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HOW TECH CAN HELP GYMS STAY AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION

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As any gym-goer will know, the last few weeks will have seen an influx of new members eager to put their New Year's resolutions to become fitter into action. But whilst February does see gym membership spike, nearly half of all new members will have quit before February. So how can gyms mitigate this exodus and successfully retain more members?

The answer, as with so many things, is digitalisation.

Before going into some of the ways in which technology can help gyms to successfully hold onto those new February members, let's put the benefits of member retention into some context: increasing the number of membership renewals in the New Year by just 5 percent can result in up to a 95 percent increase in profits according to research done by The Retention People in 2018. Even an increase as small as that can lead to a huge difference on a gym's balance sheet.

The study also found that, on average, every two interactions with fitness staff in a given month results in a member making an extra visit the following month. This is noteworthy, as it was shown that every additional visit by a member reduces the risk of membership cancellation the following month by a third. One of the only factors more important in retaining members, the study noted, was how clean and tidy the gym actually was.

Bottom line? Staff need to spend more time with customers, whilst simultaneously ensuring a presentable

workout environment, to improve retention rates and unlock that huge potential increase in profits.

So, this is where technology comes in - digitalisation in gyms can exponentially improve staff engagement with members and streamline facilities management to ensure an easier job for employees tasked with making the workout space look presentable.

But just how does technology do this?

The phrase "Internet of Things" (IoT) is used again and again, but many outside of Silicon Valley are often unsure how it can improve their specific industry. When it comes to gyms, the power of IoT and the data insights that it brings can't be underestimated. With many gym managers still relying on paper-based processes, staff members are having to take time away from the front line to fill in forms. Non-digital data also means that insights into the workings of the gym can take longer to be properly processed, meaning that any eventual insights will be out of date and hard to action.

One innovation currently transforming the way one gym group in Ireland operates is the integration of smart sensors and other IoT endpoints. This works by giving staff members a mobile device which delivers instant insights into operations in the gym. The strategically placed sensors digitise and automate several tasks, which can all be managed from the simple to use app on staff members mobile devices.

Sensors are able to alert staff immediately when there's an area which needs cleaning, or simply let employees



know when there are lots of members in one specific area. This leads to quicker solutions to customer problems or queries, as well as greater interaction with members, all whilst effectively keeping a high standard of service within the gym.

Data Health Check

A full digitalisation solution can also give gym owners unprecedented insights and visibility into the operations and trends of the business that they would otherwise never have thought possible. Harvesting data from these sensors could lead to a realisation that, for example, you need a different level of staff in the gym at peak times. This is possible because the management team will now have real time data available at their fingertips, rather than relying on paper based, manual reports that were always invariably locked away in a cupboard.

Getting rid of those written reports also frees up staff to work on the frontline. Rather than spending time in the back office writing up the latest cleaning report or tallying the number of treadmill users in a single day, employees can spend more time on the front line interacting with customers. Cutting down on admin leads to more front

facing engagement which, as the earlier report showed, is crucial in retaining new members.

Digitalisation in Action

The Clayton Hotel Club Vitae Gym in Cork uses a solution that digitises and automates its processes to present real time data to employees on staff devices. With its membership thriving at well above average, streamlining processes allows staff to focus on key tasks such as ensuring the gym environment is clean without sacrificing face to face engagement with members. This has led to a decrease in customer complaints and a better overall experience.

As more and more industries continue to digitalise, the fitness industry must not be left behind. By implementing simple technology in the business, processes can become much more optimised for member retention. Whether it's freeing up staff to engage with new members or improving the presentability of the gym, digitalisation can help the industry to ensure more new members are sticking to those New Year's resolutions.

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