



## WARMING UP

**Warming up** features the opinions of prominent people within the fitness industry. Here, Simon Hall, marketing manager with direct debit provider Ezypay, uses data collected in the 2009 Australian Fitness Industry Survey (AFIS) to identify the key factors that affect member retention.

AUTHOR'S BIO



**Simon Hall**

Simon is the marketing manager at direct debit service provider Ezypay. He has over 20 years fitness industry experience in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Simon has worked at all levels of club operations and management and spent seven years as the general manager for fitness at the YMCA. He also sat, as chairman, on the Fitness New Zealand board.

Seven thousand gym members responded to this year's Australian Fitness Industry Survey (AFIS) providing a useful insight into member behaviour and retention. This response gives a clear picture, across gender and age, of the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of both active and lapsed gym members – information which can help fitness instructors, personal trainers and gym managers ensure they are offering the correct programs and services.

Firstly, we need to understand how to keep members for as long as they initially intended when they joined their club. Seventy-four per cent of members reported that they planned to stay at their club for between 12 and 18 months; however, the survey showed that 60 per cent of active members and 54 per cent of lapsed members had only been members for between three and 12 months. Sixty-eight per cent of members also reported that they worked out three or more times a week, a figure which should be encouraging, as it is widely recognised that more frequent member visits equates to member retention. Why then, do the majority of memberships last for less than 12 months? These numbers should sound alarm bells; there is a clear need for individual clubs to research their membership base to ensure that member's aspirations are met in order to slow the rate of attrition.

The 2009 AFIS also investigated the area of goal setting and the key factors

responsible for goal fulfillment. When asked how they achieved results, many members responded that they used the guidance and advice provided by club staff (46 per cent), as well as self-motivation (34 per cent). It is interesting to note that more males feel they can achieve their goals on their own than females, who are more likely to seek unpaid guidance from club staff.

Paid assistance, in the form of personal training, did not have as much influence, with 18.5 per cent of respondents indicating that PTs influenced them in achieving their goal. This is perhaps unsurprising, as only those who use the services of a trainer would name their PT as the major influence. An interesting statistic showed that the older the member, the more likely they are to use personal training; only 13 per cent of under-25s used the services of a personal trainer, compared with 47 per cent of those over the age of 46 years. Having a training partner also had an influence on members achieving their goals, with fifteen per cent reporting that a training buddy helped them with their goals, a trend more prevalent in younger members.

The top three expectations of each club visit were for machines to be in working order, facilities to be clean and staff to be professional and approachable. However, the poor communication of many trainers and staff was highlighted by many respondents, with the following

comment typifying the feelings of many members; 'I feel that the trainers are not very friendly, only if they need to sell their personal training to you will they give you a smile'.

So, how can this information be used to increase member satisfaction and retention? Some of the findings appear quite black and white; encouragement and incentives for members to train with a partner, for example, may increase adherence, and this could be built upon by specifically selling more affordable partner training to younger members. Likewise, a greater focus on selling personal training to older members with higher disposable incomes will increase personal training sales – and increased PT hours equates to increased retention.

Taking a wider view, however, many of the findings appear to indicate the need for better communication skills on the behalf of staff. In addition to facilitating direct sales, friendly, effective communication creates a sense of community and belonging, the keys to member retention. To this end, individual clubs would be well advised to communicate with their own members via surveys, and to react to the feedback received. [N](#)

*The 2009 AFIS has insights and responses from 620 owners and managers of clubs across Australia and includes topics such as pay rates, PT structure, and group fitness. For more information or to purchase the report at a special Network member price visit [www.fitnesssurvey.com.au](http://www.fitnesssurvey.com.au)*