

COLLECTING MEMBERSHIP PAYMENTS DISCREETLY

It's fascinating how human psychology works when it comes to paying off perhaps embarrassingly late bills... We have set up www.ashbournepayments.co.uk as a way for people to settle up what are in many cases very old payments for gym membership, often long after their membership has expired.

Our role is to collect membership payments and we don't rest until we've pulled in the money, no matter how old the debt. But for many, having to write out a cheque and send it off in the post now feels like a long-winded effort. And making a payment over the phone, admitting to the person on the other end of the phone that a payment is way overdue, is all a bit embarrassing.

So, having the facility to make an online payment discreetly by debit/credit card is proving to be a popular way to pay up on a niggling old gym membership debt and perhaps then clear a default registration which may have been affecting seriously someone's credit rating.



Even we have been pleasantly surprised at the number of 'back from the dead' payments we've received through this site. Have a look at the site, which is laid out attractively and incorporates some fitness tips and news. You may receive an unexpected payment soon, generated from the site...

LIW 2009, 2010

Hats off to Dave Wright and his IOU initiative for breathing life back into LIW as far as the independent gym sector is concerned. His seminars and his awards evening (or what we remember of it, that was some free bar...), proved to be a magnet for the independent sector; something which traditional marketing for the event had previously failed to do. As a result we saw a significant increase in the number of independent gyms visiting our stand.

We are confident this will continue in 2010, with the IOU initiative expanding and Ashbourne positioning its stand right next to the 'IOU lounge' at the show. We look forward to seeing you there, NEC Birmingham, 21-23 September 2010.



Trade ■
Fitness Industry Association (FIA):
www.fia.org.uk

Ashbourne Membership Management is a member of the FIA. Sign up for their useful daily media review email.

Fitness Professionals Association (Fitpro):
www.fitpro.com

Work Out magazine, aimed at the independent sector:
www.workout-uk.co.uk

Health Club Management magazine:
www.health-club.co.uk

Sign up for their weekly Health Club Management Report email.

Sourcing leisure industry products: www.leisure-kit.net. Again, a regular email newsletter is available.

Consumer

Men's Health magazine: www.menshealth.co.uk.

Men's Fitness magazine:
<http://info.mensfitnessmagazine.co.uk>

Muscle and Fitness magazine:
www.muscle-fitness.co.uk

The Times Health Club: www.timeshealth.co.uk
 Largest 'social fitness site', worth looking at.

Welcome to the new edition of The Ashbourne Advisor,

a regular newsletter from Ashbourne Membership Management.

In this issue we are focusing on technology and its impact on gym owners and gym users. Low cost, simple but effective swipe card entry systems are now available to help you monitor every aspect of membership; we show you the benefits.

Also, with the Apple iPhone and its fitness apps firmly here to stay, we talk about how to incorporate them into your activities. And we show you a neat website, www.ashbournepayments.co.uk, developed to encourage late-paying customers to settle their outstanding payments discreetly online. We've also a quick look back at **Leisure Industry Week 2009** plus a look forward at the 2010 event.

Ashbourne Membership Management is a leading provider of membership management services for gyms and health clubs across the UK. For more information please visit www.ashbournemanagement.co.uk or call us on **0871 271 2088**.



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SWIPE SOME DATA FROM YOUR CUSTOMERS...

There is a huge amount of useful information you can gather about your members just by monitoring their attendance and linking this to their payment record. By looking at these two sets of data together you can increase your membership retention significantly, reduce bad debts and eradicate instances of people using your facilities without paying. The solution revolves around a simple swipe card; a membership card which is an entry card and a record of visiting patterns.



But let's not over-engineer this; a fashion for analysing to death every aspect of a member and his/her membership usage has led to some disenchantment with complex retention programmes. Never lose sight of the fact that your customers are people first and statistics a distant second. There's no substitute for getting to know them, remembering their names and providing a personal service.

But as membership numbers grow, no gym owner should be expected to carry in his/her head the membership renewal date/birthday/visiting pattern/payment status of every member. Our anecdotal evidence shows that gyms fall into four categories regarding entry/payment/retention control:

■ 1. In control: fully integrated entry system, payment system, exercise programme monitor etc. Probably involving significant investment, but provided it is applied consistently and

accompanied by full staff training, this may well be paying dividends.

■ 2. Disillusioned: Set off with good intentions, set up all sorts of monitoring programmes, but all required the discipline of remembering to run and check reports, conduct updates, study data which became quickly out of date.

■ 3. Entry monitored, payment monitored, but not together: Many gyms run completely separate systems for monitoring these aspects of membership. This provides two stories which are difficult to tie together.

■ 4. In your head: Membership controlled by the 'all seeing eye', the owner/manager's memory for faces/names/dates. Great for the personal touch, less effective in controlling membership accurately...

The biggest opportunity for change to this spectrum of experiences is provided by: broadband. The ability to take a live feed of accurate payment information from the internet, all for the price of an increasingly low cost broadband connection, puts sophisticated monitoring into the hands of every gym. By linking up a broadband-connected laptop or PC to a swipe-card system, it's now very easy to verify the payment status of a member in an instant at the point when they enter your gym. No need to run reports, pore over spreadsheets, just let the internet take the strain.

If a swipecard does record that a member is not up to date with their payment, our recommendation is not to wrestle them to the ground and demand payment in front of the rest of your membership (even if the deterrent effect is tempting...), but to allow the person in and then have a discreet word. Or, if you use a membership collection company such as Ashbourne, then make a quick phone call and let us handle it. People who use your gym but are behind on payment are a better problem to

have than those who never turn up and don't pay; they are at least motivated and interested in using your facilities and understand their value. They are therefore receptive to paying up and ensuring continued membership.

So, attendance is valuable to monitor: to check payment is current and to monitor frequency of visits, particularly in the crucial first sixty days of membership. Has that new member developed a regular attendance habit or has the first flush of visits tailed off all too quickly? A swipecard allows you to check all this very easily.

It's critical to monitor non-attendance too. This is far trickier for the all-seeing-eye to capture; who can remember accurately not seeing someone?? However, an absence of swiping can be monitored just as accurately as the incidence of entry. This can shortlist disengaged and demoralised members, prompting a call, a reminder; perhaps a tailored special offer to get them back in.

Just as £1 apps for the iPhone have put awesome fitness monitoring information into the hands of the average gym user (see our article to the right), so access to real-time payment information now allows gym owners to monitor membership in a highly cost effective way (OK, likely to be a bit more than a £1 app...), without the onset of time-consuming analysis paralysis. Focus on the important things, which boil down to: are members visiting my gym and have they paid? Monitor those correctly and both membership and cash will increase: simples!

Ashbourne's new **MVS2 Membership Validation System** does all this and more; contact us for more details.



iphone motivation

Unlike Wii Fitness, which can be seen as taking fitness out of the gym and putting it into the living room, far from being a threat, the Apple iPhone and its huge range of fitness apps can be used by gyms as part of a process of engaging with customers and encouraging regular attendance. Leading apps such as **ifitness**, **GymGoal** and the new **Sim Gym** all place an emphasis on the ability to monitor progress, on the need for safe and well-planned fitness programmes and plan their routines around using equipment which is largely only available in gyms. By providing portable reporting on progress, the iPhone becomes a between-visit motivator and adds a cool, hi-tech interface for fitness routines.



With its dominance in the UK market now assured (no doubt about to be helped further by the launch of the iPad) and the impressive range of popular fitness apps growing every day, it's increasingly important that gym owners are familiar with iPhone fitness apps. To be confronted by ifitness on someone's phone and to not be at least aware of it will be seen as being out of (i)touch with your customers. The popular fitness apps are very cheap to download: go to **www.apple.com** and then find the apps section. Grab the popular ones you come across being used and create complementary activity in your gym which enhances the value of the app and ensures that your gym activity remains relevant.