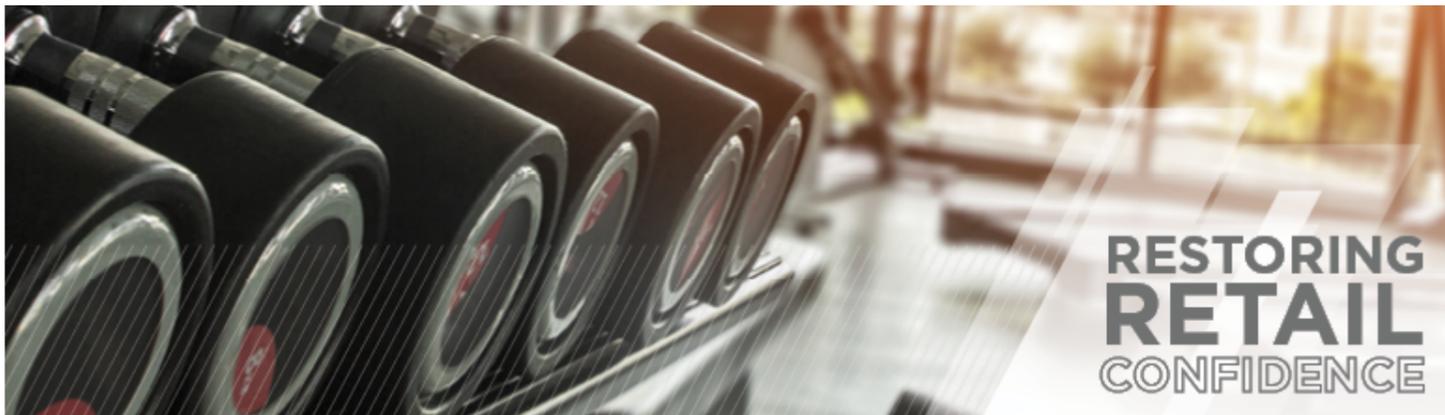


RESTORING RETAIL CONFIDENCE: THE FUTURE OF FITNESS

[Barrie Scardina](#) • 5/14/2020



The fitness industry pivoted during mid-March when fitness centers and boutique gyms were forced to close as a result of COVID-19. Answering the cries of loyal members and exercise enthusiasts, brands quickly transformed their on-site experience to an in-home one. Some, like [Peloton](#), already owned a significant online presence. Others, like [Orange Theory](#) developed online classes quickly and ramped up to ensure they maintained and served their loyal followers. Brands like [Nike](#) and [Lululemon](#) joined in seeing this as a natural extension of their brand. Now, the looming question is: *How will the fitness industry move forward as this pandemic evolves?*

Community, Health, and Safety

Beyond losing weight and toning our abs, the fitness industry differs from other retail industries as it serves as a true community for its members. When speaking with consumers, where you work out – from brand to location – is worn as a badge of honor much like belonging to a sorority or fraternity. The community is a family who knows when you show up to lift and supports you through your fitness journey. Maintaining that sense of community while adjusting the environment where “sweat equals success” is going to be much more complicated than just applying directional arrows to the floor and putting up plexiglass.

To ensure members feel safe, gyms will need to develop very detailed plans and spend significant time preparing employees and trainers prior to opening. Cleaning standards, frequency of cleaning, restricted hours, and creating a journey through the gym will all be part of the opening equation. Ensuring spacing of equipment, availability of hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes, and closing for deep cleaning will be the norm and the baseline for opening. How employees and trainers handle equipment and clients is going to need to change. Besides following state and municipal guidelines for reopening, brands may also consider expanding liability waivers, taking temperatures or asking members to confirm that they feel well prior to entry, and controlling the number of members in the facility at any given time. Extra staff may be necessary to provide extra cleaning and ensure members are adhering to rules. Special attention will also need to be placed on areas like saunas, steam rooms, and showers.

A Transformational Approach

In an industry where transformation is a common word to members, brands will need to apply this philosophy to their own form. Brands will need to build a technology and fitness eco-system to clearly identify risks and opportunities and address safety standards. Managing air quality, ventilation, humidity, and purifying the environment will be top of mind. Technology can be integrated to screen clients' health, implement social distancing patterns, and to control the number of members in the gym at any one time. Integrating technology will enable gyms to collect data and information about members' exercise patterns and habits. This information can be used to personalize programs for members which may help to transition them back from home to the gym with the focus on increasing membership value.

The Path Forward

As the industry creates a new path forward, it is important that these detailed plans include the capability to be nimble and agile: learn from experience and course correct. As brands think about geographies, generations, and

risk, there will not be a one size fits all approach. Just as different body types need different fitness programs, this approach will also apply to reopening. Generations will manage risk differently. Local, county, and state officials will assess and adjust based on multiple influences. This level of volatility means that brands need to have thoughtful, transparent, and timely communication strategies and plans to address the new realities.

As brands and members navigate this environment, the sense of community, their bond, and the desire to be together, will be a motivating force. Over the next few months there will be false starts, honest missteps, and big wins. As enthusiasts, we know this industry will evolve both online and in the gym in order to continue delivering meaningful and measurable value to its members.

This is part of the series “Restoring Retail Confidence” exploring the impacts of COVID-19 on consumer behavior and how retailers can evolve to meet these new challenges.

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