



## A Club Is a Club...Unless It's Ours

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- **Convenient location** is the #1 reason why people choose a fitness club or gym
- **Only 1%** choose a fitness club or gym because it's **a brand they trust**
- **Only 30%** of members describe their club or gym as **very different** from other options

These findings from a recent survey of fitness club/gym members are quite dismaying. If people are joining our club simply because it's conveniently located, what's to stop them from jumping ship as soon as another one opens up closer to home? If prospective customers don't see what makes our club different from others, why would they pay any more to join ours? We may want to think our club is something special – but the research serves as a reality check.

We need a way to stand out and get prospects to choose our club. And we want to keep existing members loyal to us. In other words, we need to build a strong brand.

When I say "brand," I'm not talking about a good name or a fancy logo. A brand is so much more than that. It's **the customer experience we deliver** and **the way we do business**. It's what makes us different, attractive, and valuable to customers.

And when it comes to building a strong brand, I'm not talking about coming up with a catchy advertisement or running cool marketing promotions. Brand-building depends on **consistently delivering a differentiated customer experience**. It's about identifying the values and attributes that we want to be known for and driving them through everything we do.

Here are three critical steps in building a strong brand:

## 1. Craft a compelling brand platform

A brand platform specifies the strategy for the brand, including:

- **the brand identity** – *what the brand stands for* -- the key values and attributes that define and distinguish the club, and
- **the competitive brand positioning** – *how the brand competes* – the target customer(s), the competitive frame of reference in which the club is considered, and the unique customer benefit the club provides

Both parts of the brand platform are important because together they define our vision for the brand. The brand identity may include physical characteristics (e.g., “spacious,” “in shopping malls,” etc.), functional features (e.g., “full service,” “mind:body classes,” etc.), and personality attributes (e.g. “laid-back,” “sophisticated,” etc.)

The competitive brand positioning specifies the segment(s) of customers that the club is geared toward, using demographic, lifestyle, or attitudinal dimensions. It also indicates the entities the brand competes with – this may be other clubs as well as other exercise options like home gym equipment and outdoor sports. And the positioning explains the thing that the club does for customers better than any other option.

*An example: For busy working professionals who have limited time for exercise, we are the all-in-one exercise destination that makes it easy to have a full fitness experience in less than an hour.*

Intentionally identifying and clearly articulating the brand platform is important. It's the starting point and it should direct and guide everything we do.

## 2. Create and deploy a brand toolbox

Everyone who works for or with our company (employees, managers, business partners, vendors, etc.) should share one clear, consistent, common understanding of our brand. They need to know how to interpret and reinforce it in their daily actions and decision-making – and they should be inspired and equipped to do so.

A **brand toolbox** is an effective way to inspire, inform, and instruct them. An effective brand toolbox:

- **relays the brand identity and positioning** along with the background and rationale for the platform in order to increase understanding and buy-in
- **outlines principles** for making brand-building decisions and includes **examples to guide** appropriate brand execution
- motivates people to adopt behaviors which support the brand by **explaining how they are connected** to a purpose and values bigger than themselves and by **engaging them with the brand** in creative ways in order to get them excited about working on the brand
- **helps people take actions** that are “on brand” through interactive exercises and decision guides

A brand toolbox engages people's heads, hearts, and hands with the brand and ensures that everyone works together to bring it to life.

### 3. Develop a touchpoint wheel to audit, assess, and optimize the customer experience

Advertising and other marketing communications are only some of the ways in which prospects and members experience the brand. Club layout, equipment type and variety, service standards and procedures, sales scripts, employee uniforms, locker room amenities, etc. all contribute to the brand experience a customer has. Each of these touchpoints represents an opportunity to make a “deposit” to brand equity (positive, differentiating, and brand-building) -- or a “withdrawal” (disappointing, unmemorable, or inappropriate.)

As such, we need to audit, prioritize, and optimize the touchpoints that comprise the entire customer experience. Developing a **brand touchpoint wheel** helps identify all of the touchpoints with customers – and it indicates the people and groups responsible for the various touchpoints.

Once the wheel is complete, we can assess which touchpoints have the most impact on customers and which are the most “off brand.” And then pursue strategies and plans for optimizing the priority touchpoints.

Working with a brand touchpoint wheel, one company determined that the way an employee greets a member makes a critical impression; so they instituted changes to make the message and manner of the entry greeting more brand-appropriate. By taking such a comprehensive and systematic approach to improving the customer experience, all of the pieces come together to translate the brand vision into reality.

The steps described above are not easy and will take an investment of time, money, and energy. But if we make the commitment to build our brand, our business will grow because people will prefer us and want to stay with us. Just like an exercise program, the results are well worth the effort.