

# Appealing to Eve

Pay attention to the details that build loyalty and retain your female members.



BY MEGAN SENGER

**A**s a fitness entrepreneur, you work hard to attract and retain clients. But do your message and facility appeal to women as well as men?

Women respond differently than men to marketing signals, explain authors Faith Popcorn and Lys Marigold in *EVEolution: The Eight Truths of Marketing to Women* (Hyperion, 2000).

They note that women buy or influence the purchase of over 80% of all consumer goods. And they're more likely than men to switch brands than to complain.

In fitness, women are a purchase-primed demographic that make up half of all personal training clients and facility members, according to the *2010 IHRSA Health Club Consumer Report*. So how can fitness entrepreneurs who want to target female clients ensure that their message reaches

– and ultimately retains – the feminine half?

## See the club through her eyes

"Areas of the club that some owners may not pay that much attention to are the areas many female clients pay the most attention to," says Amanda Vogel, a Vancouver, B.C.-based fitness marketing consultant and author of *Baby Boot Camp: The New Mom's 9-Minute Fitness Solution* (Sterling, 2010).

Consider the areas in your facility that receive the most feminine attention, such as the women's locker room, the group exercise studio, the babysitting area and any women-only spaces. Then ask yourself the age-old question: what do women want?

## The big thing is... the little things

In marketing, men tend to notice

## Marketing to Women

While fitness marketing efforts frequently focus on the physical benefits of exercise, there are many strategies beyond flat abs that appeal to women, says Vogel. For example, emphasize the boost in confidence a woman will feel as she becomes more fit, or the feeling of privacy offered by a women-only area or program.

Hutchinson suggests using phrases like "easy to use," "saves you time," or "gets results" that directly relate to the busy, career- and family-filled schedules many women juggle. "Use words that evoke emotion and appeal to their daily lives," says Hutchinson.

the “main message,” whereas women see the subtleties of how a message is delivered, such as colours, sound volume and smells. Similarly, women tend to look for the “extra details” when searching for a club, explains Vogel.

“Women are very visual and tactile, and most women are drawn to a spa-type atmosphere with a quiet serenity,” adds Donna Hutchinson, a fitness business coach, speaker and owner of On the Edge Fitness Educators in North Vancouver, B.C.

So even if your workout area is busy and loud, consider the atmosphere of more female-dominated areas like the women’s locker rooms. Consider using soft and warm paint colours, and install a subtle air freshening smell-dispenser. And sanitation is of special importance to women – ensure that toilets and showers (and their drains!) are regularly cleaned.

### Creating community

Facilitating social connections amongst your female clientele creates a community atmosphere that will help retain their loyalty, says Vogel.

“You hear a lot of advice about how important it is for fitness staff to learn clients’ names, which it is. But the gesture of helping clients and participants learn each other’s names can be very valuable as well.”

Group events for female clients don’t have to be complicated or expensive. Consider offering women-only weight room orientations, and train staff to introduce female members to one another. Use social media like Facebook to provide a platform for client interactions. And hosting non-fitness related social events is a great way to create loyalty amongst your feminine clientele. As authors Popcorn and Marigold write in their book *EVEolution*, “Women don’t buy brands; they join them.”

### The kids club counts

Although not usually a profit centre, the children’s area is key to a mother’s membership retention. “Many club owners tend to regard child minding as an afterthought compared to all the cool fitness programs they offer, but it can be a make-or-break area when

it comes to whether a woman with young kids signs up,” says Vogel.

She advises fitness entrepreneurs to consider the kids club through a mother’s eyes: What kinds of toys are offered? How do staff handle temper tantrums? Are food allergies accommodated?

A clean children’s area with regularly sanitized toys and engaging activities will go a long way to attracting moms.

### The difference is in the details

Women especially appreciate “little extras” and “thoughtful touches.” Motivating emails and handwritten thank-you cards can make a big difference – and easily fit into any fitness entrepreneur’s budget. “Treat all your ladies like queens. Make your female clients feel special all the time,” says Hutchinson. FBC

Megan Senger is a writer, sales consultant and business development speaker. Active in the fitness industry since 1995, she specializes in helping small-business owners reach their revenue potential. You can contact her at [www.megansenger.com](http://www.megansenger.com).

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