

How the fitness industry is using contactless technology to drive customer engagement

If you own a fitness business, you're likely struggling to stay afloat. Though COVID-19 has crippled several industries, the fitness sector has been one of the worst affected. Gyms and studios were forced to shut down, and several gym owners had no choice but to permanently shut down their operations.

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But thanks to technological advancements in the fitness industry, clubs and studios are bouncing back. In this post, we'll talk about how contactless technology is helping fitness businesses drive customer engagement.

Fitness industry on the backfoot due to COVID-19

The fitness industry, mainly brick-and-mortar gyms and institutions, was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. When the initial wave hit the world, fitness studios and gyms were among the first businesses to shut down in the US, Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world.

The global health and fitness club industry was valued at \$96B in 2019. In 2016, the sector included 36,540 clubs and 57.3 million members in the US alone. While the latest statistics are yet to be uncovered, the sector has been steadily falling due to the closing down of physical fitness outlets.

While larger clubs have somehow managed to survive, smaller businesses are the worst affected. Many gym owners and trainers have permanently closed their operations and started looking for other sources of income.

But if you decided to hang in, congratulations, as studios and gyms are finally reopening. However, things won't be the same as they were before. Gym owners will need to completely restructure their operations to ensure maximum safety for their customers.

Technology paving the road to revival

Before the pandemic, the applications of technology in the fitness industry were confined to digital payments and convenience. While these benefits remain to be crucial, the clubs and studios are utilising technology to revive their operations.

Now, the focus of fitness providers has shifted from revenue generation or business survival. They're prioritising customer engagement and looking for ways to interact with their customers. This has led to the surge of contactless technologies in the fitness industry.

So, how the fitness industry is leveraging contactless technology to drive customer engagement? Let's delve in.

1. Fitness wearables

You must've heard of Fitbit and other activity-tracker wearable devices that monitor your health and fitness-related metrics while you go about your normal life. These devices monitor metrics such as the number of steps taken, distance covered, heart rate, calories burnt, blood pressure, and more. You can sync these wearables with your smartphone to store and examine your fitness data.

But here's the catch. How would you know that your health has reached

the point of concern? Sure, you might figure out that the systolic pressure of around 180 mm Hg and a heart rate of 185 beats is a red flag.

But wearable devices can do more than that. You can integrate them with your fitness or healthcare provider's device. This way, your trainer can monitor your health status and alert you in case of any potential signs of concern. By overseeing your health and fitness data, your provider can also remotely monitor your training outcomes and suggest changes and improvements.

2. QR codes

The use of quick-response codes has surged during the pandemic. All industries - retail, logistics, and hospitality - are using QR codes to optimise their operations, and the fitness industry is no different. Besides, in such a time of crisis where human contact should be minimum, QR codes have emerged as a bridge between trainers and customers.

Some uses of QR codes in the fitness industry include:

Contact information: Gym owners have put up custom QR codes on their club gates and entrance and linked them to their contact information. Customers who want to apply for a membership can scan the code and find the trainer's contact details. This eliminates the need for physical business cards and brochures that may increase the risk of virus spread.

Digital payments: The World Health Organization has confirmed that currency notes and credit/debit cards can act as a potential carrier of the coronavirus particles.

To overcome this issue, gym owners are using QR code payments. Customers can scan the code using any wallet that supports QR code payments and transfer the fee within a few seconds. In addition to enhancing safety, QR code payments also ensure speed and convenience.

Sharing information: Fitness trainers and nutritionists are the source of useful information for trainees and exercisers. However, with human contact becoming obsolete, providers aren't able to interact freely with their customers. To tackle this issue, they're using customised QR Codes.

One of the major features of QR codes is that you can link them to a large amount of information. Fitness providers leverage this benefit by linking QR codes to commonly asked questions about diet and training.

Trainees who have these questions can scan these codes and get the desired information instead of going to the trainer. This minimizes human contact and alleviates the risk of virus spread.

3. Mobile applications

Nowadays, there's an app for everything. Applications fuel mobile devices, as people seek apps for almost everything - watch videos, read content, and more. Many fitness studios have developed apps to provide guided training and fitness lessons to their customers.

As gyms and studios aren't operating in full flow, fitness enthusiasts and exercisers are also having a hard time sticking to their fitness objectives. To bridge this gap, fitness instructors are using mobile applications to share fitness lessons and advice.

Let's take FitOn, for example. This mobile app by FitOn Inc. provides free home exercise videos that help you streamline your fitness goals. You can make in-app purchases to create personalised fitness plans, receive guided meditations, and get expert fitness advice and assistance.

Orangetheory is a fitness monitoring app that integrates with wearable devices. It also allows you to book sessions with trainers. Equinox is a similar app that enables you to create fitness plans and get personal trainer sessions.

4. Artificial Intelligence and IoT

The increasing demand for wearable tech has also surged the use of emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT). For example, AI-enabled wearable tech increases the end-user experience and overall functionality of the devices. It improves data accuracy, provides insightful metrics, and also guides the user to make better health and fitness decisions.

When used in CRM and gym management software solutions, AI enables predictive analytics and more efficient management. More streamlined operations help gym providers improve customer experiences, retain more customers, boost business growth, and revenue. Besides, AI enables you to collect and analyse customer data, which allows you to track individual growth and better know your customers.

Similarly, fitness clubs and studios have implemented IoT technology to provide group fitness activities. Each member of the group uses IoT fitness trackers that transmit real-time fitness progress to the trainers. Remember we talked about wearables integrating with trainers' smartphones? The technology that makes it possible is IoT.

5. Social media and online communities

Before the pandemic started to disrupt the fitness industry, not many gyms and studios thought of developing communities. But now, as business survival is at stake, all fitness providers are investing in community development.

Most fitness businesses are using social media for organic business growth and community development. YouTube has lately emerged as a popular platform. Many fitness providers are sharing helpful tutorials and informational content on YouTube to grow their audience and community.

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are also being widely used. Social media platforms enable you to interact with your customers in a direct manner. For example, you can use Twitter to answer one-to-one fitness questions.

Once your community grows, you can also leverage the power of user-generated content. Your consumers can ask questions and receive answers from other consumers. This enhances engagement and gives your business the key to the door of revival in this mercurial time.

Effective ways to grow your fitness business in 2021

You saw how technology is transforming the fitness industry. But you might still be confused about restarting your business operations.

Is the traditional gym model still viable? Should I entirely restructure my operations? What changes should I make? Questions like these might be flooding your head, and that's okay. Here are three ways to approach your gym business in the post-pandemic era.

1. Stick to the traditional model

Before the pandemic, you likely had an up-and-running brick-and-mortar gym or studio. Now, that gyms have reopened, you can choose to stick to the traditional model. Any online fitness training cannot match the quality of in-gym fitness training.

And as the risk of COVID-19 subsides, people want to go back to gyms. So, if your gym or club is getting a significant amount of foot traffic, it could be a wise idea to run your operations offline.

However, that doesn't mean you should entirely overlook the digital

element. Creating a digital presence and using QR codes to accept payments and share information remains critical.

2. Entirely transform your operations

This scenario would apply to you if you've reopened your offline operations, but there's no business. As discussed, many people want to go to the gym to work out. But at the same time, there are people who are still intimidated and prefer to stay at home.

If your customers want to stay at home, you'll have a hard time staying afloat. Of course, you can invest time and resources in acquiring new customers, but it's a time-consuming process with no guaranteed result.

The second thing you can do is transform your operations. If your customers want online training, provide it to them. Instead of asking them to come to your gym, conduct paid live sessions from your gym. Since home workout requires gym equipment, you can also sell weights and other equipment to your customers.

3. Use a hybrid model

Lastly, you can try the hybrid model. This model will be best suited for you if you're getting customers but not as many as you were getting before. This means a large share of your customers don't want to risk coming to the gym and want to train online.

In such a scenario, you can provide both online and offline training. Of course, the workload will increase, but catering to both customer bases will help boost your business.

The key is to understand your customers really well. If they want to come to your gym and train, you shouldn't force them to train online and vice versa. The better you'll understand your customers, the better you'll be

able to cater to their requirements.

Wrapping up

In such a time of crisis, contactless technology is helping fitness businesses stay afloat and continue their operations. As we enter the post-pandemic era, we can see more gym and studio providers leveraging technologies to enhance customer engagement.

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