customer service, and maintaining a high level of professionalism.

COMMUNICATION

Effective communication relies on open, honest dialogue between the health and fitness professional and potential clients. The fitness professional is the best barometer on how to communicate with clients. However, there are some important key points to keep in mind when communicating with clients.

When communicating about services, keep the following examples of dos and don'ts in mind:

- Do inform potential clients of the overall health benefits of increasing physical activity.
- Do address long- and short-term goals.
- Do describe how a typical session will go.
- Do inform the client of expectations that exist outside of training sessions (i.e., cardio, food intake, flexibility).
- Do establish how often physical reassessments will occur.
- Do encourage questions to better understand the client's expectations, and be upfront if these are not realistic or are outside the scope of the health and fitness professional's practice.
- Do show the client a workout template, and explain that each person is different and that a program can't be designed before assessments are completed. Explain that programs are continually adjusted based on individual goals and progress.
- Don't use complicated language; always speak to the client in lay terms.
- Don't make promises you might not be able to keep, such as using words like “guarantee” when speaking of specific goals and timelines.
- Don't talk about results coming quickly or easily.
- Don't encourage unrealistic expectations.

The more the health and fitness professional communicates effectively with clients, the better their understanding of their program will be. In turn, this can potentially help them adhere to the rules of the program.

SUPERIOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

Knowing what customers want to achieve with the services is one thing, serving them with a smile and caring attitude is quite another. Superior customer service is a commitment to the client to go beyond expectations and deliver a unique experience. If any fitness professional can help a client achieve results, then the difference in why some professionals are more successful than others is their ability to serve their clients. Beyond service with a smile, there are numerous ways to help clients have an amazing experience with the services:

- **Greet:** Greet clients at the front desk each time they enter the facility, call them by name, and welcome them with a caring smile. Clients love to feel welcome, especially in an environment where they may not feel comfortable. Helping them feel as if they have an ally waiting for them helps

motivate them to show up and keep moving along the path to their goals.

- **Inform:** Print out relevant articles or research for clients to read each week. Give them workout assignments, and keep them informed as they train about the importance of health and exercise. The more the health and fitness professional can help clients understand their actions, the more they will stay committed to their new lifestyle choices.
- **Inspire:** E-mail clients inspiration during the difficult times, such as when they are not seeing the results they desire. Be sure to ask whether you may e-mail special promotions or information. Then make a point of e-mailing them inspirational quotes, articles, or recipes they might be interested in. Keeping communication lines open and taking the time to let clients know the health and fitness professional is thinking of them helps build strong client-trainer relationships.
- **Care:** Remember important dates such as birthdays and anniversaries, and acknowledge other events important to clients, such as promotions at work or milestones in the weight loss journey. Hand them a card or special gift after the session, or send a card in the mail. Taking the time and money to invest in cards and small tokens of appreciation will help clients feel appreciated and help the health and fitness professional build a business. Purchasing gift cards in small amounts like \$10 to local stores can make clients feel special. When fitness professionals break down the cost to the benefit, they find that small tokens of appreciation can lead to long-standing relationships with clients.
- **Educate:** Print out and package clients' workouts and assessments so they can keep track of their progress. The more clients can learn about exercise, the more empowered they will feel. Never be afraid to teach clients how to work out and reach their goals. This is the role of fitness professionals, and the more professionals teach them, the better chance clients have to reach their

goals. Remember, the value is not in the workouts created, but in the service provided.

- **Motivate:** Make clients' re-assessment sessions an event. Assessments can be scary for clients, especially those who want to lose weight but are afraid of what the scale and tape measure might tell them. By making these sessions a positive experience, the health and fitness professional can help clients feel good about themselves and their results. Even if the results do not meet the clients' expectations, the fitness professional should focus on the positive changes to keep clients going and celebrate their results with a special card or a small gift, such as a coupon for an extra session or a protein shake at the cafe. If the results are less than expected, take the time to talk and motivate clients to work harder.
- **Focus:** Clients can get off track and begin to slip. Help them refocus by making them feel important. Call them if they miss a session, let them know they were missed, and encourage them to get back in the gym soon. Remind clients of their goals and the purpose they signed up for. The more clients understand how committed the health and fitness professional is to their success, the more they will stay committed to the professional.

PROFESSIONALISM

The fitness industry is a special segment of business that requires casual dress and intimate client relationships. However, although health and fitness professionals may wear sweats and gym shoes to work, this does not mean that "locker room" behavior is acceptable. Being a fitness professional means acting, communicating, and resonating a high level of **professionalism** at all times.

Dress and act appropriately. Potential clients are always watching and taking note of how trainers interact with their clients. This can be a deciding factor for whether they inquire about training. Here are some tips for portraying a professional image:

- Tuck in shirts.
- Do not wear ripped clothing.

- Keep clothing clean and neat.
- Dress appropriately, and avoid clothing that may be deemed too revealing.
- Keep hairstyles and piercings appropriate for a business setting.
- Stay away from baseball hats and visors.
- Wear a name badge so people may address you by name.
- Avoid foul or abusive language, keeping rhetoric clean and acceptable.

Also, say hello to members who are not yet clients. Being personable and approachable are easy ways to meet new members. The fitness facility is the health and fitness professional's office; always treat it as a professional setting.

Stay continually educated and update resume accordingly. Continued education is vital to staying competitive, and it is a requirement for the certified professional. Although clients probably do not care about which certification or degree the fitness professional has, they do want to know that the professional is up to date in the field.

Work ethically. As in many business fields, avoid making promises the health and fitness professional cannot or does not intend to keep. If fitness professionals tell clients that they will supply them with their workouts at the end of their sessions, then professionals must follow through. Never falsify assessment results or overcharge clients for sessions. Work with honesty and integrity, and clients will appreciate and trust the fitness professional.

By effectively communicating, creating a superior customer service experience, and maintaining a high-level of professionalism, the health and fitness professional will be able to attain and maintain a strong client base. Remember that relationships with clients can “make or break” the business. Build strong, positive relationships with clients, and business will flourish.

Summary

This chapter discussed how to market services to attain and maintain a strong client base. Marketing is more than promoting services. To successfully market services, the health and fitness professional must understand what clients want; design a strategy around their desires; and price, position, and promote services accordingly. In addition, to successfully entrench in the industry, the health and fitness professional must be able to build strong relationships with clients through outstanding customer service, communication, and professionalism. The keys to success in fitness are beyond the results generated, but in the relationships built. Focus on delivering value to clients, and in turn, the health and fitness professional and his or her services will become more valuable.

References

1. Armstrong G, Kotler P.. Marketing: an introduction. Prentice Hall, New Jersey. 2005
2. http://www.marketingpower.com/_layouts/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=M.