



By Meghan Boyer

# Personalizing The Experience

Curves, the international fitness franchise for women, attributes much of its success to its community of loyal clients. Each one receives a personalized experience when she walks into a club.

## Discover More About

# Curves

In 1992, Gary and Diane Heavin opened the first Curves location to serve a segment of the fitness market that was largely ignored at that time: women 35 and up. Since then, the company has grown to more than 10,000 franchised locations in more than 44 countries. There are more than 4 million Curves members worldwide.

"Curves is the first facility designed for women to offer 30-minute fitness and commonsense weight loss with the support of a community of women," states the company's Web site. Before Curves, "there was nobody serving the 35 and up busy mom who doesn't want to go to a conventional gym or doesn't have time to go," said Beck Frusher, head of corporate communications for the company. In addition to the workout, which combines strength training with cardio, Curves offers weight management counseling.

What increases the likelihood a person is going to keep coming back to a business? More often than not, it's the people and not the products and services that hook a client for life. Think of the reasons why you patronize your favorite establishments. I know my husband takes our dry cleaning to a family-owned business 30 miles from our home because the friendly owner greets him by name every time he stops in.

An even larger pull for customers is if a business generates a sense of community for its clients, much like the one more than 4 million members find at Curves, the international fitness franchise for women. Certainly, the company is known for targeting women 35 years and older with a quick,

30-minute workout, but that is not what Becky Frusher, head of corporate communications at Curves, thinks the company is ultimately known for with its clients: She pinpoints the Curves community and the social components built into the experience as what continues to bring women to club locations and what has helped make Curves a fast-growing international franchise.

### Creating A Community

Curves' owners didn't set out to create what is now known as the Curves community; it was an unexpected result of the program they set up, which includes an intimate exercise environment and a circuit workout with all the machines placed in a circle facing each other. It's this community that sets Curves apart from the few direct



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## OUTSIDE THE INDUSTRY

competitors with similar programs that have emerged throughout the years. The competition never survives, according to Frusher, because they all lack a sense of community.

"We have an ongoing 5-year, \$5 million study with Baylor University. We have groups that don't do our diet but they do our workout. They score the same high on the body image and quality of life portion of the testing; their scores increase the same as the people who lose the most weight because they're also dieting. It's not just the fact that someone is coming in and losing weight and getting in shape. There's also a social component to it, and that's what makes us different," she explained.

Part of what has helped create the Curves community is the supportive atmosphere at the centers. Personal accomplishments are celebrated with the group: Clients are weighed and measured with each visit, and if someone has lost weight, the trainer brings that person into the center of the circuit workout and announces the accomplishment to everyone there, and they cheer the person on. Clients that join the optional Curves 6 Week Solution come together in small classes to learn more about losing weight.

Curves centers also have a relaxed atmosphere so women, some of whom aren't used to exercising regularly, can feel comfortable. "The workout is, of course, the main



Curves is known for targeting women 35 years and older with a quick, 30-minute workout.

thing they're going to get when they come in, and they're going to find women like them who understand their problems, who don't judge them. No makeup, no men, no mirrors," said Frusher.

### Personalizing The Experience

The average Curves location has roughly 400-450 clients but can range from 200 to more than 1,000 depending on club size, explained Frusher. Even though there are lots of people registered at each location, it's important that each one has a personalized experience when she visits a club. The personalization starts the moment a client walks in: "They're going to be greeted when they walk in. There's always a trainer in the center watching, encouraging, [offering] witty conversation or the

## Taking The Community Home

When Curves clients aren't visiting a club, they can still feel connected to the Curves community thanks to available supplemental literature. The Curves magazine, *diane*, is available quarterly exclusively at Curves locations. The magazine features workout and dieting tips as well as client success stories and profiles, and its purpose is to strengthen women, according to Curves. The first issue was published in spring of 2004, and since then, it has included articles on domestic violence, diabetes, inflammation, eating disorders, breast cancer and more.

*Curves: Permanent Results Without Permanent Dieting* is one of an assortment of books written by Gary Heavin, one of the company's founders, that is also available for clients to purchase. There's even Curves CDs that feature compilations of "fitness" music available. With all of this at the clients' disposal, they can take the Curves community with them wherever they go.



The Curves magazine, *diane*, is available quarterly exclusively at Curves locations.



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latest recipes or tips to lose weight to help everybody out. They're going to be told goodbye when they leave. It's a very personal experience," said Frusher.

Curves employees focus on achieving clients' personal goals. If a

client stops attending unexpectedly, a Curves employee will call to check in with her or send a postcard. "We know if they don't come in, they're not going to see results," explained Frusher. To further help clients get results, Curves employees ask each

one to explain why she wants to lose weight. "We don't want to hear, 'Well, I just want to lose weight and get in shape.' If we can get them to tell us a concrete goal, like my son is getting married in June, if they start to get discouraged, we can remind

## Curves Fast Facts

**Headquarters:** Woodway, Texas

**Club locations:** More than 10,000 worldwide

**Club members:** More than 4 million

**Company mission:** Strengthening women

**Fun fact:** It took McDonald's 25 years and Subway 26 years to open 6,000 franchises; Curves did it in only seven, according to the company.

them." The clients get to work with someone each time they visit, which reinforces the sense of community and teamwork.

### Everyone Gets Support

Community is something Curves provides for both its customers and its franchisers. New Curves owners can elect to attend Club Camp, a 1-week intensive training on all aspects of owning a club. They can attend the training session for only the cost of their travel expenses. A Curves mentor also joins each new owner during the first week to help him or her open the new club.

### Associating A Face

It's simple for consumers to be fickle about where they shop if they regard a store as only a collection of different products housed beneath one roof. Without personalized touches, it's easier for consumers to choose shopping locals on price and selection alone. But if you can create personal shopping experiences for your customers and bring them together as a gardening community, chances are they'll develop close ties to your store, the long-lasting kind that will keep them coming back again and again. All you need to do is associate a face — and even a few friends — with your store. 🌿

For more information on this article, contact Catherine Evans, managing editor of Lawn & Garden Retailer, at [cevans@sgcmail.com](mailto:cevans@sgcmail.com) or (847) 391-1050

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