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Turning Admin Into “Adminimal”

Affiliate owners describe creative ways to offload work so they can focus on the big picture at their gyms.

By Emily Beers

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Courtesy of Theo Isekouros

When you open a CrossFit affiliate, you quickly learn you're more than a coach, and if you try to tackle every job that comes your way, you might not find time to sleep, let alone time to train your clients and develop coaches and your business.

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Emily Beers/CrossFit Journal

Most affiliate owners opened businesses to improve fitness for their clients, and offloading administrative tasks can help them get back to coaching.

Imagine this very common scenario:

You wake up at 5 a.m. and send a dozen emails before scheduling a post to go up on your website in the evening. You know if you don't do it now you'll run out of time later. After that, you quickly edit a video of a client getting his first muscle-up, which you upload to your affiliate's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

A quick sip of coffee, and then it's time to take a look at last week's attendance report. Five clients who haven't been there in two weeks need an email to see what's up. It's payday tomorrow, so you sift through your reports for the month before hopping on the phone and ordering a dozen new lacrosse balls and rubber bands because they keep disappearing.

Finally, it's time to fill out the paperwork for your sign permit, which you'll drop off at city hall on your way to coach your first client of the morning.

When you arrive at the gym at 8 a.m., you're relieved to take off your secretary's hat and put on your coach's cap.

Exciting and fulfilling as all this can be, it can also be exhausting. If you let endless administrative duties take over your life as an affiliate owner, it can be incredibly distracting to your business. This is why many owners today have found solutions to ease the headache.

Some are hiring full-time administrative or facility managers, others are shifting certain duties onto coaches, and others still are relying heavily on technology to make their lives easier. No matter what they're doing, these affiliate owners agree that shifting administration duties has freed them up to develop their clients, coaches and businesses.

Technological Solutions

For Lindsey Marcelli of CrossFit Eminence in Thornton, Colorado, automatic functions make life easier.

“I’m all about scheduling things and having things automatic. Saves me time, especially when life happens,” said Marcelli, who has discovered that Facebook lets her schedule posts up to six months in advance.

Similarly, Hootsuite—a management site for social media—is a useful tool that helps with scheduling posts, not just on Facebook but also on Twitter and Instagram.

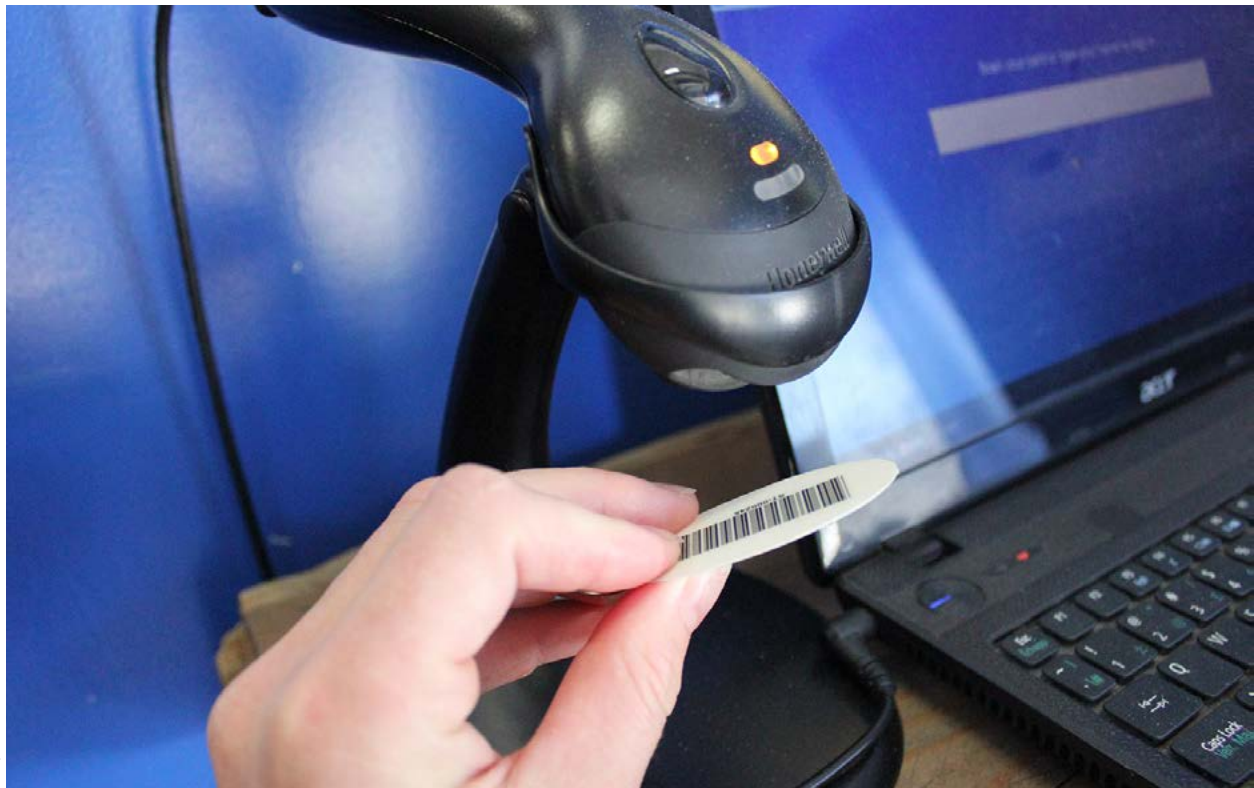
“That way you don’t spend all day on Facebook, and you can keep your page active daily in advance,” Marcelli said. “You can do your entire weekly workouts posts in one hour.”

On top of taking advantage of technology that lets her schedule her posts, Marcelli also gives her coaches specific administrative duties so they all share the responsibility. For starters, each coach is responsible for writing one blog post per month, and each coach is now an editor on the gym’s Facebook page to “spread the admin fun across everyone,” she said.

“We sit down during our monthly coaches meetings, discuss a topic. They each pick a specific discussion in regards to the main topic and blog. This helps me and my husband as the owners to get relevant info to our members monthly,” she added.

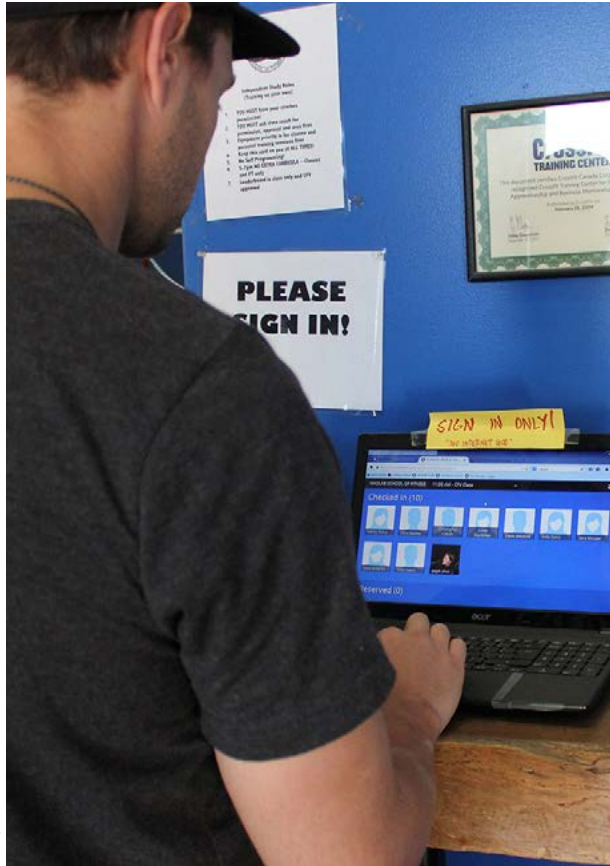
When it comes to using technology, creativity is key.

When it comes to using technology, creativity is key. And options exist when software isn’t designed to do exactly what you want it to do. Mike Ives of CrossFit 782 in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, provides proof.



Emily Beers/CrossFit Journal

Technology can be used to streamline administrative processes and gym procedures, leaving owners more time for other tasks.



With a sign-in system in place, owners can run a variety of reports and use software automations to track down absentees.

Many affiliate owners struggle to find a foolproof way to keep track of attendance, and many blame client compliance for their difficulties. Some affiliates issue key tags to make it easy for clients to sign in, but many clients still forget, no matter how far owners go to encourage clients to swipe their tag.

"Members don't like signing in," said Ives, who took matters into his own hands to combat the issue.

Because of the compliance problem he had, he developed a web-based app clients download onto their smartphones. As long as clients have phones with them, the app signs them in automatically as soon as they enter the building.

"Everyone always rocks their phone with them anyway," said Ives, who explained that the app works by using the phone's location functionality through a technology called geo-fencing.

The clients create an account and log in just once. After that, the phone knows what's up.

"So members just walk in, and it automatically tracks their attendance," Ives said. He added that the app doesn't even use any of the phone's data.

From the owner's end, all he has to do is set up an account and plug in the gym's civic address.

"It means the owner doesn't have to track attendance himself or use key tags or scanners," Ives said. And it means coaches don't have to waste time at the start of class getting members to go to the computer and sign in before they begin the warm-up.

Ives has gone to such great lengths to develop this system because keeping track of attendance is really important for client retention, especially at larger affiliates with hundreds of members, he said.

"I can get a membership report to see who's showing up for classes, and, more importantly, when people aren't coming to classes," Ives said. He finds his solution so helpful he's going to start offering it to other interested affiliates.

"It generates member reports that (trigger) you to get in touch with people when they haven't been there," he added.

Sometimes all these clients need is a friendly reminder.

Whether the bane of your existence is attendance compliance or Facebook posting, with a little creativity, technology can be a welcome friend, and clever affiliate owners can find other ways to use software and hardware to solve a host of other issues around the box.

The Right People in the Right Places

Because the workload is often too much for one person to run an affiliate, many owners have hired full-time support staff, ranging from general and administrative managers to operations and facility managers to directors of training.

Theo Tsekouras of CrossFit H-Town in Houston, Texas, got to the point where he needed a full-time general and operations manager to reduce his workload.

"When we first opened, we were a garage affiliate. Prospects, marketing, emails—every line of the business you could think of—was me," he said.

Tsekouras called all the admin work "a time suck."

“Although it was necessary, it never ended,” he said. As the business grew, it got tougher to keep up.

“The back-end stuff—the client engagement that needed to happen, the follow-up emails, putting memberships on hold—it all became a lot to deal with,” he said.

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Today, CrossFit H-Town Arts District and CrossFit H-Town Heights have 550 members total. To deal with administration, Tsekouras’ wife is the general manager, while one of his long-time members has more recently become the operations manager, meaning she handles all the new-member intake as well as liaising with clients.

“Front-desk (staff) report to her, as well,” Tsekouras said. “We also have a food program. Members buy meals from us, and she handles all this stuff, too.”

One of Tsekouras’ coaches is now his director of training and has taken over coach development.

Having full-time support staff has allowed Tsekouras to spend more time with his family and on his business.

“Typically now what I’m doing is helping with website stuff, expanding the website and services to members, developing new programs like strength classes or master’s classes, or figuring out ways to make more money for my coaches,” he said.



Courtesy of Theo Tsekouras

Theo Tsekouras hired full-time support staff to help grow his affiliate, giving him more time to focus on family and other aspects of the business.

Ken Andrukow of Reebok CrossFit Ramsay in Calgary, Alberta, is another who decided to hire specialized managers to reduce his workload. Although he started his gym more than a decade ago, he finally decided to hire managers this year. Andrukow brought in a full-time administrative manager responsible for duties he simply didn't have time for, and he employs a facility manager to look after cleaning and equipment. He said hiring staff was the best decision he's made in a while.

"All in all, these changes have allowed me as owner and head coach to focus on the development of athletes and coaches, which has helped increase our membership to more than 400," Andrukow said.

On top of this, having full-time people in charge of specific duties has also helped take the load off his coaches.

"Now coaches can focus on the lesson plans and on running the workouts," he said.

Another important lesson Andrukow has learned is the importance of developing specific policies and procedures so his coaches and managers always know how to handle a situation.



Courtesy of Ken Andrukow

A manual ensures coaches at Reebok CrossFit Ramsay are well versed in the affiliate's procedures regarding client interaction and gym policy.

"(For example), we now have a written manual that deals with things like follow-up procedures with members, as well as incident reports and how to open and close the gym," he said. "A typical operations manual."

This has helped make things more clearly defined for the full-time people he recently hired.

"Instead of saying, 'You're going to be the admin person. I'm not sure what you'll be doing, but you'll figure it out. See you later,' now people know exactly what they'll be doing," Andrukow said.

Whether it's an administrative assistant you need, a facility manager or a director of training, Tsekouras and Andrukow agree that placing people into clearly defined roles will help any business grow. Doing so has made all the difference for them.

Getting Your Coaches on Board

For Courtney Brevitz of CrossFit Kenosha in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a simple reading exercise led to big changes around her box.

She had all her coaches read a well-known article published in the Harvard Business Review called "Management Time: Who's Got the Monkey?" by William Oncken Jr. The article has been described as the best article ever written about delegation, time management and the politics of power in a work environment. It warns managers not to carry too many unnecessary "monkeys" on their backs all at once and instead shift some of these responsibilities onto their subordinates.

The article was passed on to Brevitz from a friend of hers who worked in the business world. At the time, she felt bogged down by 100 little administrative jobs that kept popping up, and her coaches kept throwing more monkeys onto her back.

"They'd say things like, 'Oh wait until (Courtney) gets in tomorrow and she'll deal with this,'" Brevitz said of how her coaches unknowingly gave her more chores to do.

While she had a great coaching staff working for her, Brevitz needed her coaches to understand what life is like for the business owner. So she sat them down to explain how taking more responsibility is ultimately in their best interest.

"I started out by telling them we have a great coaching staff, but I needed to explain to them the big picture of the business," Brevitz said. "What happens to the growth



Courtesy of Courtney Brevitz

Courtney Brevitz, owner of CrossFit Kenosha, lets her coaches take the lead on projects and tries not to micromanage their efforts.

of our facility when a manager's time is bogged down by monotony or day-to-day things?"

Then she handed them the article from the Harvard Business Review.

"It gave them perspective," she said. "It helped them realize that I'm working my butt off, but it also gave them insight as to why things weren't progressing as quickly as we wanted them to."

From there, talks opened up about how to improve things for everyone.

"We discussed our vision and goals, and I had a tremendous response (from my coaches). My employees have since started taking on initiative on different projects, and the entire atmosphere of our box has changed," she added.

For starters, her head coach came to her and initiated a girls' night.

"She hosted a 'sip and paint,'" Brevitz said, explaining that this involved women from the box getting together to drink wine and paint a picture.

"Then I had another trainer come to me and plan a nutrition challenge," Brevitz said. Two other coaches approached her and asked how they could help make life easier for her.

From there, Brevitz started to give away jobs to coaches—things like entering contracts into the system—freeing her up to work on parts of the business she used to neglect because she was too busy.

"I'm really able to focus on growing programs and looking at analyzing the business more closely—our finances and stuff like that—whereas before I would say, 'Oh, I'll do this later, because I'd get caught up entering contracts,'" Brevitz said.

As an owner, Brevitz learned from the article that she can't try to micromanage everything; it's best to let her coaches take the lead on certain projects.

Her next plan is to continue to give coaches even more responsibilities and autonomy in certain areas. For starters, she's turning one of her coaches into the manager of CrossFit Kenosha's personal-training program.

"And as we get bigger and bigger, I'll need a manager in every department," she said.

Now that she has her coaches on board, Brevitz is confident in CrossFit Kenosha's future.

Putting It all Together

Mike Jones helps run four affiliates: CrossFit St. Paul, CrossFit Minneapolis, CrossFit St. Louis Park and CrossFit Minneapolis Northeast.

Considering the scope of his business—between the four locations, Jones and his business partners have 700 active clients—he knew he needed sound policies and procedures in place to be successful. This involved both people and technology.

Today, Jones has given up much of the administrative duties to his general managers, of whom he has four—one at each box.

Managers deal with emailing, member accounts, billing, attendance and taking in new clients, freeing up Jones to focus on developing new business ideas and other things such as his competition and CrossFit Kids programs. He also coaches eight to 10 hours per week. And other than that, a great deal of his time is spent making sure his coaches and managers are happy and performing well.

"I try to have one-on-one conversations with our full-time employees each week, even if it's just a standing-meeting format," Jones said.

Like Marcelli and Ives, Jones' managers rely on automated technology, through Mindbody Online, to make their jobs easier. A host of similar programs exist.

For example, when a new inquiry shows interest, much of the process happens automatically. First, the potential member registers for an intro session online, so nobody has to communicate with the newbie until he shows up at the gym. And then when the recruit signs up for a specific day and time to get started, he receives an automated email that verifies his registration. Once the member completes his on-ramp sessions, registration and even payment for regular classes is handled in the same manner.



Courtesy of Mike Jones

Mike Jones (left) helps run four affiliates with a total of 700 active members.

"The only time we have to manually accept first-time payment is if they want to start via private training or if someone just shows up to start on-ramp (without registering), which happens occasionally," Jones said.

Once a client is a member, his payment is 100 percent automatic, meaning it runs forever or until the membership is cancelled, so no time has to be devoted to chasing members down to deal with membership renewals.

Despite reliance on technology and automation, Jones recognizes the continued importance in developing a relationship with clients, so personalized emails between coaches and clients still happen. Templates are available for certain topics, but the coach is free to add a personal touch when necessary.

Attendance reports also help his managers. If a person hasn't been to the gym in two weeks, he or she will appear on a "no-show report," which automatically signals managers to send out a personal email to see what's up with the client.

While his managers handle most admin, Jones still does payroll, but he has a great system in place that allows him to devote no more than 30 minutes a month to the task.

Jones is very focused on time management, so he limits his weekly staff meetings to 45 minutes each week to avoid accidental two-hour meetings, and his managers send out meeting notes each week to reiterate the important topics that were covered.

"You need brevity and you need to be organized," he said.

Mike Jones explained that the policies and procedures he has in place today are a far cry from what his box looked like on Day 1.

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"When we started the business, we went three years without official meetings at all. And then we eventually established the weekly staff meeting, and with an iron fist we built the agenda each week," Jones said.

Jones' next goal is to reduce the amount of time he spends on scheduling each month. Although most days have a set schedule, meaning the same coach coaches the same classes each week, the weekend classes are coached by different coaches each week, which means time must be devoted to sorting out the schedule each month. Jones' goal is to change this soon by giving more control to his coaches and general managers to make the weekend schedule themselves.

"It's not possible to do everything," Jones said.

Once Jones realized it was time to delegate, it ultimately allowed him to focus on the meat and potatoes of his business, and, more importantly, on his family.

"I also have three kids. I still work a lot of hours, but I'm able to take the kids to school and be available for them," he said.

Free Yourself

Regardless of what you prioritize as an affiliate owner—hiring part-time or full-time assistants or managers, delegating roles to coaches, or relying heavily on technology—the important thing is to set your business up so it doesn't bog you down with never-ending administrative hassles.

Affiliate owners agree: Get that monkey off your back so you can focus on your coaches and your clients—the most important parts of your affiliate.



About the Author

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