

In the Fitness Industry, the Brand Doesn't Always Fit

Many clubs that have been around for years, such as Bally Total Fitness, Gold's Gym and 24 Hour Fitness, are well-known within the industry. But how well-known are they to the general public?

Chris Gallo, president of Health Club Development Co., Providence, RI, says no fitness club brand stands out in the industry, which is unusual for any industry.

'People don't just say, 'I need to sign up with Bally or Gold's,'" Gallo says. 'None of our brands are that strong. They basically shop for the best clubs at the best price.'

Derek Barton, who was the director of marketing for Gold's Gym International from 1985 to 2005, says the fitness club industry lacks a brand that emotionally connects with the public, like how McDonald's, Starbucks, Coca-Cola, Nike and Apple connect with people.

'Other companies make their products and services a lot more attractive than we do,' says Barton, who now runs his own marketing business, Barton Productions, in Los Angeles. 'That is the fault of the whole [fitness club] industry. We've commoditized ourselves. We're doing nothing but price wars now. The consumer is not stupid, so when they see us go from 50 bucks a month to 40 to 30 to 20 to 10, they're thinking, 'Something is wrong with this product and service. Maybe I'll just train at home.' There's no value placed on our products and services when we practically give it away. People will pay, even in this economy, decent money to have a decent product and service.'

Denise Lee Yohn, who runs her own brand consulting company, Denise Lee Yohn Inc., in San Diego, says that club owners need to create value in their brands.

'In some ways, people do identify with or express themselves through their fitness club choice,' Yohn says. 'If you're in New York and you're an Equinox member, that says something about you.'

Gallo says one part of creating a brand is having an inviting atmosphere.

'Our experience should be refreshing and entertaining,' Gallo says. 'You cannot have that with a piece of equipment in your basement, and you cannot have that with a piece of equipment in your office. Hopefully, we're the experts in making that experience fun and refreshing.'

Find this article at:

<http://www.fitnessbusinesspro.com/forprofits/0801-members-choose-clubs/index2.html>