



What Annoys Your
Members, What Delights
Them and How Does This
Relate to Retention?



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Club Hassles and Uplifts

When members make a visit to their club there are a whole range of experiences that they may encounter both good and bad. Could they park okay? Did the receptionist speak to them? Was there a towel available? Were the changing rooms clean? Did the fitness staff speak to them? Did they have to queue to use the equipment? Did they enjoy their workout? These and many other factors contribute to the overall experience of the visit. In this report from the TRP 10,000™ we report on what people say when asked about their experience and examine whether their experience is associated with the likelihood of cancelling their membership.

What is TRP 10,000™?

TRP 10,000™ is the biggest and most comprehensive survey of member behaviour ever carried out in the health and fitness industry. 10,000 health and fitness members completed a baseline survey of their exercise habits and membership behaviour between July and September 2013. During regular intervals over the coming years they will be followed up to measure changes to their habits and membership behaviour.

Data and analysis

The results reported in this article are for members who completed the survey between July and September 2013 and who were followed up until the end of January 2014. During the follow up period 1,526 of participating members cancelled their membership.

Members were asked how frequently they experienced hassles (see Figure 1 for a list) and more positive uplifts (see Figure 2 for a list) and how much they found hassles annoying and uplifts enjoyable.

Results

What club hassles do members report and how annoying are they?

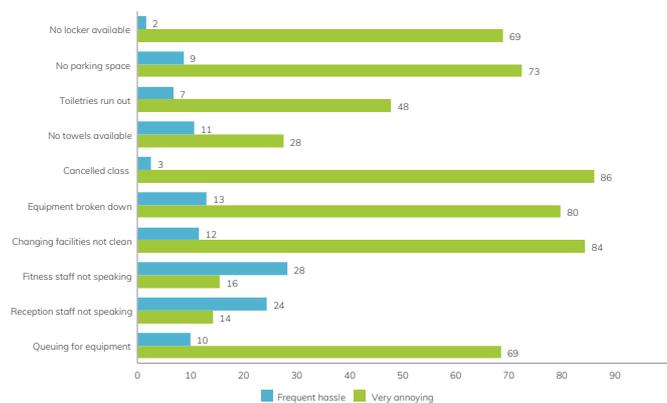
Figure 1 shows the proportion of members who reported hassles that happen to them frequently (blue bars). The green bars represent the proportion of members who say hassles happen at least occasionally and also say the hassles are annoying. So just 2% of members say they frequently can't get a locker and 69% of members say if they can't get a locker it is annoying.

Overall, 55% of members say they do not frequently experience

any of the hassles listed in Figure 1 with the remaining 45% typically reporting an average of two hassles that occur frequently.

The two most frequent hassles members report are fitness staff not talking to them and reception staff not talking to them. However, only 16% and 14% of members who say this happens to them find it annoying. On the other hand, only 10% of members report frequently queuing for equipment but 69% find queuing annoying. So some things are common but not necessarily that annoying and others less common but very annoying when they happen. The most annoying hassles are cancelled classes (thankfully not very common) and dirty changing rooms.

Figure 1. Proportion of members reporting frequent hassles and hassles they find annoying



By combining the frequency with which hassles are reported and how many members say they find them annoying we can rank the club hassles by order of burden.

The top 5 hassles are:



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1. Equipment broken down
2. Changing facilities not clean
3. Queuing for equipment
4. No parking space
5. Fitness staff not speaking to you

Equipment break down and dirty changing facilities are mostly reported as frequently annoying hassles by long standing members whereas queuing for equipment is primarily an annoying hassle for younger males. Not being able to park and fitness staff not speaking to you is not a hassle unique to any particular member group.

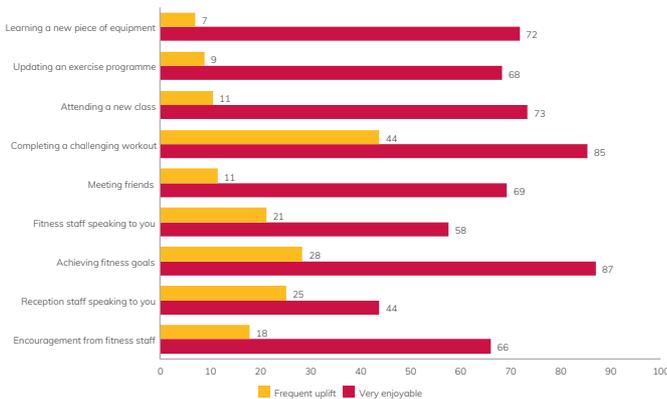
What club uplifts do members report and which do they enjoy?

Figure 2 shows the proportion of members who reported uplifts that happen to them frequently (yellow bars). The red bars represent the proportion of members who say an uplift happened at least occasionally and also say they enjoyed it. So just 7% of members say they frequently learn a new piece of equipment but 72% of members say it is enjoyable when they do.

Fifty two percent of member's report they frequently experience at least 1 of the club uplifts listed in Figure 2.

The most frequently occurring uplifts are completing a challenging workout, achieving fitness goals, and being spoken to by fitness and reception staff. Achieving fitness goals and completing a challenging workout were nearly always reported as enjoyable. Other enjoyable uplifts were attending a new class, learning a new piece of equipment and meeting friends.

Figure 2. Proportion of members reporting frequent uplifts and uplifts they find enjoyable



As with hassles, we can rank uplifts in order of magnitude of benefit by combining their reported frequency with the level of enjoyment.

The top 5 uplifts are:

1. Completing a challenging workout
2. Achieving fitness goals
3. Fitness staff speaking to you
4. Encouragement from fitness staff
5. Reception staff speaking to you

Do hassles and uplifts predict future cancellations?

Figure 3 shows the cancellation rate (number of cancellations per 1,000 members per month) according to whether members say a particular hassle never happens to them or if it happens frequently and is annoying.

The highest cancellation rates are seen for members who say they have to frequently queue for equipment and find it annoying and members who say fitness staff frequently ignore them and find it annoying. Compared to members who say these two hassles never happen to them the risk of cancelling increases by 80% and 72% respectively.

Interestingly, members who say they frequently have to queue for equipment but who do not say it is annoying do not have an increased risk of cancelling. However, the increased risk of cancelling if fitness staff frequently do not speak to members is true whether the members find it annoying or not. Twenty eight per cent of members report fitness staff frequently don't speak to them but only 7% report frequent queuing that annoys them. This suggests that fitness staff frequently ignoring members has a bigger overall effect on membership retention. The smaller number of members reporting frequently being annoyed by queuing for equipment is primarily due to this hassle being restricted to younger males. Just 6% of middle age women report queuing for equipment as a hassle compared to 47% of 16-24 year old males who state their usual reason for a visit to their club is for a workout in the gym. Increased cancellations are also seen for frequently not being able to park and no towels being available.

Three hassles in Figure 3 (cancelled class, broken equipment and facilities not clean) appear to suggest that the more they happen and the more annoying they are the less people cancel. A little bit of further investigation reveals that this is because these three hassles are really only reported by long standing members who attend their clubs regularly. In other words members at the lowest risk of cancelling compared to the newer, low attending, high risk members who don't report these hassles. Some statistical



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adjustment of these factors results in their being very little difference in cancellation rates according to how often these hassles occur.

Figure 3. Cancellation rate by hassle frequency and annoyance

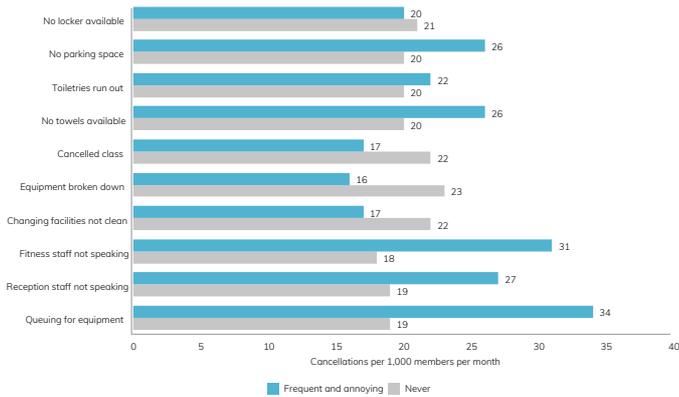
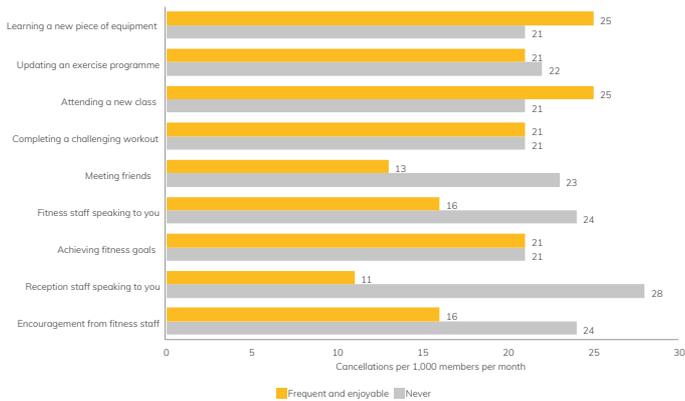


Figure 4 shows the cancellation rate according to whether members say a particular uplift never happens to them or if it happens frequently and is enjoyable. Four key uplifts are associated with the lowest cancellation rates. Receiving encouragement from fitness staff, conversation with fitness staff, reception staff communication and meeting friends are all associated with much lower cancellation rates compared to members who say these uplifts never happen to them. The other uplifts shown in Figure 4 are not significantly associated with reduced cancellation rates.

Figure 4. Cancellation rate by uplift frequency and enjoyment



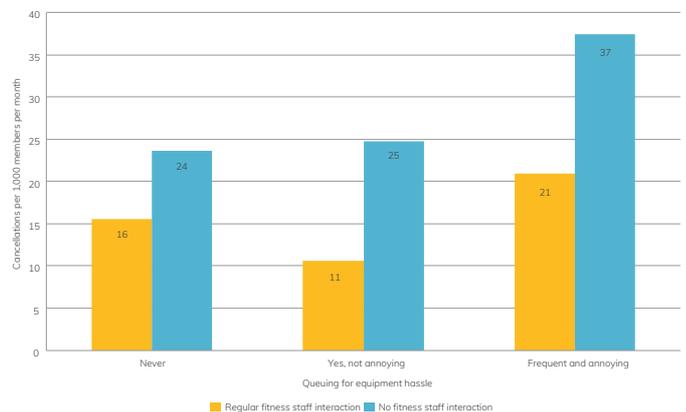
There is some overlap between the detrimental effect of some hassles and the beneficial effect of some uplifts. In both figures 3 and 4 reception and fitness staff communication are important. If members report being frequently ignored by club staff they cancel more frequently and yet if they report frequently being spoken to they cancel less. Members who report one hassle or uplift are likely to also report others and they may also differ according to other important factors that effect membership retention such as age,

length of membership and visit frequency. Therefore it is necessary to do some additional statistical work to try and identify which of the hassles and uplifts are the strongest predictors of membership cancellations. When we take account of all hassles and uplifts as well as age, length of membership and visit frequency four member experiences are significant predictors of the risk of cancelling.

- Members who report that fitness staff frequently fail to speak to them and find this annoying, are 50% more likely to have cancelled in the 7 months following completion of the questionnaire compared to members who never say fitness staff ignore them.
- Members who frequently have to queue for equipment and find it annoying are 28% more likely to cancel compared to members who never have to queue.
- Members who frequently can't find a parking space at their club and find it annoying are 33% more likely to cancel compared to members who can always park.
- Members who report they are frequently spoken to by reception staff, irrespective of whether they say it is enjoyable, are 50% less likely to cancel compared to members who say they are never spoken to by reception staff.

It is unlikely that most clubs are in a position to suddenly buy lots of new equipment or build more parking spaces. Doing so would be a longer term strategic decision. So what could be done in the short term to offset the increased cancellation rate caused by customers annoyed by lack of parking or the need to queue for equipment? Of course, all clubs must ensure their facilities and schedules are designed to maximise the space and equipment they do have. However, Figure 5 shows the interaction between fitness staff communication and the hassle of queuing for equipment. It can be seen that for each level of the queuing hassle, cancellation rates are lower if fitness staff regularly communicate with members. Although not shown, the same is true for the parking hassle.

Figure 5. Interaction between hassle of queuing for equipment and fitness staff communication on the risk of cancelling



Summary

Operational matters such as broken down equipment, dirty changing facilities and having to queueing for equipment are the hassles members most frequently report annoy them. The first two hassles are mostly reported by regular, long standing members who by definition are most inconvenienced by them. The problem of queueing for equipment is an important predictor of cancelling but is a hassle primarily restricted to young males whose main reason for a club visit is a gym workout. In previous reports we have shown that young males are least likely to be spoken to by fitness staff, compelling the problem.

Apart from queueing for equipment, it seems operational hassles are less important predictors of cancellation rates than interpersonal hassles. Whilst club cleanliness and maintenance must not be ignored and must clearly meet satisfactory standards at all times, face-to-face communication should also be a priority. A similar pattern is seen with club uplifts. While members frequently enjoy challenging workouts and meeting their fitness goals, not doing so has little impact on their risk of cancelling compared to the failure of reception and fitness staff to talk to them regularly.

A compelling story is emerging about the power of reception and fitness staff to increase the longevity of memberships even when other aspects of the club are less than perfect. In an era of fancy technological solutions to everything this may not be perceived as a very fashionable, or even welcome finding. It is perhaps much easier and more tangible to install a 'hardware' or 'software' solution to the problem of retention than it is to train staff to skillfully and consistently interact with members each visit. While certain 'hardware' and 'software' solutions will form a piece of the member experience puzzle, clubs cannot ignore the value of staff conversing with members. It may require a culture shift for all levels of club management and staff to fully appreciate the retention benefits of communicating with members every visit. Research results, however compelling, have not led to a noticeable difference in the number of members reporting frequent communication with reception and fitness staff.

Recommendations

- Ensure excellent levels of maintenance and cleanliness.
- Develop an equipment purchasing strategy, facility design and equipment layout that satisfies the needs of young males who like to work out.
- Develop a strategy to ensure all staff understand the value of communication on every visit.
- Encourage staff to be aware of hassles noted above and understand they can either compound the problem by ignoring people or alleviate it by simply conversing with members.
- Encourage staff to be aware of the uplifts noted above and understand that the power to delight a customer lies in their willingness to hold a conversation.





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