

Going it alone - think before you leap

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One key feature that distinguishes our industry from other service-oriented fields is the unmistakable presence of a strong entrepreneurial spirit. The diversity of backgrounds and ideas inherent in our industry are a powerful contributor to this ever-present desire to move into business ownership, perhaps as an avenue towards the expression and promotion of individual ideas and beliefs.

Of course a valuable role for the fitness professional is to develop the confidence and self-esteem of our clients, which can only serve to enhance this flourishing 'can-do' way of thinking. While this atmosphere of 'going it alone' is undoubtedly one to be nurtured and admired, it does contribute to an element of recklessness that is rife throughout the industry.

Within the greater health industry we strive to be recognised as fitness professionals, yet the practice of new or recent graduates, with little practical, or 'real world' experience, diving headlong into business ownership remains a common phenomenon. Undoubtedly, a major selling point portrayed by fitness training organisations nationwide is that a career in fitness offers an express opportunity to enter into business ownership. And while on a purely cost basis, establishing a personal training business is a literal drop in the ocean when compared to a high proportion of businesses, the fundamental requirements of running a successful business remain the same. Having a vast array of training knowledge offers no greater guarantee of business success than does being successful in business make you a great trainer.

Going into business of any kind requires extensive market research, identifying your client base, and budgeting for initial purchases and ongoing operating costs, all within the guise of a transparent and dynamic business plan. For fitness professionals, extensive research is the critical prerequisite that many of us forget to invest in. Research your optimal operating base, research your potential client base, research how you intend to reach them and, just as importantly, how you intend to pay the bills until you find them. It will take time and may even appear tedious, but these are all questions that need to be addressed long before you open for business. Careful planning will save you in the long term.

Of course, one critical condition for successful business ownership is avoiding the temptation of easing into your new enterprise on a part-time basis. For optimal success, complete focus is required. This also means that any other work will be a distraction and will take valuable time and resources away from your main objective.

Make sure you're entering into your own business for the right reasons, not because you're following a hobby or intending to test the waters. Go for it because you believe you can make a difference, because you know the demand exists for your services and are convinced you can be successful. Don't undersell yourself by doing something half-heartedly or by going in unprepared and jeopardising your reputation and that of our industry.

It is an old cliché, but patience really is a virtue. If you are serious about entering into business ownership within the fitness industry, give yourself the opportunity to gather ample industry experience, build some start-up capital, and even undertake a small business course. This will ensure that the very necessary decisions relevant to your proposed venture will be much more easily made.



Finally, you will be showing both your clients and the industry at large the appropriate respect by establishing and operating your business in a fully professional manner. This, in conjunction with a consistently high level of service, will lead to a business with a high probability of sustained success.

Considerations before going it alone

- Decide why you want to enter into business ownership, and why you believe you can be successful.
- Research your client base - who your clients will be, how you can reach them and how much you will charge them.
- Research your financial obligations - equipment costs, premises hire, advertising costs.
- Develop a comprehensive business plan which encompasses financing, start-up costs and operating costs.
- Enrol in a small business course, learn about BAS statements and the many other exciting challenges that await any new enterprise.
- Prepare to open for business and commit fully to your new venture. ♦



Andrew McCallum

Andrew is the operations manager of International Fitness, Australian owned manufacturers of Integrity and Eclipse brand commercial strength equipment (www.integritystrength.com). Andrew's fitness industry experience has included operating his own personal training business, and working with professional sporting teams and in corporate health.

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