



Pilates Can be Your Club's Core Strength

by Lindsay G. Merrithew

Once the province of dancers and professional athletes, Pilates is now a household word, and a widely embraced exercise available at a majority of health clubs nationwide. As it continues to grow in popularity, the potential for Pilates to attract and retain club members is virtually limitless. Which begs the question...Is your club capitalizing on the versatility of this wonderful mind-body exercise?

Celebrity endorsement and widespread media attention may give it the appearance of another fitness fad, but Pilates exercise has strong roots and it is about much more than looks. Although it's touted as *the* method for developing core strength and lean abs, it can also provide a full-body stretch-and-strengthen workout with a myriad of mind-body and functional fitness benefits. Once clients are turned on to the potentially life-changing effects of Pilates, their practice can continually evolve, with new exercises being incorporated as their bodies become stronger and more flexible. There are scores of possibilities for increasing challenge, resistance and variety as clients progress. The progressive nature of Pilates and multiple applications mean a host of options when it comes to club programming.

With a store of over 500 exercises in the repertoire, applicable to persons of almost every age and fitness level, Pilates offers unsurpassed sustainability and unlimited potential as a core offering at your club. The adaptability of Pilates can be tapped to bring clients through the door and motivate them through programming that anticipates and responds to their needs.

Of course, you will need staff who are not only well-versed in this exercise method, but who are also well-schooled. Your ability to expand and develop effective and marketable programming rests on a solid knowledge of anatomy, the functions of

each exercise, and how to modify them. Look for instructors who have completed a rigorous training program, ideally with certification that is recognized in the field.

Once you've got the right team on-board, here are six techniques for stretching Pilates' appeal and longevity at your club:

1. Offer Pilates In Personal Training And Group Class Formats.

Everyone has their exercise preference. Some of your members pay for personal training and others find added motivation in attending a group classes. Pilates can easily serve the needs of either one of these clients. Meet the needs of both and keep everyone happy.

2. Expand Mat Offerings With Props.

Add fun, challenge and variety to Pilates mat classes by incorporating balance or resistance equipment. Many items, such as stability balls, resistance bands and foam rollers, you likely already have on hand. Low-cost light equipment developed specifically for Pilates, such as resistance rings, are ideal. Give the new class formats catchy names like "Have a Ball Pilates" and "Pilates on a Roll" and watch class attendance grow.

3. Introduce A Range Of Pilates Equipment.

Many clients are now familiar with the Reformer, but there's a whole jungle gym of Pilates equipment that can be utilized. Increase exercise options by adding a Pilates Chair, Barrels or Cadillac to your studio or open gym. This equipment will enable you to expand exercise options and attract new clients.

4. Target Underserved Populations.

Pilates exercises are unique because they are modifiable and can be customized for participants of any age or fitness level, including those in rehab and the aging

population. The exercises can also be adjusted for persons experiencing back, neck or knee issues, who otherwise might be inclined to avoid exercise. Some of these people have more flexible schedules and will be able to populate your club's "downtime."

5. Develop Programming To Target New Markets.

The precision inherent in the Pilates system can be utilized to target and condition specific muscles and can be a great pre-season prep for golfers, tennis players and other sports enthusiasts at any level. Develop specific classes, such as "Pilates for Golf" or "Pilates for Tennis" to reach new markets.

6. Adapt Pilates To New Trends.

There has been a lot of print devoted to the modern-day challenge of finding time to exercise, and clubs are responding with 30-45 minute "Express" workouts. Try introducing 30-40 minute Pilates group classes of a specific design to help people center themselves for a busy day or unwind after work. Market them appropriately as energizing, or relaxing sessions.

Offer a continually evolving menu of Pilates-based activities at your facility, trust your instructors to build relationships with your members, and you will have a great foundation for building club loyalty. With benefits spanning from sleeker physiques to increased concentration and a greater ability to deal with stress, devotees of Pilates have discovered that it's an exercise system that can be customized and performed for a lifetime – and why not at your club?

Lindsay G. Merrithew is the President and CEO of STOTT PILATES, a subsidiary of Merrithew Corporation. He can be contacted at 800.910.0001, or by email at lindsay@stottpilates.com