

Are social media sites relevant to fitness club marketing?

2010 Australian Fitness Industry Survey brought to you by Ezypay will again provide the club owners and managers of Australian fitness clubs with the insights into club operations, staffing, sales, marketing and finance along with the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the members of their clubs.

To provide additional guidance and direction this year Ezypay invited a panel of leading industry professionals to discuss some of the major outcomes from this year's survey results. The AFIS expert panel included;

Grant Gamble (GG)	Owner – Bodywise
Justin Wilshaw (JW)	CEO – Contours
Gayle Brimble (GB)	Training Team Captain – Australian Institute Fitness
Megan Crow (MC)	Business Advisor - Christchurch City Council, NZ
Jamie Hayes (JH)	Managing Director - Healthy Inspirations
Edel Kilmartin (EK)	Director of Operations - Curves
Justin Tamsett (JT)	CEO - Active Management
Simon Hall (SH)	Marketing Manager - Ezypay
Celeste Kirby-Brown (CKB)	Sales & Marketing Director – Ezypay

Survey outcomes - With so much twitting going on in the world about social media only 3.5% of club owner and managers said it was a successful form of marketing last year.

Question - Are social media sites relevant to fitness club marketing?

GB I question the use of social media as a marketing tool as social media is still very new. It comes down to how businesses are measuring their marketing and how accurate is the measurement. Do people actual recognise when they first saw an advert about a club? Often traditional media comes to mind, yeah I heard it on the radio, but maybe they heard about the club from a friend on Facebook. The accuracy of measuring marketing is really quite challenging and the second point, the value, in the eyes of the business owner who may still be uneducated in the area of the new social media, will also have a big effect.

SH How many people have actually joined through social media?

JT Well Dell Computers can attribute \$6.5M to their twitter campaign. I think the biggest problem with social media for health clubs is that it's so new and people tend to think it's really hard, but once you get your head around how it works, it's easy to use but it's having a strategy and I don't think most clubs have a strategy. Social media is about having conversations with

customers and once you have a conversation and have a connection then you can use it as a marketing tool, you can't have that conversation until you've got the trust.

GG You need to have an advocate in house as well, we hired a social media marketing person, their goal is to expedite information across all the social media's and my team have to upload something each week a photo, a video, a tweet, in our weekly meeting we come up with what we are going to send out there. You need to keep it vibrate, new and fresh and you have to get people involved, I'm new and I'm learning about it, it's inevitable it's the way it's going to go, the day of the postcard drop isn't necessarily going to go away, but if you were going to check where new members were sourced from 10 years ago the internet wouldn't have figured, it's now typically in the top 4. GB was completely right, if your sales team is not asking the right question about how they heard about the club you are not monitoring the marketing correctly. The question we should be asking is "what drove you in the door today?", that's the catalyst. It's not all the small messages it's the one that got them into the door and it may have been a Twitter conversation that made them think. If we can be more accurate in checking our source of our member or prospects we can drive more dollars into those areas.

GB We probably haven't even had 12 months of twitter being involved in business so it's not front of mind, it's not being measured and it's probably hasn't even made it's way onto an enquiry card to be measured properly. But interesting enough that working across 3 campuses, one of our managers works with her students on Facebook as oppose to an email and she's on Facebook everyday answering questions, she's of an age and very IT savvy but I can see it's going to be the way that we'll have to deal with those students in the future.

JT Statistics show that with generation Y email is no longer used, they all talk via Facebook. The largest growth of Facebook is 45-55 women, there's more applications now on Facebook you don't need a website, you can build your website on Facebook. You can even buy memberships through PayPal on Facebook, sell tickets to events, all on Facebook, it's just a super powerful media that no-one really in the fitness industry has got on or understands.

JW It's another tool in your toolkit and it's a very cheap tool in your toolkit, if someone's spending 5 minutes a day twittering.

JH We surveyed 14,000 women 12 months ago, 83% of those that responded said Facebook was their preferred choice and they used it at least 3 times a week and these are women over 40. But I think there's another issue here that is not just in social media but in the web strategy. Many business people are saying that their traditional marketing isn't working like it used to. It's my personal belief that the internet has got in the way of that, now for all consumers including ourselves before we put ourselves at the transaction risk of contacting the club or making a purchasing decision, we know we can Google them, visit their website, check them out or go to Facebook and if I don't like what I see or hear what everyone is writing about

you even though I like your flyer and your offer I'm not going to call you. So I think if we fail with web strategy and social media then our traditional marketing will be less effective so it's a big filter process in the buyer process that they can now 24/7 find out about you before having to call you.

GG It's also where you land (in general search on the internet) every week I have my General Managers go on and Google search our club name and find out in common terms or Google terms where we appear. We want to constantly drive up on that list. When we first did that embarrassing we were not on the first 3 or 4 pages and we were only one of the few people in that area if you typed in the location and club name, and it's absolutely critical.

JT Google the other day said 90% don't go past the first page, 75% people used Google rather than the yellow pages online or in hardcopy to search for something having a web presence is absolutely critical and to build up your Google presence you have got to use social media.

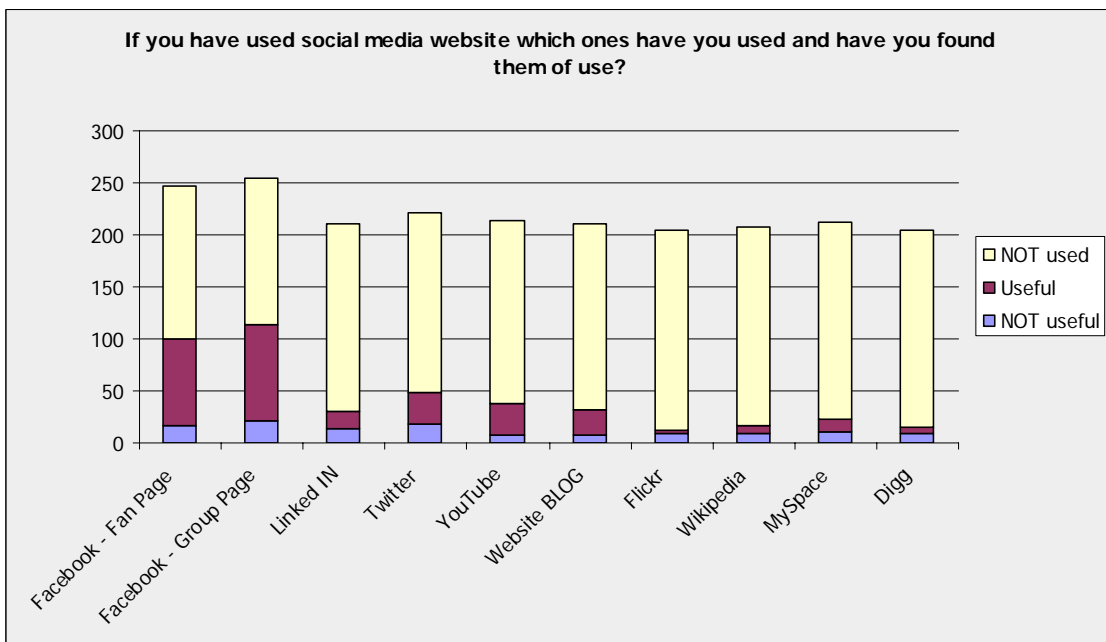
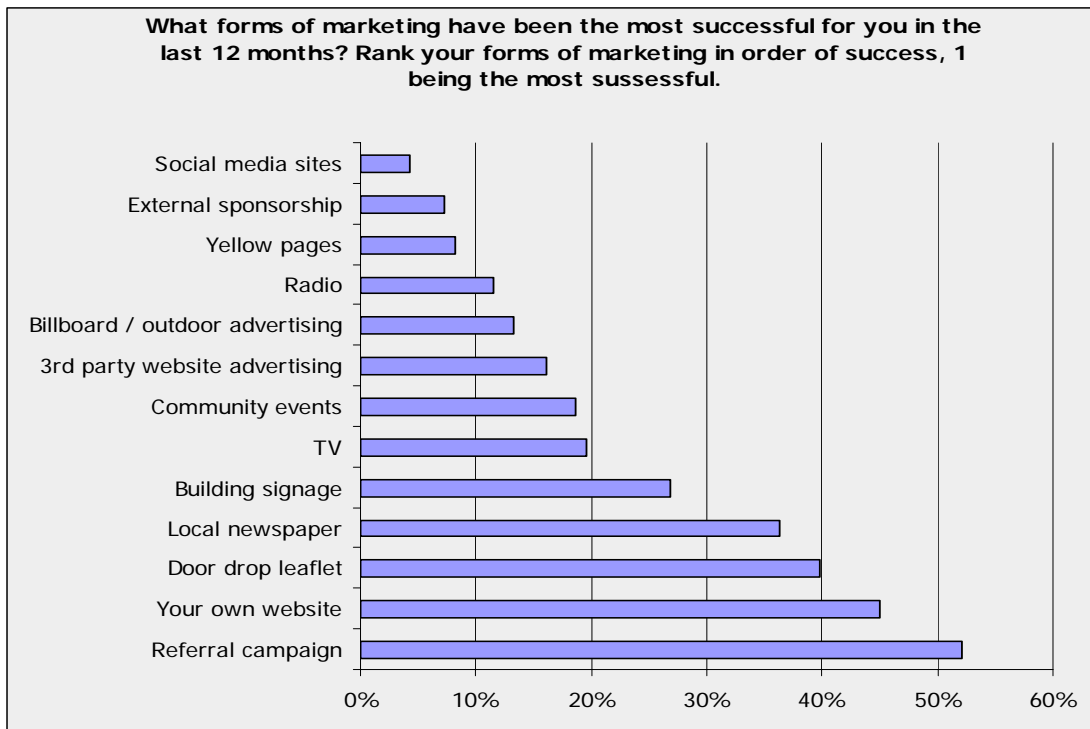
GG We also rate ourselves against all the other clubs and Fitness First for example get 97% in our rating system on their performance on the web this would be because they have 5000 pages and Curves will do the same.

JT And that's the beauty of social media you can compete with the large chain, you are getting followers who are coming to you.

GG It's a worthwhile exercise to have your website graded using an online tool to see where you can improve and it can be done quite easily and quite quickly you don't need 5000 pages to get your performance score up.

JT We know from Facebook that 6.6M of Australian's over the age of 18 use Facebook and most check it every single day which is better than any TV show and those numbers are as of June.

JK I think the question about the relevance of social media to fitness clubs, from Justin's number we know our members are actually already contacting each other anyway within social media and one negative comment is going to spread like wildfire in that social space so even if you don't use any social media strategies yourself, it's going to happen anyway so it has to be relevant to the industry.



The 2010 AFIS discussion series covers 6 critical fitness topics including, staff quality, social media, membership fees, retention and growth and the concerns around membership contracts. The full series can be viewed on www.fitnesssurvey.com.au. Visit our stand P22 at the Health and Fitness Expo

Simon Hall – Marketing Manager - Ezypay Pty Ltd – Jan 2010