

Operators need to understand the core service they are offering if they want to satisfy customers, improve retention and grow their business.

Get back to basics



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What's your primary service?

I'm constantly astonished by the number of health and fitness operators who think that good service is defined by the amount of contact that their staff have with their gym members. In fact customers using equipment that they do not own is a service and all gyms are selling equipment availability. When equipment is undersupplied and customers cannot get on it because other customers are blocking them from using it, this is bad service. If customers can easily get on the equipment that is good service. Each and every person who buys a gym membership is paying to share equipment with other customers.

This has been proved, not only by our own research in hundreds of gyms across the UK, but also by other studies. TRP's biggest research study of the health and fitness industry asked 10,000 members what they thought of their current gym; what they liked, disliked, what frustrated them, motivated them and kept them coming back. It found that members who have to frequently queue for equipment and found it annoying, were 50 per cent more likely to cancel than members who do not.



Earlier this year, Listen360, part of Retention Solutions, presented the findings of its analysis of feedback from over two million members, one of the largest studies of its kind in the fitness industry. The data showed that detractors, unhappy customers, the single biggest cause of complaint was to do with equipment, when asked what they thought about their club.

What about other factors?

Friendly staff, good customer service, spotless facilities etc. can all help to attract and maintain members, but at the end of the day people join a gym to use the equipment. That's your primary service. Still not convinced? Well what would happen if you halved the equipment in your gym? How would this impact retention and membership? Undoubtedly, it would have a dramatic impact – members would get annoyed that

they couldn't access the kit, customer satisfaction would plummet and members would leave. It doesn't matter if you excel in everything else you do, if members can't get on the equipment they want to use, they won't be happy. Similarly, if you then returned the removed equipment, customer satisfaction would increase and you'd attract new members.

Interestingly, we are consistently measuring lower customer satisfaction among male gym members, which shows that men are less happy with the availability of equipment than females. Looking deeper into our research, we can see this is because freeweight areas - generally more popular with male members - tend to be less well catered for in gyms than cardio equipment, which are more popular with females. Essentially, this means that females are getting a better service in gyms

than their male counterparts when we view the service being sold is time sharing equipment with other customers.

Similarly customer satisfaction scores fall in gyms busier January periods when gyms get busier and customers cannot access the equipment and also satisfaction scores are generally lower in the busy peak period in the evening than they are in the quieter parts of the day, because the service customers are receiving is lower, they can't access the equipment that they want, when they want.

Measure and manage it

Operators who don't understand that equipment availability is their primary service, don't measure it. And if they don't measure it, they can't manage it. Without the facts, operators are effectively working blind unable to make the informed decisions needed to improve the customer experience and grow their business. Our studies measure the availability of equipment on your gym floor, identifying unnecessary waste and where you need to invest in more kit to meet customer demand and improve service. Clients who have measured this availability and acted on our recommendations have seen quantum leaps in customer satisfaction. But the benefits extend well beyond improved Net Promoter Scores to increased retention and a growth in membership. Equipment availability is the primary service that all gyms are selling and therefore the most important factor in customer satisfaction. Given that customer satisfaction is the leading driver of growth, operators need to appreciate the importance of equipment availability, once and for all, if they want to succeed.

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