

Your Image - The Center of Your Marketing Plan and Your Profits

By Tom Lenzini

Fifty Quick Marketing Tips and Tools for Improving Your Image and Your Profits



As I travel around and have the opportunity to meet gym club owners and to consult with them about their business, I find one thread that seems to consistently run through the gyms that are having financial problems. That thread is that they are selling themselves short. They are certainly not intentionally selling themselves short, but many of their actions are sending the wrong signal to their customers.

In almost every case that I see a gym that is having trouble making a profit I find that they are simply not charging enough for their services. When I ask them why they are not charging more for their services, I get several answers fairly consistently. The most frequent answer is that I am afraid that I would lose customers if I raised my prices. Another frequent answer is that my competition is charging this amount and I don't want to exceed their price. When I look at their financial statements and show them what a small increase (a few dollars) in their price would do to their bottom line, it usually gets their attention and they ask; "Do you really think I could get by with charging more for my services."

My contention is and has always been, with this business, that we in this industry should think of ourselves as a Neiman Marcus, upscale, type business and not a K-Mart discount, type of business. Gymnastics is a highly specialized business. We require large costly facilities, highly specialized expensive equipment, and our staff must consist of very knowledgeable highly trained people. In addition, we have a very large liability risk. When the owners tell me that they are afraid they will lose customers if they raise their prices, I ask them, "Are you so ashamed of the quality of the experience you offer that you think these customers will not pay just a few dollars more?" When they say that their competitors are charging less or the same I say that my philosophy has always been that I hate it when my competitors charge more than I do, because I know that I am so much better than they are.

What I am saying here is, the image that you create for your business, is critical in determining how your customers view you, (YOUR IMAGE) and what kind of price you can demand for your highly specialized services. In the remainder of this article I have put together a list of things that you do, that cost very little if anything to determine the image that your customers have of your business. Unless you have pride in your business and hold your business in the highest esteem yourself, you will never be able to project good image to your customers.

Here are some ways that you can improve your image and therefore improve your profits. Remember, the better your image to your customers, the more forgiving they are of your errors, the more willing they are to pay a little higher price and the more likely they are to brag about the gymnastics school that their child attends. Some of these are very obvious but it is always good to evaluate how you stand with each of these to see if there is room for improvement. These are all a part of your marketing scheme.

1. **Name:** There are zillions of good gymnastics business names and quite a few bad ones. Just be sure that yours is one of the good ones. Be sure that people can pronounce it, that it does not confuse them about what business you are in.
2. **Logo:** Some people call this a trademark or symbol. Whatever you call it, it is a graphic representation, more visual than verbal, of your gym. It is smart to have one.
3. **Package:** For us in the gymnastics business it is the building or buildings that we provide our service in. The way your building appears and smells will attract or repel your customers and prospects.
4. **Size:** The size of your business influences some people to join your club or not. Big however is not always necessarily good. There are benefits to both, but the business that has the best program and offers the best customer satisfaction will ultimately win, not the size of their building.
5. **Decor:** Prospects and customers will form opinions about the quality of your gymnastics training based on decor of your gym. It should reflect your honest identity.
6. **Attire:** You and your employees represent your business. People will develop attitudes about your business based on what you and your employees are wearing at work. Are you and your staff dressed like someone that they want to teach their child gymnastics?
7. **Business Cards:** Your card should be more than your name address, and phone number. Print the benefits of doing business at your gym and turn your card into a minibrochure.
8. **Stationery:** The look and feel of your stationery make it a powerful marketing tool. Everything that leaves your business in the mail should look and feel professional.
9. **Inside Signs:** The signs on the wall in your gym say a lot about your gym's professionalism. Signs scratched out on a piece of copy paper and taped to the wall don't say to the customer, this is truly a professional organization. If the sign is sloppy is the quality of the gymnastics instruction, just as sloppy?
10. **Outside Signs:** They obviously give the impression of your business before the prospect ever sets foot in your door.
11. **Hours of Operation:** Extremely important. Yes, your hours of operation are a big part of



your marketing. When a potential customer calls during what they perceive as normal business hours and get a message or a answering machine this is an immediate signal to them that this is a part time business. Always have someone available to answer the phone and to talk to customers intelligently about your programs. I have someone answering the phone from 9 in the morning until we close at night. I

have consulted gyms in the past and have had the owners in early in the morning. Many of them have been very surprised at the number of calls that they received during those early morning hours when there may not be classes and no one is answering the phone. I can guarantee you that if a prospect calls my gym and gets a real person to tell them about our programs, I will get that customer before the gym that only has a message or answering machine. Usually if you can have a person work on administrative tasks and answer the phone in the mornings, the new business and goodwill they generate more that pays for itself.

12. **Phone Demeanor:** This usually goes without saying. It is also extremely important that all people that are authorized to answer the phone are trained knowledgeable people. I have scripts written out that we use for training anyone that has the authority to answer the phone and speak for us. It has been compiled by me and my staff and attempts to answer most questions that are asked by customers and gives the "standard" sales pitch. This is an extremely important part of your marketing scheme.
13. **Location:** Without question, this is one of, if not the most important factor in the success of your business. It's also a part of your marketing. This is a subject that should be heavily researched before a location selection is made. This could be the subject of a whole other article. How to select the proper location for a gymnastics business. Too many times location selection is made strictly on the availability of a building, not where it is located. This can be the difference in success and bankruptcy.



14. **Advertising:** Here is one of the most crucial parts of your marketing, but it is only one very small part of the process. All of the topics covered so far, remember, are a part of marketing.
15. **Service:** I consider this to be one of the top three important parts of a successful gymnastics business. Customers also consider service or the lack of it to be one of the top three influences in selecting and staying with a gymnastics school. Service wins and loses customers.
16. **Follow Up:** Many gym owners think marketing ends when they have signed up the child for class. Successful gym owners know that follow up is the key to a loyal customer base. Customers really like to know that you are concerned with them after they have paid their child's tuition and that you
17. **Customer Recourse:** Know what you will do if the customer is not satisfied. Have a clear policy so that disgruntled customers can be converted into satisfied repeat customers that recommend you to their friends.
18. **Community Involvement:** The closer you're involved with your community-local and industrial-the higher your profile will be. This takes more time and legwork than money but it certainly pays off in the long run.
19. **Tie-ins with others:** Capitalize on countless opportunities to display the signs or circulars of other businesses if they will do the same for you. Many will, cutting your marketing costs. Never miss an opportunity to promote your business. My golf bag even has our logo on it.
20. **Public Relations:** This is publicity in the media based on something newsworthy about your gym. PR is an important tool in any marketing arsenal but not the only one.
21. **Public Contacts:** The media are inundated with requests for free publicity, so if you have contacts in the media, the chances increase of your publicity appearing. This is a benefit of community involvement. Many times you meet the right people through community involvement.
22. **Testimonials:** These are free, easy to obtain, and very impressive to new prospects. Use them as signs, or in your brochure, ads, or direct mailings. They work.
23. **Smiles:** You won't find this mentioned in most marketing text books, but a smile is part of marketing and makes your customers feel special. Employees should smile in person and on the phone.
24. **Greetings:** The way you say hello and goodbye offers still another chance for you to single out each customer. Your warm greeting will be translated to word of mouth marketing. So greet warmly, using a smile, eye contact, and when possible, the person's name.
25. **Contact time with customers:** Every moment you're with the customer is a marketing opportunity. Use it to intensify your relationship, market your business, be of better service. Just go sit out in the lobby and talk to customers for a few minutes each day. It really goes a long way.
26. **Sales Training:** The more training your staff has about how to sell your service the more profits you'll earn. Make sure your staff knows your business and your policies and how you want the image of your gym to be projected by them.
27. **Sales Presentation:** As mentioned in the phone demeanor tip, the best sales people use certain words and phrases. For anyone that deals with potential customers, the best sales presentations are memorized, then delivered with enthusiasm.
28. **Credit Cards:** I have tried it both ways, credit cards are very effective in the gymnastics business. The easier you make it for someone to buy the more they will buy. It is worth the percentage and the paperwork to accept many credit cards and many sales. Our late payments have been reduced since we have credit cards and our store sales have increased.
29. **Club and Association Memberships:** Become a USA Gymnastics Member Club. It adds credibility to the image that you are trying to create.
30. **Word of Mouth:** The best source of advertising you have. You can control this by providing superb service, informative printed materials, and steady mailings. If you establish a bond with your customers, you will get many referrals.
31. **Free Trial Classes:** All new prospects are given free trial classes. This is a key part of our sales pitch. With a free trial class, you break down almost any objection a customer may have about coming to your gym and you have an excellent chance to close the sale and register a student.

32. **Demonstrations:** Once again, demonstrations let prospects see what their child could learn at your gymnastics school. Opportunities to do demonstrations arise all of the time. Have several demonstrations choreographed to fit various situations.
33. **Phone Hold Marketing:** When all your telephone lines are busy, this answering machine puts your callers on hold, then plays music while imparting useful information about your company. This system gives your organization a very professional impression. People are turned off when they call and get a busy signal or when they are put on hold in silence. We have sold many birthday parties with our advertising on hold system.
34. **Booths for malls/streets:** Many times you're given the opportunity to set up a display or a booth for various events in your community. If you have a booth or display ready to go, you don't have to scramble to get something together in order to have a display. It is also very helpful to have several members of your staff trained on how to run a display booth set up.
35. **Research Studies:** The more you know the better you can market. USA Gymnastics offers volumes of information. The on line marketing guide provides timely and valuable information that you can incorporate into your marketing program.
36. **Newspaper Display Ads:** These ads are the prime marketing medium for small business. Build an inventory of display ads that work for you. When the opportunity arises to use an ad you will have it ready and not be rushed for deadlines or have to fit in the time to compose just the right ad copy.
37. **Yellow Page Ads:** If your competitors aren't there you don't have to be there. The importance of the ad is dependent a great deal on your market area. It is for sure that when someone new is looking for a gymnastics school, a very high percentage of the time the yellow pages is the first place they look. If your ad is done correctly your goal is to have that person call you first. Be certain that these ads give as much information as possible.
38. **Direct Marketing Coupons:** An excellent way to target specific demographics and geographical areas. This is a cost effective way to advertise. Many companies compile coupon cards then mail a group of coupons to target groups. The mailing costs are shared by all who supply coupons. Coupons are also an excellent way to track the effectiveness of the advertising.
39. **Direct-mail Postcards:** These are an excellent way to communicate with customers. We have a very attractive, multi colored post card that we use a great deal. One way that we use it is to require coaches to send encouraging notes to their students. We require each coach to send out a certain number each week. This is great PR and is a great way to insure follow up with your customers.
40. **Newsletter:** One of the most valuable marketing tools you have. Not only does it serve as a way to get valuable information out to your customers, it serves as a great tool to brag about yourself, to tell of special events coming up and advertise sales you may be having. I have found that it is a good way to get information out about what is going on in your program to parents with the purpose of allowing them to brag to other parents what an outstanding school their child is attending.
41. **Competitiveness:** A marketing tool? You bet it is! This refers to your willingness to devote time and energy utilizing as many of these marketing tips as are possible, sensible, reasonable and affordable.
42. **Speed:** Time is more valuable than ever. People resent slow treatment more than ever. So they appreciate speed in handling anything that they may need from you such as the registration process, paying tuition, and answering questions. This also ties in with the tip about having someone available to answer the phone. When people call, it is when they have time to talk to you about your school. If you have to rely on calling them back you may not get them or you may get them at a time when they are not as receptive to hearing about what you have to offer.
43. **Credibility:** If you have credibility, people will believe in your quality, your values, and everything you say about yourself in your marketing. Do anything to earn it.
44. **Enthusiasm:** This contagious marketing strategy gets passed on by you to your employees, from them to customers, and from customers to more customers. It is healthy for your business.
45. **Gift Certificates:** Your services can be given as a gift. These make a great marketing tool

especially at Christmas. They do well for your pro shop sales as well as gift ideas from grandparents.

46. **Articles:** Credibility is an obvious aid in marketing, and these published pieces increase your credibility. When my customers know that I consult other gyms, do presentations at Congress and get articles published, my credibility in this business increases. Your newsletter is an excellent source
47. **Staging Special Events:** Any time you host or stage an event at your gym you have an opportunity to showcase your entire business. As an example, we host a fun meet for our recreational classes. These are like recitals. During the event, we showcase some of our top athletes and let them do demonstrations for the audience. We also talk about the travel and fun experiences these upper level gymnasts have. The parents are very impressed with the skills you have taught these upper level gymnasts. The kids and the parents usually leave determined to stay with the sport so they can do the skills to become a part of the traveling team.
48. **Reprints of ads and publicity:** Most publicity stories appear but once. Gain maximum millage from the publicity by making inexpensive reprints for mailings and future ads.
49. **Neatness:** Messiness causes many a lost sale because people believe the sloppiness will carry over into other parts of your business. Happily the same is true of neatness.
50. **Marketing Savvy:** Use every tool that you have available to you. Never ever miss the opportunity to market you business. There are endless ways to create a positive image. Every decision that you make, you should ask how will this affect our image?

As I said in the beginning of this article, some of these are very obvious and no surprise and some are obvious but a bit of a surprise on a list of marketing tips. Most of these cost very little or no money. How should you use this list? Begin by studying the list and assign it to one of four lists.

1. I am using this one now and I am using it correctly.
2. I am using this one now, but the way I am using it can use some improvement.
3. I am not using this one now and I ought to; I will start using it immediately
4. This one is not appropriate for me right now.

Look at list one. Love that list and continue doing all the things on it. Look at list two and realize the opportunities it represents, then capitalize on every single one of them. Now look at the third list and kick yourself for not using them earlier. Do it now-not the kick, the putting into action. Finally look at list four and put it away for now.

Please understand clearly that you have got to offer quality in everything that you do. The quality must be there in your facility, your programs and your customer service. Your marketing efforts must be based on firm principles, the first of which is that you have got to be devoted to excellence in your offering if marketing is going to work for you at all. If you offer that excellence your image will be one that will make prospective customers want to come to you and established customers brag about you. Finally keep this in mind. Researchers have found that for every complaint that you hear, there are 26 other complaints you won't hear. Those 26 other dissatisfied customers will tell an average of 22 people each about the problem they had with your business. And 13 percent of them will tell more than 22 people. The word of mouth on poor quality spreads far faster than you would ever worry it might. The morale to this story is to never miss an opportunity to improve your image because it equates to improving your profits.