

IF YOU BUILD IT ...

Creative affiliate owners with time and space seek new ways to support their members and generate revenue. *By Emily Beers*



Running a CrossFit affiliate involves using the CrossFit methodology to help people increase their fitness and improve their lives. That's black and white. Gym owners enter a slightly gray area when they start to talk about what else to offer clients, be it services, products, additional programs and so on.

In the 2012 CrossFit Journal article "[The CrossFit SAT-Prep Program](#)," CrossFit Inc. Founder and CEO Greg Glassman suggested that if he were still running his gym, he'd be administering more than just workouts.

"If I could go back to that original little CrossFit gym in Santa Cruz and unlock the door, I'll tell you right now what I would do next: I would take those chairs we were using for seminars and I'd hold SAT-prep classes. I'd teach math to people who are afraid of math, and I'd be doing everything I could to improve the cognitive processes of my friends," he said.

This is just one idea of how affiliates can use their time and space to help improve lives and possibly generate additional revenue in the process.

Generally speaking, affiliates generate revenue by selling fitness training—fundamentals, personal training and group classes. But many gyms are getting creative and extending their reach to raise revenue and help more people. From hosting children's birthday parties to renting space to chiropractors and massage therapists, affiliate owners are making use of time and square footage to create a happy community and a business that is perfectly tailored to the needs of its members.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Lindsey Marcelli of CrossFit Eminence in Denver, Colorado, discovered planning events is one of her favourite aspects of being involved with the CrossFit community. She runs many events at her gym and also helps other affiliates with their event planning.

"Sometimes they're just community-based events. Sometimes they generate revenue," Marcelli explained.

Many affiliates run small competitions, but Marcelli has gone beyond fitness challenges: She also uses her members' often-obscurer talents and expertise to bring her community together. For example, one of her members, a photographer, hosted a photography class for the Eminence community, while another member led a class in which people learned how to make a set of earrings. When Marcelli hosted a health fair, she invited experts including chiropractors and food-company representatives to offer education and sell services and products. The day

also featured a well-received opportunity for members to get blood work done at reduced cost.

Marcelli explained she simply looks within to come up with ideas.

"If I were a member of my gym, these would be the things I'd want," she said.

Her creative ideas are primarily driven by a desire to help her community.

"I love that we're a gym, but these things build all these friendships. It's not just a gym," she said.

TREATMENT CENTERS

Many educated CrossFit athletes take care of their health by paying regular visits to professionals who can assist them with maintenance, injury prevention and recovery. Today, many affiliates are providing these types of services inside their boxes.

Brian Strump of CrossFit Steele Creek in Charlotte, North Carolina, is a chiropractor as well as a CrossFit coach and affiliate owner. He's combined his gym and treatment center under one roof. The arrangement saves him money on rent and travel time, and it generates additional revenue. Cross-

over is good for the gym and the chiropractic center, and it adds something for the clients as well.

"It provides a convenience for members that's difficult to match," Strump said.

He added: "It gives members another option for their health care."

Leslie Friedman from CrossFit DeCO in Denver, Colorado, brings in chiropractors and massage therapists for her athletes, paying herself a small portion of the revenue.



Courtesy of Lindsey Marcelli

Special events are a great way to unify the community while generating revenue for the business.

"It's a split that works favorably for the therapists, but I would rather be able to offer this service than view this as a major source of revenue," said Friedman, who currently has one chiropractor and one massage therapist on site regularly.

"Our members know and see our specialists on a regular basis ... and are comfortable approaching them with small or larger issues. To me, it enhances the community, lets our members know their health and wellness are valued, and helps set DeCO apart," she said. The added revenue is obviously good for the business as well.

Athletes appreciate having the option of getting treatment at the gym, and the additional revenue these services generate makes it a win for all.

Like Friedman, Brett Marshall of CrossFit Calgary in Calgary, Alberta, has a treatment area for his athletes and leases the space to a registered massage therapist he trusts. Katrina Mackay pays Marshall a flat rate each month, leaving her free to run her own small business within Marshall's space. Mackay schedules and treats her clients independently, creating no additional work for Marshall. The arrangement creates a stable stream of income for the facility, and Marshall is expecting the treatment area will grow as practitioners decide to link up with the CrossFit community.

Jamie DeFelice of CrossFit KMK in Fairfield, Connecticut, is another gym owner who offers chiropractic services. He takes things even further by offering "therapy night" at the gym.

"Multiple people come in—chiro and acupuncturists—and work on our athletes," DeFelice said.

Although Strump, Friedman, Marshall and DeFelice all offer health services in a slightly different manner, they all agree on one thing: Their athletes appreciate having the option of getting treatment at the gym, and the additional revenue these services generate makes it a win for all.

MIND AND BODY

Brian Nugent is the owner of CrossFit Courage in Pickering, Ontario. A former professional athlete who played in the Canadian Football League, he's also a certified life coach and a graduate of York University. Nugent completed the 10-week online life-coach certification through the Certified Coaches Federation, founded by author Derrick Sweeney.

"It's my job to make sure (my clients are) filling their purpose. Maybe they're in a job or a relationship they don't want to be in, so I give them a tool set to deal with this," he said.

"A life coach has to be able to work with someone emotionally, spiritually, intellectually. It's about getting our minds right to handle the battle of life, relationships, work," he added.

Once Nugent realized many people come to his gym for more than just a workout, he decided to start offering life-coaching service to his CrossFit Courage members.

"You're going to get your fitness, that's for sure. But we're more than fitness. We're a wellness center. Thirty percent of clients are looking for something more, to get their minds right," Nugent explained.

Nugent charges his athletes CA\$49 an hour for life coaching, 50 percent less than he would charge a non-member.

He starts out by doing one two-hour intake session in which he assesses his client's goals and digs into his client's thought processes. From there, Nugent works with his client to find out what's holding him or her back and then provides strategies for positive change. Currently, Nugent has eight athletes enrolled in his life-coaching program.

Beyond the one-on-one sessions, the group also meets once a month for a group session called "power therapy," an opportunity for athletes to share methodologies, compare eating habits and goals, and discuss ideas about bettering their lives.

"People share stories, and others pick up things from them and give advice," Nugent said.

Nugent has found his therapy clients never quit his box, which is a good thing considering Pickering isn't a metropolis and doesn't have thousands of new people moving to the city each year.

"Our retention is extraordinarily high. The only time we've lost people is because they've moved," he said.

While life coaching is a relatively obscure area of expertise, many CrossFit coaches have talents or skills in other areas. Coaches who also happen to be RMTs, dietitians, athletic therapists and so on have something more to offer clients.

PRODUCT SALES

As an affiliate owner, you certainly don't want to become the snake-oil salesman of the week, the guy who's always pushing a new product on members. Glassman has always been clear that professional trainers offer services and train their clients; they don't focus on selling paraphernalia. But if you're truly focused on bettering the lives of clients and put training virtuosity first and foremost, some products and services might fit the bill if you're convinced they can help your clients get fitter or add convenience to their lives.

DeFelice recently started selling a performance and recovery drink that's all natural and contains very little caffeine.

"It's a product that I feel comfortable selling. I'm not a big supplement pusher," DeFelice explained. "I don't want to sell things just for the sake of making money, but I believe there's good value there."

So far, his members love the drinks, and DeFelice earns a cut of the revenue. In the first month, he sold 10 cases.

Other gyms have meal services that offer convenient and healthy ways for clients to eat for performance. Many services provide options such as grass-fed meat, gluten-free snacks or ready-to-eat healthy meals, which can help out a busy client who might be considering unhealthy options on the way home. Other gyms have coffee or smoothie bars for clients to refuel after a workout or grab an espresso after the 6-a.m. class. Both options remove a line from a client's to-do list.

If you aren't interested in opening a second business or retailing, maybe one of your clients is. Athletes are constantly starting small businesses that cater to other athletes, and perhaps a client would jump at the chance to rent space or strike a deal to share profits from products sold at the gym.

It's no secret the CrossFit community is ravenous for products and services that will better their lives. And they're willing to pay for them. So if clients are demanding a product that truly helps them, a gym could set up a retail system to respond to the demand.



Brian Nugent (right) is a trainer who uses his skills as a life coach to help clients and offer additional wellness services at CrossFit Courage.

FOR THE CHILDREN

Brian Alexander of CrossFit Illumine of Niles, Illinois, and Marshall both have successful CrossFit Kids programs that generate considerable revenue for their businesses. Alexander has an entire area of his facility—5,500 square feet—designated for kids. In Calgary, Marshall's CrossFit Kids program has been running since 2008 and generates approximately CA\$25,000 in revenue a year, a helpful boost for the affiliate.

Reebok CrossFit FirePower, owned by Andrea Savard, takes kids programs to another level altogether in Milton, Ontario. Savard dedicates a ton of energy to kids and even created a website called FirePower Kids. Jackie Clark is head coach of the program.

"Milton is the fastest-growing city in Canada. The demographics of youth and children moving here (are) high. There has been a lot of growth in the need for our kids program," Clark said.

As the program grew, Savard cut a hole in the wall in 2013, adding an additional 3,000 square feet dedicated to children.

"They need to be kids, to run and play and jump and throw. They need their own space," said Savard, whose kids program generally accounts for one-third of her gross annual revenue.

Kids programs highlight a need to consider demographics when thinking of new ways to fill space.

On top of running regular CrossFit Kids classes, which are divided into age categories, Savard and her team also run circus training and a junior-firefighter program. Savard said the latter perfectly complements the CrossFit program.

Beyond classes, FirePower hosts birthday parties, which cost CA\$250 for two hours of gym time. First, the kids go through CrossFit Kids workouts and games, and then they stick around for birthday cake and presents. Currently, FirePower sells four to five birthday parties each month, generating \$1,000 to \$1,250 in additional revenue.

FirePower also offers summer camps. For \$250 each, 16 to 20 kids attend a five-day camp that runs from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Coaches do not spend the entire day with the kids because it can be exhausting. Instead, CrossFit Kids coaches run the workout portion of the day, while Savard hires other professionals to take the young campers on field trips to places such as the local grocery store, where they learn about healthy food choices.

Savard is proudest of her Fun Fit Girlz program.

"It's for girls that might not necessarily be your superstar track athlete or hockey player, girls who may struggle with balance or coordination," Savard said.

Savard's own daughter has a development coordination disorder, as well as vision problems, which is why Savard created the program.

"All the other kids could jump and climb and hang. (My daughter) works with an (occupational therapist) and a pediatric physiotherapist," Savard explained. "Kids like her, when it gets intense, they pull away, so we made a new group for girls who are maybe shy or maybe who are overweight."

The program has been very successful.

"They have completely flourished," Savard said of her Fun Fit Girlz. "They have found a love of fitness. It's been great to be able to find a niche for those kids and help them grow together."

Kids programs highlight a need to consider demographics when thinking of new ways to fill space. Are there groups looking for space or fitness programs affiliate owners can easily provide?

TOO MUCH SPACE

Alexander opened CrossFit Illumine just a year ago and said he took a risk when he settled on a 17,000-square-foot facility. Overhead costs are high, so he's made it his mission to take advantage of the space and the gym's quiet times by offering as many services as he can.

"It was a scary leap of faith (opening a facility this large), but our on-ramp program was growing rapidly and retention was good, so we took a gamble," he said.

"With all the space, we had to find other ways to generate revenue to help with the overhead and make it worthwhile," he added.

To get people inside the gym, he started an Olympic-weightlifting program, which he sells to those who want a bit more help with their technique. Each session is six weeks long and includes one three-hour class per week at a cost of US\$175 for members and \$225 for non-members. The program also includes strength and accessory work, as well as video analysis and feedback. And at the end of the six weeks, Alexander hosts an in-house weightlifting competition.



Courtesy of Brett Marshall



Courtesy of Jackie Clark



Courtesy of Jackie Clark

Many CrossFit affiliates have found programs for kids are a great way to fill empty space and offer more to members with young ones.

Alexander explained that starting the program was another risk because sometimes it's difficult to ask your members for more money on top of regular membership fees. But he knew the program would succeed if members saw value and improved performance. So far, he's been proven right. Thirty-five people went through the first six-week cycle he offered, and 40 people are going through the second.

To accommodate the group that already went through the program, Alexander recently added a second level. To be part of this more-advanced group, members pay an additional \$50 a month for two classes a week. One hour is coached, and the second hour is more or less open gym time. Because he has the luxury of space, Alexander is able to run these programs simultaneously with regular group classes.

"You can't create more popular times, so you have to limit what you do or grab more space and capitalize on having more space," Alexander said. "We've definitely built the CrossFit of our dreams from a space perspective. We have 250 members now and will continue to offer programs members are interested in."

Like Alexander, CrossFit Calgary offers Olympic-weightlifting, gymnastics and strength-based programs that are membership add-ons. Each runs over a 12-week block.

Marshall charges \$275 for regular members and \$350 for non-members. To his surprise, non-members are the ones generating much of the revenue. Currently, 30 to 50 percent of the athletes who join his specialty courses are members of other boxes. Sometimes, they're even new affiliate owners who are eager to learn from CrossFit Calgary, the original Calgary affiliate.

Marshall believes part of the reason people are attending is because the coach who runs the Olympic weightlifting sessions is Chris Lemky, a national-level lifter with a lot of expertise.

The point: If the program is good, people will pay for it.

GROUP TRAINING

Affiliates with space and expertise have a host of options, including sport-specific team training, obstacle-course-race training and corporate training. Nugent offers corporate training at his facility. He explained that most people who live in Pickering are business professionals, so offering corporate training was a no-brainer. He charges CA\$200 a session for group corporate-training sessions, which he coaches himself.



Courtesy of Brett Marshall

If a gym owner is always focused on improving the lives of clients, new opportunities will present themselves all the time.

CrossFit Courage also offers sport-specific training. One of Nugent's clients is hockey player Jennifer Wakefield, a left winger who won gold for Canada at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. His sport-specific athletes generally do one-on-one training, which costs \$100 an hour, and he currently has four athletes he trains three or four times per week.

Like Nugent, Alexander also offers sport-specific training at CrossFit Illumine, although he's getting involved with teams. His first was a local swim team he used as a "dry" run, and now he's building out his program to include football and lacrosse teams from local high schools. The beauty for Alexander is he has enough space to run an entire team in one part of his gym while a group class is going on somewhere else.

"The space is big enough to separate everyone. We have 5,500 of additional square footage attached to the main room, separated by two garage doors," he said.

Time, space and demand can easily combine to create new programs, and it might be worth looking into what types of groups or teams you can bring into your box.

GET CREATIVE

When building the community and generating revenue, creativity is key.

What's stopping you from hosting a trivia night or a book-club meeting? Or from renting space for a stag or stagette, a ski or bike swap, or a garage sale?

Community and space combine to present a host of opportunities. Back when there was but one CrossFit gym, its owner saw empty space and opportunity.

What could you put in your empty space to build your community and create new revenue streams for your business? ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Beers is a CrossFit Journal contributor and coach at [CrossFit Vancouver](#). She finished 37th at the 2014 Reebok CrossFit Games.



With 17,000 square feet of real estate, CrossFit Illumine can run several programs at once, accommodating a host of members at popular times.

Courtesy of Brian Alexander