



# What Motivates Your Members and Does Their Perceived Progress Affect Retention?



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# “Lose Weight, Tone Up, Get Fit”

## Is This Really What Your Members Want From Their Club?

Members join their clubs with a variety of aspirations and goals for how they would like to see themselves in the future. Whether clubs help members achieve their goals or if other unexpected changes occur has never been reported. In this report from the TRP 10,000™ we will examine what members say motivates them to exercise, what progress they report in their most recent 3 months of membership and how these two factors relate to membership retention.

### 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 to select from a list of 17 options what motivated them to exercise. The questions were based on a measure of motivation that categorises responses into 4 types of motivation: 1) Fitness motivation; 2) Appearance motivation; 3) Enjoyment motivation and 4) Social motivation. They were also asked to report how much progress they had made, in the last 3 months, on a list of 10 possible outcomes that broadly reflected the categories of motivation.

## Results

### What are members motivated by?

Table 1 shows the proportion of members who reported high levels of motivation for fitness, appearance, enjoyment and social factors (friendship) according to gender, age group, length of membership and visit frequency.

The proportion of members reporting high levels of motivation was similar for each type of motivation but marked differences

in motivation were seen by gender, age, length of membership and visit frequency.

- A higher proportion of females report being motivated by fitness and appearance compared to males, but less so enjoyment.
- In general, the oldest members reported lower levels of motivation than younger members and this was especially true for appearance motivation. Three quarters of youngest members reported high motivation for appearance compared to just one fifth of the oldest members.
- Length of membership was not strongly related to level of motivation although long standing members were less likely to report high levels of motivation for appearance compared to newer members.
- In general frequent club users are more highly motivated than low frequency club users. Members who are highly motivated by enjoyment tend to use their club more frequently.



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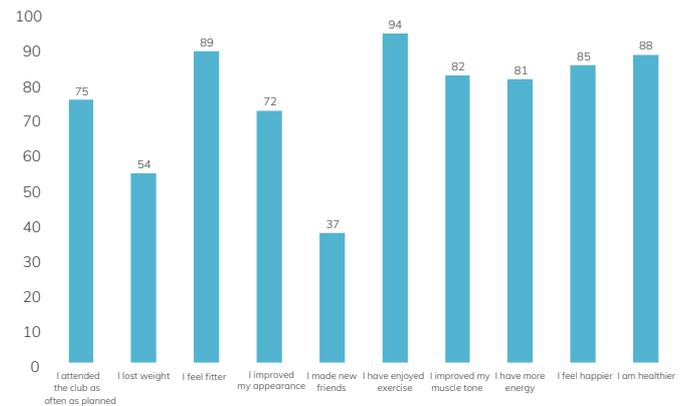
Table 1. High motivation by gender, age group, months since joining and visit frequency

	High motivation (%)			
	Fitness	Appearance	Enjoyment	Social
Overall	60.4	55.0	57.5	58.3
<b>Gender</b>				
Females	61.8	58.3	54.8	53.9
Males	57.7	50.9	61.3	55.9
<b>Age group</b>				
16-24	60.3	74.9	72.8	72.8
25-34	61.4	68.3	62.3	62.3
35-44	60.5	57.5	58.2	58.2
45-54	61.9	46.9	52.9	52.9
55-64	57.0	32.8	46.8	46.8
65+	48.8	20.8	44.4	44.4
<b>Months since joining</b>				
3 < 6	60.9	61.3	58.5	56.1
>=6 to <12	61.8	58.4	60.7	53.9
>=12 to <36	58.9	55.9	56.5	52.7
>=36	58.6	44.5	54.9	56.3
<b>Visit frequency</b>				
Less than 1x week	55.6	52.7	47.3	50.8
Less than 2x a week	58.1	52.8	56.3	52.9
Less than 3x week	64.8	58.9	65.0	58.9
More than 3x week	68.5	62.3	73.3	63.7

### What do members report they have made progress on in the last 3 months?

Figure 1 shows that members report at least some recent progress on a wide range of factors. The areas that most members report progress on are enjoying exercise, feeling fitter and healthier. Factors where the lowest proportion of members report progress are losing weight and making new friends. On average members report progress on 8 of the 10 factors in Figure 1 with no differences in the number according to gender, age group and length of membership. Members who use their club at least 3 times per week report significantly more progress than members who visit less than once per week.

Figure 1. Proportion of members reporting progress in the previous 3 months



### Is the level of progress related to retention and what are the most important factors?

For each factor that members report they have made progress on the risk of cancelling during the 7 months after answering the question reduces by 10%. This is true for members at all periods of membership. This suggests that it is always important for members to feel they are making progress however long they have been a member.

Table 2 shows each of the measures of progress ranked by how much they reduce the risk of cancelling. Members who made a friend in the last 3 months were least likely to cancel during the 7 months after being surveyed. Compared to members who did not make a friend, those who did were 40% less likely to cancel their membership. In fact if all members had made a friend in the last 3 months, 14% (214) of the 1,526 cancellations would have been avoided.

Attending the club at the level planned was second to making a friend, reducing the risk of cancelling by 11%. Improved appearance, having more energy and feeling happier were not related to the risk of cancelling at all.

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Table 2. Measures of progress ranked by risk of cancelling (1= lowest risk)

Factor	Rank
I made new friends	1
I attended the club as often as planned	2
I am healthier	3
I improved my muscle tone	4
I have enjoyed exercise	5
I lost weight	6
I feel fitter	7
I improved my appearance	8
I have more energy	8
I feel happier	8

### Do members need to make progress on the things they are motivated by to reduce the rate of cancelled memberships?

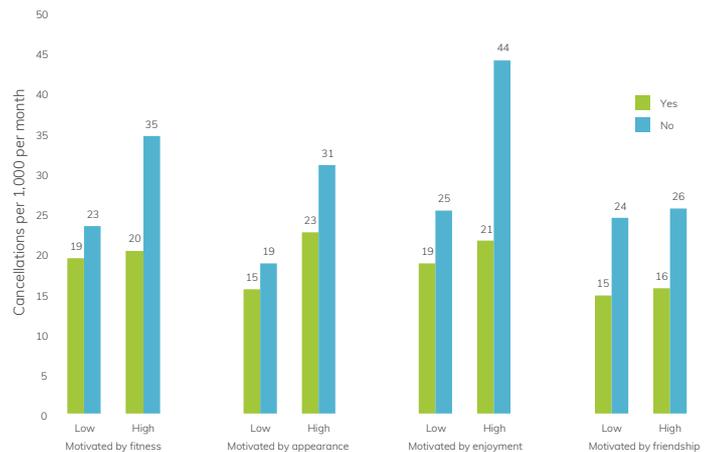
The green columns in Figure 2 represent the rate of cancellation for members who report high and low levels of motivation and who also report progress on the same factor. The blue columns represent the rate of cancellation for members who report high and low levels of motivation but do not report any progress on the things they are motivated by.

The first thing that can be seen is that all of the green columns are lower than their corresponding blue columns indicating that reporting progress always reduces the rate of cancelling compared to making no progress. Secondly, members reporting high motivation for each type of motivation and who fail to report progress on those motivations have the highest rate of cancellation. This is particularly true for members motivated by enjoyment who then find they are not enjoying their exercise. They are more than twice as likely to cancel their membership compared to members who are motivated by enjoyment and do report they have enjoyed their exercise. The lowest levels of cancellation are seen for members who report they have made friends in the last 3 months irrespective if this was a motive for exercising or not. The other group that have low levels of cancellation are the members that were not motivated by appearance but felt that they had improved the way they looked in the last 3 months. In fact this is a general trend. Members with low motivation but who reported progress had lower levels of cancellation. We might refer to this group as surprised pessimists. They start out with low expectations but surprise themselves with how much progress they make.

One other observation stands out. Members who had high motivation for appearance and report looking better have a higher rate of cancellation than members who were not motivated by appearance and didn't believe they had improved

their appearance – almost as if the motivated group remained dissatisfied with their appearance even though they believe it has improved.

Figure 2. Cancellation rate (number of cancellations per 1,000 members per month) by level of motivation and reported progress



## Summary

A high proportion of members report some level of progress on a wide range of factors. High levels of motivation vary by gender, age group, length of membership and the frequency of club visits. Social motives such as making new friends are most likely to improve membership retention compared to physical and aesthetic goals. It is imperative for members to perceive they are making progress at all times or else the risk of cancelling increases. Failure to achieve the things that members are highly motivated by is most likely to lead to cancellation. The lowest rate of retention (highest rate of cancellation) is seen in members who are highly motivated to enjoy exercise but then find they are not enjoying it. The pursuit of improved appearance even when achieved is not related to improved retention.

## Recommendations

- Develop a marketing strategy that conveys fun and friendliness
- Understand members' motivations and set out a realistic plan for achieving them
- Regularly review members' progress and revise plans if progress is not being made
- Ensure that above all else exercise programmes are enjoyable
- Prioritise fun and friendship over fitness and thinness



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