

MAT IS WHERE IT'S AT!

Purchasing large equipment not in the plan? Here's why adding Mat-based Pilates programming to your facility will attract new members (and keep the existing) without breaking the bank.

By Kerrie Lee Brown

During these challenging economic times, Pilates studios may be continuing to thrive, but it's an important time for the industry to accommodate changing needs by becoming more creative with their program offerings.

One solution is for clubs to add more group sessions to their itineraries to meet the demand for lower prices and more convenient schedules. This serves the dual purpose of retaining membership of people requiring budget-conscious options, and of concurrently increasing the club's bottom line. Another option is to implement a high-quality Mat-based program that is cost-effective and attractive to all members.

"In this economy, some facility owners have been forced to take a more fiscally conservative approach, supplementing private sessions with group or Matwork-based programs," explains President & CEO of STOTT PILATES®, Mr. Lindsay G. Merrithew. "However some owners are still hesitant to implement Pilates into their facilities as a whole because of the perception that this can only be done with large, expensive equipment. But this is simply not the case."

DO YOU OFFER PILATES AT YOUR FACILITY?

There is a large misconception that Pilates involves very intricate moves that only dancers would be able to execute, or requires large equipment that is bulky, hard to obtain, and expensive. But what most facility owners don't realize is that Pilates can be incorporated into regular workout programs by using a few basic props that can be found around your gym or fitness facility. Pilates Matwork-based programming is growing in popularity – and diminishing the amount of members going outside of facilities to satisfy their fitness needs.

Celebrities and pro athletes alike are incorporating mind-body fitness into their training regimens and exercise enthusiasts everywhere are becoming more familiar with its benefits. More importantly, members are becoming more attracted to clubs that offer "alternative" methods of exercise. Club owners are realizing the overall commitment to Mat-based programming is not what they envisioned and therefore, instead of losing members, they are driving new participants to their locations.

Moreover, the rest of the fitness industry is taking note. Fitness instructors, athletic coaches, and even rehab specialists are realizing that in order to keep their clients' attention and/or enthusiasm for a specific targeted muscle group or body part – changing the way the move is performed is often crucial. Adding a prop or changing the dynamics of a particular move that is performed on the Mat makes all the difference.

The good news is that there are numerous basic exercises that can be performed and/or modified on the Mat that can be helpful in addition to an already established workout program. Some popular Pilates exercises can put strain on the low back in clients with typical postural imbalances, so it's important that you ensure that your instructors are properly trained to teach more complex exercises.

Light equipment such as 1 lb, 2 lb or 3 lb Toning Balls help close the kinetic chain, add proprioceptive awareness and add challenge to exercises by increasing the load or de-stabilizing the base of support. Other small equipment such as Stability Balls, Circles, and Bands can also add variety to Mat-based programming.



STICK TO THE BASICS

Pilates Matwork is the foundation of the exercise system. All the basic exercises are designed to target very specific muscle groups in very specific ways. "Pilates focuses on active eccentric lengthening of muscles rather than prolonged static strengthening," explains Moira Merrithew, Executive Director of Education for STOTT PILATES®. "This results in maintaining the integrity and strength of the joint while allowing it to move more freely in a greater range."

It is widely known that Pilates-based exercises help improve performance, reduce injury, and relieve stress. Unlike other hardcore strength training regimens that focus more specifically on muscle mass, Pilates focuses on toning your muscles, thereby improving your balance and alignment.

"Pilates also assists in rehabilitation after injury and creates balance throughout the entire body," adds Moira. "Pilates is a form of overall strength and conditioning used in the development of strong core muscles and joint stability, which also focuses on breathing, balance and range of motion."

BENEFITS OF ADDING PILATES TO YOUR FACILITY

With your own Pilates studio you can offer internal and external instructors part-time or full-time positions according to the studios' demand. Facility owners will ultimately increase non-dues revenue, while instructors have the ability to earn more income. Consider recruiting and training your existing quality personal trainers and group exercise instructors to be Pilates instructors. Personal trainers can subsidize their current client base with alternative training methods and grow their personal training clientele.

"Much of the growth in the areas of Matwork-based exercise is due to professional trainers gaining knowledge of and confidence in the results they are achieving with their clients," explains Carol Tricoche, Executive Director of Full Solutions™ for STOTT PILATES®. "Highly-skilled instructors can bring a plethora of exercise variety to your facility and cater to those who may feel intimidated to try Pilates at their age. Qualified instructors will also look out for the safety of your clients which is pertinent to the owner and exerciser."

Pilates education doesn't stop after certification. It is also important to make sure that your instructors are attending continuing education courses and workshops at specified fitness venues - or you can host workshops at your facility to keep your programming fresh and retain your numbers in the long term.

OFFER VARIETY TO ATTRACT NEW CLIENTS

By implementing Pilates Mat training, club owners can introduce a new method of exercise to their members. Even the most basic of moves can be intensified by adding props. High-quality Mat-based training appeals to a wide audience because they're affordable and can cater to various target markets. Courses can be tailored for Golf or Athletic Conditioning, Pre- or Post-Natal clients, Active Aging, or those looking for post-rehab with Pilates.

"We're seeing the trend that more and more facility owners are offering lower prices than their regularly scheduled programs in their Pilates studios so they can bring in more patrons watching their budgets and its working," adds Carol. "Such facilities are also realizing the benefits of creating extra attention to their location which is bringing more people through the doors. By offering Mat-based programs, clubs are offering members something different with the opportunity to streamline their target demographics."

DO YOU HAVE THE SPACE?

Industry surveys suggest that most club owners are interested in adding mind-body programming to their locations, but they feel the equipment takes up a lot of room and they simply don't have the space. The good news is that with Mat-based Pilates, you can use rooms that are currently being used for other group exercise programming.

Your members will feel right at home in their exercise environment and they will appreciate the fact that your facility cares about their needs enough to implement new programming specific to their needs. In order to keep members from seeking Pilates elsewhere, it is important to find a way to make space within your location to accommodate these unique sessions.

THE KEY TO YOUR SUCCESS

So remember, just because the economic environment these days requires some facility owners to make different choices about how they spend their money, you don't have to make a choice about the level of quality training your members receive. There's something for everyone with Pilates - from all age groups to fitness levels. The opportunity is out there, in equal opportunity, to take advantage of this popular form of exercise and continue to grow your business. Offering Mat-based programming at your facility will attract new members and keep your current client-base from looking elsewhere. **OSF**

For more information on Mat-based programming go to www.stottpilates.com.

Керри Ли Браун is Vice President of Communications for STOTT PILATES®

