

Gym Marketing for Dummies

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What is marketing?

By definition, *it is the activities such as advertising, packaging, and selling involved in transferring goods or services from the producer to the consumer. When most people think of marketing, they think of advertising...newspaper ads, TV commercials, mail pieces, etc. I believe that the **packaging** of our product/service is far more important than any print advertising.*

What is your package?

First, the largest box our product/service is contained in is the building. Is the outside of your gym appealing, in the right location, and easy to find? Is the inside of your gym clean, bright, customer-friendly, fresh smelling? Is the gym layout attractive and functional?

Are the equipment, mats and carpet in good condition? As you can see, I am focusing on the physical appearance of the facility. The reason is simple; your typical customer cares more about the cleanliness of your gym than how many trophies you have on the wall.

Where do your customers come from?

Over 85% of our customers come from word of mouth (WOM) marketing. Therefore, we should focus the majority of our marketing efforts on our current customer. They will sell your products/ services for you if you make them happy. This is easy if you give them what they want. How do you find out what they want? The same way you get anything you want in life... ask. Talk to your customers, survey your customers, and bribe your customers (give them something for their input). I will save you some time. My customers look for the same things in a gym school as your customers. Customers want a clean, safe, organized facility. This is where you start your marketing strategy. Everything they see, smell, hear, taste and feel in your gym should be clean, safe, and organized. Your customers are your best salespeople in this industry. They tell everyone about the activities their little boys and girls participate in. Your goal should be aim to control what they say about your gymnastics school.

Your marketing plan

Keeping in mind where new customers come from and that you need to focus on your products' packaging, how do you get everything you want out of your gym (and your life)? First, determine your present situation. Next, establish clear-cut goals with a deadline. Last, plan your path from your present situation to your goals. Sound easy? It is. I assume that everyone can determine his or her present situation (where you are now) and establish goals (where you want to be). I will tell you how to get there with regard to your gymnastics school. There are four elements to your marketing plan and I have listed them in order of importance below:

1. **Facility** Clean, clean, clean. Need I say more? Establish a cleaning schedule that doesn't miss a beat. Start with the restrooms. Make them pleasing to all the senses. Continue this in your lobby, observation areas, front office, pro-shops, and finally in the teaching areas. Focus on the safety and organization of your facility layout. Is it easy to move around or do you bump into things or one another?
2. **Staff** Up until now I have said little about your troops. First, they should look presentable-staff uniforms, clean-cut, athletic appearance. Next, focus on their character in the selection process. Are they individuals you would trust with your own child? Are they professional? Are they role models? Last, what is their experience? Are they knowledgeable? Do they have the ability to learn? Can they get you to where you want to be?
3. **Information Systems** This begins with your front office. How are your front desk people? Do they provide good customer service? Are they polite? Is your phone answered at all times the gym is in operation? What types of computer program(s) do you use to run your office? (I will say that if you are not using a class management program, you are doing yourself an injustice. You are also spending way too much time and money in the wrong areas.) Is your registration process easy? Is your literature neat, organized and customer-friendly? Does your literature answer most of your customer's general questions regarding your program(s)?
4. **External Exposure** I purposely did not call this marketing because everything you do that shows in and out of your gym is marketing. Before I go any further, let me say that any time you spend time or money on marketing outside your facility, make certain you can track your return. Have a space on your registration form entitled, "how did you hear about our gym?" Include coupons specific to the campaign you are running. Keep a phone log and include "how did you hear about our gym?" in every conversation with potential customers.

Top 7 External Exposure Activities

1. **Customer referral program.** As I already mentioned, over 85% of our customers come from WOM. Offer current customers a discount on next session's tuition for referred trial students that register for class. A great way to do this is in conjunction with a "Bring a friend" week.
2. **Yellow Pages.** When people want to find a gymnastics school, they pick up "big yellow." Have a great ad, preferably the best and brightest gym ad in your book. They will call you first.
3. **Direct Mail.** This should be the best return on your investment. Stick to your immediate area, no more than 10 miles depending on the profile of your typical customer and your area. Mail out birthday postcards to both active and inactive students. Kids love to get mail. Include a special "birthday offer" for tracking purposes. Mail specials to inactive customers to get them back in the gym. Obviously, these mailings can be very inexpensive and easy to do provided you have a good computer program.
4. **"Welcome Wagon."** Every community has a service that sends information on businesses in the area to new homeowners. This service is affordable and you get to the new customer first. Make sure you have an exclusive agreement to be the only gymnastics school.
5. **PTA/Local Schools.** Give away free gymnastics lessons to every school fundraiser and for student awards. Be sure to stipulate "new students" or "something extra" if they are current students. You do not want these giveaways to take away from your bottom line.

6. **Print Advertising.** This is very costly. I suggest limiting print advertising to special areas of the newspaper or magazine, such as a "back to school" section. Be certain to include a coupon to track your results. I see lots of money wasted here for a minimal return.
7. **TV Advertising.** This is extremely expensive. However, if you are looking to make a leap, have done all of the above and have the financial resources, go for it! Have an attorney review your contract and make sure you can cancel if you are not getting the return you want.

Where to begin?

I suggest you take a day off from the gym and find a quiet place. Bring a pad and paper, laptop or any other recording device. Use this article as your guideline and design your marketing plan. I strongly suggest attending Jeff Metzger's Gym Owners' Boot Camp. Visit the successful gyms in or outside your area. Attend the state, regional and national congresses. Learn from people who are where you want to be. They will be happy to share their knowledge and experience with you. To get everything and anything you want, you just have to ask. Good luck.

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