

# Promoting Online Joining

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THE WORLD OF SELLING HAS changed. Internet technology has evolved tremendously and club membership prospects are now shopping online. Successful clubs are implementing sales strategies to get people to their Web sites and engage prospects and members throughout the buying cycle. You can benefit from this knowledge by creating an easy link for non-members, former members, and prospects to easily join your facility right from your Web site.

Industry stats show that many clubs, on average, are now adding 10 percent to 20 percent of their new memberships online. It arms the staff with a better marketing tool and they're actually closing sales faster. By using the Web site as a business platform, all visitors can connect, learn and purchase from you in ways not even imaginable a few years ago. Clubs need to see this as a sales tool and realize there's a promise of significant sales productivity and revenue gains available through the Internet.

## PROCESS

Start by talking with your club management software provider. They should be able to put online joining in place as a link from your Web site. They'll set up the functionality and integrate the data captured directly into the software, seamlessly and with minimal human involvement, if any.

Then you create engaging presentation visuals on your Web site. Have simple examples of the membership plans, a virtual tour and member testimonials. Easy-to-understand membership rates will help in the decision making for prospects.

Next, promote this capability. All marketing sources (direct mail, billboards, ads, posters) should state that people can join via your Web site. Even promotional flyers and pieces used for local community events should include language to prompt action. The message: There's no confrontation, no dealing with a sales rep, prospects can do it all online and then, when they're ready, come in and pick their membership card and get started on the way to good health.

When a prospect joins online, they



see a confirmation screen welcoming them to the club and receive a follow-up e-mail. Be sure your online joiners can see and print their online contract — the real contract complete with their personal information. This is very important as it serves as their official, legal agreement and their receipt of membership.

Reports you should receive: Daily number of Web site visitors, how many joined, who joined, type of memberships purchased, increase to the monthly dues line, and how they heard about you. Managers will be able to see the effectiveness of promotional campaigns.

## ASSOCIATED BENEFITS

Online joining allows staff to focus more on members in house and the guests they tour and less on the immediate close. Prospects can be told "Go home, think about it, and join online, you'll find the same rates there." It allows club staff to be honest and consistent along with being very up front about membership fees and other costs. Seeing the rates and offers online eliminates haggling and negotiating. You can also promote online incentives and create some urgency. Refer a friend or add on a family member now and save \$5 a month as long as they stay a member,

one month free, a personal training session — the possibilities are endless.

Most clubs find that when they promote online joining, it leads to other online sales as well. Items such as towel service, childcare, lockers, tanning or activity registration can all see revenue boosts when sold online.

## COSTS

Expect to pay a reasonable set-up fee to cover initial contract customization and offset program development costs. There may be ongoing fees to maintain the integration with your club management software, monthly hosting fees, and approximately 2.5 percent for credit card merchant fees. The return on investment is great and easily offsets the costs.

Today's smarter and better-informed prospects demand more of clubs and facilities. The ability to join online is just the first step in a collaborative and repeatable sales and marketing process. The result: Dramatic improvements in revenue generation and better retention as members become more involved in their facility.

The big question is not "Why should a club offer online joining?" but "Why not?"

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