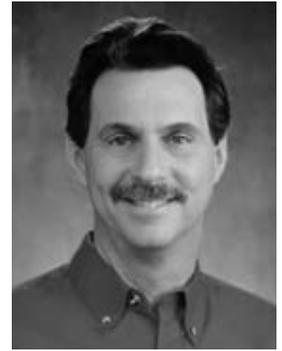


Pilates – An Investment In Success

By Ken Endelman, CEO of Balanced Body, 1-800-PILATES www.pilates.com



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Pilates is one of the fastest growing forms of exercise in the world. The Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association reports that the number of Americans participating in Pilates has grown from 1.7 million in 2000 to 10.5 million in 2004, an enormous increase of over 500%. The exercise system, created more than 80 years ago by Joseph Pilates as a method to rehabilitate injured soldiers, offers extraordinary benefits – including strength without excess bulk, improved flexibility, better posture, balance and coordination.

Today, health clubs nationwide are generating non-dues revenue and creating profit centers by adding Pilates programming.

Clubs often begin the Pilates experience with free mat classes, and then advance their membership into fee-based Pilates equipment programs. While mat classes enable clubs to meet consumer demand for Pilates and support membership growth and retention, it is the fee-based equipment classes that can become a profit center.

Like personal training, Pilates equipment sessions are perceived as an amenity, and members are willing to pay for it. Group reformer sessions typically have 5-10 participants, and are popular because they can be priced at about one-third the cost of one-on-one Pilates sessions. Clubs often find, however, that many members eventually gravitate toward private sessions as well.

Starting and maintaining a fee-based Pilates program requires an investment in both equipment and instructor education, but the payback on your startup investment can be dramatic.

Clubs can recoup initial equipment costs in just a few months. Outstanding profit potential then kicks in for clubs that launch well-designed and marketed equipment-based programs and furthers two goals: adding value for members plus increasing your club's bottom line.

Hiring qualified instructors or educating your existing staff is also paramount to the success of your Pilates program. Group exercise instructors face different class dynamics every day, and know how to train groups of varying levels of conditioning. However, the extensive range of Pilates exercises and styles requires that group training go further. The best instructors are those who are continually advancing their knowledge. Pilates participants can range from de-conditioned to fit, so instructors must be able to *modify* the exercises to suit members' individual abilities and make the classes fun and challenging for everyone.

"Investment" is the key word here, because a properly implemented Pilates program is one of the few commercial fitness programs that will generate non-dues revenue each and every day.

As an example, The Perfect Workout in Incline Village, NV, was ini-

tially a personal training gymnasium. After discovering the merits of Pilates and becoming a certified instructor, co-owner Debra Fishman purchased a Balanced Body Allegro[®] Reformer and began offering private sessions in 2002. The response from her membership was immediate. "They loved it and it just took off from there," Debra recalls. Within two weeks the Perfect Workout had recouped its initial equipment investment.

In September of 2004, Fishman started her first group Pilates class. Less than a year later, The Perfect Workout offers 20 group classes a week with five certified instructors, along with 60 private Pilates sessions. The facility now features five reformers, three trapeze tables and a host of other equipment and accessories.

The Pilates programming has doubled The Perfect Workout's total revenue, and the facility expanded from 900 square feet to over 2200 square feet to accommodate the high demand for Pilates classes. Fishman estimates that her program generates close to \$4,500 of profit each week and nearly 85% of her total revenue. These are amazing results for a husband and wife-owned facility.

"We still have personal training sessions (in the gym), but the Pilates programming has just exploded. It has been a wonderful investment opportunity," says Fishman.

Another key component to a successful Pilates program is marketing

your classes to both members and non-members. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Create internal awareness:** Don't assume that your members or staff know about Pilates. Educate them about the benefits of Pilates and how it differs from other forms of exercise. Make sure your staff can disseminate accurate information when asked about Pilates in general, as well as the specifics of your program. Offer a free class to get members involved.
- **Community outreach:** Network with local businesses and clubs. Invite them to see a demo or take part in an initial session at a discounted price.
- **Specialty classes:** Pilates is renowned for increasing athletic performance. Do you have golfers at your club? Tennis players? Create specialty classes with exercises designed to improve their game.

Pilates gives your club a way to offer additional services, add value for your members, and generate substantial non-dues revenue. While requiring an investment of time and money, with proper planning and marketing savvy your investment in Pilates can quickly turn into profit.

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