

Cross Over Into Cross-Promotion

by Lawrence Biscontini, MA

Client Share

Programs: Use these methods to market both personal training and group programming and grow your business.



Welcome to part five of the “Crash Course in Excellence” with takeaway strategies for managers. This final article of the series explores ways to market and promote new and existing programming options by using the rather new technique of cross-promotion. An often-untapped method of bringing more exposure to programs, cross-promoting relies on current resources, requires virtually no capital investment and reaps instant rewards.

“Sell” to Staff First

The technique of cross-promoting requires an understanding of cross-training and cross-utilization. The first step is internal marketing. For cross-training to be effective, everyone on staff must understand a new programming option before they try to promote it to the public. A good way to make sure this occurs is to dedicate a few minutes at every staff training meeting to a discussion of the promotion at stake.

Second, management must make it both possible and mandatory for all staff to experience the current promotion. For example, if the vision is to make a “Back-to-School Core Class for Moms” the promotion of the month, then set aside time during training to distribute the promotional materials, slogans and media to your *internal* customers (your staff). Those responsible for scheduling should also make it convenient for all front-of-the-house associates to *attend* that class. The goal: to experience the new class and be able to describe it with full authority. If such staff participation is not feasible, incorporate a shorter “demo” class into the meeting to give staff a teaser.

Cammy Dennis is the fitness director of both On Top of the World Communities and The Ranch Fitness Center & Spa in Ocala, Florida. She urges all staff to attend meetings to help them understand new programming, saying that “all too often, promotions fail because the clubs miss this first step of promoting to internal staff. This means making sure that everyone takes the class so that everyone can speak to the complete experience. Not doing so would be as disheartening as hearing a restaurant server respond, ‘I don’t know much about it yet’ when asked about the day’s special.” Internal promotion must occur first.

Cross-Instruction

When all internal customers are on board and have the necessary background information about a new program, the next step is to cross-promote programs to the external customers. All marketing should be in place and designed to spread the word about the benefits of the new program.

To disseminate this message to the greatest number of potential guests, the technique of cross-instruction proves key. This means that new programs should be co-directed, or team-taught, strategically involving different club demographics. For example, for Golden Door Spas I created a fusion program called Yo-Cycle®. The class description read, “This fusion experience combines kinesthetic awareness and cardiovascular training with studio cycling and floor-based yoga. We will begin on the cycle and finish on the floor. Embark on a mind-body-spirit journey by incorporating a wide variety of mindful breathing techniques, visualization, tai chi, Feldenkrais® exercises and yogic flexibility asanas.”

To cross-promote this program, two instructors—one yoga instructor and one studio cyclist—facilitated the experience. The advantage of using *cross-instruction* for *cross-promoting* the program was exposure. Specifically, the yoga instructor’s students, who normally would not take a cycling class, followed their familiar instructor to an unfamiliar new format, gaining exposure to a new environment. The same occurred with the cycling instructor’s students. In this way, more guests were exposed to the new fusion experience.

Another popular example of cross-instruction occurs when a club promotes classes that are to be taught by one instructor from the group fitness department and one personal trainer. For example, a personal trainer and a group fitness instructor may team up to teach a

boot camp–style class with a catchy name. This type of cross-promotion via cross-instruction further expands the number of potential participants, because some of the personal trainer’s clients—who normally do not attend group fitness—will tend to follow their trainer into the classroom for the special event. An additional positive byproduct of such an endeavor is that all of the regular students of group exercise who attend the special class—many of whom may be too intimidated to ever consider hiring a personal trainer—will be exposed to the personal trainer’s style and be more inclined to book that personal trainer. This type of cross-promotion is a unique way to increase sales of both group fitness and personal training, while offering a solid, new type of class on the schedule. This can be either a special event (with or without an entrance fee) or a regularly scheduled team-taught class.

Cammy Dennis regularly organizes cross-instructed classes to cross-promote programming, such as her “Mind Body Balance” and “Boomer Boot Camp.” Using her unique approach, she splits “both the class and the room, and the group fitness instructor leads seated chair exercises for 10 minutes to half of the class while the other half is with me (the personal trainer) doing individualized gait training and dynamic balance drills. We then switch groups and repeat at intervals.” Such programming introduces all participants to different staff, departments and teaching techniques.

Cross-Requirements

The second type of cross-promotion involves *cross-requirements*: creating a competition in which guests are *required* to try each new experience listed on “fitness passports.” Depending on the available budget, these passports can range from single sheets of paper to elaborately printed, multicolor booklets that contain squares for fitness passport “stamps,” ready to be stamped or signed by the various instructors. When club members attend a class that’s part of the competition, they receive a stamp on their fitness passport. To reward participants for trying new programs, you might want to offer prizes to the first 10 individuals who fill up their passport with stamps.

Ceri Hannan, national group exercise manager for Virgin Active South Africa, in Cape Town, fuses the technology of the Internet with this passport philosophy, setting out to incentivize new group exercise usage with a “loyalty card system.” Club members earn incentives for various prizes via a passport sign-off that gets entered online when they achieve certain levels (in class attendance, etc.). Hannan says,

“Creating a passport system not only creates healthy competition among class-goers but also stimulates people to take classes that may be out of their normal comfort zone. When creating the competition, be sure to include on the passport a variety of times as well as some less-popular classes to make it challenging.”

Cross-Promotions: Being Different Makes a Difference

To summarize, it may help to think of cross-promoting our trailblazing programs in the same way we think of cross-training the body. In physical cross-training, we create muscular interdependence and bring about change as we overcome training plateaus, drawing from different resources to stimulate the muscles in different ways. Asking *different* groups of muscles to work together in *different* ways proves key.

Similarly, if we think of different departments of the fitness facility metaphorically as muscles, cross-promotion and cross-instruction foster interdependence among different departments. This technique helps staff become fully knowledgeable about new programs. At the same time, it gives guests exciting new programs that are created by taking advantage of the strengths of the facility’s different departments.