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WORD OF MOUTH DRIVES EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

The Peak part of the Stirling Sports Village at Forthside, Stirling, Scotland, is on the wild ride of group fitness success!

When the brand new facility opened its doors in April this year, the forecast was to have 2,000 members by the end of the year. But by June, the fitness club had reached that goal already. The club currently has 2,800 members and an astonishing 58% of members use group fitness. A full membership (£39.00/US\$ 63.50 per month) includes classes, otherwise classes cost £5 (US\$8) each. Fifty-eight percent of members pay the full membership by direct debit to do the classes.

“We are way ahead of budget, and struggling to get enough classes on!” says Diana Leighton, Programme Co-ordinator of Active Stirling, the company that manages The Peak.

The club launched all eight LES MILLS™ programs on the day it opened in April.

“And now our city can’t get enough of them!” says Diana. “On a Monday night we hold BODYPUMP™, BODYCOMBAT™ and BODYJAM™ in the main hall and from day one they have been fully booked with 80 participants, plus more than 60 on the reserve list!”

655 group fitness visits a day

For the very first launch, 187 members booked in for BODYCOMBAT™, with 163 turning up on the night, and over 100 participants booked in for the rest of the classes. The turnout is amazing given that the event was marketed only by word of mouth and some posters!

On the 100th day after opening, 65,500 visits had been group fitness – that is 655 people per day! Next month, Diana plans to launch a new timetable

with 120 classes per week – 20% more than the club currently offers to members, as it just can’t fit all the participants in. The club has three studios, of which one is an RPM™ studio, plus the main hall. The studios have a capacity of 40 for equipment-based classes and the RPM™ studio has 40 bikes. Diana currently runs about 20 classes a day on weekdays – 120 classes a week – and many of them are fully booked. In fact, BODYPUMP™ and RPM™ are usually fully booked over a week in advance. But the most popular program, by far, is BODYCOMBAT™ she says. “I can’t get new instructors through the system fast enough. I’ve been recruiting for the last six months,” she says.

Range of classes attract members

So why is the group fitness usage percentage so high? Part of it is the beautiful facility and the enthusiastic instructors – “they love teaching here”, says Diana. “Everyone working here has been wonderful in their support for all of my ideas and for providing the very best of sound and fitness equipment.” But she puts a significant part of the success down to the LES MILLS™ range of classes. “The classes suit everybody. There is something for everyone and there are options if people need them. People just love the LES MILLS™ classes and the range of styles they offer,” she says. The Peak and the Stirling Sports Village now dominate the local market, with outdoor football, rugby and hockey pitches, swimming pools, an ice rink, gym and group fitness studios, “I don’t think there is anything else like it in Scotland”, says Diana. The amazing thing about The Peak is that the group

fitness boom is driven completely by word of mouth. The average capacity usage is about 70%, but Diana estimates that capacity usage could be about 90% across the whole timetable. Diana, herself an instructor, works fulltime as Group Fitness Manager. She has a contagiously bubbly and enthusiastic personality, which she says she shares with many of her colleagues. “The group fitness boom is

- Brand new facility attracted 2,000 members in two months
- 58% of members use group fitness
- Eight LES MILLS™ programs
- 65,500 group fitness visits in first 100 days
- Group fitness boom driven completely by word of mouth
- Instructor recruitment through hosting module training and networking
- Low-cost, successful re-launch events driven by word of mouth



overwhelming,” she says. “Everybody’s in a buzz, and it’s only six and a half months down the track. We are all committed to trying to improve everything about our club.”

Smart recruiting and time-efficient instructor management

The Peak recently had special module training at its facility for BODYCOMBAT™ and BODYPUMP™ just to bring more instructors through the system. A recent RPM™ module was filled up with only The Peak instructors. Stirling is located around 40 miles (64.4 kilometers) from Glasgow to the south and Edinburgh to the southeast—“right in the heart of everything”, making it ideal for instructor training, says Diana. “Instructors come here from all around. We’ve got such good facilities for module training. The Trainers come here and are just gobsmacked by how beautiful it is with the extensive use of glazing throughout, allowing lots of natural daylight in”.

Diana had five LES MILLS™ instructors on her team when the facility opened. She now has 37 instructors, of which 27 are LES MILLS™ instructors, and she is still recruiting! She found the instructors without advertising or external help. “I talked to a lot of people,” she says. “Instructors recommended other instructors. We hold auditions and bring good instructors through the system.” The Peak subsidizes the module cost for new instructors. Rookies start to shadow-teach straight after the module and will begin to teach tracks whenever they feel comfortable to do so. Through an informal buddy system, the more experienced instructor is there to coach the new instructor to be successful. If they need help, the other instructor will step in. Diana organizes a meeting with free soup and sandwiches for all instructors once a month. The meeting is a chance for instructors to come along, get to know each other and network. It’s great for building a community and making the instructors feel committed to each other, which is good for when they need cover for their classes. “The instructors give so much – they are practicing their classes, filming each other and helping each other, and most of all, they are inspiring people,” she says. Re-launch events have also been a success at The Peak. 260 people attended the last Quarterly re-launch, and, again, it was advertised with only a couple of posters. Diana and her team usually do all re-launches in the main hall over one night, she says.



Group fitness frenzy driven by word of mouth

The group fitness frenzy is driven by members telling other members and non-members to come along because the classes are so fantastic, and the facility so beautiful, she says. There is no marketing what so ever – at first there was not even a timetable set up on the wall! However, there are timetables on the reception counter, “but they go very quickly”, she says. “People who have never done exercise before get intrigued and want to see what it is all about for themselves,” she says. “BODYVIVE™ is a great class to get started for beginners, and from there, they might try another class and realize that it works for them!” Diana has some people in her BODYCOMBAT™ class that hadn’t done any exercise for 30 or 40 years before they came to her class. “And now they absolutely love it!” she says. “People just seem to get caught up in the group fitness excitement”, she says. Going forward, the main priorities include retaining and growing the membership base and maintain the quality – “not to be a one-hit wonder”, smiles Diana. “I’d like us to become a center of excellence,” she says. “An important part of that is to continue to have instructors teaching the classes they feel passion for. The class will feel that and love it!” “We are the beginning of something amazing,” she says.

The Stirling Sports Village is the biggest single development for sport and leisure in Stirling with an investment of £25 million funded by Stirling Council and £2.3m from SportScotland, the government agency for sport. The club has eight LES MILLS™ programs.

Les Mills says... What an inspiring story! Attracting 2,000 members in two months and 65,500 group fitness visits in the first 100 days without any marketing whatsoever shows that word of mouth really works when you are offering high-quality services. The Peak is an excellent example of applying Key Element 8 – Appoint or be a world-class Group Fitness Manager. Diana is doing a great job in recruiting and keeping world-class instructors.

