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## E-Newsletters: Why and How

ELECTRONIC PUBLICATIONS OFFER AN EASY WAY TO KEEP YOUR MEMBERS ENGAGED.

*By David A. Fish*

**As a manager of a private club fitness center, you know your facility offers members significant amenities like classes, strength training and personal attention. Your center can give your clientele a deeper, broader sense of engagement with their club community, and offer tailored programming to fit their needs.**

Yet, how do you draw members to the center, maintain their loyalty and develop new services to keep them engaged?

Try an e-newsletter. Electronic publications provide a powerful communication resource that allows you to stay in contact with members - a factor that goes hand in hand with frequency and volume of fitness center use. Maintaining high usage, of course, elevates the importance of your fitness center to club

management. And e-newsletters are surprisingly affordable; you can launch and distribute an e-newsletter at a fraction of the cost of print mailings.

A monthly e-newsletter not only keeps your facility in front of members, it also helps you assess

and cater to members' needs, emphasizes the benefits of fitness within the overall club experience, and promotes for-fee services, such as personal training and massage.

### Get them started, keep them coming

One distinct advantage of e-newsletters is that, by publishing monthly, you engage readers on an ongoing basis. Relevant, well-written articles draw readers' attention and give them a sense of connection to the center.

So what subjects will entice your readers? Content that relates physical fitness to the club's primary activities, such as golf and tennis, will spark members' interest and emphasize the relevance of fitness to their own lives, and to the country club experience. For example, you might include an article about how range-of-motion exercises will improve a golf swing, or how strength training will bolster a tennis serve. Articles about new classes, instructors, equipment and upcoming events will also attract membership participation.

In addition, lifestyle articles are an excellent way to provide timely and meaningful content that connects members to other club amenities and services. Join up with the club chef to write about how the FDA's new dietary guidelines can be woven into healthful menu planning, or spotlight golf vacation destinations that also have outstanding fitness facilities. Lifestyle-oriented content broadens the appeal of your e-newsletter, and creates a publication readers look forward to receiving.

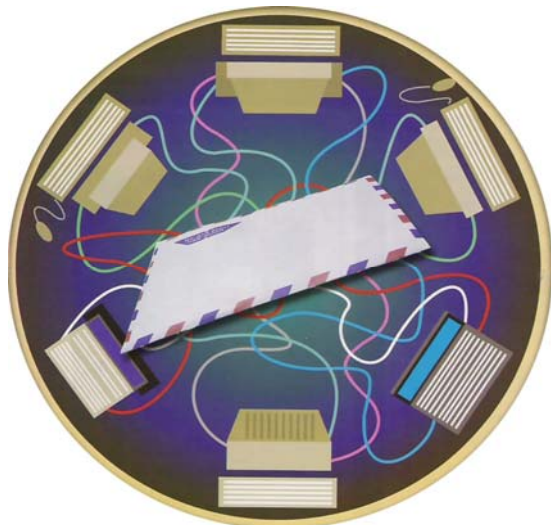
### Word of mouse

E-newsletters can also help acquire participation in your fitness center because they are easily passed on to others. When members find an appealing or timely article, they are more likely to pass your e-newsletter on to friends. This process is effortless with the simple click of the "send" button.

The "pass along" or "word of mouse" quality of electronic communications gives your publication importance, since "forwards" from friends are more likely to be noticed. It also allows you to expand your mailing list. Because a good e-newsletter should always carry a subscription option (and opt-out), new recipients can easily sign up to receive your publication.

### Fine-tuning fitness

So your e-newsletter has helped you acquire and engage members. Can it also help you fine-tune



your fitness center to meet the changing and growing needs of your clientele? The answer is a resounding “yes.” E-newsletters provide a great way to probe the specific interests of your community. In addition to using e-newsletters to conduct member surveys, you can also use them to gather detailed, precise information about your readers’ needs.

For example, some e-communications service providers offer reports that show, among other things, what e-newsletter topics were of greatest interest to readers, how long readers spent looking at those articles and which content they forwarded. You might find, for instance, that many members read and forwarded your article on range-of-motion exercises for golf; therefore, you might consider adding yoga classes or even a Pilates studio to your center’s repertoire. With such compelling knowledge in hand, you can be sure your fitness center is evolving in a way that meets members’ needs.

E-newsletter readership information will not only help you refine your fitness offerings, but it will also help you keep a vibrant, interesting e-newsletter in front of your readers. Just as you can fine-tune your fitness center’s services, you can also fine-tune your e-newsletter content to stay timely and relevant.

### **Promote personal services**

If your fitness center offers fee-based services in addition to the basic membership – such as personal training, massage or Pilates – an e-newsletter is an excellent way to promote these offerings. Remember, if done well, an e-newsletter has an involved and loyal readership. So, you might put a promotion for yoga classes next to your article about golf range-of-motion exercises. Or, you might offer a discount on nutrition counseling with your story about the new dietary guidelines.

Regardless of what fee-based services you offer, your e-newsletter can entice readers to try them. In addition, because e-newsletters allow you to track readers’ interests, you can mold your fee incremental services to fit their needs.

### **Getting started**

You’ve made the commitment to launch an e-newsletter. Now what? While monthly e-newsletters are easy to implement, you need a few key elements to get started.

First, you need an e-newsletter system or service provider. Options abound. You might consider software packages such as Microsoft Office

Small Business Edition, which is effective for small mailings; or, you might want to hire an advertising agency, Internet marketing firm or e-communications service provider. An e-communications service provider, for example, can offer you e-newsletter development, including a web-based e-newsletter template, content design and development, and reader tracking.

Once armed with an e-newsletter provider, you face the most critical aspect of creating your e-newsletter: content. Remember, you want each issue to include exciting, lifestyle-oriented articles that will draw readers to the fitness center and reinforce the perception that it is a valued amenity.

To gather content, assign sections of the e-newsletter to members of your team, or engage other club personnel to help. For example, the golf pro can co-author an article with your fitness trainer about strength-training exercises for golf, or your chef might team

up with your nutrition counselor to write about low-carb diets. Ask members of your staff to contribute lifestyle content, such as articles about their favorite winter activities, coveted healthy snack foods or favored relaxation techniques. As manager, you should oversee and act as editor for the e-newsletter.

Suggest that your staff refer you to interesting articles that may spark ideas for e-newsletter content. Keep a file of relevant stories that you can reference. You might also solicit articles from members.

To simplify production, establish and maintain a standard editorial palette. Develop regular columns and features, such as a Quick Tips section, Member of the Month profile, etc. A standard format also helps you establish rapport with your readers; they become comfortable with, and therefore connected to, your publication.

If you prefer to outsource creation of the content, consider hiring a freelance writer or marketing firm. Some e-communications service providers offer tailored e-newsletter content and design, in addition to hosting, email distribution and tracking/reporting of readers’ responses. Leading-edge service providers can even include video clips in your e-newsletter depicting the latest in strength-training techniques or a message from the personal trainer.

Regardless of how you approach your e-newsletter, know that, if done effectively – with timely, well-written articles and frequent distribution – your e-communications will engage your members and help your fitness center evolve into one of your club’s most valued assets. **FOS**

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