



by Hervey R. Lavoie

Family

Planning Designing for the Adult/Child Mix in the Club Setting



Children are a fact of life in the club business. It is a rare market that offers large numbers of adult members without kids attached. Fathers and mothers are attracted to clubs that have something to offer their children. On the other hand, having other people's children underfoot as they try to enjoy their club does not amuse most adults. There is a real need for careful planning when a club includes children's programming in an adult-oriented facility. Most programming/babysitting services are limited to children who have arrived at the club with an adult who will stay on premises until they are ready to leave together. This article outlines eight design ideas for peaceful coexistence in a mixed adult-child environment.

1. Filter the kids out early in your club entry flow. Access to the secured area, which you have dedicated to children's programming, should be located just inside your main club entrance. This location is most convenient for parents and eliminates the need for children to be circulating into the club core.
2. Consider creating a dedicated parent-child entrance away from the main club entry, but convenient to under-utilized parking. This entry point would only be open during

active periods of children's programming and would only be available to adults accompanied by a child. The parent is admitted to the club at the same time that the child is signed into the kids' program area. An added benefit of this approach is the improved likelihood of open, close-in parking, convenient to this entry. Children's traffic is removed from the main adult entry and no additional staffing is required because the kid's area will already be staffed any time it is open.

3. If your club has a food and beverage area, divide the dining area into a family zone and an adult-only zone. This kind of layout will give your child-free, adult diners a quiet space to enjoy their food. The interior theme and furniture types used for the family area can also be customized accordingly.
4. Locker rooms are a common location for adult complaints about troublesome children. Providing family locker rooms can eliminate this issue. This provision will allow a parent-child couple of any gender combination to change clothes and shower in a private changing room. Locking is generally provided, outside of this private room, in a co-ed locker alcove. For the most part, children will only need locker-room facilities for aquatic activities. They usually arrive dressed and ready to play for most dry-land activities.
5. When designing program space for children's activities, age-group segregation is important. Kids may be

kids, but 9-year olds and 6-year olds don't mix. Conventional wisdom suggests that separate spaces be defined for each of the following age groups: 6 months-12 months; 12 months-24 months; 2 years-5 years; 6 years-8 years; 9 years-12 years; and 13 years-15 years. Most clubs allow 16-year olds to work out with adults. Accommodating programs for these six age groups will consume large amounts of dedicated floor space, 4-6,000 sq. ft. is not uncommon. Without this kind of space, many of these age groups must be excluded from club participation or forced to mix with the adult population, which will not be well received by most adults. Many clubs simply have no place for the 7-15 age groups, due to lack of space or programming foresight. If these kids are excluded from the club, the parents to which they are attached may be forced to consider leaving the club. If these kids are permitted to roam the club in unsupervised packs, other adult members may choose to give up their memberships and seek out an adult-only club environment.


6. For clubs with the ability to allocate sufficient space, the inclusion of a separate, multi-purpose kids' gym is a great feature. 30' x 60' are good dimensions for a small kids' gym. 70' x 50' is ideal for a larger gym. These dimensions are good for junior basketball, volleyball, kick ball, soccer, and street hockey. The location of this gym should be suitable for occasional use by adult team sports when the junior programming is inactive.
7. Many clubs will build outdoor pools for family use during the hot summer months. Access to these pools should not be channeled through the club's main entry lobby. It is better to have a direct outside gate to the pool from parking. This will keep a lot of potentially noisy and disorderly

groups of kids from circulating through the indoor lobby, in order to access an outdoor destination.

8. Destination programming for children are the types of programs where the parents will drop the child off, leave the premises, and return when the child is ready to be picked up. This kind of operation requires strict enforcement of child security and safety policies. Secure and supervised waiting areas should be provided. Queuing lanes for parent vehicles are

needed. Where this kind of programming is provided, a separate entry is recommended to keep the resulting congestion from negatively impacting the main adult-member entrance. This is particularly true in facilities that invite outside teams and groups "en masse" into the building for competitions and league play.

Adults and children can happily co-exist under the same athletic-club roof if, and only if, operational policies and facility design are conceived in a coor-

ordinated and intelligent fashion. Keep the faith--family planning works! 

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How Well Do You Know Your Members?

by **Stuart Worrell**

Smart operators are beginning to understand the power of the raw data that sits in their membership databases but, as an industry, we are some way short of leveraging that information in a way that will drive our businesses more effectively.

The membership database is fast becoming the club's biggest asset:

- It provides the means to encourage members to stay longer.
- It provides the information to foster secondary spends.
- It allows operators to identify who their most profitable members are and to recruit more of them.

Once data is managed efficiently, clubs can access a wealth of operational information:

- Patterns of club usage
- Membership profiles
- Which residential areas produce most members
- Which facilities are most used

Interpreted correctly, this data can be converted into valuable knowledge about the needs, usage, and spending patterns for specific segments of the membership base. This knowledge can be converted into an effective marketing strategy; clubs are able to target prospects and customers who fit into similar

groups and are most likely to respond to the offers and communications.

But, clubs can now go one step further. Data analysis can highlight specific trends within a membership itself that, in turn, can help operators to predict when a member is likely to terminate his/her membership. Once these patterns have been recognized, clubs can intervene with the right stimulus at the appropriate time. If a member stops exercising and doesn't receive any communication from the club for two weeks, the chances of that member quitting altogether are significantly increased.

The findings of the FIA's 2001 annual research project, conducted in conjunction with LIW and using the expertise of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Leading software supplier, Ge.MRM, will be revealed at LIW this year. The study will look into members' activities from joining through to the time of leaving – examining and explaining the factors influencing both high and low membership retention.

A recent example of how data analysis can improve profitability was demonstrated when a national health and fitness chain conducted research into their data. They discovered that members who participated in their specially tailored induction program stayed at

the club 5% longer than the average. They decided to target new members via e-mails and telemarketing to improve the rate of participation in the induction program. If the average length of membership were increased by 5%, this would result in an increase in revenue of more than 1.2 million pounds over three years.

It is inevitable that data-driven marketing will become standard in our industry:

- Accurate member segmentation ensures targeted promotions, and so, offers are more cost-effective. Clubs simply can't afford to target the wrong segment.
- Accurate membership profiling creates a host of cross and up-selling opportunities that would not otherwise exist. New activities (and revenue streams) can be introduced based on members' interests and needs – rather than on gut instinct.
- Systems and communications of the future will be radically faster. If there is a last-minute slot for a class, details can be posted immediately through the web, or offers can be made instantaneously through SMS messaging or e-mail.

To maintain a competitive edge, operators will have to become increasingly customer-focused and well-managed technology will have a massive role to play in that process. 