

Touch Point Creation & Optimisation to Combat Attrition

By Richard Ekstrom, President of Retention Management

As you look around the club at your members working out, you probably recognise the majority of them as active, happy members and you aren't too worried that they are going to cancel. Why? Because you know them, they know you, they participate, they are involved, they feel comfortable, there is a connection between them and the club – they are getting value out of their membership investment and are being touched by your club regularly.

Now, who's leaving? Simple, those that you don't see. Why? Because they are not being touched by you – there's no positive exchange for their investment. The more visible, connected and interactive your club is with a member the greater the likelihood that they will stay a member. The challenge is finding ways to stay more visible or to increase your involvement in their membership. It's not enough to simply have your doors open – to be available. Fostering member involvement is an active, dynamic process and, by creating as many 'touch point' opportunities as possible, you will begin to harvest the value that comes from improved retention.

There are all types of touch points with some being more powerful or having a greater influence than others. One thing is certain: a member that is not being touched will not stay a member. This article will describe the different types of touch points and what you can do in your club to increase their frequency.

What is a touch point? It is simply any type of interface that the member receives from your club.

First, let's look at some mass delivery touch point types and then we can focus on the more personal methods.

How your club is visually presented to the member: This is a fairly expansive touch point that presents a huge number of opportunities that will impact a member. We won't spend much time delving into the minute details. The majority of this article will focus on the elements that entail personal interaction and not overall presentation. From a visual perspective, pay attention to the basics:

- Put effort into your club's appearance. It is to your members what your home is to your friends – take pride in its presentation. And not just inside the club, keep up with your exterior as well as your entranceway or lobby. This is their first touch point at every visit.
- Frayed carpets, scuffed walls, etc. should be consistently addressed.
- Your team is a part of the visual surroundings – well groomed and not only in uniform but worn professionally.
- Keep it CLEAN. A club that looks unclean is doomed with poor retention!

Statements or Invoices: For many members the statement is often confusing, hard to interpret and cold. Plus, if the member is not a consistent user, it may be the 'tipping point' for cancellation. Take a hard look at how it's written. Ask a friend who doesn't belong to a club or, better yet, a marketing professional, to provide feedback on how it can be improved to make it appear less harsh and negative – no one likes bills. Always include some additional information about the club (open house, renovations, new equipment, added classes or programmes, etc.) to further validate the expense of their membership.

Signage in the club: Is it well written and up to date. No one likes to be told emphatically what to do (rack your weights, cardio time limits, wipe equipment, etc.), so if the signage is asking something of the member, pose the policy in a professional and courteous manner.

Website: With each passing day your members are becoming more internet dependant. However, that doesn't mean your website will make it onto their 'favourites' list – it's not a touch point if they don't take the effort to go there. And, ask yourself what value will it have if they visit? Many club sites are geared more toward sales than to the existing member – it can serve both. To make it valuable for the member a commitment must be made to keep it up to date with the proper information. A member-centric site will have the following components kept up to date that can be easily found:

- A comprehensive contact page, listing department and staff email addresses and phone numbers
- Programming or service options and specifics
- Group Exercise Class descriptions and schedules

Because we are in the midst of an internet society, when possible, give enough information on the site so that the member does not need to pick up the phone to find out more about a particular offering.

Member Mailings: Many clubs, especially the larger multi-purpose facilities, send monthly or quarterly newsletters to keep members informed about the various programme offerings available. While the effort required to produce these is often substantial, they are an extremely important tool to keep your members connected – particularly valuable to your less active members as it helps lessen their perception that they are “on the outside looking in.” The cost associated with these mailings have gone down dramatically over the last couple of years as clubs now have the option of sending them via email. Also, when sent via email, the newsletters have the added benefit of being interactive (re: [click here](#)), which not only makes it easier for the member to express interest or sign up but can help drive more members to your website.

Community Involvement: Stay involved in the community and let your members know about it – relief drives, charity 5 or 10K's, donation drop-off points, etc. This indirect and less tangible touch point helps to instil not only a sense of pride by the member towards your club but you become a valuable charitable outreach vehicle for them.

As was said earlier, all touch points have the ability to create more value, but now let's get more personal. These are the touch points that create the difference between “someone that pays fees” and “a member that belongs to your club.”

Personal touch points are things that are directed to a specific member. And, when delivered compassionately and consistently, create an emotional bond that transcends the club-to-member relationship. It may seem as if I'm getting a little “deep” but remember that the success, or failure, of this service oriented business is relationship-based and we are in the business of making that persons' life better – how can you not get personal?

Whether you are at the front desk, on the floor, in the locker room, or out in the parking lot, never miss an opportunity to deliver these basic touch points. They are so basic I'm hesitant to present them, however, in my personal experience, I don't receive them a majority of the time:

- When you see someone, smile. It's contagious, it demonstrates you are happy to see them and it makes them feel good.
- Follow that up with a “hello” and make an effort to learn their name.
- Be proactive; ask how they are doing and if there is anything they need or that you can do for them. Show them you care enough to provide attention.

It can't be stressed enough; don't be skimpy or selective in doling these out. The member that's most likely to leave is the one you don't know.

These personal touch points should not be underestimated as they help to build an intangible bond based simply on how you think someone feels about you. To illustrate, for my DIY needs I have two options in my area: One is the mega DIY store – huge selection, great prices and I can usually find a knowledgeable associate if needed. The second is the all but extinct small DIY store on the corner – they can't compete on price or selection but always give me a warm

welcome and do their absolute best to give me good service. I know they appreciate my business. The only reason I give any business to the small DIY store on the corner is because they have gotten into my head – they've shown that they care about me and because of that I care enough about them to give them my business even if it costs a few dollars more. Creating this emotional touch point is an even more valuable element for a service business such as ours. Get into their head!

Other personal touch point opportunities that take more effort but will deliver big retention results should be built into your standard club operating procedures:

New members should be given special attention. If you don't make a strong effort to integrate new members it is likely that 60% of them will cancel next year:

1. Deliver a personal welcome to the club from the manager or owner. Let them know you appreciate their membership and look forward to having them use their new club often.
2. Give them a comprehensive Orientation – not only spend time on how to use all the services you provide (especially group exercise) but stress the importance of consistent usage. Educate them on the fact that if they commit to 3 visits a week for the next 3 months that their life will change forever.
3. Be extremely attentive when each new member visits. Keep their workouts short and the intensity low – the goal is to establish a regular usage habit not to create an Olympic athlete.
4. Follow up and stay in touch weekly for the first couple months. If they don't show up, contact them!

Your new member touch point efforts will pay off in a big way

Consistently market and push your Group Exercise classes. The group dynamics that occur when people share an experience together are very powerful. Tons of personal member-to-member touch points are exchanged. Spend time at team meetings discussing the class options and give them incentive to get members involved.

Encourage trainers to provide complimentary annual "tune-up" sessions to members with low usage patterns. Additional personal touch points will be created and a percentage of these "fringe" members will sign up for more sessions, this not only improves PT revenue but the member is no longer a cancellation risk.

Follow up on all complaints and injuries. Even if you cannot solve the issue, an unhappy or injured member will generally appreciate the follow up. An unaddressed complaint will fester and potentially balloon out of proportion.

Monitor member visits and follow up with members whose usage pattern changes. This includes congratulating members who are visiting more frequently, but more importantly following up with those who have a sudden drop off in usage. This proactive touch point takes the club/member relationship to a new level and demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that you, their club, are taking an active role in their success.

You can take this usage-based approach a powerful step further by following up with members who have recently stopped using the club and make a reward type of offer, such as a re-orientation or complimentary personal training session as an enticement to re-establish their usage. Talk about the right touch at the right time – you are a "touch master!"

As we finish up here, I hope you've been 'touched' with the understanding that your members can and should be touched in a variety of ways – with many of the touches occurring outside the club. Touch point creation doesn't just happen, be cognisant of who your members are and how they can be reached.

Remember, as you take a look around the club, it is the members that you don't see who will have the biggest impact on your financial success; if they are being touched – life is good, if not – chalk up another cancellation. Keep them connected. Show them you care. Touch, touch, touch leads to retain, retain, retain.

Richard Ekstrom, President of Retention Management, www.RetentionManagement.com. Retention Management is a privately held company that manages the complexities and time demands of running a comprehensive retention improvement service for health clubs. It focuses on new member integration, member attendance, health/fitness education and the automation of attrition defence systems. Retention Management's mission is to create a positive impact on a club's bottom line through improved member retention.

The Retention Management Service is now available to clubs in Australia and New Zealand. Contact PulseTec Solutions on 03 9872 5856, visit www.pulsetecsolutions.com or email sales@pulsetecsolutions.com for more details.