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Polishing a Brand's Image

ART CURTIS AND
SMAIYRA MILLION
HAVE ENHANCED THE
SPORTS CLUB/LA'S APPEAL



Viveca Jensen, front right, created Piloxing

Not Your Mother's Pilates!



NEW FORMATS, PROGRAMS, AND EQUIPMENT KEEP THINGS EXCITING

By Patricia Glynn

For some fitness enthusiasts, Pilates is just one of many fitness regimens. For others, though, it's an art, a precise science, a transformational study of movement. But, regardless of the phrases used to describe it, one thing is certain: Pilates, in a word, *works*—for clubs and members alike.

Thanks to its unquestioned effectiveness, demonstrated over a period of more than 90 years, and to constant improvements, upgrades, and imaginative new variations on the original theme, Pilates remains an ideal protocol for attracting, engaging, and retaining members.

Recently, the recession has, to be sure, left its mark. Pilates-Pro.com, an online community for industry professionals, recently conducted a survey on the financial performance of Pilates businesses. Some respondents acknowledged that sales had, indeed, slipped as clients trimmed their training time; but, surprisingly, a large number reported that their revenues had either remained stable or, better yet, increased significantly.

Those who continue to flourish despite the economy's failure have recognized a few fundamental facts. They understand that, while they must remain focused on the basics—safe, efficient programming; excellent customer service; sound business practices—they must be ever alert to fresh opportunities to improvise, innovate, and otherwise reinvent what they do.

Existing opportunities

One of the simplest and least expensive ways to reinvigorate a club's Pilates menu is to leverage its current offerings. An increasingly popular and profitable approach capitalizes on group equipment classes. Such sessions, in which an instructor works with two to as many as six clients at a time, deliver a number of advantages. They make Pilates more dynamic, are socially rewarding for members, and are kind to their wallets, increasing utilization—all of which translates to greater revenues for the club.

PJ O'Clair, a STOTT PILATES Master Instructor Trainer and the 2008 IDEA Program Director of the Year, can attest to their value. The owner of Club Xcel/Northeast, a small boutique-style club with some 480 members in Hamilton, Massachusetts,

she's compensated for a slight dip in private lessons with an uptick in group sessions.

Individual sessions cost \$55-\$85, depending on the leader's level of training, but group classes are just \$30 per person, and a 10-pack can be purchased for \$195.



Tangolates pairs
Pilates and dance

Group equipment options, O'Clair points out, obviously require more equipment, but, she contends, more than pay their own way in the long run.

"Our numbers are up this year," she enthuses. "We logged a 5% increase in revenues during the first quarter."

Another way to pump up Pilates proceeds is to make use of equipment that may already be in the club, for which manufacturers have devised routines based on Pilates movements. Reformers, chairs, and other traditional Pilates pieces may remain pivotal, →

Not Your Mother's Pilates!

Paul Lyden Photography



PJ O'Clair, left, with Club Xcel client



Pilates on Pineapple vibration platform

but devices originally designed with other exercises in mind can add a unique, fresh twist to workouts, and do double, even triple, duty—serving, as well, in personal training and group-exercise situations. Among the categories of equipment that can be utilized for Pilates are glide boards, cable and pulley systems, whole-body vibration devices, and, even, rebounders (mini-trampolines).

New possibilities

Grafting Pilates concepts to nontraditional equipment or combining it with other exercise modalities are two great ways to get creative. Yogalates, which pairs yoga and Pilates, has already become something of a standard at many clubs, and now, new couplings are occurring.

Viveca Jensen, a native of Sweden, former World Gym instructor, and the owner of V Pilates in Toluca Lake, California, a part of Los Angeles, has moved Pilates into the boxing ring. “When I studied Pilates, I discovered that its originator, Joseph Pilates, was a boxer,” she explains. “And I was like, ‘Oh, there it is!’” Jensen’s inspired creation, Piloxing, is an hour-long routine that flows seamlessly from uppercuts to mat work. Classes, priced at \$15, generally attract 15-35 people, and, Jensen notes, attendance is increasing.

“Clients say that Piloxing makes them feel good not just physically, but mentally, as well,” she reports.

The program, which has generated a fair amount of buzz, also serves as a feeder into V Pilates’ traditional training services, which has brightened

Jensen’s bottom line. “It sparks an interest,” she says.

A hemisphere away, another innovator, Tamara Di Tella, has married Pilates and Argentina’s national dance, the tango, to create Tangolates. Pilates first made a name for itself when it was embraced by professional dancers, and Di Tella seems to be resurrecting history. Tangolates is offered at her five Pilates studios in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in Argentina, and is licensed for use at some 50 clubs in 12 other countries worldwide.

Tangolates makes use of a special piece of equipment, the T-DiTella apparatus, a platform with four upright bars that accommodates two users at a time, which introduces a formerly missing exercise element. “Pilates is excellent for flexibility and strength, but Tangolates adds cardio to the equation,” Di Tella explains. “Many clients are looking for weight loss, but not finding it, in traditional Pilates. Tangolates, on the other hand, burns calories.”

Each of Di Tella’s studios caters to approximately 200 clients, and her Tangolates classes average about 10 people in size.

Another clever individual, Joan Breibart, the president and cofounder of the PhysicalMind Institute (PMI), based in New York City, which certifies instructors in the Pilates Method, has also developed some promising permutations: Standing Pilates and Circular Pilates. “We’ve done what we



Tangolates
choreographer
Tamara Di Tella

“MANY CLIENTS ARE LOOKING FOR WEIGHT LOSS, BUT NOT FINDING IT, IN TRADITIONAL PILATES. TANGOLATES, ON THE OTHER HAND, BURNS CALORIES.”

think Joe (Pilates) would have done if he were still alive,” says Breibart.

As the name implies, Standing Pilates is performed in a standing position. One of the primary goals of the class is to teach clients how to apply the neutral spine of Pilates to everyday tasks, such as bending and walking. Circular Pilates, a 20-minute routine, was developed in association with Kristin Hapke, an instructor for the Institute, and Marika Molnar, a clinical advisor to the PMI. This class includes standing, sitting, kneeling, supine, and prone movements, all of which are designed to build strength during rotation.

Interestingly, injury-prevention and rehabilitation is now one of the fastest-growing segments of the Pilates industry—a natural development, perhaps, given the fact that Pilates was originally devised for wounded, bed-bound soldiers during World War I. “People came to Joe with an injury, and he found a way to help them,” explains Ken Endelman, the founder, owner, and CEO of Balanced Body, a Pilates equipment manufacturer based in Sacramento, California. “He was essentially one of the first physical therapists.”

Attuned to the trend, STOTT PILATES intends to introduce a continuing-education series focused on

post-rehab training, as well as on different medical disorders. “Specialty tracks will give instructors the expertise to specialize a little more and help them hone their skills,” explains Moira Merrithew, the cofounder and executive director of education for STOTT PILATES, the Toronto-based subsidiary of the Merrithew Corporation, a leading provider of Pilates products and services.

“Post-rehabilitation is a huge new trend,” attests O’Clair, of Club Xcel, who specializes in post-rehab and athletic performance. “I’m getting a

lot of referrals from doctors—more than I’ve ever had.” Approximately 50% of her clients are post-rehab, she says, and athletes constitute 20% of her private-training business.

“Many pro athletes are incorporating Pilates into their training regimens, and the majority of them are men,” points out Lindsay Merrithew, the cofounder, president, and CEO of STOTT PILATES. “Perhaps they’re introduced to it while on the mend from injury, but most are sticking with it. I think that, in the future, we’re going to see a lot more men taking advantage of the benefits of Pilates.”

Of special note, and indicative of a new direction that Pilates seems to be taking, is O’Clair’s Pilat-ease offering, developed to provide cancer patients with “a



**T-DiTella unit
for Tangolates**

gentler approach” to Pilates exercise; 10 people are currently enrolled in the pilot program.

Bettina Blank, a Pilates Method Alliance (PMA) Gold Certified Pilates teacher at the Circle Studio in Portland, Oregon, has also done some groundbreaking work, helping individuals suffering with Parkinson’s disease. The author of *Pilates for Parkinson’s Disease: An Instructional Handbook*, Blank is convinced that Pilates can alleviate some of the symptoms of Parkinson’s—e.g., tremors and a shuffling gait—and has witnessed such improvements firsthand. The participants in her classes, she reports, “feel better, feel more energized, and their posture improves.” —

— Patricia Glynn, p.glynn@fit-etc.com



**Lindsay L. and
Moira Merrithew**

STOTT PILATES® Photography © Merrithew Corporation

Pilates' Evolution

After nearly a century, Pilates, today, remains as popular as *any* exercise regimen *anywhere*. It has managed this impressive achievement by regularly introducing products and programs that effectively address shifting market needs—an accomplishment attested to by the following offerings from IHRSA associate members.

AEROBICS AND FITNESS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (AFAA)

AFAA's *Yoga and Pilates On The Ball* and *Yoga and Pilates Double Ball Workout* self-study courses are designed for everyone. Each workout includes a warm-up, conditioning phase, and cool-down. The exercises come in three levels, Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced, and include modifications for beginners, individuals with medical concerns, and those who want a more challenging workout. The routines are designed to challenge both the mind and body, strengthen and stretch the muscles, improve balance and coordination, and improve body awareness.

"AFAA's *Yoga and Pilates On The Ball* and *Yoga and Pilates Double Ball Workout* DVDs are filled with fun and creative exercises incorporating the use of a stability ball and/or a small Pilates ball," explains Kathy Stevens, AFAA's educational director. "These total-body workouts are designed for participants of any ability. Each self-study course package includes a DVD training, 60-minute music CD, choreography notes, and a self-study offering six AFAA CEUs."

Contact: www.afaa.com, 877-968-7263
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BALANCED BODY

Balanced Body has introduced the EXO Chair with split-pedal option. The innovation permits greater rotational and reciprocal movement of the extremities, enhancing performance and producing a more robust exercise repertoire. The split-pedal EXO is appropriate for group Pilates classes and personal training sessions. An optional Functional Resistance Kit facilitates additional exercises unique to the chair.

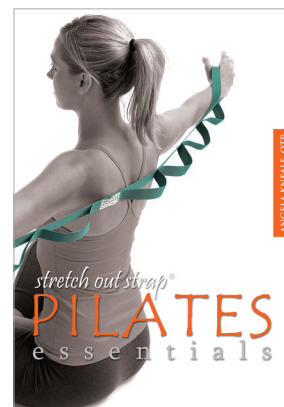
"We originally designed the single-pedal EXO in 2007 to meet the needs of fitness centers, Pilates professionals, and home users who wanted a versatile piece of equipment with a small footprint," notes Ken Endelman, the founder and CEO of Balanced Body. "Since then, we've improved the chair's design and functionality to stretch and strengthen muscle groups not typically reached by more traditional equipment and techniques."

Contact: www.pilates.com,
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OPTP

OPTP's *Stretch Out Strap Pilates Essentials* guide features dynamic exercises that lengthen and strengthen the body and challenge core stability and control. Using the Stretch Out Strap during workouts provides users with sensory feedback that helps improve posture, flexibility, muscular balance, and body symmetry, as well as core strength and shoulder stability. The book includes more than 40 exercises, and can be purchased separately or as a package, along with the Stretch Out Strap.



"The exercises in *Stretch Out Strap Pilates Essentials* increase one's awareness of how their body moves and feels," notes Angela Kneale, OTR, a certified Pilates instructor and OTPP consultant. "Using the strap allows one to experience movement that increases strength and flexibility and alleviates muscle stress and tension."

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"AN INCREASINGLY POPULAR AND PROFITABLE APPROACH TO PILATES INSTRUCTION IS GROUP EQUIPMENT CLASSES."

PEAK PILATES

The Peak Pilates MVe program represents an easy, nonintimidating way to introduce a new group-equipment class or to expand an existing Pilates program. The complete package combines stackable chairs or Reformers (or both) with on-site instructor training, educational materials, and dynamic programming created by Master Trainers that incorporates familiar fitness moves.

"The MVe workout is fun, produces results, and utilizes the entire body to increase core strength, flexibility, and balance. It generates interest on the part of men and woman, alike," attests Julie Lobdell, the president of Peak Pilates. "The sleek, stackable

PeakPilates®

line of MVe equipment is equally at home in a multi-purpose room for group classes or in a dedicated Pilates studio."

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STOTT PILATES

STOTT PILATES' lightweight (100-pound) SPX Max Plus Reformer was designed for shared spaces and is ideal for group or private Pilates training in multi-purpose studios. It makes use of an innovative retractable rope system and traveling pulley system on its vertical frame; is stackable and easily stored; and offers a full complement of Reformer accessories to expand programming options without sacrificing quality or stability.

"The SPX Max Plus Reformer has all of the same features as our popular V2 Max Plus Reformer," points out Lindsay G. Merrithew, the president and CEO of STOTT PILATES. "This lightweight, vertical-frame Reformer is perfect for studios that need to optimize space efficiency, without compromising either programming or results."

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