

marketing to men

you know that men would benefit from doing pilates, i know it, and yet most studios are overwhelmingly female. how can we educate guys about the method—and then get them into our studios?

BY SHARI BERKOWITZ

Statistically speaking, if you're reading this article, you're probably a female Pilates practitioner or an instructor with a primarily female clientele. So where are all the men?

If men comprise approximately 50 percent of the population, then why aren't they 50 percent of your business? Wouldn't they benefit from Pilates, too? And wouldn't you benefit by adding the viable male market to your studio revenues? Men need Pilates to get fit and stay fit. You need men in your studio to keep your studio doors open. It's a win-win situation.

So our mission becomes understanding why more men aren't coming into Pilates studios and figuring out how to get them in and keep them as clients. Toward that end, I interviewed a number of Pilates pros on their thoughts and strategies. The conversations were fascinating. Here's what they had to say:

“eliminate the stigma”

Most men don't know what Pilates really is, and we haven't done a good job educating them. Let's turn that around! Men need Pilates as much as women do, yet collectively they seem to have the misconception that it's a program for women.

“We must eliminate the stigma,” says John Garey, STOTT PILATES® master instructor trainer in Long Beach, CA. “The onus is on the studios and teachers. Pilates is for men!”

Of course, he's absolutely correct. Pilates was created by a man for men, but many guys are still not aware of the value of Pilates. To get men doing Pilates to make them stronger, more physically and mentally balanced, and less likely to incur injuries in their other activities, it's



John Garey

going to take more than telling them about the benefits; we've got to get out there and prove it.

"The perception is that this exercise is for women," says Lindsay Merrithew, president and CEO of Merrithew Health & Fitness. "[Men] think Pilates' roots are in the dance world and perceive it as unobtainable." It's up to us to make them see that it is.

how to pick up guys

Our experts had loads of creative ideas for recruiting male clients. Here are some of our favorites:

Target parents Mari Winsor suggests contacting local private schools and setting up free half-hour mat classes at the school right after parents drop their children off in the morning. This way, you're likely to get men and women in that class. They'll love it so much that they'll come to your studio for private and semi-privates.

Organize sports-specific workshops Julian Littleford recommends setting up dedicated workshops, like four weeks for runners or golfers. He further suggests talking to the free press or local TV or newspaper. Use Twitter, Facebook and other social media to get the word out.

Offer men-only classes John Garey thinks this is a great idea, but rather than calling them "classes," offer them as "workshops." Price them just below the normal rate with one class per week for a month. Name them things like Pilates for Men, Strong Men, Strong Workout, Bootcamp for Men, Man-Made Pilates.

make it relevant

Women take Pilates because it's well known as a workout that gives you long, lean muscles and a slim, strong physique. This is the type of body that today's women see on celebrities and models, read about in magazines, and therefore, want.

Men, on the other hand, don't shop for exercise based on something that will make them slim and lean. Merrithew reminds us that men exercise so that they can do something else. They do Pilates to ski better, to enhance their golf swing, to play pick-up basketball, run faster, bike longer or do an activity better. Often they're working out in traditional gyms, meaning that, for them, Pilates is usually extra exercise, whereas for women, it is often their only exercise. We've got to educate men that Pilates was actually created as the ideal form of conditioning for their other activities.

Among the many individuals that she trains, Kathi Ross-Nash, of American Body Tech, Inc., also teaches Pilates to her son, Zach. Currently one of the top 100 football players in New Jersey, Zach uses Pilates as conditioning for that sport. He has actually eliminated weight training, focusing on Pilates instead, and it's kept him injury-free and strong. Impressed by his strength and success, his team members have jumped on the Pilates bandwagon. As Kathi says, "You have to make it athletic: Work them hard!"

where the boys are

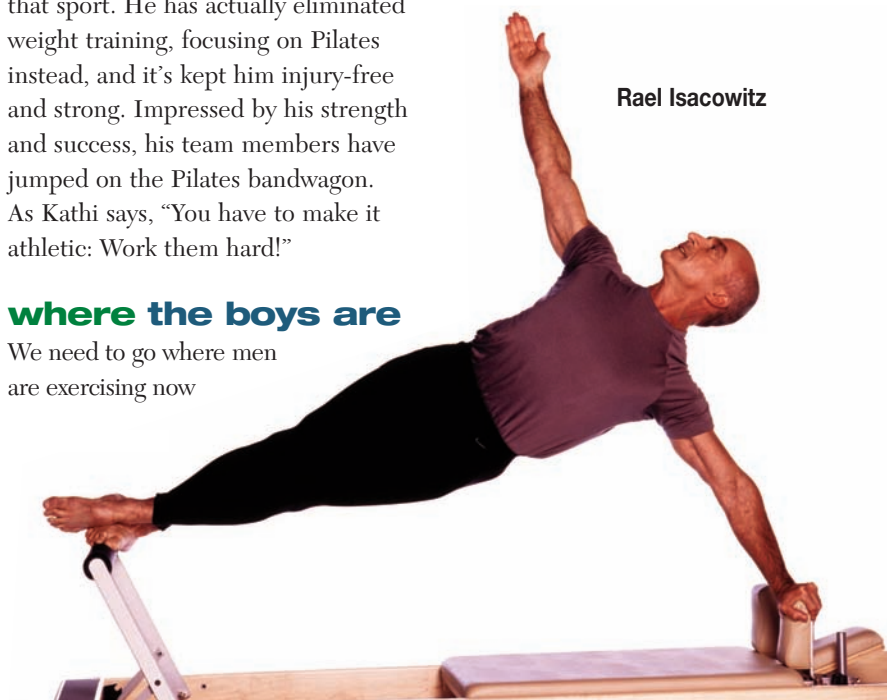
We need to go where men are exercising now

and educate them about the value of Pilates. Julian Littleford, of J.L. Body Conditioning in Del Mar, CA, encourages Pilates teachers to go to sports-specific clubs (golf, running, cycling, etc.) to tell the group about Pilates.

Garey agrees, saying, "Men are passionate about their sports. They are competitive! Whatever will increase their ability in their sport, they'll do."

So search for local sports groups, leagues and teams. (You might even consider reaching out to other groups of men who do physical labor, such as contractors, carpenters, builders and plumbers. They need extra strength and stability to do their jobs.) Contact leaders and coaches and request an opportunity to talk with the entire group at the start of their next training or practice session. When you're there, extol the benefits of Pilates: strengthening the core, arms and legs and decreasing the rate of injury and increasing their results.

Educate yourself on the sport so that you can speak directly to your audience. Once you know what they need, you can explain how Pilates can fill that need. "Find a way of making it



Rael Isacowitz

relevant,” says Merrithew, “and you’ve got their attention. Then support it with the benefits.”

And there’s no better lure than free sessions. Yes, free. You will discover this to be a great investment. Instead of spending your money on advertising, which many experts feel does not work, spend it in the form of comps. They can be 30-minute trial sessions rather than full hours. Just get them in the door, give them great Pilates, and they will come again.

Both sexes often first discover Pilates as a result of an injury or a chronic physical ailment, so networking with local orthopedists, physical therapists and chiropractors is a great way to find more clients. You might consider offering them discounts or free sessions for every client they refer to you.

word of mouth

“Many men are introduced to the method through their wives and girlfriends,” Merrithew points out. So your current clients are a great resource for recruiting new male ones. All of them have husbands, boyfriends, fathers, sons and/or friends who all could benefit from Pilates. Be honest with your clients and tell them that you’d like to increase your male clientele and that you firmly believe that more men could—and would—benefit from Pilates if only they tried it.

Douglas Evans, a Pilates teacher and physical therapist in Los Angeles, suggests you take the time to explain to female clients that while many of the exercises she does in her session would happen in a man’s session, there would be many differences, too. Evans suggests taking the time to demonstrate, so they are equipped to explain to their guy friends. He further recommends offering a free gift certificate to your client to give to her male friend. Your cost in giving out that free gift certificate will have a high return when that man becomes a

regular client—and perhaps refers his friends and colleagues.

motivation

When men do manage to find Pilates on their own, it’s usually because they have an injury or chronic ailment and have heard that Pilates can help. These guys are wonderful! They’ve sought Pilates out and invested themselves in using it well. Of course, a common downside is that often after they’ve achieved their goal, they don’t return to Pilates. “If male clients don’t stay as long, don’t freak out or be upset,” Evans says. “Just do good work and fix their problem. They may leave, but they’ll send their friends.”

Men and women also differ in the ways they like to be taught. And, unfortunately, many female teachers don’t modify their teaching style with men. Evaluate your voice, imagery choices, style of corrections/cues, hands-on cueing and even your scheduling when dealing with guys. Why?

How a woman teacher speaks to a man can make or break a session. Most women use the higher register of their voices to teach, but many men literally don’t hear higher pitches the way women do. Women are designed to speak and hear high pitches to communicate with and hear the cries of their children. This is simply an adaptive product of evolution. But when women teachers teach men, they need to speak in a lower register. (Incidentally, this is effective for teaching women, too. Pilates is a muscular exercise, and muscularity is best taught with a deep, resonant voice.)

Women must also watch how much they repeat themselves. Many men consider repetition “nagging” and may shut you out. So state your cue effectively—



Ron Spiess, senior instructor at Pilates on Fifth

once. If a change doesn’t happen, restate it. If a positive correction still doesn’t happen, just finish the repetitions and move on (unless it’s a safety issue). As with all clients, it takes time for change to occur.

And then there’s that little matter of the male ego. Women have egos, too, of course, but men’s are different. There’s a natural competitiveness in men, even within themselves; if we ignore it, we are missing an important aspect of our client. Kimberly Corp, who owns Pilates on Fifth with her sister, Katherine, reminds us that when an exercise is particularly difficult for a man to do, he may feel diminished by his inability. So be sure to follow that up with an exercise that is challenging yet doable. That’s not babying; it’s appropriate compassion.

Katherine Corp points out that while sessions must always work the full body, working a man’s upper body is essential. True, they naturally have stronger upper bodies than women, but it’s important for men to get those shoulder, back, chest and arm exercises to feel accomplished and physically powerful.

speaking their language

Images are effective teaching tools in Pilates, and since it’s likely that most of your clients are women, you probably employ images that suit them. But do


they apply to men? For example, we often say things like “the line of your bra-strap” or “peel up like a pearl necklace, one pearl at a time.” To effectively teach men, you need to find and use comparable masculine images. In a co-ed group class, use the male image

first, followed up with the female image (even if the class has more women). Instead of using the bra-strap image, refer to “your middle back, just below your shoulder blades.” Switch out the “pearl necklace” for “a thick, steel chain, one link at a time.” Can’t

think of a masculine image? Then just be literal in your explanation. If there’s no equivalent to “put your high-heeled shoes on,” say “lift your heels as high as you can.” It’s important to keep men feeling like men.

Hands-on/tactile cueing is another important teaching tool. While we must always strive to give the correct meaning and signals with our hands, it’s even more important when we teach the opposite sex. Mari Winsor, of Winsor Pilates, calls it “an intimate affair.” Whether you make corrections with a full palm or just your fingertips, take care that your intention is clearly read and not misinterpreted. In general, men are not as used to being touched as women are. Be direct and strong with your hands and intentions.

All of the experts we talked with agree that scheduling men around other men is an important factor in retaining them as clients. Remember: They don’t want to feel they are stepping into an estrogen zone. Of course, people need to schedule when it’s convenient for them, but you can candidly suggest, “I’d like for you to come in when there are other men. It’s a good idea for you all to meet.”

We’ve got to get out of our comfort zones and seek out new clients—men! They need what we have, and we need them, too. Educate men about Pilates and yourself and staff about how to teach men. And enjoy! 

Shari Berkowitz lives in NYC, where she teaches Pilates sessions and workshops, designs jewelry and writes. Visit her at theverticalworkshop.com, read her Pilates teacher blog at theverticalworkshop.wordpress.com, and check out her jewelry at sharibjewelry.com.

it’s a guy thing

Many men don’t initially relate to Pilates because the images and language they encounter don’t relate to them. Photos, logos and interior design have an impact on what brings a man in—or keeps him out. Evaluate your images to make sure they’re inclusive of both genders.

Photos Women are the subject of most of the Pilates photos, but if you want to lure men into your studio, put them in your photos! Women doing arabesques or backbends are beautiful, but they are not the images that will draw men in; in fact, they will keep them away. They want masculine images and masculine results. Include photos of men that demonstrate strength and virility on every single page of your website, in your Facebook photo albums, on your studio walls and on your printed marketing material.

Logo Take a good, hard look at your logo: Is it particularly feminine? Does it speak to men? Men will be turned off by flowers, curly cues or swirls. Your logo is a direct visual of who you are and who you are looking to work with.

Fonts Yes, we are talking typefaces. Travis Pagel, marketing director for Power Pilates, urges studio owners to look at the font of the text in their logos and marketing materials. “Fonts convey more about who you are than any other element,” he says, explaining that

your choice of typography says whether you’re traditional, contemporary, feminine or masculine. It even suggests whether you are welcoming or not. Steer clear of fonts that are nondescript, but bear in mind that handwriting and “sweeping” fonts are too feminine. Choose a font that is strong and clean, just like Pilates is. Work with a graphic designer to pick one that speaks to everyone.

Color scheme Do the colors in your marketing materials appeal to men as well as women? Consider the hues you use on your business card, studio signs, printed material, website, etc. Avoid traditionally feminine colors like pink and purple. Use “unisex or gender-neutral” colors like shades of blue, red, brown and green.

Décor Also consider your interior decoration, including the colors used in your studio, the style of furniture and accessories. Is your studio decidedly feminine or is it gender neutral? Would a man feel welcome in your studio or will he feel like he’s just stepped into a women’s-only club where he does not belong?

Changing rooms You need a changing room and shower just for men. While everyone ought to sweat doing Pilates, men tend to sweat more than women. And while a woman might be able to go on with her day without showering, most men can’t—and won’t.

Got a Pro Zone idea?

Email us at editor@pilatesstyle.com