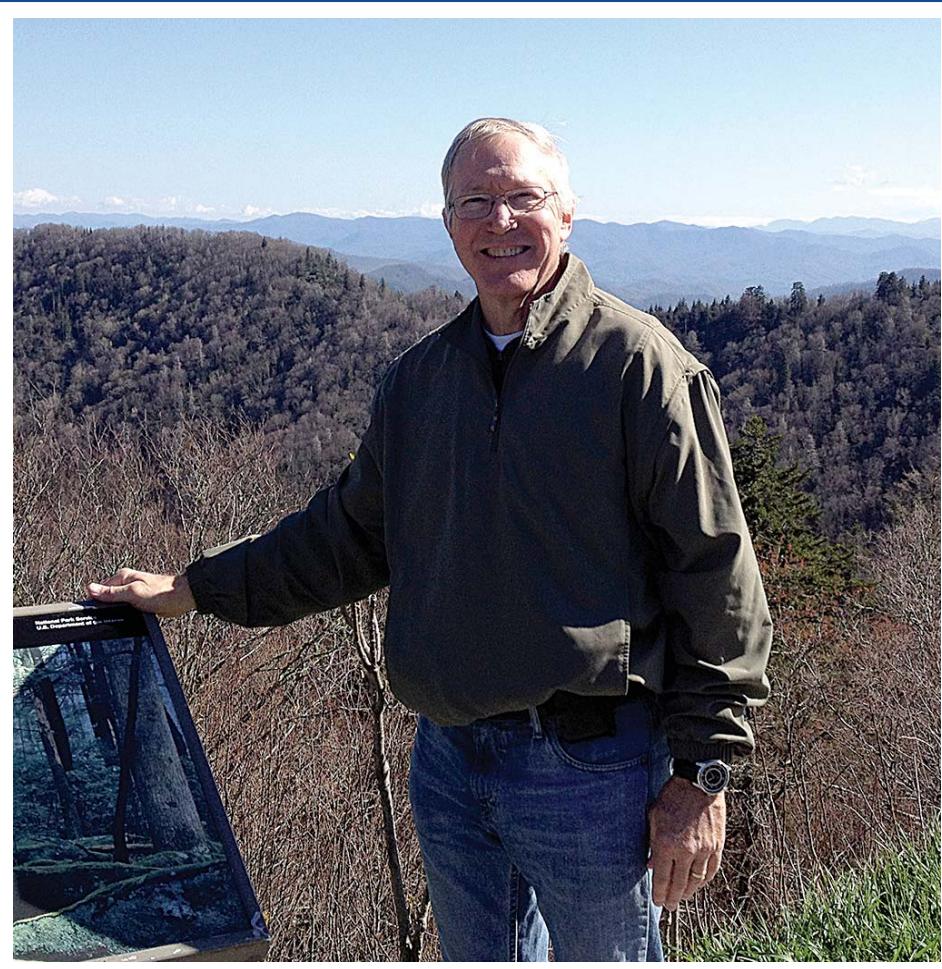


Norm Cates'

# CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 27 YEARS OF TRUST



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**Lyle Ray Irwin  
1949 - 2020**

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**AUGUST 2020**

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# CLUB INSIDER

CELEBRATING 27 YEARS OF TRUST

## Lyle Ray Irwin: 1949 - 2020

By: Norm Cates

**Lyle Ray Irwin** was as close as you could get to the "Perfect Man." Why, Norm, you may ask, would you describe Ray as the "Perfect Man?" Well, Ray was a truly remarkable and an absolutely great human being! Ray was one of the best friends I've ever had in my life of 74 years. To all, I say this: Meeting Ray Irwin in 1974, and working with him, truly changed my life entirely and forever. There are not enough superlatives in our language for me to properly illustrate the enormous value I have for my friendship with Ray Irwin. But, I'm going to give it a good try.

This very Special Cover Story honoring the life of Lyle Ray Irwin will share many reasons why I've come to

describe him in such a glowing manner. Importantly, this very Special Cover Story is not just about Ray Irwin and our 46-year friendship. This Cover Story is about a great man who, someday, the historians of our health, racquet and sportsclub industry will recognize, along with his partner, **Rich Boggs**, as two of the greatest entrepreneurs ever in the history of our industry. They should both be known in the same class with the late **Arthur Jones**, who brought **Nautilus** to the world; and **Ray Wilson** and **Augie Nieto**, who brought the *LifeCycle* to our industry worldwide. The achievements made with the *STEP*, and later *MOSSA*, in my view, warrant Ray and Rich of being known in such a high status in the history of our industry.

I invite you to read on as I

honor my friend, our industry's friend, **Lyle Ray Irwin**.

### I Know Ray

I know Ray. He would have totally scoffed at such flattering accolades, but I'm not going to let that fact stop me. I'm going to do what's right. And, what's right here, with this keyboard, is to give Lyle Ray Irwin (and yes, especially at this important time, Ray's partner, Rich Boggs) the credit they both so richly deserve because of the enormous contributions they've made to our industry. It saddens me that, before now, I had not adequately expressed the thoughts that I'm going to share with you here today.

(See *Lyle Ray Irwin* Page 10)



Lyle Ray Irwin

## Jim Thompson, Sr. and His Family Team Celebrate 45th Anniversary of the Oakland Hills Tennis Club

By: Norm Cates

*Club Insider* is very pleased to bring to you this very special **45th Anniversary story**, as we help **James (Jim) Thompson, Sr.**; his son, **James Thompson, Jr.**; and their entire family, their members and their friends celebrate that amazing achievement.

The Thompsons are the owners of the **Oakland Hills Tennis Club** in *Oakland, California*, across the Bay from San Francisco. To have achieved 45 years of being in business in *any industry or business* is not just amazing, it's a tribute and clear testimony to the quality of the

people who did it... in this special case... the *entire family* of James Thompson, Sr! And, to have achieved this in the tennis club industry is truly a great accomplishment!

My son, **Justin Cates**, who's my partner in and *Publisher* of *Club Insider*, and I, want to congratulate Jim Thompson, Sr. and his entire family as they celebrate this extraordinary achievement in our industry.

At the very same time, sadly, there are many other health, racquet and sportsclub owners and operators across the United States who're struggling as they try hard to deal with this horrific pandemic.

(See *Oakland Hills Club* Page 14)



The Thompson Family (L to R) - Michelle Delphey (Jim's Daughter); Lauren Lafferty (Jim's Granddaughter); Eileen (Jim's Wife); Jim Thompson, Sr.; and Jim Thompson, Jr. (Jim's Son).

## Inside the Insider: Edition #320

- Double Conversion Rates With This One Technique - **By:** Mario Bravomalo
- Four Ways Digital Tech Can Maximize Your Marketing Budget - **By:** Jillian Curl
- Staff Stress Busting to Impact Performance During COVID - **By:** Karen Woodard-Chavez
- Business Finance Depot Video Series: Equipment Leasing - **By:** Paul Bosley
- How to Bootstrap Your Gym's Sales and Marketing During the Pandemic - **By:** Jim Thomas
- The Long Journey Back - Part I - **By:** Thomas Plummer
- The Claremont Club Permanently Closes
- IHRSA Goes Virtual With Innovation Summit
- Karen Woodard Chavez Publishes New Book: *Sterling Sales Skills*
- And, of Course, *Norm's Notes*

# Norm's Notes

■ **Hello Everybody!** This is your Club Insider Founder and Tribal Leader Since 1993 checking in with our 320th monthly edition of Club Insider! Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm very happy to report to you that JUSTIN and I are well. I'm able to see well now with my left eye (while my right eye still remains essentially blind); thus, I'm able to write this to you all.

■ **Is AMERICA a GREAT COUNTRY, or WHAT?** Let me again tell you why I think America is a truly great country, and WHY I LOVE AMERICA more than the extent of my vocabulary will allow me to properly explain. I love America because she's the home of 320+ million downright good people, most of whom have been raised to treat their friends, their neighbors and even their enemies fair and square. In friendship, in business, and yes, even when they're at odds with each other... I love America because it's full of people who're so very generous, not only with their money, but with all of their skills, their talents and their time, and all of their passions. They never hesitate to help a friend or even a stranger

*in need.* I love America because the World has seen her stand up for other countries that have been attacked and have had their very existence threatened... you could ask our friends and allies in England, and throughout Europe, about how they feel about America's huge contributions to the freedom of their countries. And, last but certainly not least, I love America because not a day goes by when we're not helping someone in our great country and others somewhere on this beautiful Earth. I want to close this Note with the following promise. I promise you all that, throughout the rest of my life, I will live and breathe with my Passion and my Love for our great America in place, and I hereby challenge all of you who're reading this today, and who feel the way that I do to take up my mantra, adopt my rabid love and passion for our great America and to do anything and everything you can to protect and support America no matter how difficult the World becomes. STAY TUNED, KIND FOLKS!

■ For 27+ years, it has been my goal to help you all prosper in your club operations.

These days are very sad for me because I know that many of you are truly suffering in your clubs across America because of the **Coronavirus Pandemic**. And, by now, you may even have been forced to close your club(s), perhaps again, or you may be, very scarily, heading that way. For example, just a few days ago, my son and great partner in Club Insider, my partner, and now Publisher, received a copy of the amazingly moving letter from our friend and long-time Club Insider Contributing Author, MIKE ALPERT, containing his sad announcement that they had to close their long-time running Claremont Club in Claremont, California... a wonderful place where Mike has been the CEO and President for 23+ years. We wish the best to Mike Alpert, his staff, their families and the members who have all lost the Claremont Club, as they move on from this sad chapter of the pandemic.

■ Also, very sadly, this month, our Cover Story is about the one and only LYLE RAY IRWIN, the man who literally changed my life in 1974 when I first met him as we awaited our turn to play racquetball outside the courts at Riverbend, where we both lived at the time. Ray Irwin's story is a heartfelt report from me on the life and times of and the sad passing of this TITAN of our industry, LYLE RAY IRWIN. Ray is one of the greatest people I've ever known! Here, I also want to Thank Ray's lovely wife of 40 years, and now his Widow, LOUISE IRWIN, for her time and effort helping me produce this amazing Cover Story. So, I urge you to take the time to read Ray's amazing story from front to back. When you're finished, I believe you will be glad you did, and you will fully understand how Ray Irwin, along with his great partner, RICH BOGGS, who's also my long-time industry friend, changed our industry worldwide forever. The story begins on Page # 3. May Lyle Ray Irwin Rest In Peace.

■ **THANKS and SINCERE APPRECIATION.** With the sudden passing of my great friend, RAY IRWIN, I have taken on a challenge to myself. That challenge is to reach out to people here in Atlanta, and across America, with whom I have been friends for many years... to THANK everyone of them for their friendships. And, right now, let me express my THANKS and SINCERE APPRECIATION for all of your friendships. At 74 years of age, and still in good health overall, I see friends of mine here in Atlanta, and all across our great America, passing away, and I kick myself because I've not called them lately and extended my sincere Thanks and Appreciation to them for our friendship. Truthfully, the last thing I want



Norm Cates

to do on this Earth is to pass away without first telling everybody I have grown to know and love over these many years how much I truly do appreciate their friendships. With this done in the near future via many phone calls and by mailing a copy of this 320th Edition of Club Insider to them, I will sleep much better every night because I'll know my good friends will then know how much I really cared about them and appreciated their friendships.

At the same time, in this writing, I believe it is important for me to also say to all of you that I'm not planning on kicking the bucket UNTIL I'm at least 100! Folks, I believe I'll accomplish this because, when my wonderful Dad passed away at age 92 as the result of freak accident, I promised Dad, and myself right then that I would reach the same goal he had before his accident, which was to live to be 100! So, I say here and now: STAY TUNED, Folks!

■ I'm very pleased to update you all that, as of this morning, August 5, 2020, I've lost 35 pounds on my way to losing 80, and I'm projecting to be at my goal of 80 pounds off by not later than January 31, 2021! Again, STAY TUNED!

■ The following bizarre story I read this week in our friend, PETE BROWN's Athletic Business Magazine online coverage was written by BROCK FRITZ, who in turn, got the story from The Cherry Hill Courier Post in New Jersey. The headline read: Owners Break Into, Reopen Own Gym After State Closure. This is an amazing story about how the owners of Atilis Gym in Bellmawr, New Jersey broke into their own facility and reopened the gym after the State of New Jersey had sealed the entrance days before due to their non-compliance with Government restrictions put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The (See Norm's Notes Page 7)

## About Club Insider

### CELEBRATING 27 YEARS OF TRUST

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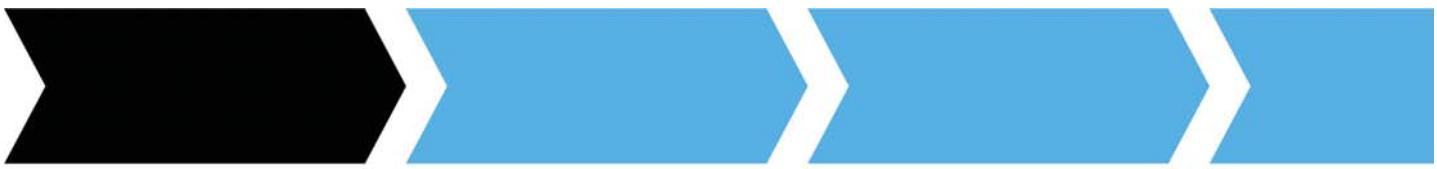
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# Double Conversion Rates With This One Technique

By: Mario Bravomalo

When something obviously works, that doesn't always mean it's easy. Take, for example, exercise... we know it obviously works, but it still takes a lot of effort. The same is true with *LEAD CONVERSIONS*: reaching leads faster obviously works better, but it takes a great deal of operational efficiency and effort.

Research conducted with more than 20 companies clearly showed that leads that were called within the first minute have more than a 231% increased conversion rate over those leads called just 60 seconds later. The study, conducted by *Velocity - The Ultimate Contact Strategy*, clearly showed that, with each minute that passes, the conversion rate drops dramatically.

Club owners clearly understand that lead conversion is one of the most important operational challenges in their clubs today.

Generating a high volume of internet leads is a function of the amount of marketing dollars you're willing to spend, but successful lead conversion is a function of effort and execution. There are plenty of leads out there on the Internet. The real work begins with how we convince those leads to come into the club.

As every club owner will tell you, and the research clearly indicates, there is no better lead conversion tool than a phone call. With the tools that a club owner has available (text messaging, email, phone call), it is the phone call that requires the most effort.

Text messages and emails can be completely automated, decreasing the staff dependency and increasing the operational efficiency, and it's been shown that pre-recorded phone calls have very little effectiveness.

A 231% increase in conversion

rate if a club contacts a lead within the first minute of inquiry! This is an amazing statistic, but the question is: how can a club actually make this happen? The reality is when a web lead fills out an inquiry, the staff must be notified, the phone number found, the phone number dialed, and contact made with that lead in under a minute... How in the world is this possible!?

The task of contacting that lead with a live phone call in under a minute seems insurmountable. Unless... there is a technology available that knows when a lead entered their phone number, and then, the system immediately calls the club to connect the lead to the sales staff.

The technology is complex, but the system is simple. When a lead enters their phone number into a web form, the system automatically dials the front desk and asks them if they would like to connect with the lead. This *Hot Lead Notification* is

currently being utilized in other industries and is now available to club owners.

The beauty of the *Hot Lead Notification* system is that it is automatic and simple for most clubs to execute, as they are already accustomed to taking phone inquiries. Essentially, this turns every web lead into a telephone inquiry.

But, like all technologies that are efficient, it is just a matter of time before the club across the street is taking advantage of the system... **the first club to make contact with the lead generally wins** (According to a study by *Lead Connect*, 78% of customers buy from the company that responds to their inquiry first).

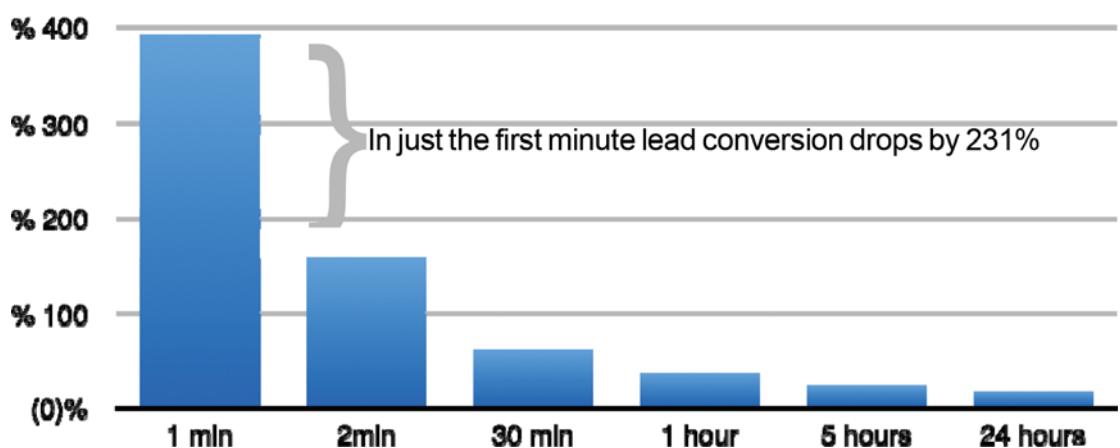
If you'd like to know more about how to increase your conversion rate with a *Hot Lead Notification System*, schedule a presentation with the guys from VFP, or visit [VFP.us/HotLeadNotification](http://VFP.us/HotLeadNotification).



Mario Bravomalo

(*Mario Bravomalo is the Founder of Visual Fitness Planner, and he can be reached at [mario@vfp.us](mailto:mario@vfp.us).*)

## ■ % Conversion rate decreasing by the minute



# The Claremont Club Permanently Closes

CLAREMONT, CA - As the Coronavirus Pandemic rages on, the toll on human life and the economy continues to escalate. For the health and fitness club industry, one of the more shocking and saddest losses has occurred with the permanent closure of **The Claremont Club** in Claremont, California. **Mike Alpert, President and CEO**, announced the closure in letters to staff and the membership.

Mike wrote, "It is with a very heavy heart that I am writing to inform you that the Club will be closing operations permanently as of August 1, 2020. This was not an easy decision for the owners of the Club to make,

but they had no choice. Several times over the past years, they have been approached with offers to sell, and they have always declined. Their true desire has been to continue what Stan Clark started in 1973 and to pass it on to their children. However, the financial cost incurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unexpected government closures of the Club, plus the loss of almost 1,200 memberships simply leaves us with no alternative but to close the Club."

Mike continued, "We have been blessed to have had the most dedicated and talented employees and managers

in the fitness industry. Because of their efforts, the Club has been recognized all over the world for being a leader in health club inclusivity and *Exercise is Medicine*. The programs that we have developed for adults and children with cancer, our spinal cord/paralysis, diabetes and *Cycling for Parkinson's* are highly regarded, not only in the fitness industry, but also in the medical and health care communities."

*Club Insider* wishes the best to Mike Alpert, his staff, their families and the members who have all lost the Claremont Club, as they move on from this sad chapter of the pandemic.



## ...Norm's Notes

continued from page 4

action to close the Atilis Gym was taken via orders from **New Jersey Governor PHIL MURPHY**. Sadly, along with the court order closing the gym, **IAN SMITH** and his partner, **FRANK TRUMBETTI**, were charged with contempt and disorderly persons offenses. This story can be accessed at [www.athleticbusiness.com](http://www.athleticbusiness.com); put **Atilis Gym** in the Search Bar, and the story will pop up along with a couple of other previous reports. **Pete's Athletic Business Team does an amazing job!**

■ Speaking of my friend, **PETE BROWN's** *Athletic Business Magazine*, here's **BAD NEWS** about their annual convention and trade show. **Read On:**

### AB Show 2020 Has Been Canceled

**MADISON, WI** - Athletic Business Media has made the difficult decision to cancel AB Show 2020. This decision was made in consultation with key stakeholders and our partners, the Medical Fitness Association, the National Alliance for Youth Sports and the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association.

"The decision to cancel did not come easily and was ultimately made in the best interest of the health and safety of our attendees, exhibitors, speakers, partners and staff," said **Shawn Gahagan, Athletic Business President**.

"The cancellation is also based on guidance from public health officials that address the challenges associated with holding large gatherings, as well as the increasing number of organizations and states that have travel restrictions in place," said **Sue Sears, Show Director**.

On behalf of Athletic Business, MFA, NAYS and NIRSA, we thank our attendees, exhibitors and speakers for your patience, loyalty and partnership as we move through these challenging times together.

Please stay healthy and safe. We cannot wait to see you in **San Antonio, October 27 - 30, 2021**.

■ From **The Five Show** on **Fox News Network** on **July 24, 2020** - 60% of people in a recent poll think that American Fitness Clubs won't return. Another statistic flying around is that, in an unidentified poll, 59% of respondents say they're not going back to their gym.

■ For those of you who're **over 40**, I have this **health tidbit**. In the *Parade Magazine* that's inserted into the *Marietta Daily Journal Saturday/Sunday Edition*, I found this health tip, which was something that I didn't know until today, and I'm quoting it for you directly: **"CATARACTS - Actor JOHN GOODMAN**, 68, is part of the group of more than 24.4 million Americans over 40 with cataracts. When the eye's natural lens

changes from clear to cloudy, the world can appear blurry, hazy or less colorful. Protecting your eyes from sunlight is one of the most important ways to slow down the development of cataracts, as studies show that years of exposure can increase the risk."

Folks, these days, I'm pretty interested and wanting to stay in touch with any information about eye issues, and in turn, I want to help you avoid what I've gone through during this **2020 Year from Hell**, which is what I am beginning to call 2020! I say this because cataracts actually took away my vision in my left eye.

On March 1, 2020, a beautiful and sunny Sunday morning, I awakened at 8:45 AM. Although I did not feel a thing, while I was sleeping, I had what's called a "Retinal Stroke" that essentially blinded me in my right eye. I felt nothing whatsoever as it happened in my sleep. My only clue was that, when I got out of bed, my right eye was 100% blacked out! And, as of this writing, even though I had surgery a few days later, I'm still almost completely blind in my right eye. *But, that was not the end of my problems!*

A month before that, I'd scheduled cataract surgery on both of my eyes. But, the Retinal Stroke knocked me out of that from happening. While this very scary eye problem was going on, the Coronavirus Pandemic was just hitting America, so everything healthcare wise, such as my

cataract surgeries I had scheduled two months before, were cancelled. During that delay, the cataracts actually also made me blind in my left eye, so that essentially left me blind in both eyes for two and a half months until May 14, 2020 when I was able to have cataract surgery on my left eye. Thankfully, that surgery restored vision in my left eye. So, to say the very least, I was more than thrilled to have gotten back my ability to see my beautiful wife, Ilena, who by the way, was in Colorado for her Brother-in-Law's funeral at the time of my Retinal Stroke.

Since May 14th, I have again been able to read, write, drive my Beemer 750i, watch TV, etc. So, in a sincere effort to help any of you who're over 40 to avoid what I went through, I would suggest two things to you: (1) **Wear sunglasses all the time when you're going to be exposed to direct sunlight**. And, (2) **If you're over 40, and you are starting to notice your eyesight is not as good as it used to be, DO NOT hesitate... find a good eye doctor** and have your eyes examined to find out if you're already in need of cataract surgery. **Don't delay!**

I would give this advice to anybody over 40, and I hope I can help you out there. **STAY TUNED** folks, because on September 15, 2020, I'm now scheduled for another appointment with **Dr. JOHN COBB**, the **terrific Eye Surgeon at The Thomas Eye Group** who did the cataract

surgery on my left eye, and he will confirm then that we can do it again on my right eye... Yes, this will be the surgery that was postponed because of my Retinal Stroke and then Coronavirus hitting America. I will keep you posted when I can see these writings with BOTH eyes again! **YAHOO!**

■ **GEOFF DYER**, my long-time industry friend, a veteran club owner/operator for many years and a **past President of IHRSA**, shared this news from his company with us:

**"CR Fitness**, headquartered in Brandon, Florida, has announced the appointment of **CHRISTY STROSS** as the company's **Chief Legal Officer**. In this newly created role, Stross will leverage her roots in the fitness industry to handle all legal affairs for the company. Stross brings over 17 years of legal, real estate, human resource and marketing experience as a board-certified licensed attorney, as well as a licensed full-service real estate development broker. Having worked as the Director of Real Estate Development and Legal Counsel for **You Fit Health Clubs**, Stross has a strong track record of advising on real estate strategy as well as location selection and development. She has experience handling compliance on the state/federal level, trade marking, drafting/ negotiating contracts and leases and membership agreements. **CR Fitness** (See **Norm's Notes** Page 8)

## IHRSA Goes Virtual With Innovation Summit

**BOSTON, MA** - In the blink of an eye, the landscape of the fitness industry changed. Now is the time to come together with the best minds in the industry to innovate, connect and thrive in the new economy. That's why the **IHRSA Innovation Summit** was created. This one-day interactive, virtual event will be held **Thursday, September 17** on a unique digital platform. Watch inspiring, world-class keynote presentations, participate in timely and engaging education sessions, and interact with industry peers through online chat, all from the comfort of your home or office! Highlights will include:

**Two World-Class Keynote Speakers:** Best-selling Author and Paralympian **Josh Sundquist**'s inspiring presentation, "*One More Thing, One More Time*," will remind us that all our stories are interconnected, and even our smallest actions and decisions impact the world around us. And, Futurist, Technology Strategist and Author, **Crystal Washington**, will keep our eyes looking forward as she discusses innovative ways technology can impact your business in her address, "*Imagine the Future*."

**Panel Discussion on The Future of the Fitness Business:** After months of re-strategizing, innovating and rebuilding,

the fitness world continues to adapt into a different version of what it once was. Gym closures, temporary shutdowns and staff changes have forced the industry to embrace change in order to survive. Hear about the experiences of executive club leaders from around the world as they provide key learnings from the past few months and discuss how they have navigated changes, provide excellent customer service and rebuild their teams.

**Classes:** Choose from several compelling options, including:

■ **Innovate, Motivate & Engage Your Members to Build Loyalty with Diva Richards, Founder & CEO, Hard Work No Excuses;**

■ **Preparing Budgets for Every Scenario with Larry Conner, CPA, President & General Manager, Stone Creek Club & Spa;**

■ **Developing an Innovation Strategy for You, Your Business, & Your Team with Michele Melkerson-Granryd, General Manager, Castle Hill Fitness 360, and José Teixeira, Head of Customer Experience, SC Fitness;**

■ **Reimagine Your Sales Strategy with Luke Carlson, CEO, Discover Strength;**

■ **CEO Leadership Panel Discussion** - Hear from the experiences of supplier executive leaders as they drive innovation, provide for their clients and their members and reinvent the fitness community;

■ **IGNITE!** - A fast-paced, 60-minute event where guest speakers have five minutes to convey a concept they are passionate about, themed around innovation.

**Sponsor Marketplace:** Industry suppliers have come up with a variety of solutions to help clubs navigate the crisis. Displaying the latest equipment, programming and technology, the **Sponsor Marketplace** will allow you to browse and connect directly with event sponsors via chat messaging or video call.

**Social Hour & Networking:** Connections have never been so important! Join IHRSA for a creative networking hour. Reconnect with old friends and make new connections during this event.

**Reserve Your Spot** - Visit [ihsa.org/innovation-summit](http://ihsa.org/innovation-summit) to learn more and to register. Club Insider readers can save 10% on their registration by using the coupon code **INSIDER** at checkout.

# Four Ways Digital Tech Can Maximize Your Marketing Budget

By: Jillian Curl

Direct mail is a highly effective marketing strategy for gyms and fitness clubs. Experts say that, on average, direct mail advertising gives a business a 13:1 return on investment (ROI). In this uncertain economic climate, however, many owners and operators may not feel confident spending their marketing budget on designing, printing and mailing costs.

For clubs that aren't operating at normal capacity yet, digital marketing is a great, lower-cost way to reach current and potential members. Here are four digital marketing strategies you can start using right away:

## 1. Give Your Website a Makeover

Your website is your digital storefront. People go there to get information, schedule appointments, make payments and even shop. Any other digital marketing strategies you use will ultimately funnel people to your website, so it needs to work hard for you. You'll want your site to:

**Support Multiple Devices** - Your website should be responsive and optimized to display on mobile, tablets, laptops and desktops.

**Be Search Friendly** - Your website is only as good as the number and quality of visitors, so your website should be Search Engine Optimized (SEO). This means setting it up in a way that makes it more visible to people who use search engines like Google, Bing or Yahoo.

**Support E-Commerce** - At a time when in-gym traffic is lower than you'd like, you build revenue by offering products such as workout gear straight from your website.

**Add a Blog** - Blogging is a great way to engage your current membership base and interest future members. Especially relevant topics now could include at-home workouts to do with your kid or full-body, 20-minute workouts. Blog articles can also provide rich, informative content for your email marketing efforts.

## 2. Use Local Business Listings

The Yellow Pages are as outdated as videocassettes and VCRs. These days, people search online for places to eat, get the car fixed and to work out. Make your business more visible online with local business listings, like your "Google My Business" profile, Waze, Yellow Pages, Yelp, Facebook, YouTube and every other location where you can list your business.

We talked a bit about using SEO for your website. There's a caveat, though: You want your website and business

listings to **only rank high for health clubs and gyms in the area where you do business**. To help your business leap to the top of local online search results, make sure to:

**Be Consistent** - Every listing, including your website, needs to be exactly the same. This includes *everything*: business name, address, phone number, hours of operation, payment methods, pictures and promotional copy. For example, you can't be "ABC Fitness Studios" on your website and appear as "ABC Fitness Studios - Lakeside" on Yelp. This consistency allows your business to "claim" dozens of result pages and drive them all back to your website.

**Use Keywords** - To start, type your domain name and your competitor's domain name on an analytical website like [www.SEMrush.com](http://www.SEMrush.com) to see how they currently rank in search results. Other keyword phrases might be "fitness center near me" or "cheap gym membership." The promotional copy on both your website and your business listings should be keyword-rich.

## 3. Spread the Word With Social Media Marketing

Internet users spend an average of 2 hours and 22 minutes a day on social media. That's a massive opportunity for you to connect with your prospects and members. To build and retain your membership base, consider these three ways to harness the power of social media:

**Target Your Ads** - Facebook has an incredible number of ad-targeting options that help your message reach the right audience. Targeting can be based on criteria such as location, demographics and purchase behavior. Or, you can connect with people on Facebook who have already demonstrated interest in your business, from loyal members to website visitors.

**Use Lead Generation Ads** - For example, Facebook's Lead Ads help you easily collect information on future customers with pre-populated and custom forms. These forms make it much easier for mobile users to get the information they want about your gym and for you to get a qualified lead. You can easily download the submitted information or connect it directly to your CRM.

**Try New Social Media Channels** - If your gym or club doesn't yet have a presence on social media, it's not too late! Facebook is a great option to get started, but if you have potential customers under the age of 35, you may also want to consider using Instagram. Once you gain some

traction there, consider expanding to other platforms like Twitter and Snapchat for more diversified content and engagement.

## 4. Consider Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Ads

In addition to SEO, another traffic-generating marketing strategy is pay-per-click (PPC). PPC is exactly what it sounds like: you pay for each time a visitor clicks on your ad. This is essentially a quick way to buy site visits, rather than earning them organically through SEO. Often, PPC is associated with search engine advertising, such as Google Ads.

Using a major search engine like Google is particularly valuable because of the massive amounts of traffic it receives, meaning more opportunities to gain clicks on your ad! With a successful PPC campaign, you can:

**Increase Brand Visibility** - Your site will quickly appear on relevant search pages that give potential customers new access to your brand.

**Reach a Highly Targeted Audience** - Take advantage of selecting a specific demographic or location to target for your PPC campaign.

**Get Faster Results** - Once you start the paid campaign, you're instantly visible in that search category to begin seeing results.

**Control Your Budget** - Easily scale or limit your budget and only get advertising for what you pay for.



Jillian Curl



For local businesses like gyms, direct mail still delivers top marketing ROI, especially when combined with the digital strategies just described. Club traffic is down right now, and many gyms are feeling the financial pinch. Until things return to normal (and they will!), digital tools can help keep your marketing alive and healthy.

*(Jillian Curl has been at UpSwell for five years and has held multiple positions within the company. From Production Coordinator to creating/leading the Social Media Division and now as a Marketing Consultant, Jillian brings a plethora of knowledge in both digital and print marketing to all her clients. For more information, you can visit [fitnessupsellmarketing.com](http://fitnessupsellmarketing.com) or email her directly at [jcurl@fitnessupsellmarketing.com](mailto:jcurl@fitnessupsellmarketing.com).)*

## ...Norm's Notes

continued from page 7

**operates 24 locations in Florida (Tampa, Sarasota, Clearwater and Orlando) and Atlanta and has plans to open 12 more locations by the end of next year. CR Fitness is owned by VINCE JULIEN, GEOFF DYER, TONY SCRIMALE and JEFF DOTSON.** As an ownership team, they have a combined 150+ years of industry experience and have opened more than 100 gym locations.

**JUSTIN and I want to say Thanks for reading Club Insider!**

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*(Norm Cates, Jr. is the Founder of Club Insider, now in its 27th year of publication, and its Tribal Leader Since 1993. Norm can be reached by phone at 770-635-7578 or email at [Norm@clubinsideronline.com](mailto:Norm@clubinsideronline.com).)*

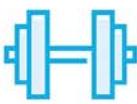
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## ...Lyle Ray Irwin

continued from page 3

### Comments From Louise Irwin About Her Beloved Husband, the Late Ray Irwin

I'm going to start with comments from **Louise Irwin**, *Ray's beloved wife of 40 years*. This excellent interview with Louise will go a long way toward my goal of properly describing and chronicling the kind of person Ray Irwin was, and beyond that, giving both Ray and Rich the huge credit they *both* deserve for their great contributions to our industry.

Ray Irwin was a *really special guy* as evidenced by these comments from his wife Louise. Along the way, I'll provide some "**Author's Notes**" to embellish her comments, while at the same time sharing my own feelings and thoughts about the life and times of my good friend Ray Irwin.

**Club Insider (C.I.)** - Louise, when, where and how did you first meet Ray?

**Louise Irwin (LI)** - Norm, I met him at *The CourtHouse 1 Racquetball Club* on Franklin Road in Marietta, Georgia. I was so excited that a racquetball club was opening! I worked for Hewlett-Packard at the time, and I remember getting flyers at work. Everybody was so excited about having a racquetball club there. That was **THE BUZZ!**

**C.I.** - What a cool memory!

**LI** - **IT WAS COOL!** It was *THE Flagship Club!*

**C.I.** - When did you and Ray get married?

**LI** - You were there, Norm! We got married on *December 17, 1980*. I have some pictures from our celebration at the LaPaz Restaurant in Sandy Springs. I remember there were lots of tequila shots that night!

**C.I.** - Louise, what are the ages of your sons, **Jack** and **Richard**? Where do they live? Did you all have grandchildren yet?

**LI** - Jack is 36, and Richard's 34th birthday is next week! They both live here in the Atlanta area, so we've been very fortunate to have them both living near us. No grandchildren yet, though.

**C.I.** - Louise, Ray was a *really special guy*. What was it like being married to Ray Irwin, a *truly great American entrepreneur*, who was also a highly qualified Certified Public Accountant (CPA)?

**LI** - Well, I always said that I didn't know that *marriage could be so much fun!* Ray had such a good sense of humor. He was interesting. He read all the time. He was actually our book '*guru*.' Everybody would always ask, 'What's Ray reading?' We had some really good times, and he loved to do a lot of things. He was a *great father*. You would not know that he invented things, as CPAs are not exactly known for their imagination. But, Ray had a *great imagination*. He had visions of things that he wanted to get done, and he did them. He was just a very kind and simple man. And, oh my gosh, he was very easy to be with.

### In World Class Company

**Author's Note:** Rich and Ray had already seen **Gin Miller** doing **STEP classes** in their clubs using very heavy and extremely cumbersome wooden boxes... These wooden steps presented a lot of problems operationally for owners of clubs who tried to provide these group exercise classes because the boxes had to be moved to and from the room before other classes could be held. The weight of the wooden steps was quite prohibitive. Plus, they would snag and tear the carpet. Ray told me about how he actually got the idea for the **STEP** one night. He said that, one night, he was watching his son, Richard, playing with Legos. Bingo!!! A light went off in Ray's mind. Then and there, Ray created the design of the **STEP**, which was made of very light and hard plastic. Ray and Rich

went on and patented what they called the **STEP**, and they started mass producing and selling the product worldwide. If you have been an owner/operator of a club anywhere, it is very likely that you have installed the **STEP** in your club. *This great team of Ray Irwin and Rich Boggs went on to make the STEP a worldwide smash success in over 25,000 health and fitness clubs, YMCAs, university and military fitness facilities, JCCs and even home use.*

To me, the achievement of the **Step** very clearly puts **Ray Irwin** and **Rich Boggs** into the same category as my late friend, **Arthur Jones**, *Founder of Nautilus*; and **Ray Wilson** and **Augie Nieto**, *creators and Founders of LifeCycle*. As it played out, however, even though Ray essentially invented the **Step** due to his **Lego** experience with his son, Richard, the truly world class marketing guy on this amazing team was the one and only Rich Boggs. To me, this great team truly changed the world of health and fitness clubs globally by providing club owners with a product that gave them the ability to recruit and keep millions and millions of members in their clubs worldwide. Since I'm somewhat of an experienced historian of our industry by now, after 46 years in our industry, *including 27 years of publishing Club Insider*, I can't remember anything in the history of our



The CourtSouth Founders - Back L to R - Ray Irwin, Norm Cates and Rich Boggs - Seated - Fred Streck

industry that *took the country by storm more than the STEP* (Like I said, **Nautilus** and **LifeCycle** were certainly the other two true **GIANTS** in our industry).

### More Comments From Louise Irwin

**C.I.** - So, Louise, with the preceding background commentary, during your *40 years of marriage to Ray*, what would you *(See Lyle Ray Irwin Page 12)*

## THANK YOU

Thinking back on the very early days of the **STEP**, it was so cool for me to remember when I got my first batch of **STEPS**. I went over to the **STEP Company** and filled my big Buick Station Wagon, the great car that I'd nicknamed '**Bessie**,' with **STEPS**, and I took them to my Lenox Athletic Club, which was next door to Neiman Marcus at Lenox Square Mall. And, I swear... our members went **totally NUTS about the STEP**. I can truly say having those very early **STEPS** in my Lenox Club, almost before anybody else in town, truly helped my club business enormously in both membership sales *and* in member retention. It was great and amazing to watch and be a part of. And, I'm quite sure now that there are 25,000+ locations in America and around the world that could say the same thing about the **huge and very positive impact the STEP had on their club businesses!**

I'm not sure if I've ever **THANKED Ray and Rich for the enormous help the STEP gave my Lenox Athletic Club and Downtown Athletic Clubs**. But, I'm going to do that now. **THANKS GUYS!** (I know and believe in my mind and my heart that our great friend, Lyle Ray Irwin, is now in Heaven looking down on all of us with the great big smile that he was always customarily wearing!). And, I can tell you this, too. My members at the former CourtSouth at Lenox, which I'd renamed The Lenox Athletic Club after we split up the CourtSouth Clubs, didn't even wait until the classes were over to *rave about the STEP!* You know how folks walk around the classroom toweling off sweat between sets. Well, they were doing that, and while doing so, *they were also raving to me and our instructors about how much THEY LOVED the STEP!* I don't know how else to describe it, but it was as if we had handed out candy to a bunch of kids! **WOW** did they love it! The **STEP** was truly a game changer in my club, and in thousands and thousands of other clubs literally around the world, which is precisely **WHY** I definitely put the **STEP** right up there with **Nautilus** and the **LifeCycle** as one of the **Top 3 Game Changers in the History of the Health, Racquet and Sportclub Industry**.

I also want to **THANK** Ray and Rich for their long-time support of **Club Insider** with their **STEP Company** and **MOSSA advertising**. Without their dedicated and strong support of **Club Insider** over many years, I am not sure at all if we would have even made it past five years let alone to 27 years of publishing this publication which has been so important to our great industry. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT and HELP, RAY, RICH and TERRY!**

-Norm Cates



Rich Boggs, Norm Cates and Ray Irwin at a Yearly Lunch Get Together

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## ...Lyle Ray Irwin

continued from page 10

say was the *most exciting time in business* that you can remember Ray experiencing and sharing with you?

**LI - Oh, it was definitely the STEP!** But, there were so many other exciting times, Norm! For example, outside of the health and sportsclub business, opening **The Blue Eagle** was exciting (**Author's Note:** The Blue Eagle was a country-rock night club that Rich, Ray, Fred Streck and I opened on Roswell Road in Sandy Springs, Georgia). Then, we started **Body Training Systems**, which is now called **MOSSA** (**Author's Note:** See **MOSSA's Full-Page Ad** on the **Inside Back Page**). We just went from one thing to the next and the next.

Now, with MOSSA, they have an online streaming platform that's just phenomenal. *The thing is the STEP has always been made in the United States.* And, while many other companies during this pandemic could not get their **STEPS** and exercise equipment in the past four months with COVID-19 shutting down many suppliers, **we have product... we have STEPS... we have weights... we're still selling. It's amazing!** This experience had been **VERY** exciting for Ray and me, because with Ray suffering from lung cancer, this was something that really helped him take his mind off that because the demand for product during this pandemic has been really heavy.

But, Norm, it's important to note here that Rich and Ray really made a great team. Ray and I always thought that Rich was very generous with his credits for Ray. He was always bringing up Ray's creativity and support. Ray was quite happy, and he was just fine being behind the 'behind the scenes guy' at the **STEP** and all of their other endeavors.

**(Author's Note:** Rich Boggs really was, and continues to be, a truly world-class

marketing guru. And, by the time he and Ray started marketing the **STEP**, this was something that Rich had already proven, over and over. First, via his great work on our *CourtSouth* group of nine racquetball clubs, including four in Atlanta; two in Knoxville, Tennessee; one in Murfreesboro, a suburb of Nashville, Tennessee; and one each in Birmingham, Alabama and Columbus, Georgia. Then, after the four of us *CourtSouth* partners went our separate ways in 1981, their terrific *SportsLife* group of Atlanta clubs was very successful. *SportsLife* was an excellent group of Atlanta area clubs they'd created with **Lou Off** and **Gerry Alles**. Then, lately, in the last ten years, with **MOSSA**, formerly known as *Body Training Systems*, that became a great organization in which Rich has groomed and mentored another industry star, **Terry Browning**. So, to say the least, Ray was in mighty good company for marketing skills when he and Rich converted Ray's *Lego idea* into the **STEP**.)

**C.I. -** Let's talk about the situation six years ago when Ray was hit with throat cancer. I know he fought it hard, and he defeated it. So, would you please share with us what it was like for you and Ray while he was fighting throat cancer and how he defeated it?

**LI -** Absolutely. Six years ago, Ray was hoarse. And, doggone it, he wouldn't go to the doctor! So, I finally got him to go to the doctor, and they diagnosed him with throat cancer. And, like everything else he did, he never complained. He just took it in stride. He would go over and get his radiation treatment, and then, he would go to work all day. He kept exercising regularly. He continued to eat. We really focused on keeping his energy level up. We did a lot of research on cancer patients with throat cancer and what we had to do. Fortunately, with throat cancer, there is a 95% success rate. We felt really good about that. He was amazing. Sure, he got

tired, but again, he never missed work. He never missed exercise. He never lost his appetite. He never lost any weight. He just came through it with *FLYING COLORS!* People were praying for him. Jack, our oldest son, gave him a massage every week. Rich was giving him special water to drink. Everybody was just jumping in and doing all these things. He was very, very positive. Ray's reaction was, 'Oh, well, I'm going to take care of it and plough through it,' which he did.

**C.I. -** Louise, back in the late 1970s, I was a U.S. Air Force Jet Instructor Pilot during the Vietnam War. And, in that job, I taught guys right out of college how to fly high performance jets. I think I mentioned to you prior to this interview that I can tell you for sure that Ray would have been one heck of a great fighter pilot had he pursued aviation. He was one of those guys you wouldn't believe was real, because after knowing Ray for 46 years, I have yet to ever see ray get mad about anything! Not even once! Ever! Ray was **ALWAYS CALM, COOL and COLLECTED**. He was one of those guys who would definitely have finished *1st in a Class of 75* student pilots like those I used to train. Ray was a truly amazing guy!

**LI -** He sure was.

**C.I. -** Louise, we have reached the point in this interview where we must discuss Ray's passing. Sadly, Ray was again hit with cancer in January of this year. This time, he was hit hard with lung cancer. Over all these years, I had been staying in touch with Ray and Rich via emails, phone calls, our annual Christmas time lunch, etc. During that time, when Ray was hit by cancer again earlier this year, I was very sad. Then, about a month ago, I was happy because the last time I ever spoke with him, it sounded like Ray was winning his lung cancer battle, too. He sounded upbeat because he felt that he was beating cancer

a second time. So, Louise, what was Ray's second cancer battle like for both of you? When did the doctors send him home from the hospital? And, what was his status when they sent him home?

**LI -** In October of 2019, he and our son, Jack, went to Atlantic Station in Midtown Atlanta for a 5K road race put on by the Atlanta Track Club. Ray came in first in his age group in a 5K road race! Can you believe he came in first!? His goal was to take a couple of minutes off of his previous time. But, then, at the end of October, he started coughing, and it wouldn't go away. I told him he needed to go to the doctor, and like his normal, typical male thing, and like before, he ignored me!

At the end of December, he went in for a check-up, and they did x-rays. They came back and said he had a mass in his lung. So, in January of this year, they came out with the diagnosis that he was at **Stage 3 lung cancer**... the medical term being: *squamous cell carcinoma*. He had a tumor the size of a baseball in the upper lobe of his left lung. Ray, who had never, ever had any blood pressure issues during his life, not only had lung cancer, he then got *atrial fibrillation a/k/a Afib*, and then, he got *pneumonia*.

It was just one battle after another! He was always confident. He was always upbeat. He still had a great sense of humor. All of the nurses and doctors just loved him. **He was just Ray.** He was a true gentleman to the end, Norm. He had lost about 30 pounds in the hospital because of the pneumonia, and they actually had him in isolation and were testing him for COVID-19. The test came back negative.

He was released on April 1st, and he came back home. They put him on 24/7 oxygen, and we set up a routine. We did research, and we did everything that we could to try to get weight back on him. It was very hard because he had no appetite, but he was eating small bits

(See **Lyle Ray Irwin** Page 15)



Ray Irwin and Rich Boggs



Ray and Louise Irwin Ready for a 5K



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**...Oakland Hills Club**

continued from page 3

Our thoughts are with all of them, as well. Truthfully, Jim, Sr. and Jim, Jr. are experiencing the same challenges as all of you who're reading this.

However, at *Club Insider*, it's our attitude that the "Show Must Go On!" And, with that mindset, we're bringing you this special story. I invite you to read on as I interview **Jim Thompson, Sr., President of Oakland Hills Tennis Club**.

**An Interview With Jim Thompson, Sr., President of Oakland Hills Tennis Club**

**Club Insider (C.I.)** - Jim, please tell us when and where you were born and where you grew up.

**Jim Thompson (JT)** - I was born in Oakland, California on May 21, 1942, and I was raised in Alameda, California.

**C.I.** - Did you participate in sports while growing up, and in high school, and if YES, what sports? Let me guess: **Tennis!**

**JT** - I played basketball and tennis in grammar school and high school (St. Joseph Grammar and High School, 12 years). I first started with basketball in the 5th grade, and I started playing tennis in public parks at age 13. I was on the high school basketball team, but I dropped out in my Junior year, as I wasn't really that good. I enjoyed park tennis as a youth, but I never participated in competitive tennis.

**C.I.** - Did you attend college? If yes, where did you go and what was your major? And, did you participate in sports while you were in college?

**JT** - I completed two years of junior college,



Jim Thompson, Sr.

majoring in business. After that, I graduated from Oakland City College with an AA in Business Administration. I played with the Advanced Tennis class at Oakland City College, but I never competed.

**C.I.** - Jim, you and your family are now celebrating an amazing 45 years in business at your Oakland Hills Tennis Club. **CONGRATULATIONS! What a great achievement!** You and your team should be mighty proud, that's for SURE! Please go back in time and tell us what your previous activities were that preceded that and led up to the creation of and operation of your Oakland Hills Tennis Club for what's now a truly amazing 45 years.

**JT** - I got married to my wife, **Eileen**, in 1963, and she is the love of my life. We're celebrating 57 years of marriage on August 31, 2020. Also, my dad took me into his painting contracting business that same year, August 10th of 1963.

In 1964, I got hooked on real estate, and I obtained my salesman's license. In 1966, I earned my Real Estate

Broker's License. My focus in real estate was investment properties, and Eileen and I started out early with apartment investments.

To stay healthy, Eileen decided to start playing tennis in 1968. Previously, that was a sport I couldn't get her to play! But, she got hooked on tennis and dragged me back. In 1968, tennis started booming, and I was amazed that one could make a profitable enterprise out of the sport. After two years of searching, I came across our beautiful 6.3 acres of property in the Oakland hills, and I decided that, since I couldn't afford to join a club, I might as well build one on my own!

The owner of the property was a major Bay Area Real Estate Developer named **Robert T. Nahas**, and he backed me 100%. I owe a lot of credit to him because he's the reason I'm in this business today. He and his family, but especially his son, **Randy Nahas**, were great! They assisted with financing, building, mentoring and dealing with me, a *bonafide neophyte in such endeavors*. Randy and I are still great friends until this day, and so are our wives.

Mr. Nahas set us up in a corporation. His five children, the **5 R Trust**, owned 50% of the corporation; Eileen and I owned the other 50%. The club opened on **August 1, 1975** with 10 tennis courts and a 4,000 square-foot clubhouse. We installed the pool the following May. In 1978, the Nahas's sold their interest in the club to my mother and father (I couldn't afford to buy them out). Eileen and I acquired my parent's interest in 1988. Today, we own 100% of the corporation.

In 1988, after acquiring my parent's interest, Eileen and I added 8,500 square feet to the club, incorporating fitness, aerobics and expanding our babysitting services. In 2018, with tennis

waning, we took out one tennis court and added four Pickleball courts.

**C.I.** - Who are your key employees, and how long have they been with you? And, Jim, how many total full-time employees do you have and how many part-time employees?

**JT** - Two of my longest employees are our son, **Jim Jr.**, and our daughter, **Michelle**. Jim Jr. has been with me for 35 years, and Michelle has almost 30 years with us. *It's really a family operation.* In normal times, I have about 12 full-time employees and 38 part-time employees all year round. And, we have 15 part-time employees who come in on a seasonal basis as needed. That's remained pretty consistent over the years.

**C.I.** - Jim, I've visited your very well-done website ([www.oaklandhills.com](http://www.oaklandhills.com)). Your club property, pool, courts, etc. are all beautiful and quite impressive. Do you have an *Initiation Fee*, and if yes, how much is it? How about your *monthly dues*?

**JT** - It costs **\$1,500** to join our club, and we have six categories of dues: *Individual, Couple and Family for Tennis* (all facilities) or **Fitness** (all facilities except access to tennis courts). So, our dues range from **\$150 to \$314 or \$150 to \$245** for fitness-only memberships, but that does include access to our Pickleball Courts.

**C.I.** - Please tell us about Pickleball at your club. You mentioned you installed those courts in 2018. How many Pickleball players do you now have at the club? Have you seen a lot of folks drop tennis in lieu of Pickleball?

**JT** - Yes, we added Pickleball in 2018 because we decided to include that sport with our Fitness Memberships. Currently,

(See **Oakland Hills Club Page 15**)



Welcome to Oakland Hills Tennis Club



Courts With a View at Oakland Hills Tennis Club

## ...Lyle Ray Irwin

continued from page 12

every two hours. They were sending in physical therapists. Ray loved the physical therapist coming in twice a week because they would walk and do weight training. He actually used the *STEP*, of all things! Was it normal? No, it wasn't. But, for sure, he was moving, and, that made him happy so he would have a smile on his face. He was always exercising with a smile on his face! I've even got videos of him exercising and smiling. It wasn't a great deal, but he was always moving.

His death was unexpected. I didn't expect him to pass away. We had just switched over to go to Emory for treatment. We had an appointment the next day, and I thought we were going to be there. Ray was

a gentleman up until his last breath. I got to tell him I loved him before he died. But, he knew that; I didn't have to tell him. It was just one of those things. You want to say, 'I love you' when you are losing the love of your life. I have nothing but incredibly good memories of Ray!

### The PERFECT MAN

**Norm Cates** - I understand, Louise. If there was ever a **PERFECT MAN** on this Earth, it was Lyle Ray Irwin, your beloved husband and the great Father of your sons, Jack and Richard. That's the **TRUTH!**

■ ■ ■

Folks, your *Club Insider* Founder

and **Tribal Leader** Since 1993 was crying during this part of an amazing interview with **Louise Irwin**. And, as I transcribed this interview that I was blessed to have with his very brave and wonderful Wife, and now, Widow, Louise Irwin, I cried again! Sorry, but I just can't help it. But, you all should know that I feel as if I have truly lost a **Brother in this life**.

I ache and hurt very deeply for **Louise**; their sons, **Jack and Richard**; and **Ray's partner, Rich Boggs**. **God Bless them all**. And, I hope that **God will help them through this extremely sad and very difficult and trying time!**

Let me close this by saying to you all that my reference to my tears at this time is for me to live up to my pledge of 27 years ago when I created *Club Insider*, which was to: "Tell-It-Like-It-Is!"

## ...Oakland Hills Club

continued from page 14

we have about 60 avid Pickleball players, about half of whom are also tennis players. To my knowledge, many of the tennis players have continued playing both sports.

**C.I.** - Jim, how have you and your family been doing during this awful pandemic? I read your well-done letter to your members on your website. From that writing, it's clear that this pandemic has been hitting your operation pretty hard, just as it has every other health, racquet and sportsclub, as well as every other business in the United States.

**JT** - The lockdown has proved to be devastating to our club with a lot of membership cancellations, and for sure, a lot of stress. We're limping along with outdoor sports permitted, but the restrictions are handcuffing. The club lost about 10% of its membership, so far. But, the cancellations continue trickling in every

day. We started out on March 16, 2020 with 1,000 memberships (about 3,300 members). We are now down to slightly less than 900 memberships today (about 3,000 members).

The club was fortunate enough to get a PPP loan. But, those funds evaporated rapidly as I kept *all* employees on the payroll. Dues for May were waived. Then, in June, we charged 50% of *normal dues*. And, in July and August, we charged 75% of *normal dues*. I believe it's hard to expect members to stay with us when their club use is so limited, and we're very lucky to have held together this long. What does the future hold? I have NO idea.

During my youth, our country was frightened with polio, tuberculosis, mumps, measles and chicken pox, among other diseases. More recently, AIDS and drug addiction have been attention getters, all with a huge loss of life and or life-affecting consequences. In no other instance has our economy ever been shut down like this, not even during World War II.

**C.I.** - Have you, or any of your staff, gotten Coronavirus? Are you aware of any of your members who've contracted Coronavirus?

**JT** - To my knowledge, no member or staff have contracted Coronavirus. There was a minor scare with one of the member's partner's having tested positive. But, the member himself tested negative, and that was that.

**C.I.** - Jim, do you have anything there that you feel is totally unique to your club and that you would like to share with our readers?

**JT** - If there is anything *truly unique* about our club, it is just the amazing view! Our 6 1/4 acres overlooks the entire San Francisco Bay area, including a beautiful vista with three bridges: the Golden Gate Bridge, the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Bridge and the San Mateo Bridge. On a clear day, you can see all the way out to the Pacific Ocean, and our sunsets are an everyday joy!

**God bless you ALL and Thank You ALL for reading and supporting Club Insider.**

(Norm Cates, Jr. is the Founder of *Club Insider*, now in its 27th year of publication, and its **Tribal Leader** Since 1993. He is a 45+ year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. As IHRSA's First President and a Co-Founder of the Association with Rick Caro and five others, in 1981; the 2001 DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award, one of IHRSA's highest honors; and Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award Winner in 2017, Norm Cates, Jr. is a highly decorated veteran who cares about you. And, he wants to hear from you. Norm can be reached by phone at 770-635-7578 or email at Norm@clubinsideronline.com.)

**C.I.** - With everything discussed, Jim, I again want to **Congratulate you and your great team at Oakland Hills Tennis Club on your 45th Anniversary!** And, I also want to express my son and partner, Justin, and my **sincere Thanks and Appreciation for you sharing your 45th Anniversary with us!**

**JT** - Thank you, Norm!

(Norm Cates, Jr. is the Founder of *Club Insider*, now in its 27th year of publication, and its **Tribal Leader** Since 1993. He is a 45+ year veteran of the health, racquet and sportsclub industry. As IHRSA's First President and a Co-Founder of the Association with Rick Caro and five others, in 1981; the 2001 DALE DIBBLE Distinguished Service Award, one of IHRSA's highest honors; and Club Industry's Lifetime Achievement Award Winner in 2017, Norm Cates, Jr. is a highly decorated veteran who cares about you. And, he wants to hear from you. Norm can be reached by phone at 770-635-7578 or email at Norm@clubinsideronline.com.)



Aquatics at Oakland Hills Tennis Club



Group Exercise at Oakland Hills Tennis Club

# Staff Stress Busting to Impact Performance During COVID

By: Karen Woodard-Chavez

As each and every one of us under 85 years of age can attest to, we are living through an unprecedented time: economically, politically, culturally, generationally and educationally... all stemming from how we are handling our worldwide health pandemic. We have no experience with this and are in a time of constant change, conflicting information leading us to lack confidence in whom and what we believe, all of which creates constant uncertainty.

Add to this, double if not triple, the workload for businesses (and families) due to learning and delivering new modes of operation which require a tremendous amount of repetition in training staff as well as members to get it right. And, the cost of getting it wrong is wayyyyy too high.

Some of you reading this article were built for rapid fire change and thrive under these conditions. However, most of us are not great at rapid fire change and find a lack of control (or illusion of control) and uncertainty exhausting, even depressing. A recent CNN poll found that, at this time last year, 1 in 15 Americans expressed that they were depressed. As of today, 1 in 4 Americans are depressed. That is a dramatic change that will have a dramatic impact on people's lives personally, physically and economically. The top three mental health conditions that are on the rise currently are depression, anxiety and stress, which can easily cascade into other mental health issues and substance abuse.

As you read this, you might be thinking, "Well, I am fine. I am not

depressed." If you are not experiencing depression, I am happy for you and hope your mental health continues to be strong. However, as a businessperson, you need to be aware of the burden that poor mental health creates economically, especially as it relates to you and your workforce, which can have an adverse impact on you, them and your business.

The remainder of this article will focus on what we can do to minimize anxiety, stress and depression for ourselves, our loved ones and our staff.

1. Far too many people feel like the sky is falling and there is no end in sight, causing them to react from a base of fear and emotion which often results in people not being at their best. Brace yourself for rude and nasty interactions and train yourself and staff to not personalize, nor escalate but instead, turn these difficult conversations into effective conversations. Please practice calm, consistent, well-thought-out-before-you-speak communication. A few helpful reminders to insure successful conversation outcomes:

**Inquiry** - Be curious, ask questions. The Dalai Lama said, "When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. When you listen, you learn more." Start by asking questions that get a dialogue going. This is not a monologue where you are the only one talking "at" the other person. Have a list of opening questions that will open the conversation. Make sure the questions are open-ended (to be answered with more than a Yes or No) and not closed-ended questions (only answered with a Yes or

No). Questions such as, "What specifically are your fears with coming back to the club?" will allow the conversation to go further and provide an opportunity for you to offer appropriate solutions.

**Acknowledgement** - Acknowledge what is said by the other person by either repeating so you are clear or summarize what they have said so you both are clear. Statements such as, "I want to make sure I am clear in understanding your thoughts. Are you saying...?" will move you in the right direction.

**Advocacy** - You are there in the conversation to support the success of this person and make sure the relationship stays strong and productive. Therefore, the importance of being emotionally ready for the conversation is critical. Snark, blaming or belittling is not of use in advocacy.

**Patience** - Be patient, do not interrupt, do not finish sentences. Give them time to digest what has been said. You may need to repeat things in different ways, not just louder, and you may need to meet several times. Setting a reasonable deadline for expectations will move you in the right direction.

**Problem Solving** - Above all, go into the conversation with the belief and behavior that this is a problem-solving opportunity, and when the conversation is over, you will have a better understanding of each other and a stronger relationship. In fact, that is good verbiage to start the conversation.



Karen Woodard-Chavez

2. Ask your staff what they need from you as their manager to feel safe and confident in their job. Of course, you have put together an effective plan to keep your staff and the others you serve safe and healthy. However, the fear still exists. This is a conversation you need to regularly have with your staff. This is important for three reasons:

- The obvious perspective of putting their fears to rest;
- This will provide an opportunity for you to learn some things that, perhaps, you did not think of previously; and,
- If you do not ask and handle it, then your staff will communicate to others, and perhaps, not in a way that is very positive.

Additionally, ask your staff what (See Karen Woodard-Chavez Page 17)

## Karen Woodard-Chavez Publishes New Book *Sterling Sales Skills: 125 Simple Tips to Polish Your Sales Success*

BOULDER, CO - Karen Woodard-Chavez has published a new book, entitled: *Sterling Sales Skills: 125 Simple Tips to Polish Your Sales Success*. This book is designed to give you the tools to make your sales success simpler, more enjoyable and more profitable in the Business-to-Consumer sales arena.

The book is written in simple brief "Tips" for easy implementation. Whether you are a sales professional veteran or new to the selling profession, each tip will provide you with insight to go further faster and increase your productivity through polishing your skills, behaviors and processes in the following areas:

■ Your Big Picture;

- Get the Gate Keeper Behind You;
- Polishing Up Your Outreach Skills;
- Polishing Up Your Sales Skills;
- Create Differentiation and Build Desire;
- Closing Skills;
- Presentation Skills;
- Whose Job Is It to Create Business?
- Beating Burn-out.

*"I've been in the sales 'game' for over 40 years. Just when I feel comfortable in my sales management processes, Karen's latest communication comes out. I'm not only reminded of what I've forgotten, but she gives new and pertinent insights into the sales process.*

*It has been my pleasure to work with Karen for 20 years. Her understanding*

*of first hiring the correct people to asking for the commitment and everything in-between is second to none.*

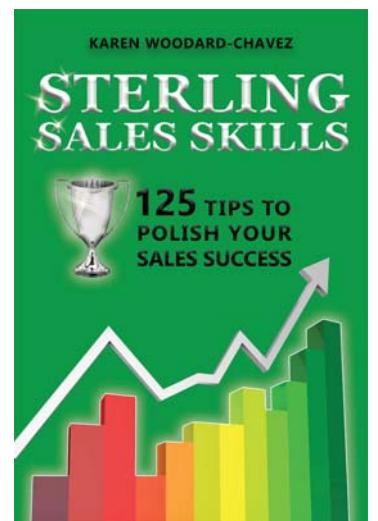
*I would highly recommend 'Sterling Sales Skills.' This book transcends industries, and it should be a required read for anyone interested in increasing their bottom line... business or individual.*

*Congratulations Karen on another home run!"*

**Steve Vucovich**

Managing Partner, Apple Athletic Club

To order, contact Karen Woodard-Chavez at [karen@karenwoodard.com](mailto:karen@karenwoodard.com) or (303) 417 - 0653.

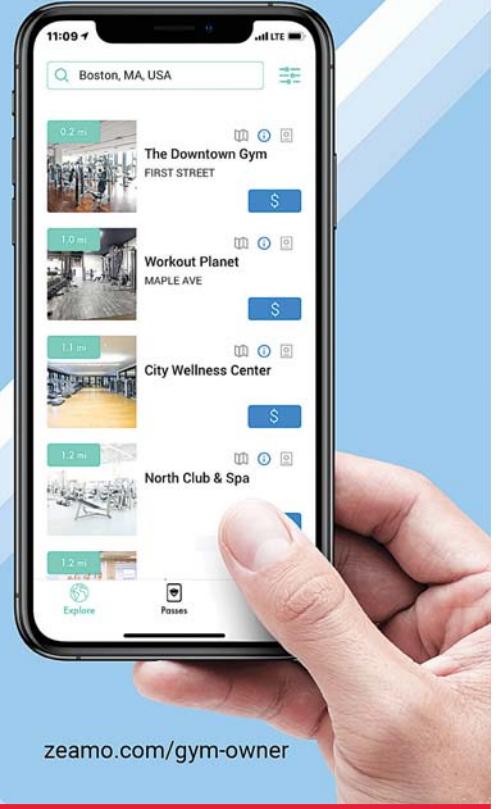




## Reach the Unreachable

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[zeamo.com/gym-owner](http://zeamo.com/gym-owner)

### ...Karen Woodard-Chavez

continued from page 16

they need from you as their manager so that they can be as productive as possible in their positions. This is a challenging economic time for most businesses and every staff person needs to be as productive as possible for the sustainability of the business.

3. Train the staff on how to express their fears, frustrations and "complaints"/contributions in a productive way. Let's create clarity on complaint versus contribution: A complaint is a statement that a situation is unsatisfactory or unacceptable. A contribution is something that you do to *help produce* or make something *successful*. Thus, a complaint is simply stating that something is wrong. A contribution can be creating clarity that something is wrong, but most importantly, offering thoughts on how to change the situation to be better.

If your staff is communicating in a negative and dysfunctional manner (complaining), remember, this is part of the *fear factor*. It is critical that you train and reinforce the communication protocol that will be the most productive. This includes who to communicate to, who not to communicate to, when and

where to communicate and the spirit of communicating the message as well as contribution. Refer to the previous section of this article on **Inquiry, Acknowledgment, Advocacy, patience and Problem Solving** as a foundation for your communication skills training. Additionally, I encourage you to utilize the *7 Cs of communication: Clear, Concise, Concrete, Correct, Coherent, Complete, Courteous*.

During difficult times such as what we are all experiencing, it is easy to fall into negativity and "the sky is falling" mentality. It is important to cleanse fear and negativity daily through correct communication. I also encourage you to challenge your staff to a "**negativity fast**" one to several days a week. This encourages staff to see things in a more positive light.

4. It is time to get serious about humor in the workplace. I am not suggesting that everyone is joking every moment of the workday. But, humor is something that most of us use and enjoy instinctively, and there is plenty of scientific research to confirm what those natural impulses tell us: *Humor is good for us*.

Psychologists **Herbert Lefcourt** and **Rod Martin** were among the first to prove that stressed out people with a strong sense of humor became less depressed and anxious than those in whom it was

less well-developed. Even the anticipation of having a good chuckle increases levels of beta-endorphins, which make us feel good and helps keep our immune system functioning. Simply said... *laughter relieves tension*.

Research shows humor encourages us to collaborate, provides motivation and can help prevent burnout. It is a sign of a successful leader: when used effectively, it signals confidence, competence and high status. And, in workplaces where humor is shared openly, the culture tends to be one that encourages people to be themselves, resulting in a more loyal and productive workforce.

To make humor work more effectively in your workplace, follow a few simple guidelines:

**Keep it appropriate:** Be aware of who you're joking with and which buttons, good or bad, your comment might press. If in doubt, "Keep it PC and PG."

**Base your humor on good intentions:** Aim to laugh with someone, rather than at them. It is important to have no malice in your joking.

**Be prepared to laugh at yourself (and be yourself).**

**Be aware of sarcasm:** Sarcasm sends a mixed message that leaves people wondering if what you said was funny, serious or even mean. Sarcasm is best used with people you know verrrrrrrr well.

5. Learn to animate and enunciate. While wearing masks, we are missing 50% of expressive non-verbal communication due to the majority of our face being covered. Additionally, masks muffle our verbal communication, especially for those who experience hearing difficulty. When this happens, much can be lost in translation, and the sense of empathy is muddled.

Honing your non-verbal communication skills is critical at this time. One of the ways you can do this is through animation of facial expressions. Smiling, even though no one can see your mouth is still very important. When you smile, your eyes and the skin around your eyes changes. Look at yourself in a mirror whilst wearing a mask and smiling. If your eyes and the skin around your eyes does not change, then you will need to work on expressions with your eyes such as raising your eyebrows. One of my clients, **Sarah Henry**, who is the *Membership Director at Bronson Wellness Center* in South Haven, Michigan, has verrrry expressive eyes. However, she has joked about animating (See *Karen Woodard-Chavez* Page 19)

# Business Finance Depot Video Series: Equipment Leasing

By: Paul Bosley

**Publisher's Note:** In March, our friend and Club Insider Advertiser and Contributing Author, **Paul Bosley, Managing Member of Health Club Experts dba Business Finance Depot** produced a new video series covering various topics that may help you in your health and fitness club business. This month, we resume coverage of those videos, and over the next few months, we will be sharing each video and Paul's accompanying writing. To get maximum value, we recommend you to *Tune In* to both his written and spoken words.

■ ■ ■

This month's video on Equipment Leasing can be watched by going to: [bit.ly/clubinsider98](http://bit.ly/clubinsider98).

**Introduction** - This video about equipment leasing describes a financing option available to owners of fitness centers, group fitness centers and personal training studios to finance the purchase of fitness equipment and non-fitness equipment. Non-fitness equipment can include security systems, entertainment systems, computer hardware and software, flooring, outdoor and indoor signage, and any tangible items needed to operate your business.

If your equipment requirements are relatively small, and you have the money, then buy the equipment. If you require a substantial amount of equipment, why tie up a large amount of cash, especially when you could use that same money to grow your business in other ways?

**Make  
It  
Fun!**

The following are four key benefits to your business of leasing equipment:

**1. Conserve and Control Cash** - Equipment leasing saves your working capital for day-to-day business expenses, business expansions or unexpected business-related expenses. In addition to saving your working capital, a lease provides a pre-determined monthly line item, which can help you budget more effectively. With predictable monthly expenses, you can develop long-term plans for your business with confidence and get your business set up with the equipment you need, while keeping your cash flow available for other expenditures.

**2. Upgrade Outdated Equipment** - Depending on your business type, equipment leasing can help you stay on top of the latest advances in equipment and technology. How long do you plan to keep the asset? If you're only planning to keep it for the short term, you may find that leasing is a better alternative than buying it and trying to resell it when you no longer need it. You can also determine the length of your lease, so if you work with technology that changes rapidly, you can request a short lease to ensure you are always at the cutting edge in your industry.

**3. Tax Benefits** - Lease financing presents your business with tax benefits with a full deduction of lease payments against current earnings. It also preserves working capital that you wouldn't have access to if you had to purchase your equipment up front. Check with your tax advisor to determine the tax benefits of leasing for your business.

**4. More Attractive Balance Sheet** - Monthly lease payments are viewed as a business expense instead of long-term debt. Having little debt on your balance sheet helps you secure financing to fund your business.

The main manufacturers (Life Fitness, Matrix, Precor, etc.) offer equipment leasing for their equipment. Companies like ours that offer equipment leasing can combine invoices from a variety of manufacturers into one lease. The typical lease for existing businesses will require a one- or two-month security deposit and offer up to a 60-month repayment term. Start-up businesses are required to pay a 20% down payment, and their repayment term ranges up to 36 months. Lease documentation fees range from \$95 to \$495 and are paid at the time the deposit is paid. Nearly all leases in our industry are capital leases, so the equipment will be owned by the business at the end of



Paul Bosley

the lease term. Owner(s) with more than 20% equity are required to personally guarantee equipment lease, but the good news is that the equipment is the only collateral required!

■ ■ ■

For more information, contact **Paul Bosley** at [paul@businessfinancedepot.com](mailto:paul@businessfinancedepot.com) or visit [www.businessfinancedepot.com](http://www.businessfinancedepot.com).

*(Paul Bosley is the Managing Member of Healthclubexperts.com dba Business Finance Depot. Paul can be reached at [paul@businessfinancedepot.com](mailto:paul@businessfinancedepot.com).)*



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## How to Bootstrap Your Gym's Sales and Marketing During the Pandemic

By: Jim Thomas

The pandemic is affecting every gym operation differently: some gyms are going to go out of business; some will manage through it and be okay; and some will benefit hugely from it simply due to the kind of gym or service they offer.

However, we simply can't stop marketing and communicating with our members and prospects, and now is the time to think about what we can do with what we have and where we are (play the hand we're dealt).

So, with that in mind, here are some ideas for effective marketing activities you can do that cost little or no money and that every gym should probably be doing more of anyway.

Some may work for you; some may not, but take a look and see what you think:

**1. Reach out to past telephone and web inquiries that never bought** - Try reaching out to potential members that have made inquiries previously but never joined or never went through the full sales cycle. Your email database is going to be a great asset for you right now, so leverage your database to communicate with all of your prospects.

**2. Leverage your gym's vendor network** - We can't go to networking events right now. Therefore, we have to do what we probably should have been doing a lot more of anyway: proactively reaching out to our top vendors and our top contacts and communicating with them more. If you're a gym owner or manager, if you're in a sales role, now is a great time to be reaching out to your main contacts anyway and finding ways to add value and help solve some problems that can make your relationship even stronger.

**3. Write more blogs and articles, publish more** - If you have a website, which you all do, this is going to be your single, main asset. So, you want to double down on it. You should focus especially on anything related to how you are a safe place to work out and how you can get results for your members.

**4. Repurpose your articles onto LinkedIn, Medium or AmericanTowns** - Obviously, social media platforms are free to use, but they're really noisy. We have to find ways to cut through that noise. The one way to do that is to republish your top-performing articles on your website currently (and the ones that you're writing) onto your personal LinkedIn profiles, Medium or AmericanTowns as articles. This gets them in front of your network, your vendors and your audience.

**5. Embrace video production across your**

entire team - We want to create video. We want to get out there, and we want people to see our faces, to hear our voices. We want people to see our body language. You don't have to have all the gear. A smartphone, a low-cost microphone, a tripod, etc. will work. But, it doesn't matter, really. Balancing your smartphone on top of a pile of books and being able to do a video right now is good enough. Keep it specific. Address main questions, fears and anxieties. Do some walkthroughs or demos. Keep it short, and just get it out there. Perfection is not what we're aiming for. We want to get it done.

**6. Create a proactive plan for saving member cancellations** - We need to get ahead of concerns before they become problems. Proactively reach out to your members at risk. Put yourself in a position to understand how the pandemic is affecting them. This gives you the opportunity to think about how you could provide more value at this time. It may mean that you have to think of a new service, a new product or a new way to provide value. This just gives you that chance to get ahead.

**7. Proactively reach out to prospects** - The first thing to remember here is that people will still buy, so you want to be communicating with your database. Member referrals, former members, missed sales, internet leads, telephone and web inquiries, corporate accounts, etc. are some quick opportunities. Instead of waiting for them to move through the buying process, call them, text them, email them and create a personalized connection with them. Reach out proactively instead of letting them go through the process organically.

**8. Follow up quickly and personally with all gym inquiries** - Give all your inquiries super service as much as you possibly can.

In other words, not only are you going to act quickly and get back to people in good time, but use video when you do it to make a personalized connection. Do everything you can to make your buyers feel special (because they are).

**9. Publish content where your prospects are** - You need to be leveraging social media platforms, wherever your prospects are hanging out at the moment: current members, potential clients and potential members. Let go of the need to have all the content on your website. Put the content on the platform where your prospects are. It might mean publishing whole articles on LinkedIn, Medium and AmericanTowns and link back to your website.

**10. Ask for referrals. Who do your members know that could join?** You should communicate with people who are either current members or current clients of yours, or people who have been previous members and really liked what you did for them. It's always good to reach back out to them, with a personalized touch, to see if you can help them in any way. Also, you can ask them for a testimonial or a case study. Then, ask them if they did enjoy what you did for them and them if there is anybody else that they know right now who would benefit from working with you.

**11. Embrace live chat for your website** - Finally, live chat. Get Facebook Messenger onto your website so your members and prospects can communicate with you directly. I have seen member and prospect interaction go up as much as 4X by using Facebook Messenger as the live chat feature. This is going to be especially important for gyms that used to rely on prospects coming to see you in your studio or in your gym.

**...Karen Woodard-Chavez**

continued from page 17

her body more by using "jazz hands" when she sees people. If jazz hands are not for you, think about how you can animate your body more to make for the loss in facial expression to more effectively create empathy and connection.

Enunciation, inflection, slowing your speech and volume of voice are also critical behaviors to master during this time to further create connection and minimize errors in communication.

• • •

During this time, your leadership skills and the repetition of why we do what we do matter more than ever to create

clarity of vision and re-enforce the Core Values of your business, which will remind all who are employed in your business why they are there. The tips in this article will further help to make each day easier for you and your staff to continue with your contribution in how you impact the lives of those you serve.

(Karen Woodard-Chavez is President of Premium Performance Training in Boulder, Colorado and Ixtapa, Mexico. She has owned and operated clubs since 1985 and now consults with and trains staff throughout the world in multiple industries. She provides her services on-site, online, by phone and through her books, DVDs and manuals. She can be contacted at 303-417-0653 or [karen@karenwoodard.com](mailto:karen@karenwoodard.com).)



Jim Thomas

### Let's get back to the basics

This is what gym sales and marketing is all about: personalized communication with members and prospects in a way that's going to help them to feel like they want to be part of what you do at the gym.

*(An Outsourced CEO and expert witness, Jim Thomas is the Founder and President of Fitness Management USA Inc., a management consulting, turnaround and brokerage firm specializing in the gym and sports industry. With more than 25 years of experience owning, operating and managing clubs of all sizes, Thomas lectures and delivers seminars, webinars and workshops across the globe on the practical skills required to successfully overcome obscurity, improve sales, build teamwork and market fitness programs and products. In addition, his company will buy gym equipment from gyms liquidating or closing. Visit his website at [www.fmconsulting.net](http://www.fmconsulting.net) or [www.jimthomasondemand.com](http://www.jimthomasondemand.com).)*

Back  
to  
Basics

# The Long Journey Back

By: Thomas Plummer

**Publisher's Note:** During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Thomas Plummer has written and presented a series of Letters to his readers. This month, we present another Letter in that series because we feel it contains important information to consider as you move forward with re-opening and beyond. This is a new world, and to survive it, new ways of thinking and the solutions that are a result of that thinking will be crucial.

■ ■ ■

Change is a part of life and a part of business. You accept the world as it is now, adapt to how you have to live and build a forward-looking life.

There will be a short window of stabilization in the industry, followed by a second round of misery when the virus meets the flu season. As cases rise now, states are already reversing course and adding more operational restrictions, so we will have to operate on a week-by-week basis adjusting to what is happening at the time.

The overall consensus is that, by the early summer next year, we will be working with vaccines, improved treatments and possibly the arrival of a saturation point where, as a group, we have moved past this thing.

Until then, we will be regulated and restricted in our operations, and the clients will be dazed and confused by the ever-changing rules we will have to give them to get them into the gyms again.

It does not matter if you do not believe this thing is real. The reality you do have to deal with is the rules and restrictions handed to us as those in charge fight back, and these rules dictate how we, as owners, have to operate. I cannot fight shadows of what might be. But, I can punch a rule in the face because it is there, and I can deal with its reality.

In business, you have to make the same choice. You analyze what is, give up what was and move on adapting to the new demands of how business has to be run. The virus has changed the nature of how we have to do business for the next several years, which in terms of small business, is a forever time of change.

If you refuse to change, you fight back clinging to what was denying the change that is already wrapped around you. When you deny, you live in anger fighting to get back to a "normal" that will never exist again in this business. You fight, you rage and you rant, but how it was will never be what it is again.

If you want to survive as a human, and as a businessperson, let go of what was and embrace what is. Today belongs to those willing to give up trying to capture what used to be and figure out how to function and win as things are today and will be during the next few years.

None of your anger brings back how

it used to be. None of your rants change the reality you are now living in. Scream unfair, I want my life back, yell all you want, but it makes no difference. And, while you are whining, there are those who quietly accept how things are and readjust their lives to fit the world as it is, not how they want it to be.

You have a choice to make now while you still have time: **evolve or die.**

**Nothing will change in the fitness world until at least May, 2021.**

In the earlier letters in this series, I made several key predictions, which all came true:

- At least 30% of all the gyms in the country will permanently close;
- Most gyms will not get reopened until July;
- Government restrictions will force us to drastically change how we do business;
- Gym owners who force openings will suffer;
- Gym owners who let their personal frustration rule by exploding on social media will pay the price by opening with a reduced membership, having driven away a large percentage of their membership;
- Gyms not using contracts will hurt the most. The month-to-month membership gyms were the first to fold;
- Online is a support tool, not the total answer;
- We have to change to meet the new client who has evolved out of this mess.

## Be Prepared for the Long Haul

Now is the time to reorganize your business for the long year to come. Business will not, and I emphasize again, will not return to the normalcy of 2019, if ever, until early summer of next year.

The combination of flu season, the resurgence of the virus in multiple states and the slow adaptation of the population to safety practices is going to make this a long year. Remember, hope for the best but be prepared for the absolute worst days, and this is what I am advocating here. Here are a few things you can do now to make the year easier:

■ If you can, work with your landlord and put together a scaled rent proposal starting at about half of what you pay regularly then working slowly upward back to full rent starting in May. Even landlords who were rigid in the beginning are now understanding this is not going to go away in a few months and everyone starts to pay again as promised in leases.

■ Refinance all debt and extend it out for 7-10 years if you can. This is also true for private investors. By refinancing, you lower your monthly operating expenses, allowing for more free cash flow as business begins to build again. The SBA, working with local banks, is doing great work in getting owners

those \$150,000 express loans, but there are other options available to, and the Feds are expected to open up new loan options as well.

■ Restructure your personal debt and do not be afraid to ask for help. If you have a new car loan, can you refinance for a fresh five years? Can you refinance your home for a fresh twenty and ask for three months of non-payments, too? Can you hit the parents or a friend for a loan and do a complete debt consolidation package?

## What Money Will You Need

You will need at least three months of reserve capital to cover operating losses between now and May, 2021. For example, if it takes \$25,000 per month to pay all your bills, including your team, it will take you an extra \$75,000 between now and May, 2021 to cover shortfalls as you rebuild your business.

If I am wrong about this, you kick butt and your business is back and covering expenses, I will apologize later and buy you a beer or two. If I am right, then you are safe and will not need the reserve, but let's plan to need the money.

## What Has to Change in Your Gym to Keep You in Business

Some form of distancing, advance cleaning and sanitation, and most likely, wearing masks is going to be the new reality in your business throughout the winter.

The gyms who opened without masks in the states that opened early are now mostly shut again and most likely be able to reopen a second round with increased distancing loads and mandatory masks for everyone in the space.

I do not care about your politics here; you are going to be mandated to wear masks indoors in your gyms in almost every state. You accept it and figure out how to make it work or you posture and resist. **Your choice, but remember again, the client also has the right to take his business, and money, somewhere else.**

Most chain gyms are simply too large to maintain the extra needed level of cleanliness needed to keep everyone safe. These gyms claim to be clean, but by the nature of how they make money, which is by cramming more people into a smaller space, maintaining this visual will be unlikely because of the increased cost and reduced membership through spacing requirements.

Training gyms, the heart of the industry these days, are clean by our normal business standards but not clean enough by virus increased standards. Bluntly, most training gyms have never been as clean as we believe them to be because we clean them using our coaches, family members and the dog, and this looser standard will not work going forward.

You will need to get these gyms professionally cleaned on a daily basis, meaning you will have to hire a dedicated



Thomas Plummer

cleaner who has training; invest in equipment, such as foggers; and learn the safety protocols for destroying a tenacious virus.

You also have to learn to exploit your cleaning procedures. Daily videos, using testimonials citing how clean the gym is and how safe the person feels in your gym, coupled with short clips of the cleaning process underway with someone masked up, shield on, gloves and fogging the place, will become part of your daily marketing.

## An Important Side Note

Most states are slowly adapting a set of rules that seem consistently accepted by the powers that run your individual state. These are current rules used early by the Northeastern states and seem to be making their way to the states that went early without guidelines and now must close, adapt and reopen.

Here are a few of the key points you should expect to come your way, especially in the early states that shut down the gyms again:

■ You may be mandated to keep fixed equipment fourteen feet apart, including center to center on treads.

■ Mandatory masks for staff and every client entering your space. There will be no exceptions for this rule. You will have to adjust and figure out how to make this work with your clients. You may need a Bluetooth headset coupled with a small speaker to be heard in small groups.

■ Your group rooms (more on that later) will be forced to operate at about one quarter capacity and probably a max of half your normal load.

■ You may be forced to create a thirty-minute window between all groups so the gym can be properly cleaned.

■ You may be forced/allowed to offer outdoor workouts for any groups of more than four. (See Thomas Plummer Page 21)

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If you have the dirt, consider a permanent 1,400-square-foot permanent structure like a park pavilion.

■ You as the owner, and the clients, will be fined during random inspections if you are found in violation of these rules, and many states will forcibly shut you down and might take your business license.

■ The city in which you operate has the right to go beyond what the state will mandate, so expect weird rules that do not seem logical. Most of these dissipate in a few weeks, but you may get surprised.

### Follow the Rules and Err on the Side of the Most Terrified Client

Gyms in the states that have gone slower, set and followed more safety rules and are only now slowly increasing loads, have found it still takes their client base a full 90 days to regain traction.

The clients, as discussed in earlier letters, fall into three categories: the ones who do not believe and do not care about the virus (although this group is shrinking) and who are the first in after reopening; the timid who wait a full 30 - 45 days to reenter, waiting to see what happened to the first wave (did they get sick or die); and the truly terrified who may, if proof exists supplied by you over time, will come back toward the end of the 90-day opening window.

Most early openers really messed this up. The early guys fell victim to the social media trap, where a handful of your clients are pounding you every day begging you to open and swearing they will all be there when you do.

The mistake is you believe the handful represents the entire membership. The early guys refused to follow the "recommended" procedures, opting to go without masks and the other things mandated in states that have had successful reopenings for gyms basing their opening model on the belief the few loud clients represented the majority, and this proved to be false.

Run your gym as if you are operating for the ten most terrified members you have. Yes, the first group of live forever clients may snicker, but eventually, everyone allowed in your gym, in most states, will have to wear masks or be banned or fined.

**Overkill is a good optic. Exploit it through consistent social media posts, such as the cleaning staff doing its thing and let the clients speak for you. You can always back down later and go easier if the situation allows, but opening, getting shut down, the trying to reopen again will be easier if you overkill it rather than going too easy and trying to ramp it up later.**

### Marketing That Works

Exploit the closures and fear members have in your community. There will be a large number of clients without gyms as they fail and an even larger number of members who do not believe their current gyms are safe, and therefore, refuse to go back. Chase these groups.

Offer a mini-membership using six

weeks for somewhere in the \$149 - \$299 range and actually call it a mini-membership. Here are a few thoughts on promoting it:

■ Use two different social media tracts to promote this for the first ninety-days you are back:

**Track One** is the owner stating in a video: We are still here. If your gym has closed, or if you do not feel safe in your current gym, please come try us. We are offering a six-week mini-membership for only \$\_\_\_\_ to give you a chance to try us and see if we are the gym for you. Here is what we are doing to keep you safe...

**Track Two** is the same theme but using clients in short testimonial videos saying how safe they feel in your gym. If you shoot these outside of the gym, it is okay to do it without masks, but in the gym, let the client wear a mask to validate your safety point.

■ Go back to every old member you have had since January, 2018, and send him an old fashioned snail mail using these four paragraph themes. Also back this up with an email and call as well:

**Paragraph 1** - Thank you for being a former member. We want you to know we are still here and still in business despite everything that is going on.

**Paragraph 2** - Here is what we are doing to keep our clients safe.

**Paragraph 3** - Bring this letter in by September 30 and I will give you, as a former client, a 30-day trial to check us out again and see everything we are doing to protect our clients.

**Paragraph 4** - Thank them for their past loyalty and let them know you would love to see them back with you.

■ Remember, it is about safety, not results these days. I will trust you with my body if you can prove you are safe and care about me as a client. I assume you can get me results, as all gyms claim, but there are few gyms the clients trust these days with their personal safety.

■ You will get frustrated and get sloppy. Keep up a steady weekly supply of videos through the end of the year, talking about safety issues and what you are doing to keep your current, and future clients, safe. Post three different videos per week, running for seven days each, at about \$2 - 3 per day, for at least the rest of the year. Again, these are a combination of you as the owner and using your clients as testimonials.

### Big Boxes Will Hurt the Most

The big box players, as of now, have done little to sway the clients that they will be safe. Even the stupid details (such as how do I open the door to get into this place) are being overlooked.

Treadmills with out-of-order signs on every other one does nothing to make the client feel safe, and in fact, makes them mad as they know the treads work because you just blocked them from their favorite spot.

Visuals and optics are everything. You must take out every other treadmill, reduce your amount of fixed equipment, severely cut down or eliminate most of your traditional group exercise and basically reinvent your entire membership plan.

You will not be allowed to operate at full capacity in most states until at least early summer of next year. Adjust your emphasis away from group-driven activities and rebuild toward smaller groups and one-on-one.

**The basic concept for decades in the mainstream world has been to chase volume, or in other words, how we get the most members, at the lowest competitive price, into this box? This does not work in the world of the virus where total capacity will be limited for the next year.**

The question now is: How can I improve my return per client served learning to make more money from fewer clients? Volume is gone; return per client will rule in the big boxes.

Traditional group can be replaced with smaller, but pricier options, such as boxing, meditation and restoration of natural movement. One on one, usually less than 6% of most box gyms, can be enhanced if you create smaller, gyms within our gyms where the client does not have to share equipment or come in contact with other members. The days of dragging a client through your gym sharing equipment with other clients, in your box and in a training gym, are dead forever.

### Training Gyms That Rely Strictly on Groups Need to Adjust Now

We know it is coming, so why not evolve now? Team training was fading pre-virus, and the market was becoming saturated. The days of thirty people crowded into a small 1,800 square-foot gym are gone.

Embrace the change and adjust your plan by starting small group coaching, limited to four or less, and chase one-on-one, which is back and growing again. You already have a segment of clients who will pay more to not share equipment, work in restricted and safer spaces within your gym and who love you but no longer want to be one of many. Take advantage of this and add small group as a more expensive option.

You are not going to have the luxury of getting back to your full team quotas for almost a year. The second wave will force the States to step in yet again. You will not get closed, but you will be forced to operate under heavy load restrictions.

It is coming, and you have warning. Segment your clientele, charge more for smaller groups and one-on-one, and be prepared. If you can go full group, then you simply made more money, but if you cannot, then you are prepared for the long year I anticipate.

### If You Have to Close Your Business For Good?

Sometimes, there is no way forward. When you get to that point, consider these steps and ideas:

■ If you are a small group and one-on-one gym, can you switch to totally online coaching? The answer is Yes, but only if you target a specific target market. For example, becoming a Fitness After Fifty specialist gives you a unique brand for your area and could be turned into an online business. Use 12-month contracts, charge full price, or more than you did in your gym, and offer full support.

■ Contact your attorney if you anticipate closing. You need to kill the liability trail, meaning your company will have to end legally, and you may have to file personal bankruptcy. This used to be a big thing but not any longer. Just make sure you talk to your attorney about protecting personal assets if you chase this. Do not do this without legal help.

■ Can you downsize? Going from a 6,000 square-foot gym into a smaller box, such as 1,500 square feet, might make sense for you. Talk to your landlord and explore this if it works for you.

■ There is no shame in closing. This virus has killed many good businesses, but many owners entered into this without reserves. It is going on too long, so it is taking many gyms down.

### Someone Will Get Sick/Be Prepared

It will be inevitable that a staff person or client comes down with the virus. How you handle it will either close or enhance your business.

Think of these things and have a written plan in place when this happens to you:

■ If staff say they are ill, send them home for self-isolation. Talk to your attorney about pay for this person.

■ If this happens, shut the gym down for 24 - 48 hours, fumigate, clean and start all over again. You should have the entire team, including yourself, tested.

■ Clearly state online what happened and what you did to respond. Hiding this will kill your business when it leaks out. Show leadership and close if for at least a day to make sure it is safe to go in there.

■ You might have a client call and tell you he has it and worked out in the gym. The same procedure has to happen; close it for at least

(See Thomas Plummer Page 22)



# NFBA

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a day and make it safe again.

If you do not take leadership, the clients tend to make up their own stories, and these stories are always much more horrible than the truth. Control the spin, or the spin will control you.

Again, talk to your attorney about this. It will vary from state to state and city to city. Review this with him now, before it happens, and have a plan, because it will happen

### The Reality You Should Not Deny

We are all frustrated, but you have a choice to let this frustration ruin your life and your business or you can adapt to the world as it is, learn to adjust and accept what is, not clinging to what was.

The gym business will be under continual restraints, restrictions, half-closures and oversight until May of 2021.

The virus will meet the flu, and we will be going backward for many more months during the winter. Change your business now for the long haul.

Your anger expressed through rants, your reposting of other's unproven rants and misinformation, and your frustration at mandated restrictions you do not agree with will take down your career and your business. It takes decades to build a great reputation but only a few texts sent out after a couple of stiff drinks to destroy it.

**Yes, you have the right to express your opinion, and I respect that right... and your clients have the right to walk away taking their money with them. Stay out of the social media rant wars; they kill your brand.**

If you want to keep your business open, stay out of politics. If you rant and post, that is your right, but it will be hard to save your business and your personal brand when you alienate the half of your clientele who disagree with you.

In March, I stated we will lose 30% of all the gyms in the U.S. I was wrong; the number is going to be higher. Most of the

closures up to now are owners who simply refused to accept that about half of their clients are afraid and want to see leadership by proving they can be kept safe. If you reopened with only about half your clients, then they voted, and they decided they do not trust you.

The gyms in the States that reopened with no guidelines in place, then got shut down again, ignored the part of their client base who want you to wear masks, practice social distancing and prove you are safe.

If you opened without safety protocols and got shut down again, get it right the next time. Always err toward the most terrified clients in your gym, even if you do not personally agree.

The year 2019 is not coming back. We will not be running anything close to a gym as it was then. You adapt and win, or you fight back, clinging to the old days, and you will lose. Think about these things before you blast me.

I am talking about your business. You have the right to run it any way you desire, but as a lifetime business coach, I

have a right to point out what you are doing may kill your dream... and I will point that out as best I can.

■ ■ ■

**If you need help, book a call. If you are scared and need someone to talk you through this, book a call and ask for help. That is what I do, and I will be glad to help you.**

For more information, email NFBA at [marian@teamnfba.com](mailto:marian@teamnfba.com) or call (508) 776 - 8940.

*(Thomas Plummer has been working in the fitness industry for over forty years and is considered by many to be one of the most influential individuals in the industry worldwide. He is also considered the creator of the modern training gym concept and has taught over 1,100 workshops around the world during his career. He can be reached at [thomasplummer@mac.com](mailto:thomasplummer@mac.com).)*

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