ATN

ATHLETECH NEWS : FRANCHISE OUTLOOK

NOV 26



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365 MEMBER ACCESS
UNATTENDED ACCESS CONTROLS FOR GYMS

INSIDE THE INDUSTRY

Why Gym Owners Are Leaving Security Vendors for 365 Member Access

After years of after-hours lockouts, tier conflicts, and 2 a.m. support calls, a team of club operators built the platform they wished existed, then put a real human on the other end of every kiosk.

By 365 Member Access



Most access control companies are security vendors that adapted a product for fitness. 365 Member Access went the other way. Founded and still run by operators who manage clubs, the company builds its hardware, cloud software, and support around the problems gym owners actually face: tier conflicts, after-hours lockouts, past-due accounts, and front-desk teams buried in access logistics. Every system is configured to a club's tiers, amenities, and staffed hours, with 24/7 live human support reachable right from the kiosk.

The 365 System pairs two microkiosks with a cloud dashboard. Guardian secures exterior entry and after-hours access with real-time membership validation, while Attendant controls interior amenities, premium rooms, and class registration right at the door. Members scan with a smartphone, wearable, NFC fob, barcode, or QR code, and 365 enforces plan rules and billing status automatically, turning denied access into upgrade prompts. It integrates with ABC Fitness, Club Automation, Hapana, Zenoti, and Daxko Operations, so most clubs go live in days

FIVE-STAR FEEDBACK FROM REAL CLUBS

What Operators Are Saying

★★★★★

"Member experience is everything. We migrated 13 locations from Club Access Systems to 365 Member Access in January 2020. Since migration, the time spent supporting upset overnight patrons has been virtually eliminated."

Director of Support, 10 Fitness
Multi-Location Health Club Group

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Single-Location Club

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"With 365 door controllers, we provide 24/7 member access while reducing staffing demands. Our experience has been consistently strong."

Owner, Rise Up Fitness
Single-Location Facility

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"365 helped us develop a proprietary platform aligned to our business model. Their team was creative, practical, and highly engaged throughout launch."

CEO, Human Touch
Technology Partner

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"We have worked with 365 Member Access for years. Their team is responsive, professional, and consistently resolves issues quickly."

Owner, Rincon Fitness
Single-Location Club

24/7 member access · Live human support · Reliable operations · Software integrations

ABOUT ATN

WE INFORM AND INSPIRE those who are out to disrupt the future of our rapidly evolving industry. Launched in 2020 at the intersection of fitness, wellness and technology, we cover topics as diverse as brick-and-mortar gyms, connected fitness products, boutique formats, outdoor exercise, equipment innovations, emerging technologies, wellness trends, and consumer insights. ✡ Our writers set out each day to deliver proprietary content and analysis that will help spark ideas and shape agendas for decision-makers in the fast-paced fitness space. ✡ We provide comprehensive and multi-platform coverage of the most impactful news and trends shaping the fitness and wellness segment, bringing together innovators, influencers and executives with content that sparks ideas, uncovers opportunities, and drives growth.

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> **Experiencing success when launching a new brand in one of the country's gateway markets does not mean you have a scalable concept."**—**Douglas Jerum**, SABRE



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*2026 Global Fitness Report

> **People are far more educated about healthspan today.”** — **Julie Cartwright**, PVOLVE



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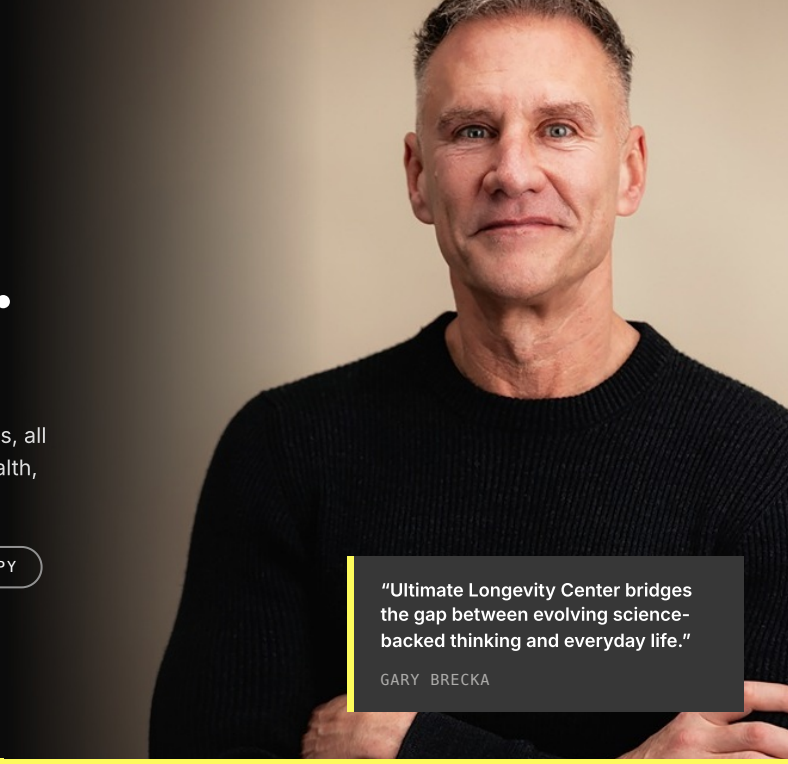
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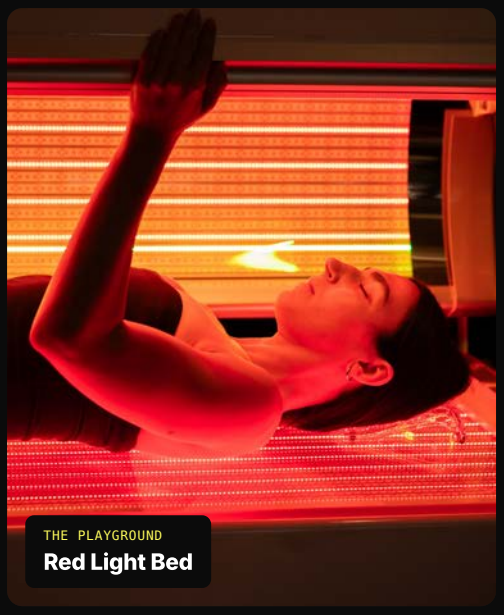
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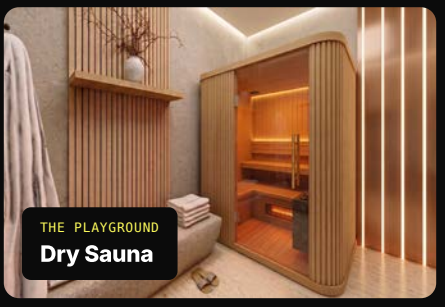
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FITNESS FRANCHISING ENTERS A NEW ERA

Private equity-backed operators are getting bigger and several boutique fitness franchisors are taking off. However, a wave of industry turmoil is raising questions about the future of franchise growth. **by Josh Liberatore**



JETSET PILATES



Fitness franchising is entering a new era.

Flush with private equity capital, some of the industry's biggest franchise operators are expanding at breakneck speed, acquiring smaller groups and building portfolios that span dozens, if not hundreds, of locations.

Meanwhile, boutique fitness franchising continues to grow, fueled by a yearslong Pilates boom and the emergence of new brands looking to challenge established players.

But there's some cause for concern. Recent struggles at Xponential Fitness, along with the bankruptcy of fast-growing pickleball franchise The Picklr, have raised questions about the long-term sustainability of certain franchise business models, and by extension, the sector as a whole.

Taken together, these developments offer a glimpse into where fitness franchising could be headed in 2027 and beyond.

THE RISE OF THE MEGA-FRANCHISEE

The fitness franchising sector is getting bigger, and so are its companies.

In May, Fitness Ventures acquired 22 Crunch Fitness locations from Harman Fitness, becoming the high-value, low-price (HVLP) gym giant's largest franchisee with 115 gyms across 30 states.

The private equity-backed group plans to invest more than $50 million in upgrades to the acquired clubs, with ambitions to surpass 130 locations by the end of 2026.

"We believe we are just getting started," Fitness Ventures founder and CEO Brian Hibbard said following the deal. "We truly believe we are redefining what a successful fitness franchise operation can look like."

CR Fitness, another major Crunch franchisee, is targeting 110 locations by the end of this year, securing a $350 million investment from Sixth Street in 2025. In May, the operator reorganized its business into three regional subsidiaries, a move designed to help manage its growing gym empire.

> **"We believe we are just getting started. We truly believe we are redefining what a successful fitness franchise operation can look like."** —**Brian Hibbard**, Fitness Ventures

Other big-name fitness franchises are drawing similar investments.

In March, Flynn Group, one of America's largest franchise operators, acquired 98 Planet Fitness locations, bringing its portfolio to 141 gyms across seven states. The deal is particularly noteworthy given Flynn's background. The company operates more than 3,000 restaurants under brands including Taco Bell, Applebee's and Wendy's, and only entered the fitness business in 2023.

"Health and wellness are on the minds of consumers more than ever before, and fitness is a natural complement to our core restaurant business," Flynn Group founder and CEO Greg Flynn said.

PLANET FITNESS

> **"A quick Google search yields 40,000 yoga studios nationwide. There are only 10,000 Pilates studios."** —**Jenna Morris**, Club Pilates

The emergence of these mega-franchisees is a sign of the maturation of the fitness franchising sector, as institutional investors increasingly see an opportunity to build massive, multi-unit operations, leveraging economies of scale to drive profitability.

However, the emergence of large, well-capitalized franchises does threaten the existence of smaller operators and mom-and-pops. Experts have told ATN they expect to see more consolidation in the years ahead as these large players swallow up smaller ones.

THE BOUTIQUE FITNESS BATTLE INTENSIFIES

The big-box gym business isn't the only part of fitness franchising experiencing rapid growth — and rapid change.

Boutique fitness continues to attract serious investment, particularly in Pilates, where established brands and newcomers alike are racing to capitalize on the modality's popularity.

Club Pilates, the world's largest Pilates franchise, surpassed 1,500 studios globally in August, further cementing its dominance in the category. The Xponential Fitness-owned brand has also signed several massive development agreements this year, including a 127-studio deal with Riser Fitness and a 70-studio agreement with Renew Fitness, a franchise group backed by private equity firm Cohere Capital.

Elsewhere in the red-hot Pilates sector, Pilates Addiction, the newer franchise backed by Anthony Geisler's Sequel Brands, has sold hundreds of franchise territories since launching its franchising program last year.

JetSet Pilates, another fast-growing concept, has more than 350 studios in development across the U.S., with ambitions to eventually build a global network of more than 600 locations.

While it's fair to wonder just how many Pilates studios the market can support, executives still see plenty of runway for the modality that's ranked as the most-booked fitness activity on ClassPass for three years straight.

"A quick Google search yields 40,000 yoga studios nationwide," Club Pilates vice president of training and experience Jenna Morris said. "There are only 10,000 Pilates studios."



Some other boutique fitness franchise concepts are seeing success, too.

In September, CR Fitness signed a deal to open 25 Yoga Joint studios across Florida and Texas, marking its first major move outside the Crunch ecosystem.

The deal is notable for a couple of reasons. For one, it shows that established gym operators are increasingly interested in expanding beyond their core brands, using their operational expertise and financial resources to enter the boutique market.

It also suggests that investors see opportunities in boutique fitness beyond reformer Pilates, which has dominated much of the industry's attention in recent years.

Still, perhaps the biggest threat to boutique fitness franchises is coming from traditional gyms themselves.

As part of its Crunch 3.0 initiative, Crunch Fitness is introducing dedicated reformer Pilates, boxing and strength-training studios inside its clubs. LA Fitness, meanwhile, has already opened 200 Pilates studios inside its gyms across the U.S. and Canada, while Vasa Fitness, EoS Fitness and other operators are rolling out their own reformer concepts.

The strategy is relatively straightforward: give members access to boutique-style experiences without requiring them to purchase separate memberships at standalone studios, thus providing a cheaper alternative.

For boutique fitness franchisees, that could make an already competitive market even more challenging.

"For consumers, the value proposition is fairly straightforward," Michael Goodsell, chief strategy officer of top Crunch franchisee Fit Fusion, told ATN. "Why pay for several separate memberships if your gym can increasingly offer strength training, Pilates, boxing, recovery and traditional fitness under one roof?"

FRANCHISE GROWTH FACES A REALITY CHECK

For all the optimism surrounding fitness franchising, 2026 has also provided some cautionary tales.

Look no further than Xponential Fitness.

Once the standard-bearer in boutique fitness franchising, Xponential has endured a difficult stretch, shedding six brands since 2024, reporting declining revenue and facing mounting legal troubles. In April, the company launched a strategic review that could result in a sale or merger. That process remains ongoing.

Xponential has also faced significant legal settlement costs this year, including a $22.75 million settlement involving more than 500 current and former franchisees.

The company's struggles are particularly striking given the continued success of Club Pilates, its flagship brand, which continues to attract major multi-unit franchise investors.

The Picklr, a fast-growing indoor pickleball franchise, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, citing financial obligations tied to its aggressive expansion.

The filing came as pickleball's once-explosive growth appeared to be slowing. After five consecutive years as America's fastest-growing sport, participation increased just 1.3% in the first half of 2026, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association.

The Picklr's troubles don't necessarily mean pickleball is in decline, but they do raise questions about the dangers of building a franchise business around a trend that might not grow forever.

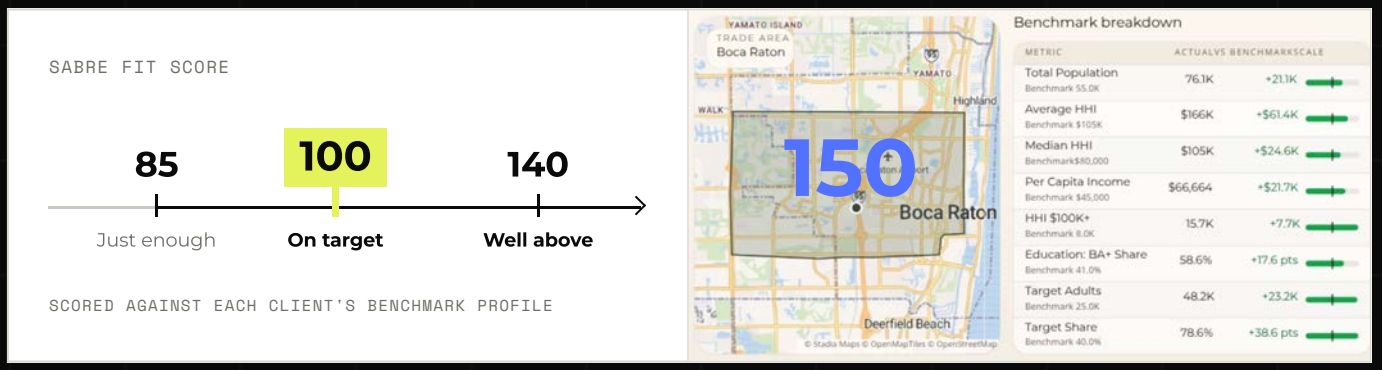
This is pure speculation, but it seems fair to wonder whether the same questions could eventually confront other fast-growing fitness concepts, particularly in increasingly crowded categories like Pilates. ■

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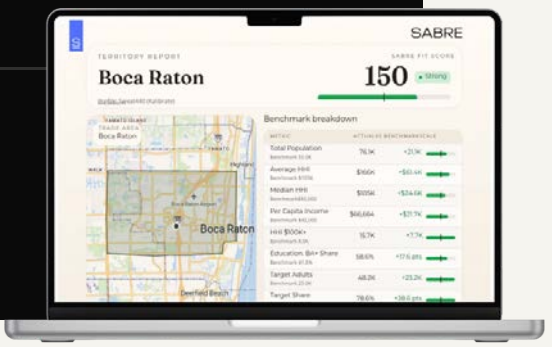
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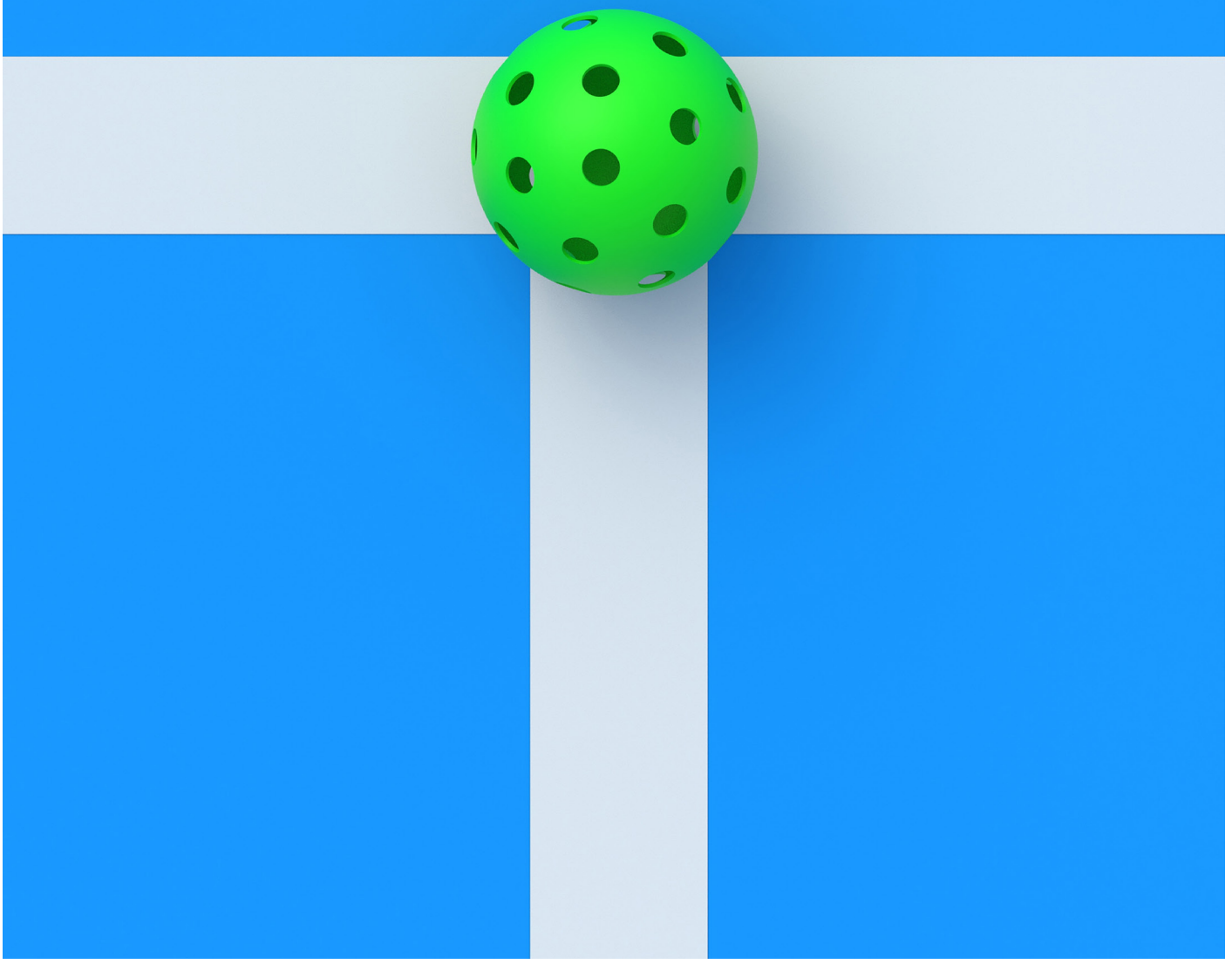
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7 MAJOR WELLNESS & FITNESS FRANCHISE MOVES

From blockbuster gym acquisitions and the rise of longevity franchising to turmoil at one of the world's biggest fitness and wellness franchisors, these seven developments figure to shape the industry's future for years to come



SHUTTERSTOCK

IT'S BEEN ANOTHER EVENTFUL YEAR for fitness and wellness franchising. ✡ Low-price gym brands continue to grow at a rapid pace, fueled by private equity dollars and an increasingly competitive market for fitness memberships. Meanwhile, boutique fitness remains a hotbed of activity, with established players expanding their footprints and upstart brands looking to make a name for themselves. ✡ But not everyone is thriving. Some of the industry's biggest franchisors are struggling, raising questions about the long-term viability of certain companies and business models, and the dangers of expanding too quickly. ✡ Athletech News breaks down the seven biggest fitness and wellness franchising moves of 2026 so far, and analyzes what each could mean for the industry moving forward.



7. THE PICKLR FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY AS PICKLEBALL BOOM APPEARS TO SLOW

Pickleball has taken America by storm over the past few years, and few companies have been more aggressive in trying to capitalize on the craze than The Picklr. But the indoor pickleball franchise might have grown too quickly for its own good.

In October, Picklr Inc., the brand's parent company, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, citing financial obligations tied to its rapid expansion. The company has secured a commitment for $4.5 million in debtor-in-possession financing as it looks to restructure its business.

It's a stunning development for a brand that, as recently as last fall, counted more than 50 clubs open and another 70 planned over the following 12 months.

WHY IT MATTERS: The Picklr's bankruptcy comes at an interesting time for pickleball, which appears to be losing some of its momentum after years of explosive growth.

After five consecutive years as America's fastest-growing sport, pickleball participation increased just 1.3% in the first half of 2026, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. Meanwhile, padel, an emerging racket sport that's gaining popularity in the U.S., grew 14.5% over the same period.

Pickleball certainly isn't going anywhere, but the days of seemingly endless growth might be coming to an end. That's potentially bad news for franchise operators like The Picklr, which have invested heavily in large indoor facilities, betting that Americans' appetite for the sport would continue growing.

6. GARY BRECKA, ANTHONY GEISLER (ABOVE) BET BIG ON LONGEVITY FRANCHISING

Anthony Geisler's Sequel Brands has wasted little time making its presence felt in the fitness and wellness franchising world. But its most intriguing concept — and so far, one

SEQUEL BRANDS



of its most successful — isn't a gym or boutique fitness studio.

In March, Sequel launched Ultimate Longevity Center (ULC), a wellness franchise backed by popular human biologist Gary Brecka and developed in partnership with preventive health platform Lifeforce.

The concept has quickly attracted franchise interest. By July, ULC had awarded 200 territories to 70 franchisees, and in September, it announced a 50-location development agreement in Australia, its first international market. The brand has now surpassed 300 territories globally, although its first locations haven't opened yet.

WHY IT MATTERS: Longevity is one of the hottest trends in fitness and wellness, and ULC is making an aggressive bet that consumers will increasingly turn to brick-and-mortar locations for preventive health services.

Still, there's a big difference between selling franchise territories and running profitable locations. ULC's early success on the franchise sales front is impressive, but the real test will come when its centers begin opening — and stay open for the long run.

If the model works, expect more fitness and wellness franchisors to make a direct play for the longevity market.

5. TOP CRUNCH FRANCHISEE ENTERS BOUTIQUE FITNESS WITH YOGA JOINT DEAL

One of the biggest moves in fitness franchising this year didn't involve a major acquisition or a new company launch. Instead, it involved a successful big-box gym franchisee entering a new vertical.

In September, CR Fitness, one of Crunch Fitness' largest franchise groups, announced a deal to open 25 Yoga Joint studios across Florida and Texas, marking its first major expansion outside the Crunch ecosystem.

The deal came less than a year after CR Fitness secured a $350 million strategic investment from Sixth Street, giving the operator significant financial firepower to pursue new growth opportunities. CR Fitness CEO Tony Scrimale has indicated that Yoga Joint won't be the group's last venture outside of Crunch.

WHY IT MATTERS: This could be a watershed moment for fitness franchising. For years, low-price gyms and boutique fitness studios have largely operated in separate worlds, targeting different consumers with different business models.

But as HVLP gym operators grow larger and more sophisticated, there's little stopping them from entering the boutique market.

CR Fitness already has extensive experience in real estate, gym operations, marketing and member acquisition. Those capabilities could give it a significant advantage as it looks to scale Yoga Joint.

It's also worth wondering whether other major gym franchisees will follow suit. If they do, independent boutique studios and smaller franchise groups could find themselves competing against operators with deeper pockets.

4. CLUB PILATES SIGNS RECORD FRANCHISE DEAL DESPITE XPONENTIAL TURMOIL

Club Pilates continues to grow, even as its parent company faces an uncertain future.

In April, the world's largest Pilates franchise signed a massive development agreement with Riser Fitness, calling for 127 new studios over five years. The agreement marked the largest multi-unit deal in Xponential Fitness history.

Just two months later, Club Pilates announced another major agreement, this time with Renew Fitness, a newly formed franchise group backed by Cohere Capital and developer Saber Ammori. That deal calls for 70 additional studios across New York, Michigan and Maryland.

In August, Club Pilates surpassed 1,500 studios worldwide, further cementing its position as the dominant player in the booming Pilates market.

WHY IT MATTERS: Club Pilates is providing a much-needed bright spot for Xponential Fitness. While the parent company has struggled with declining revenue, legal issues and questions about its future, Club Pilates continues to attract serious franchise investors.

The brand's success also shows just how much confidence investors have in Pilates as a long-term fitness category.

3. CRUNCH FRANCHISEES CONSOLIDATE AS HVLP COMPETITION HEATS UP

Crunch Fitness has been one of the biggest winners of the low-price gym boom, and its franchisees are getting bigger by the year.

In May, Fitness Ventures acquired 22 Crunch locations from Harman Fitness, becoming the brand's largest franchisee with 115 gyms across 30 states. The private equity-backed operator said it planned to invest more than $50 million

CRUNCH FITNESS

in upgrades to the acquired locations, with plans to surpass 130 gyms by the end of 2026.

The deal put Fitness Ventures ahead of CR Fitness, another rapidly expanding Crunch franchisee that operates 100 gyms and is targeting 110 locations by this year's end.

Other major Crunch operators, including Undefeated Tribe and Fit Fusion, are also pursuing ambitious growth plans.

WHY IT MATTERS: The rise of mega-franchisees is one of the most important developments in the modern fitness and wellness industry. As the industry becomes increasingly attractive to institutional investors, well-capitalized franchise groups are acquiring smaller operators, opening new locations and building regional or national gym empires.

The benefits are obvious: larger operators can leverage economies of scale, invest in technology and marketing, and negotiate more favorable terms with vendors and landlords. But the trend could also make it harder for smaller franchisees to compete, leading to more consolidation.

As the biggest operators continue getting bigger, the fitness franchising sector may increasingly resemble other mature franchise sectors, where a relatively small number of sophisticated groups control large portions of major brands' footprints.

2. FLYNN GROUP MAKES MASSIVE PLANET FITNESS ACQUISITION

Speaking of mature franchising sectors, the Flynn Group knows a thing or two about franchising.

The company, which operates thousands of restaurants under brands including Taco Bell and Applebee's, has been aggressively expanding its fitness portfolio in recent years. In March, Flynn acquired 98 Planet Fitness locations, tripling its footprint within America's largest gym franchise in a single deal.

The acquisition represented another major step in Flynn's push into the fitness industry, which it entered in 2023.

WHY IT MATTERS: Fitness franchising is attracting a new class of investors and operators as companies like Flynn, which have built massive businesses in the restaurant industry, are bringing their playbooks over to a new sector.

For Planet Fitness, having a franchisee with Flynn's resources and operational experience could be a significant advantage as the brand looks to fend off competition from the likes of Crunch and EoS Fitness.

For the broader industry, the deal is another sign that fitness franchising is becoming a serious destination for investors who've historically focused on other established franchise categories.

1. XPONENTIAL FITNESS EXPLORES SALE AMID MOUNTING PRESSURE

It's been a tumultuous year for Xponential Fitness, the parent company of brands including Club Pilates, Pure Barre and StretchLab. In April, the boutique fitness franchisor announced that it was exploring strategic alternatives, including a potential sale or merger, following mounting pressure from shareholders.

The announcement came after a difficult stretch for the company, which has shed six brands since 2024, reducing its portfolio from 11 concepts to just five. Things haven't gotten much easier in 2026.

In October, the company adopted a limited-duration stockholder rights plan, commonly known as a "poison pill," a defensive maneuver which could make it more difficult for an outside investor to acquire control without negotiating with the board.

WHY IT MATTERS: Few companies have done more to shape the modern boutique fitness franchising industry than Xponential. Under founder and former CEO Anthony Geisler, Xponential built an empire by acquiring promising boutique concepts and using a centralized franchising platform to rapidly expand their footprints.

For a while, the strategy appeared to be working, but Xponential's struggles have exposed some of the potential weaknesses of the multi-brand franchising model, particularly when companies prioritize aggressive expansion across numerous concepts.

The company's future remains uncertain, but one thing seems clear: Xponential's next move could have major implications for boutique fitness franchising, and the industry as a whole, since it's one of the few publicly traded companies in fitness and wellness. ■



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365 MEMBER ACCESS WANTS GYMS TO RETHINK AUTOMATION

From empowering employees to supporting reduced-staff and unstaffed operations, the provider helps gym owners choose an automation model that fits their business

GYM OPERATORS often view automation as a way to reduce labor costs, and with good reason. Technology can reduce the number of employees needed on-site, extend unstaffed operating hours and, in the right facility, support a fully unstaffed gym. However, its value can go further. Even clubs that maintain a full team can leverage automation to give employees more time to serve members instead of performing repetitive tasks.

That's the approach behind 365 Member Access, an access-control technology provider built by gym operators. The company believes that focusing exclusively on payroll reduction can cause businesses to overlook automation's potential to improve operations, strengthen service and support revenue.

"The biggest mistake is starting with, 'How much payroll can I eliminate?'" said Bill Buckner, chief information officer at 365 Member Access. "I think the better question is, 'How much low-value work can I remove to maximize my payroll dollar?'"

By using automated services to handle routine access decisions, gym and studio operators gain flexibility in how they staff their facilities. Some may choose to redeploy employees toward sales, service and member relationships. Others may reduce front-desk coverage, operate unstaffed during certain hours or adopt a fully unstaffed model, while still enforcing membership policies consistently.



WHERE AUTOMATION MAKES SENSE

Many routine gym tasks are well-suited to automation. Having employees repeatedly check membership eligibility, open doors or explain basic access rules can take time away from higher-value member interactions.

"A huge amount of front-desk time is really just answering the same handful of repetitive questions over and over again," Buckner said. "The goal isn't to remove every employee; it's to stop making the staff behave like manual access-control systems."

That becomes especially challenging when newer front-desk employees must handle sensitive conversations about unpaid balances, membership limitations and access denials. Inconsistent enforcement can frustrate members and put unnecessary pressure on staff.

"One of the strange things we do in this industry is put the least experienced and often lowest-paid employees in the building at the front desk, and then ask

> The goal isn't to remove every employee; it's to stop making the staff behave like manual access-control systems."
> —**Bill Buckner**, 365 Member Access





them to have the highest-friction conversations with members," Buckner explained. "We're asking staff to tell somebody they can't come in, their membership doesn't include something, their account isn't current or they can't use an amenity they thought they could. Those conversations invite miscommunication between staff and members and can contribute to employee turnover. A lot of times, the result is that the employee doesn't enforce the rule at all."

Automation cannot eliminate every difficult interaction, but it can remove many routine access disputes from the front desk and help make policy enforcement more consistent.

"The system doesn't get embarrassed, intimidated or worried about upsetting somebody," Buckner said. "It simply applies the rule every time."

At the same time, some of the most important touchpoints in the member journey are beyond technology's area of expertise, such as bringing a cheerful voice to the gym floor, remembering someone's name or hitting on all the other social nuances that establish a welcoming environment. It's all about finding the right balance.

"That's the tradeoff," Buckner went on. "Let tech do what tech is good at and let people do what people are good at."

365 MEMBER ACCESS' APPLICATION

365 Member Access puts that philosophy into practice with kiosks, readers and control modules that manage access to doors, rooms and supported amenities. When a member presents a supported credential, the platform can check their eligibility against the club's membership rules and connected systems, then authorize or deny access. Depending on the installation, that could mean opening a door or enabling a tanning bed, massage chair or other premium service.

"Without automation, every new amenity can create another process," Buckner said. "An employee has to look something up, determine whether the member is eligible, unlock something or start a piece of equipment and then enforce whatever rules apply to that membership. We've been able to take a lot of those routine transactions out of the workflow. The member scans, the system looks at their membership benefits and makes the decision. If they're entitled to use the amenity, it works. If they're not, the system explains that and presents an upgrade path instead of putting a young employee in the position of having to argue about it."

Some conventional access-control systems offer limited feedback after a denied scan. By displaying useful messages and, where configured, information about upgrade options, 365 Member Access aims to reduce confusion and turn an otherwise frustrating moment into a clearer member experience.

"With a lot of traditional access-control systems, you scan and then nothing happens," Buckner said. "Now, you're standing there wondering if you were denied, did something wrong, if the door is broken or if the system went down. That's not a great member experience. We communicate rather than leaving them guessing."

365's kiosk interfaces are also designed to offer a familiar, consistent experience across supported member touchpoints. That consistency helps members understand what to expect as they move between amenities.

The benefits go beyond convenience and payroll efficiency. By checking access to premium amenities against

membership entitlements, clubs can better protect the value of higher-tier memberships and show members when additional benefits may be available through an upgrade. Exact options depend on the club's configuration and connected systems.

Just as importantly, automation doesn't mean leaving members without human assistance. 365 Member Access backs its technology with a live Member Services team available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Members who encounter access problems outside staffed hours can reach real people for help, allowing routine decisions to be automated while reserving personal assistance for situations that need it.

For gyms seeking to reduce payroll, the same capabilities can make a different operating model possible. Automated entry and amenity controls can reduce the need for employees to be physically present for routine access tasks, whether a club wants to trim coverage during slower periods, open around the clock without staffing every shift or operate without on-site staff. Those decisions still require appropriate safety measures, emergency procedures and compliance with local rules; technology does not eliminate every operational responsibility.

ESPECIALLY HELPFUL IN FRANCHISING

The benefits of consistent access management become more significant as an organization grows. For multi-location operators and franchises, centralized oversight can help reduce variation between clubs without requiring every location to offer the same services.

"The bigger the organization gets, the harder consistency becomes," Buckner said. "At one gym, you can explain the rules to the front desk and probably keep everybody on the same page. At 50 or 100 locations, you've got different managers, employees, staffed hours, amenities and sometimes owners interpreting those rules. A member shouldn't get a different answer depending on which club they're in or which employee is behind the counter. Centralized access management lets you establish the rule once and then enforce it everywhere consistently."



Central management does not have to eliminate local flexibility. Individual facilities may offer different amenities, operating hours or membership products while using a common platform to configure and enforce the access rules that apply at each location.

"You're not eliminating local customization," Buckner said. "One location may have different amenities, hours or membership products than another, and the system can account for that."

That operator perspective is built into the business. 365 Member Access and the multi-location gym chain 10 Fitness share ownership, giving 365 firsthand exposure to the challenges of managing member access, premium amenities and operational consistency. The team can evaluate ideas in real gym environments and refine solutions using feedback from daily operations rather than relying solely on theoretical use cases.

Ultimately, automation's value depends on an operator's goals. For some gyms, that means reducing labor costs, operating unstaffed hours or even running a fully unstaffed location. For others, it means keeping the team they have and freeing employees to focus on service and relationships. 365 Member Access aims to give operators the flexibility to pursue either approach while making access more consistent and the member experience easier.

"We are not a software company in Asia imagining what gym owners in the U.S. might need," Buckner said. "We were standing in our own clubs dealing with these problems ourselves and we were unsatisfied with all the available solutions we tried. 365 Member Access is really about being gym operators first." ●



WHO'S IN CHARGE IN FITNESS FRANCHISING?

A franchise system lives or dies on execution. So how much should headquarters dictate, and how much should it trust the owner who opens the doors? **by Courtney Rehfeldt**

SHUTTERSTOCK



Buy a franchise and you're your own boss — mostly. How much control belongs to the parent brand and how much to the owner is one of franchising's oldest tugs-of-war. Fitness raises the stakes, since the product isn't a burger but an experience delivered by people.

Here's what three seasoned fitness franchise leaders and one owner say about misconceptions, how to strike the right balance and why some of the best ideas come from the studio floor.

Brandon Cullen, co-founder of the strength-focused boutique fitness franchise MADabolic and founder and publisher of PLYN GLTY, a new independent media platform exploring entrepreneurship, business strategy and brand positioning, said his view on control shifted over the years of building a franchise system — but not in the way one might expect.

In the early years, he and MADabolic co-founder Kirk DeWaele ran what he described as "an incredibly tight and consistent ship." Standards were high, expectations were clear and their success rate, he added, reflected that discipline.

As the business evolved and its ownership structure changed, he said he was exposed to different perspectives on growth.

"That experience reinforced something I've come to believe strongly," he said. "Scaling a franchise system requires a careful balance between expansion and protecting the principles that made the original business successful."

Hindsight, he added, is 20/20.

"If I were to do it again, I would place greater emphasis on retaining decision-making authority," Cullen said. "I believe a company benefits from having one clear decision-maker. Someone empowered to protect the vision, establish the standards and make the difficult calls. That doesn't mean making every decision in isolation, but it does mean maintaining accountability for the DNA of the business. When that authority becomes fragmented, the business can lose its identity."

And if he were to build another franchise system?

"I would place an even greater emphasis on protecting the standards from day one," he said.

In practice, he said, he'd be "exceptionally selective" about qualifying franchise partners and awarding markets, and he'd avoid awarding initial development agreements exceeding two units.

"There is simply too much that can happen between signing an agreement and opening a business," Cullen said. "Additional development rights should be earned through demonstrated execution, not awarded primarily on an applicant's capital or growth ambitions. Prove you can operate the first location successfully, contribute to the system and uphold the standards. Then we can talk about expanding."

Most importantly, he said, he'd establish a culture where favoritism has no place.

"I've always believed one of the most powerful examples of leadership is having the confidence to bench your star player when they stop following the system or putting the team first," Cullen said. "Every franchisee should be held to the same standards, regardless of how many locations they own or how much revenue they generate."

Holding firm to those standards may mean growing more slowly, and perhaps putting a ceiling on how large the business can become, he added.

STRIDE FITNESS

> **Innovation can come from anyone in the network. Our job at head office is to recognize a good idea, help make it repeatable and give other owners the tools to use it."**
>
> —**Scott Capelin**, inLIFE Wellness

"But I'd rather build something exceptional and sustainable than something bigger that gradually loses the characteristics that made it successful in the first place," Cullen said. "A truly durable franchise system should be built from the inside out. Expansion should follow operational strength, not precede it."

Cullen also holds up a mirror to the franchise industry itself, partly because he believes it feeds prospective franchisees' misconceptions about the freedom that awaits — or doesn't — once they sign.

"As franchisors, we sell the allure of entrepreneurship, independence and business ownership," he said. "But here is the reality: A franchisee purchases the right to operate within an established system and uphold its standards. They aren't purchasing the right to reinterpret or reinvent it."

That doesn't mean franchisees lack autonomy — quite the opposite, he added.

"They have enormous responsibility and freedom when it comes to leading their teams, developing relationships and building their local communities," Cullen said. "I've always said that fitness is hospitality dressed in sweat. And hospitality is fundamentally a people business. A franchise system can provide the framework, but the operator and their team have to bring it to life. That's where real freedom exists. Not in changing the system, but in becoming exceptional at executing it."

Shaun Grove, CEO of Stride Fitness, a boutique high-intensity interval training cardio and strength-training brand, has been a franchisee, franchisor, attorney and executive, and previously helped scale Club Pilates.

He believes the best franchise systems are rigid at the core and flexible at the edges.

"Many franchise partners are entrepreneurs at heart," he said. "They're investing their own capital, taking on the risk and building businesses in their own communities. They should have meaningful ownership over how they lead their teams, develop local relationships and engage with their markets."

At Stride Fitness, he said, the nonnegotiable is protecting the member experience and the integrity of the brand. Partners have flexibility in how they bring that experience to life in their communities, which can look different from market to market.

As a former franchisee, he recognizes the pain points many owners experience, like corporate decisions handed down without enough context or consideration of what it takes to execute them at the studio level.

"I want our corporate team to think about decisions from the franchise owner's perspective before we implement them," he said. He also doesn't believe that the corporate office has a monopoly on good ideas.

"They often see opportunities and challenges before anyone at the corporate headquarters does," Grove said of franchise partners. "If an idea has merit, I want us to evaluate it objectively."

A Stride Fitness franchise partner suggested putting a TV in the lobby so prospective members could check out classes in real time. The idea has since been implemented systemwide.

"This small idea cost very little, improved the member experience and increased membership sales conversion," he said.

The goal, he said, isn't maximum control.

"It's maximum consistency in the things that matter, combined with enough entrepreneurial freedom for great owners to do great things," Grove said.

Scott Capelin, CEO and founder of inLIFE Wellness, a boutique fitness franchise specializing in reformer Pilates and group workouts, said that as the brand has grown across different markets and countries, it has become more deliberate about what needs to remain consistent and where local flexibility adds value.

"Growth makes clear standards more important, but it also exposes the limits of assuming that something successful in one market will work exactly the same way somewhere else," he said.

He believes the head office owes the owners context, just not directives.

"'Because head office said so' is a weak explanation," he said. "If we're asking someone to invest money, change a process or take a different approach, we should be able to explain why."

Owners may not always get the answer they want, he added, but they should feel heard and supported.

"We also have to be willing to change our position when the evidence supports it," Capelin said. "Trust depends on that working both ways."

Owner input is welcome, too, and a good idea in one studio can end up on the schedule in all of them. One example is a reformer Pilates strength class that came from the owner of inLIFE's studio in Camperdown, Australia.

"They noticed that our female studio members were providing feedback saying that they wanted more strength work incorporated into their weekly routine," Capelin said. "This particular franchise location developed a specific class, which was a hit, and we rolled it out to the entire network."

What caught their attention was the demand.

"We worked with them to understand what made it successful, then created a series of systemized workout routines that are now part of the inLIFE Wellness IP," he said.

That's one of the real strengths of franchising, he added.

"Innovation can come from anyone in the network," he said. "Our job at head office is to recognize a good idea, help make it repeatable and give other owners the tools to use it. The owner who originated it should receive the credit, too."

Josephine Monteleone, who owns inLIFE's location in Richardson, Texas, sees the arrangement from the studio floor. As an owner, she said, she wants the most freedom in how she connects with her local community, whether through partnerships, community events or marketing ideas.

"I'm speaking with members every day, so I want that insight to help shape our approach," she said.

But she's happy to let the head office make the call on safety, instructor standards and brand identity.

"Those are areas where I value the experience and resources of the wider network," she said. "I bought into a franchise partly because I wanted a proven framework and support."

Her wishlist mirrors what Grove and Capelin described from the corporate side.

"The balance I'm looking for is clear standards with room to bring my own initiative," she said. "I don't need every decision to go my way, but I do want to understand the reasoning and know my feedback is taken seriously. I want to feel trusted to run my business and supported when I need help." ■

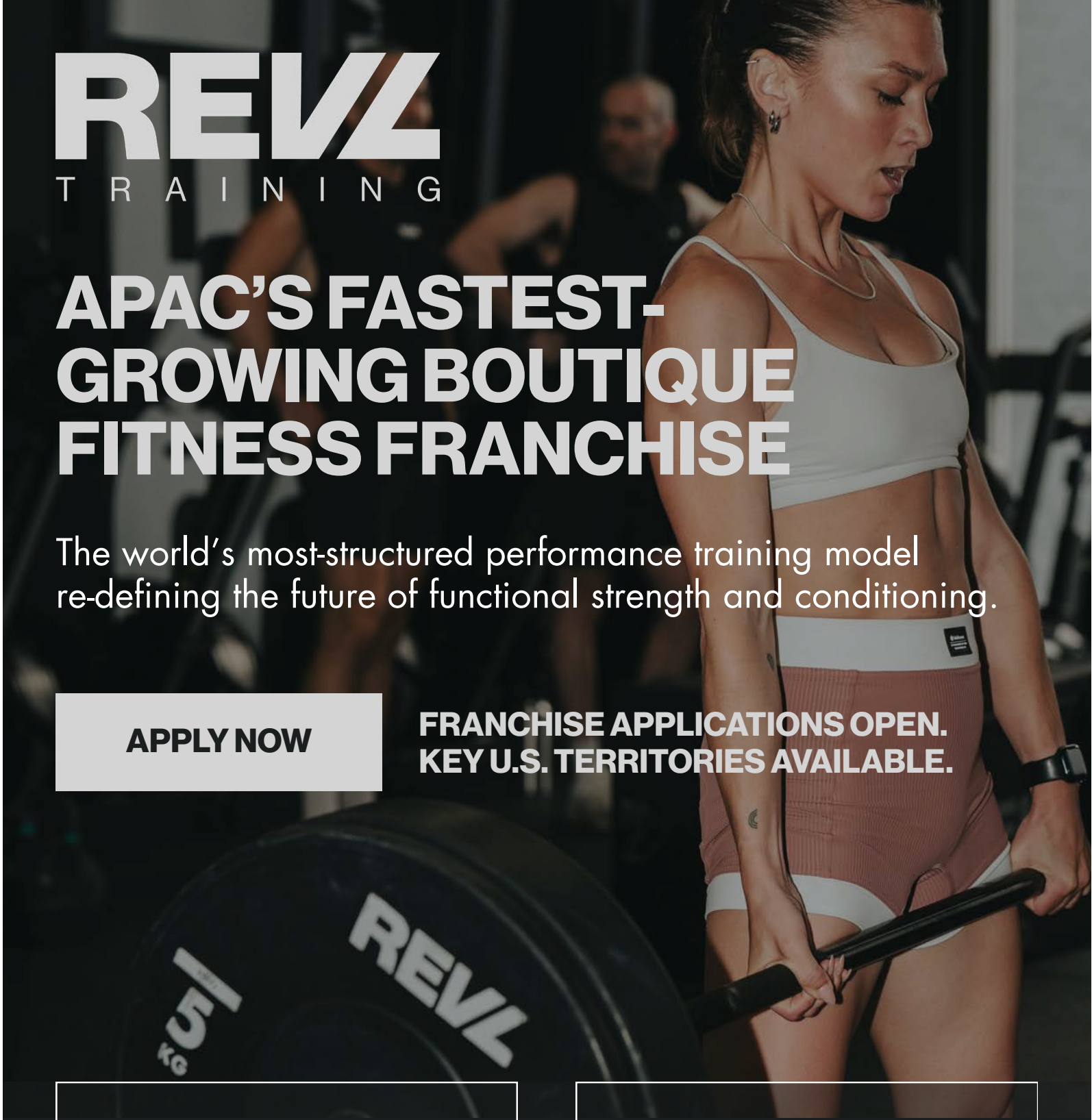
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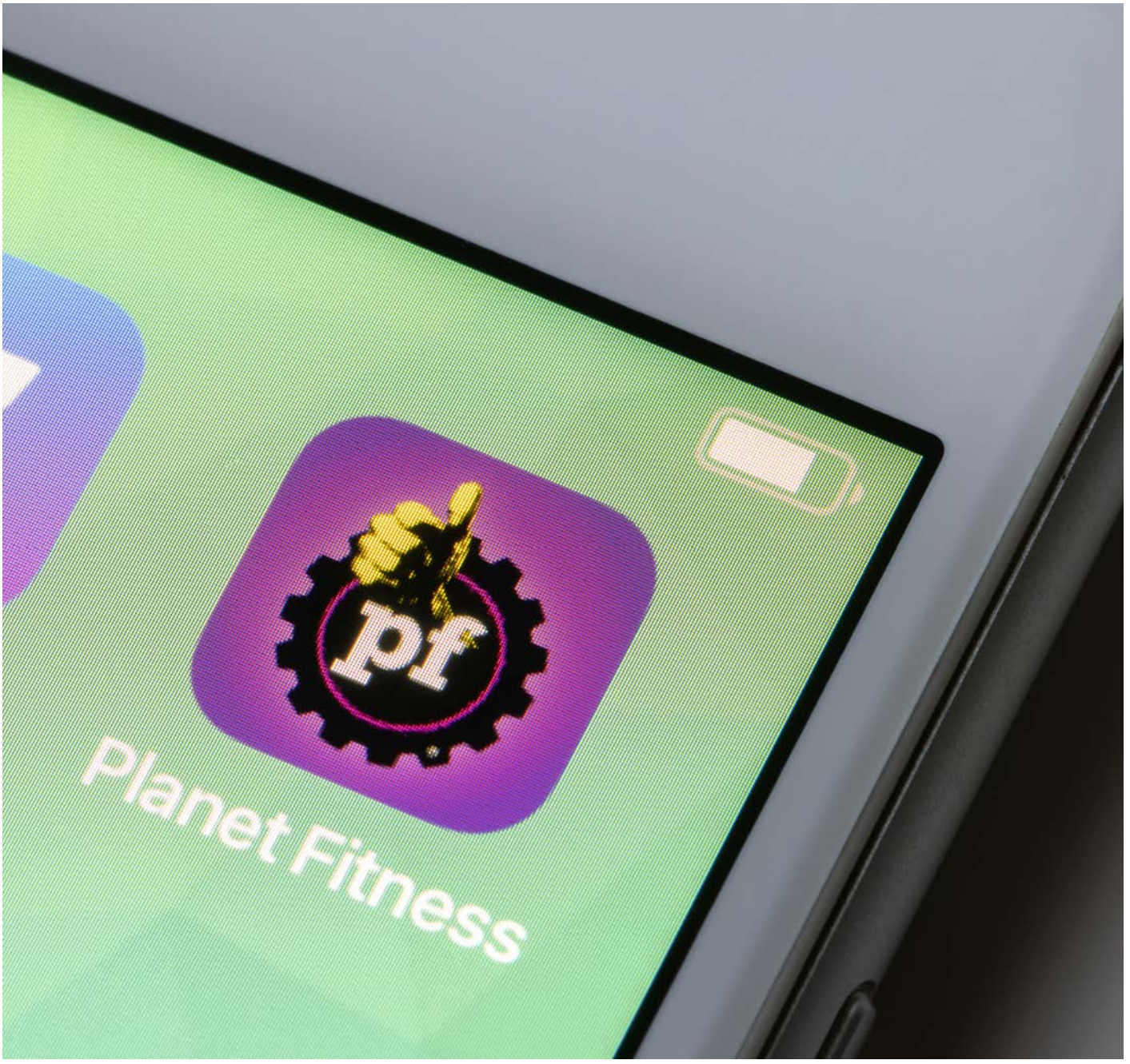
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NORTH AMERICA'S BIGGEST FITNESS & WELLNESS FRANCHISES

ATN breaks down which fitness and wellness brands landed on the 2026 list and where they were ranked, along with some key trends revealed by this year's rankings.**by Ani Freedman**



SHUTTERSTOCK

THE GROWTH of the fitness and wellness industry is in large part fueled by its franchises. Some brands, however, have proven that they're not just integral to their corner of the market, but to the franchising scene as a whole.

If you take a look at this year's Entrepreneur Franchise 500 list, which ranks the top franchise brands in North America based on costs/fees, size/growth, franchisee support and brand strength, you'll find numerous familiar names from across fitness and wellness. That should come as no surprise, given how rapidly the industry is expanding and growing, with health, longevity and exercise changing how people socialize, identify and in the status symbols they carry.

Here, ATN breaks down which fitness and wellness brands landed on the 2026 list and where they were ranked, along with some key trends revealed by this year's rankings.

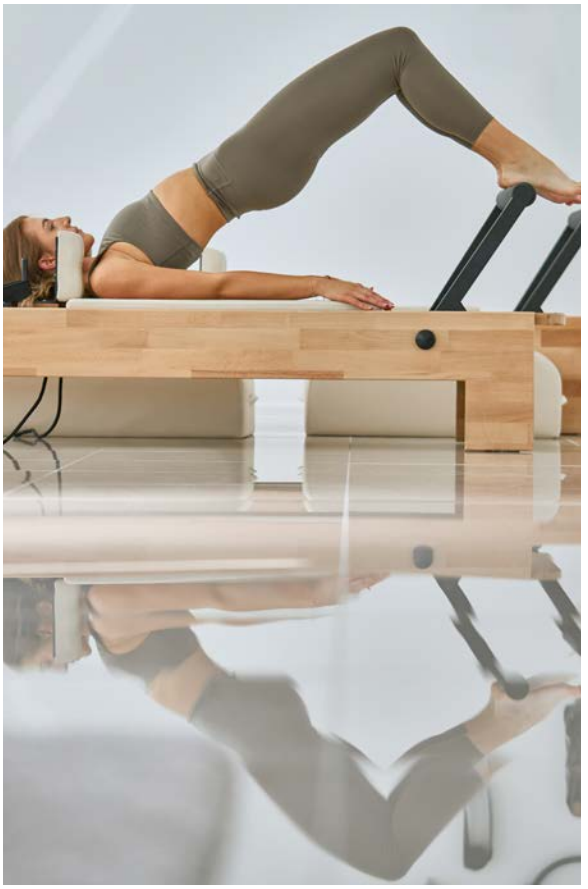
MAJOR GYM BRANDS, BOUTIQUE STUDIOS CRACK THE TOP 100

Planet Fitness claimed the top fitness franchise spot on this year's list, cracking the top 20 at #16, with fellow big-box giant Crunch Fitness close behind at #20 — an improvement on last year's ranking at #32.

Anytime Fitness also placed fairly high (#82), as the gym brand has continued explosive global growth, opening its 6,000th location this summer, with plans to open 500 clubs this year — and maintain that pace into next year — as it focuses on building up its presence in Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Nordics.

It's not just gyms that made it into the top 100 this year, with boutique brands Hotworx (#58) and Club Pilates (#79) also having strong showings.

Both brands have seen notable growth this year as well, even amid the turbulence at Club Pilates' parent company Xponential Fitness. Club Pilates, for its part, passed 1,500 studios globally this summer, cementing its international dominance with locations from Bangkok to Mexico City. Meanwhile, the infrared fitness franchise Hotworx is quickly closing in on 1,000 studios, on trajectory to hit that target by spring 2027.



OTHER GYMS & STUDIOS MAKE THE CUT

The fitness industry had a strong showing throughout the whole list as well across big-name gyms and boutique studios. Orangetheory Fitness (#120), Gold's Gym (#179), F45 Training (#311), Studio Pilates International (#323), Barre3 (#344), Pure Barre (#379) and Burn Boot Camp (#394).

With several Pilates and barre brands on the list, it seems that the momentum behind the low-impact movements is sustaining for the time being. Numerous barre brands are even looking to tap into the excitement behind Pilates now, offering more Pilates-style classes to capture the expanding market.

Rounding out the top 500 were several other notable brands, including the 1969-founded Jazzercise (#453), which has been a staple on the Franchise 500 for several years now. Fitness enthusiasts will recognize other top boutique brands including Rumble Boxing (#487), YogaSix (#496) and Bodybar Pilates (#497).

WELLNESS FRANCHISES CONTINUE TO GROW

With longevity and wellness being top of mind for many consumers nowadays, it's no surprise to find franchises geared towards holistic health on this year's list.

As with last year, many of the top franchises are grounded in tried and true self-care practices, including massage and chiropractic therapies. The Joint Chiropractic has yet another strong showing at #57, jumping up significantly from last year's spot at #170.

Massage therapy is proving to be a lucrative sector for franchising, with a strong showing by brands including Hand & Stone Massage and Facial Spa (#219), Massage Envy (#231), MassageLuXe (#371) and The Now Massage (#450) all making the list. In a similar vein, Xponential-owned StretchLab has made yet another appearance on the list at #260 this year.

But it seems trendier wellness treatments are also gaining substantial traction, as med spas and clinics like VIO Med Spa (#147), Gameday Men's Health (#199), Restore Hyper Wellness (#345) and 4Ever Young (#412) are creeping up on the more traditional franchises.

Every Fitness & Wellness Brand on This Year's Entrepreneur Franchise 500 List:

16. PLANET FITNESS
20. CRUNCH FITNESS
57. THE JOINT CHIROPRACTIC
58. HOTWORX
79. CLUB PILATES
82. ANYTIME FITNESS
120. ORANGETHEORY FITNESS
147. VIO MED SPA
177. FYZICAL THERAPY & BALANCE CENTERS
179. GOLD'S GYM
199. GAMEDAY MEN'S HEALTH
219. HAND & STONE MASSAGE AND FACIAL SPA
231. MASSAGE ENVY
234. PRIME IV HYDRATION & WELLNESS
260. STRETCHLAB
271. THE EXERCISE COACH
311. F45 TRAINING
315. D1 TRAINING
323. STUDIO PILATES INTERNATIONAL
331. WOODHOUSE SPA
344. BARRE3
345. RESTORE HYPER WELLNESS
371. MASSAGELUXE
379. PURE BARRE
394. BURN BOOT CAMP
412. 4EVER YOUNG
425. BODY FIT TRAINING
450. THE NOW MASSAGE
451. MADABOLIC
453. JAZZERCISE
477. HYDRATE IV BAR
481. PERSPIRE SAUNA STUDIO
487. RUMBLE BOXING
496. YOGASIX
497. BODYBAR PILATES

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MAXIMIZING YOUR FRANCHISE CONNECTION TO ONE OF SPORTS' BIGGEST BRANDS

The fitness franchise is turning its connection to UFC into a powerful tool for brand awareness, member acquisition and global growth

FIGHTING IS IN UFC GYM'S DNA, but you'll never catch the gym chain battling its own. The franchise is an extension of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, and makes that clear with branding, programming and equipment that mirror what you'd find in or around the octagon. It even carries the UFC acronym in its name.

However, UFC GYM doesn't embrace its UFC roots because it's a fan of the league's color scheme, fights or figures. The gym recognizes the power that the UFC name carries and how it can channel franchise growth.

"Those three letters bring so much attention to our brand," said Ryan Utsman, EVP of Franchise at UFC GYM. "Many of our global franchisees are fans, and so, the idea of an investment or doing business with those three letters is really intriguing."

That intrigue has allowed UFC GYM to surpass 173 locations. And while a connection to the UFC also involves a responsibility to properly represent the brand and everything it stands for, UFC GYM provides guidelines to help franchisees represent that identity consistently. When everything is aligned, success falls well within striking distance.



THREE LETTERS THAT MEAN SOMETHING

Even after reaching that bicentennial milestone, UFC GYM still believes it's in what Utsman called the "beginning growth stages" for a brand.

"People aren't always quite sure what we are," he said. "There are questions if you open up in a new country, city or state. We're not quite what you'd call a household name, yet."

However, UFC is, and UFC GYM's clear relation to it drives curiosity. That'll often boil into genuine interest, and possibly a membership down the line. It can even happen to individuals who don't watch the sport, but recognize its name and find themselves wondering how it connects to this new building in their neighborhood.

"You get these interested parties that end up going to the website, visit a social media page or a gym

> Go after everybody, and then, once you have them in your facility, explain our value proposition, where you can speak to the different modalities that'll take their training to the next level."—**Ryan Utsman**, UFC GYM



and ask questions because of that intrigue," Utsman added.

Devoted fans are naturally drawn in as well. While UFC GYM also facilitates traditional gym experiences, it features boxing, kickboxing, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and conditioning programming as well. The programming and equipment collectively allow members to train like the MMA athletes they support, should they want to put on the gloves or not.

"When people come to a UFC gym, a lot of them are interested in MMA-inspired fitness," Utsman said. "This is one of the main reasons we started UFC GYM — creating an environment where the average person can train like a UFC champion, not necessarily to get into the octagon and fight, but to become the best version of themselves."

EVENTS THAT CREATE OTHERS

Fight nights are another major way UFC GYM benefits from its UFC ties. When major bouts take place, operators or owners often host events at their gym.

"All the large TVs are used," Utsman said. "The sound is pumped throughout the gym. It's awesome."

It's also a fun way for owners and operators to foster a sense of community among members, which always bodes well for long-term member retention.

"Everybody brings their beach or lawn chairs in with their families and watch the fights within the facility," Utsman went on. "We allow them to bring guests that aren't members, so that also gets more eyes on what we do. It definitely creates a lot of engagement. Some gyms even go over the top and have VIP sections that people can purchase ahead of time."

UFC GYM will also partner with venues hosting other fight-watching experiences, where they'll set up tables and/or tents to attract potential members with giveaways.

"We're creating tons of awareness," Utsman said. "We get a lot of members that join our facilities because of the conversations that we're having at fight nights."



If a live event is happening near a gym's geographic area, gyms can also set up inside the arena to drive interest in a similar fashion. UFC GYM calls them "activation tables."

"We actually just did one in Paris, France for their event on Sept. 5th," Utsman said. "It's a great way to capitalize on fight nights and the UFC calendar."

PRESERVING WHAT'S IMPORTANT

However, the opportunities that come with the UFC name also carry a responsibility. Since UFC GYM's consumer appeal largely depends on its connection to the UFC, franchisees need to preserve that bond with consistent programming and marketing.

"From an IP standpoint, we have to use those three letters with tons of respect," Utsman said.

UFC GYM helps franchisees do so by setting them up with preferred marketing vendors. This ensures all materials or campaigns fall in line with UFC and UFC GYM HQ standards. Franchisees still maintain some autonomy, as UFC GYM HQ allows them to seek out and potentially leverage their own vendors, but they must pass through a vetting process first.

"This allows us to make sure we're all on the same page," Utsman said. "If a franchisee has a digital marketing agency that's in their community and they're very passionate about, they just have to work with us to make sure everything is on point."

DON'T RESTRICT WHO YOU'RE APPEALING TO IN THE PROCESS

But while Utsman argues franchises should anchor themselves to one brand image with their marketing, especially when that brand has the power UFC does, he also believes they should try to appeal to a broad range of consumers. Despite UFC GYM's concentration on its relationship with UFC, the brand doesn't limit itself to MMA fitness consumers alone.

"If you do that, you're making your funnel smaller," Utsman said. "Only 26% of the population belongs to a gym or fitness studio, and the majority of that group just wants to work out in a traditional way, whether it's cardio, group fitness or weights. So, if you just focus on MMA-inspired fitness, you're going to miss out."

Having witnessed UFC GYM's success firsthand with this approach, he argues others should take the same.

"Go after the masses," Utsman added. "Go after everybody, and then, once you have them in your facility, explain our value proposition, where you can speak to the different modalities that'll take their training to the next level. That is one thing we're really big on. Do we love mixed martial arts? Clearly. But we also understand the importance of business, and we want to make sure we go after everybody." ●

EMERGING FITNESS & WELLNESS FRANCHISES TO WATCH

A new generation of boutique fitness operators is attracting experienced franchisees and entering new markets, even as established chains move into more specialized workouts.

by Elizabeth Ostertag



YOGA JOINT



PILATES ADDICTION

The broader U.S. health and wellness franchise sector is projected to surpass 99,000 establishments in 2026, a 2.1% increase from last year, with economic output reaching $66.4 billion, according to the International Franchise Association.

Among the fitness and wellness brands attracting attention this year, many are building their businesses around increasingly specific offerings: heated yoga and strength, shorter workouts, reformer Pilates and recovery services. Some have only a handful of studios operating, while others have crossed the 100-location mark.

One of the year's most telling deals came in September, when CR Fitness Holdings, the country's largest Crunch Fitness franchisee, signed a 25-studio development agreement with Yoga Joint, covering 17 studios in Florida and eight in the Dallas market. It was CR Fitness' first franchise investment outside Crunch.

For Yoga Joint, which operates approximately 20 studios exclusively in Florida, the deal was a significant endorsement ahead of its first out-of-state openings. In April, New York franchise owner and former Barry's executive Adam Shane led a $5.5 million capital raise, backed by investors including Port Street Ventures, to support the brand's planned New York City expansion.

"I think a lot of people today are looking for strength training mixed with heat, longevity and low impact, and that's exactly where Yoga Joint lives," CEO Bernie Zarco told ATN. "We're 50 percent yoga and 50 percent fitness."

Yoga Joint's two formats, Flow and FIIT, pair traditional yoga with low-impact cardio and strength training in infrared-heated rooms, and the company is targeting experienced operators willing to develop at least three studios.

"We proved the model in Florida before we franchised out of state," Zarco told ATN.

The Crunch operator's investment is part of a wider movement of experienced fitness executives and franchise groups into younger boutique concepts: Catalyst Health Partners launched with rights to develop 54 territories across Bodyrok, lower-body strength concept Bunda and Sweat440.

While such agreements give smaller brands access to operators with experience developing and running multiple locations, the next challenge is turning those commitments into operating studios.

"The fitness industry as a whole is highly competitive, let alone the saturation of the Pilates sector, so differentiating ourselves as an investment opportunity is imperative."

—**Matt McCollum**, Bodybar

FINDING A PLACE IN PILATES' CROWDED MARKET

Pilates was the most-booked workout on ClassPass for the third consecutive year in 2025, with global reservations up 66%. The category's established players are expanding aggressively: Club Pilates passed 1,500 studios worldwide in August, while traditional gym operators including LA Fitness and Crunch are installing dedicated reformer studios inside existing clubs.

"Reformer Pilates is having a genuine moment, and when a category gets hot, it fills up with people who bought ten reformers and put a logo on the door," a Jetset Pilates spokesperson told ATN. "That isn't a business; it's a room."

Newer Pilates franchises are working to establish recognizable identities through proprietary equipment and class formats, while building the instructor-training systems needed to deliver those experiences across growing networks.

Pilates Addiction, the Sequel Brands concept that began franchising in 2025, has sold more than 350 licenses across 27 states, with 40 locations open and another 75 preparing to launch through early 2027. Its signature Aurum apparatus combines a reformer, jump board, ballet barre and Wunda chair into one machine.

"We look for an owner who will protect and uphold the brand standard and be a good steward of the brand in their local community," A Pilates Addiction spokesperson told ATN. "Typically, our owners do not have Pilates experience; rather they have an appreciation for process and systems and want to go into business with a team and support."

RockSalt Pilates is taking a different approach, blending reformer work with cardio, weights, choreography and music-driven classes. The brand has eight studios open and 84 in development, including a planned expansion into the United Arab Emirates.

For both concepts, the majority of their announced franchise pipelines have yet to open.

For brands with larger operating networks, maintaining a consistent experience across locations presents another challenge.

Bodybar Pilates, which crossed 100 open studios in September, introduced Bodybar Instruct, a proprietary instructor platform designed to make class delivery more consistent across its network. CEO Matt McCollum said the brand is targeting another 100 studio openings in 2027.



"The fitness industry as a whole is highly competitive, let alone the saturation of the Pilates sector, so differentiating ourselves as an investment opportunity is imperative," Bodybar CEO Matt McCollum told ATN.

STRENGTH TRAINING GETS MORE SPECIALIZED

Emerging strength-training franchises are approaching the category from different angles, offering everything from short, individually coached sessions to group classes built around flexible schedules.

For Discover Strength, the obstacle is time. The Minnesota-founded brand promises a twice-weekly, 30-minute resistance-training routine built around individual coaching, operates 43 locations and is targeting approximately 250 U.S. studios over the longer term, founder Luke Carlson told ATN in September 2026.

Sweat440 is addressing the obstacle of scheduling. Its 40-minute strength and conditioning classes begin every 10 minutes, letting members arrive throughout the hour rather than committing to a single start time. The Miami-founded chain continued opening South Florida studios this year and is preparing its first Georgia location.

Other younger concepts are emphasizing the experience around the workout. Training Mate, which pairs strength and cardio with the camaraderie of team sports, targeted 50 new territories in 2026.

"I started Training Mate on the premise that community was really needed, and that team-sports culture was something I wanted to deliver to the mass market," Founder Luke Milton told ATN in a 2024 interview.

Established and repositioning brands are making their own versions of the same bet. Stride Fitness, formerly centered on treadmill workouts, repositioned its model around cardio and strength and announced a Huntington Beach flagship that will double as a training site for prospective owners.

"In redeveloping the concept and redesigning it, we actually removed half of the treadmills and the pre-existing model, and incorporated these custom-made weight benches," plus "everything that you really need to have a good, solid strength program," Stride CEO Shaun Grove told ATN in February 2026.

Pvolve, with more than 45 locations open, has expanded its low-impact functional fitness message around strength, stability and mobility under a new "Movement Longevity" positioning.

> **"Pilates is experiencing tremendous growth, but we've been in this business since 2002. This isn't a trend we're chasing."** —**Jade Winter**, Studio Pilates International

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Even athletic-training franchises with long track records are updating their models around what members say keeps them. D1 Training told ATN it had opened 35 facilities so far in 2026, including its first franchised location in South Dakota, and now has more than 180 open with another 200 in development.

"In a survey we performed this year of more than 1,700 members, strength was the top factor in adult retention and the top self-reported improvement," founder and CEO Will Bartholomew told ATN. Among youth athletes, he added, "79% said getting stronger and faster is what they like most about D1."

RECOVERY BECOMES A FRANCHISE CATEGORY OF ITS OWN

The franchise opportunity is also extending beyond exercise studios as recovery brands look to turn sauna sessions, cold plunges and other wellness services into recurring consumer habits.

SWTHZ, the private sauna and cold-plunge franchise also known as SweatHouz, is making a bet on recurring visits. It is entering New York City with a Tribeca location and a 12-studio development agreement covering Manhattan and Brooklyn, testing its private-suite model in a market with significant competition for wellness spending.

SWTHZ credits its growth partly to a corporate leadership team with firsthand franchise experience. Its CEO, COO, senior vice president of product and lead construction project manager are all franchisees themselves.

"When we make decisions about technology, training, construction, or the member experience, we're making them with a franchisee's perspective at the table," the company told ATN. "It keeps us grounded in what actually works inside a studio."

SWTHZ is targeting another 75 franchise licenses in 2027, with Southern California, the Pacific Northwest, New York and Minneapolis among its priority markets.

"Our priority is not simply to grow quickly, but to grow responsibly while maintaining the standards that define the SWTHZ experience," the company said.

Ultimate Longevity Center, a Sequel Brands concept developed with Gary Brecka and Lifeforce, reported more than 250 U.S. territories sold and a separate 50-location plan in Australia. The brand has yet to open a center, despite its substantial development pipeline, and is targeting 150 openings in 2027. That would make next year its first major test as an operating franchise.

"Our family of ULC franchisees includes a very diverse variety of professional backgrounds, from physicians, attorneys, oil and gas industry engineers, to nurses, financial advisors, healthcare tech company founders and many other fields," a ULC spokesperson told ATN. "70% of franchisees are multi-unit developers, and most franchisees are first-timers in the franchise ownership space but many have owned their own business before outside of franchising."

Established wellness brands are extending their offerings as well. Spavia's more urban-oriented Sway concept is developing its first franchised locations in Dallas and Washington, D.C., following agreements signed in 2025.

> **"People don't think of massage and skincare as a splurge anymore. It's part of how they take care of themselves, like the gym."**—**Marty Langenderfer**, Spavia

"People don't think of massage and skincare as a splurge anymore," Spavia CEO Marty Langenderfer told ATN. "It's part of how they take care of themselves, like the gym."

Alexis Lauren, the Miami-based medspa brand, launched franchising in January 2026 with a membership-led model and plans to enter additional U.S. markets.

"We'd rather grow a little slower with the right partners than rush and bring on people who aren't a good fit for the brand," an Alexis Lauren spokesperson told ATN.

NEW MARKETS, NEW FORMATS

For fitness franchises with a tested concept at home, the next growth opportunity increasingly lies in places where the brand has little recognition and limited operating history. Two of this year's most active expansion stories come from the same playbook: Australian reformer brands using the U.S. as their next frontier.

Australia-founded Strong Pilates has been pursuing U.S. and international expansion with a hybrid reformer-based format. The brand opened its first California studio in West Hollywood this year, with more U.S. markets announced, and signed an overseas agreement calling for 21 studios in Saudi Arabia over 10 years.

"2026 was the year STRONG became a truly global brand. We signed two master franchise agreements that take us into entirely new regions: Healthpreneurs in Saudi Arabia, who've committed to at least 21 studios over the next 10 years starting in Jeddah and Riyadh, and Xtreme Brands in Central and Eastern Europe, starting with Poland and the Czech Republic," co-founder Michael Ramsey told ATN. "We are also opening in New York City in November 2026, which is a huge moment for us in the US."

Studio Pilates International is opening in some of boutique fitness' most competitive markets. The Australian company, which has more than 140 studios globally, opened its first Midtown Manhattan studio in September and signed 12 franchise agreements covering 16 territories this year, with a Portugal entry planned for November.

"Pilates is experiencing tremendous growth, but we've been in this business since 2002," co-founder and CEO Jade Winter told ATN. "This isn't a trend we're chasing."

Larger fitness franchises are pursuing new geographic markets, too. Hotworx, now above 900 studios, entered Alaska this year through a four-studio agreement, and founder and CEO Stephen P. Smith told ATN that most of its owners were members before they invested.

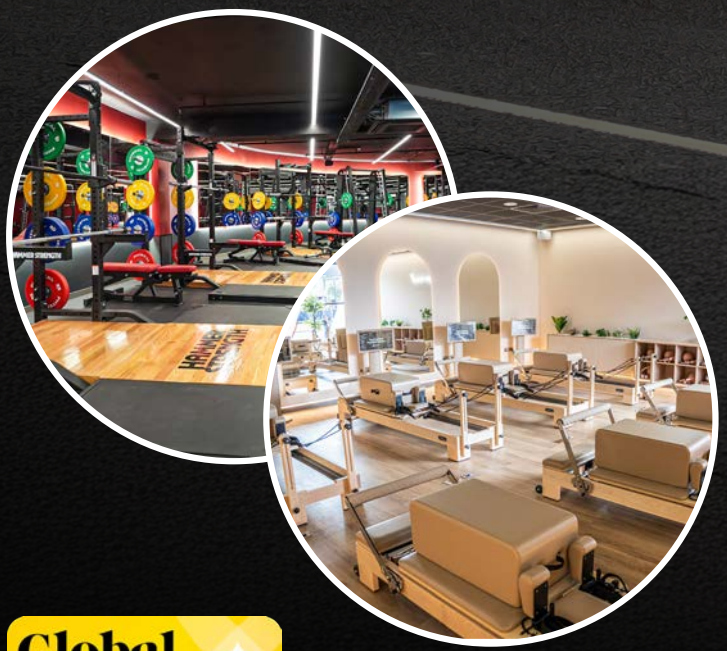
At that scale, Smith said the challenge shifts from growth to helping owners run bigger portfolios.

"Growth at this pace brings challenges. The biggest is helping owners scale well," Smith told ATN. ■

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HOW FIT BODY BOOT CAMP TURNS FIRST-TIME FRANCHISEES INTO FITNESS OPERATORS

Fit Body Boot Camp is betting that leadership matters more than fitness experience, backing new franchisees with established systems, training and ongoing support.



FITNESS INDUSTRY experience isn't a prerequisite for owning a Fit Body Boot Camp. In fact, most of the brand's franchise partners have never worked in fitness.

They are corporate professionals, veterans and career changers who want to own a business and make an impact in their communities. Fit Body's franchise model is designed for them to do just that.

AJ Pope is one example. Pope left a corporate career at Disney and opened a Fit Body Boot Camp location in Norwalk, Connecticut, in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic. He had no previous gym experience and was entering the business at an especially difficult time. He followed Fit Body's system, leaned on its support team and scaled the business in his first year. Today, his location is one of the brand's top performers.

"AJ didn't succeed because he knew fitness. He succeeded because he knew how to lead people and was willing to run the play," said Fit Body Boot Camp CEO

> Our standard is simple. Opening day should never be the first time a franchise partner has done anything."
> —**Bryce Henson**, Fit Body Boot Camp



Bryce Henson. "Our coaches bring the fitness expertise. Our franchise partners bring the leadership, and that is a compelling combination."

Henson knows the learning curve firsthand. When he and his wife, Tatiana, opened their first Fit Body location in Yorba Linda, California, in 2012, his training consisted of a box of DVDs.

He studied them, took notes and learned much of the rest through trial and error. His experience as a first-time operator helped shape the franchise support system Fit Body has built since.

"I started with a box of DVDs so that our franchise partners would never have to," Henson said. "The lesson I took from those early years is that information alone does not build a business. Support does."

BUILDING THE BUSINESS BEFORE OPENING DAY

Today, that support begins as soon as a franchise agreement is signed.

Fit Body's onboarding specialists help franchise partners identify real estate and negotiate a lease. From there, the launch team guides them through build-out, hiring and coach training, as well as a robust pre-sale strategy.

Every franchise partner also attends the brand's Onsite Experience, spending a full week training inside its top location in Berkley, Michigan. Each is paired with a franchise business consultant who travels to the new location for launch week and continues working with the owner after opening.

Throughout the process, Henson says Fit Body focuses on teaching owners four things: how to generate leads, enroll a member, hire and lead coaches and read the numbers.

"None of that requires a fitness background," he said. "It requires a proven process and the right people guiding you through it."

The goal is to remove as many unknowns as possible before the business begins operating.

"Our standard is simple. Opening day should never be the first time a franchise partner has done anything," Henson said. "By the time the first member walks in, they have already practiced the business."

LEARNING TO RUN THE PLAY

Henson says one of the biggest challenges for first-time owners is knowing where to focus.

"Most first-time franchise partners do not struggle with a lack of effort. They struggle with too much of it, pointed in too many directions," he said.

A new promotion, platform or idea from another business can quickly pull an owner away from the fundamentals Fit Body has already established. Henson calls it "shiny object syndrome."

His advice is simple: run the play.

"A playbook only works if you run it, and a new franchise partner is being asked to trust it before they have seen it work in their own location," Henson said. "That confidence comes from seeing it in action. Until then, our team's job is to keep them focused. Discipline before proof is the hardest thing we ask, and the most important."

The playbook includes established systems for workouts, member experience, sales, marketing and brand standards, all of which have been tested and refined across Fit Body locations.

Owners have more freedom when it comes to building their local culture. They hire their teams, form relationships with local businesses, host events and support causes within their communities.

"The system removes the guesswork so they can put their energy into the people in front of them," he said.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY MEMBERS STAY FOR

The formula also places a deliberate focus on the role coaches play in the member experience.

Coaches are NASM-certified, while a dedicated headquarters team handles workout programming and structure. With the workout already designed, coaches can put more of their attention on members.

Fit Body trains that relationship-building through specific behaviors: know members by name, understand why they joined, notice when someone has missed a week and reach out, and celebrate progress in front of the group.

"Anyone can find a workout on their phone," Henson said. "What they cannot find is a coach who knows their name and their story."

Henson says strong coaches also become important as franchisees begin stepping away from the daily operation of the business, a goal for many owners seeking more time freedom.

"A membership is easy to cancel," Henson said. "A community where people know your name is much harder to walk away from."

Fit Body's system also gives franchise partners opportunities to expand their reach within their communities. Fit Body Forever, the brand's group training program for adults 60 and older, allows owners to serve a growing demographic using the same location, equipment and team already supporting the core business.

"These adults are not pursuing a certain look," Henson said. "They want to stay independent, travel, and keep up with their grandchildren."

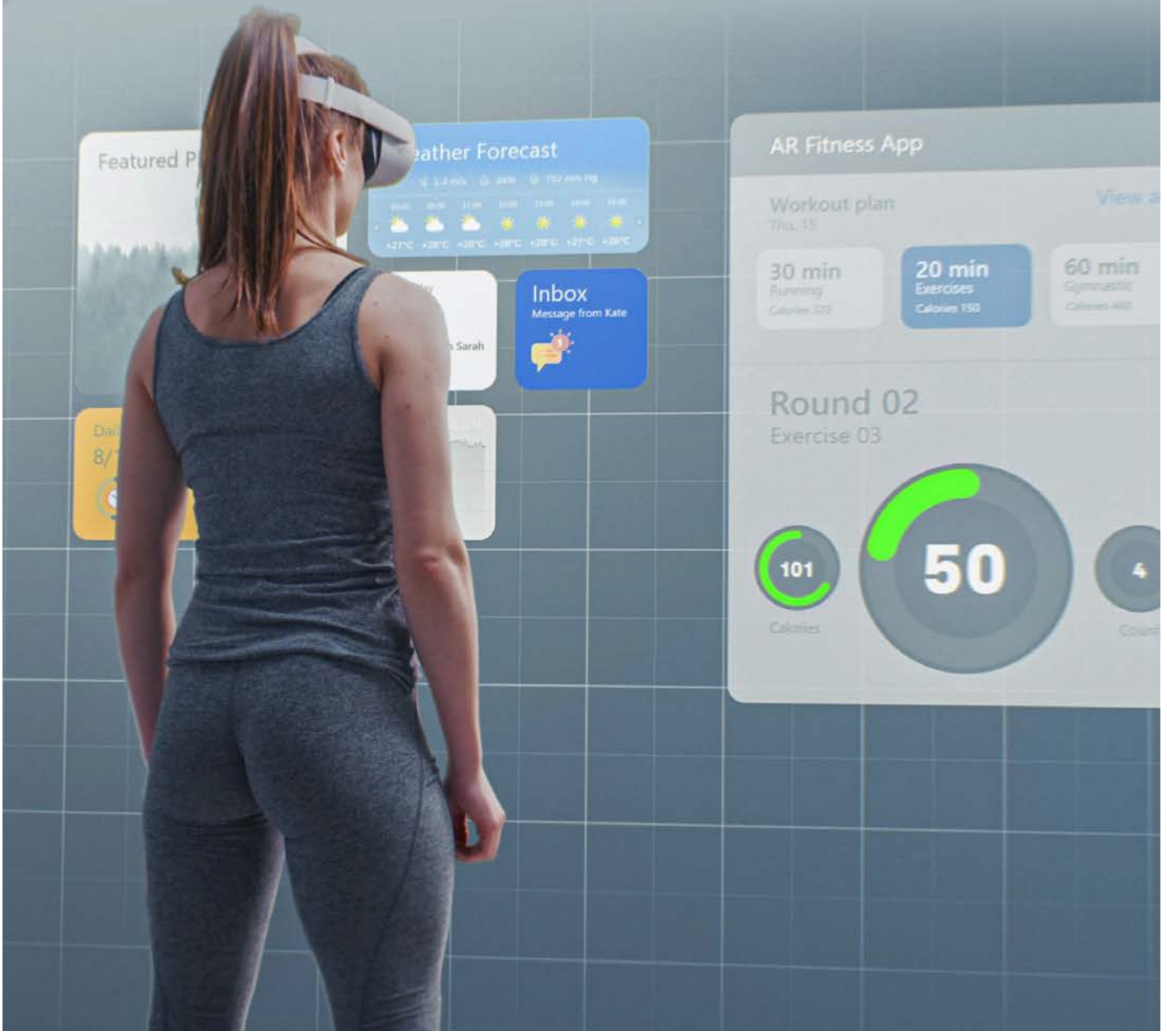
For franchisees, it is another example of the larger model Henson believes allows someone without a fitness background to enter the industry: provide the system, training and ongoing support, then allow the franchise partner to focus on leading the business and serving the people in their community.

"We hand you the business, you bring the town," Henson said. ●

HOW TO WIN THE FITNESS FRANCHISING GAME

From finding the right partners to building strong teams and leveraging AI, top fitness executives and operators share their strategies for franchise success

by Ani Freedman



SHUTTERSTOCK

FRANCHISING is ubiquitous in the fitness and wellness industry, for good reason. It's an effective strategy to growing a business, lending itself to domestic and international expansion while helping build relationships in local communities through franchise partners.

But franchising is only as powerful as the brand and its leaders behind it. When observing who seems to be thriving in the space, there are several key themes that emerge, from a strong corporate culture that reverberates down to each location, to a thoughtful framework that provides ample support, structure and training for each franchise, to the implementation of artificial intelligence and technological automation to streamline operations.

To understand the path to a successful franchise, ATN breaks down strategies, tips and insights from top executives and operators in the industry.



HOW TOP EXECUTIVES APPROACH FRANCHISING IN THE US

Across the board, executives who understand franchising prioritize surrounding themselves with the right team to not only help them lead, but to take ownership of key tasks and know how to hold them accountable.

Bodybar Pilates president, co-founder and chief brand officer Kamille McCollum is first to own up to any mistakes or acknowledge when there's something she doesn't know — and she credits that to surrounding herself with the right people.

That's crucial when rolling out a new system, she explained during a panel earlier this year. At those key points, McCollum said she leans on her team to hold her accountable, be transparent and validate her concerns.

Felicia Alexander, the co-founder of BoxUnion — which franchises through its sister brand Title Boxing Club — underscored that point, noting a good leader needs to know when to step away. She often practices "firing yourself" from day-to-day tasks and delegating to trusted team members to be able to lead more effectively at an enterprise level.

"If we think that we have to be the one doing everything, then that's hard to scale," she said.

Execs tend to agree that successful scaling comes from two key factors: having a solid brand infrastructure in place and finding the right franchisee partners. For McCollum, success in growing Bodybar emerged once she helped the brand implement system standards, ensuring national campaigns and methods were consistent across locations — and talking directly to franchisees about why they're implementing changes to make sure they were on board and understood the systems in place.

"As we continue to scale and we make systemwide changes, we always try to have that big communication out to everyone," she said.

For barre3 founder Sadie Lincoln, evaluating if new owners are values-fits is a non-negotiable. She makes sure prospective owners are already displaying barre3's core values, have good studio culture and are excited to further its mission of science-backed and supportive female fitness.

"Barre3 is not the hero, our client is. What is best for her?" Lincoln said.

> **"If we think that we have to be the one doing everything, then that's hard to scale."** —**Felicia Alexander**, BoxUnion

THE RIGHT PARTNERS MAKE OR BREAK INTERNATIONAL FRANCHISE SUCCESS

Having the right team and partners also applies to international franchising, as top executives outlined when discussing global expansion during this year's ATN Innovation Summit.

No matter where a brand is choosing to expand, they want to have the best partners on the ground, which is especially crucial when selecting the right master franchisees to manage a given country or region.

"Foundationally, it comes down to making sure that relationship with that partner is well established, and the vetting process is mutual and everything's well-aligned," Crunch Fitness managing director of international development John Kersh said.

ORANGE THEORY FITNESS

> **“I had a really good leader once tell me that you have to be like grease and glue — grease to remove the obstacles out of the way, and glue to bring the culture in, and keep it together and keep it right.”**
>
> —**Henry Gonzale**z, StretchLab



While Barry’s locations are corporate-owned in the U.S., the brand elects to franchise abroad to leverage local expertise.

“A concept like Barry’s is so about building a community on the ground,” Barry’s senior vice president of franchising and JVs Zachary Collinger said. “The benefit of a franchisee is it’s their risk. And while you’re there for every step of the process, it’s their responsibility.”

With that being said, Purpose Brands (Anytime Fitness, Orangetheory) chief international officer Sander van den Born pointed out that the relationship goes both ways — brands must make sure they’re able to support international partners adequately.

“You need to handhold that new partner for a couple of years,” he said. “It’s a massive investment; it’s a big lift.”

He also advised focusing on a small territory or region and build out from there instead of trying to hit all major cities in a new country.

WHAT FRANCHISEES ARE DOING ON THE GROUND

Just as important as the people leading the companies are the operators on the ground who take on the responsibility of running those franchises.

Numerous franchisees have spoken with ATN about the ins and outs of running and growing successful businesses, with their own library of tips and operational playbooks to learn from.

One of those being Lauren Montz, a multi-unit Pure Barre studio owner in Las Vegas, bought her first Pure Barre in 2010. A key tactic she employs is to purposefully keep her studios overstaffed to prevent burnout, allowing teachers to take time off or make substitutions without friction.

Like many other franchise owners, Montz also leverages AI (via SalesRevv) to help streamline operations. Multi-unit StretchLab franchisee Henry Gonzalez has also been bringing in more automation and AI-infused technology to help create a more efficient operation across his several North Carolina locations.

In addition to AI, Gonzalez has taken a page out of executives’ playbooks in focusing on hiring a strong, effective team for each location — ensuring they can run the business better than he could, providing that sense of security and reassurance.

Then, as a leader, Gonzalez works to establish a strong culture across his franchise locations.

“Now, my job is to remove obstacles for them,” he said. “I had a really good leader once tell me that you have to be like grease and glue — grease to remove the obstacles out of the way, and glue to bring the culture in, and keep it together and keep it right. That’s really where we’re spending a lot more of our time.”

Body20 operator Austin Wighaman has taken a similar approach in creating a successful business on the ground in Bee Cave, Texas for the EMS suit strength training brand.

Wighaman believes owners and operators themselves need to value and empower their employees to be effective franchisees, even allowing that to take priority over the product at key moments.

“If there’s anything that probably separates us from most of the other Body20 locations, it’s our culture,” he said. “I invest everything I have into that. I invest in my people.”

In doing so, Wighaman is able to translate that strong culture into a better experience for members.

“It comes down to customer experience, customer value and you’ve got to have the right perceived value at the front end of that equation when someone comes to the door,” he added. “Then, it starts by word of mouth, someone telling someone what a great experience it was.”

Once you’ve built that strong infrastructure within the studio, franchisees invest deeply in building connection among their members and understanding the local community that they’ve joined. That tactic has been a pillar for Orangetheory franchise group Aspyr Holdings in California.

Co-CEOs Marc Thomas and Pete Selner have 45 Orangetheory locations stretching from the Bay Area to San Diego, owing a lot of their success to connecting with the local communities that they enter.

“The success of our model is heavily reliant on our community engagement and building it in our studios,” said Thomas. “We’re not selling widgets, we’re not selling burgers — we’re selling relationships.”

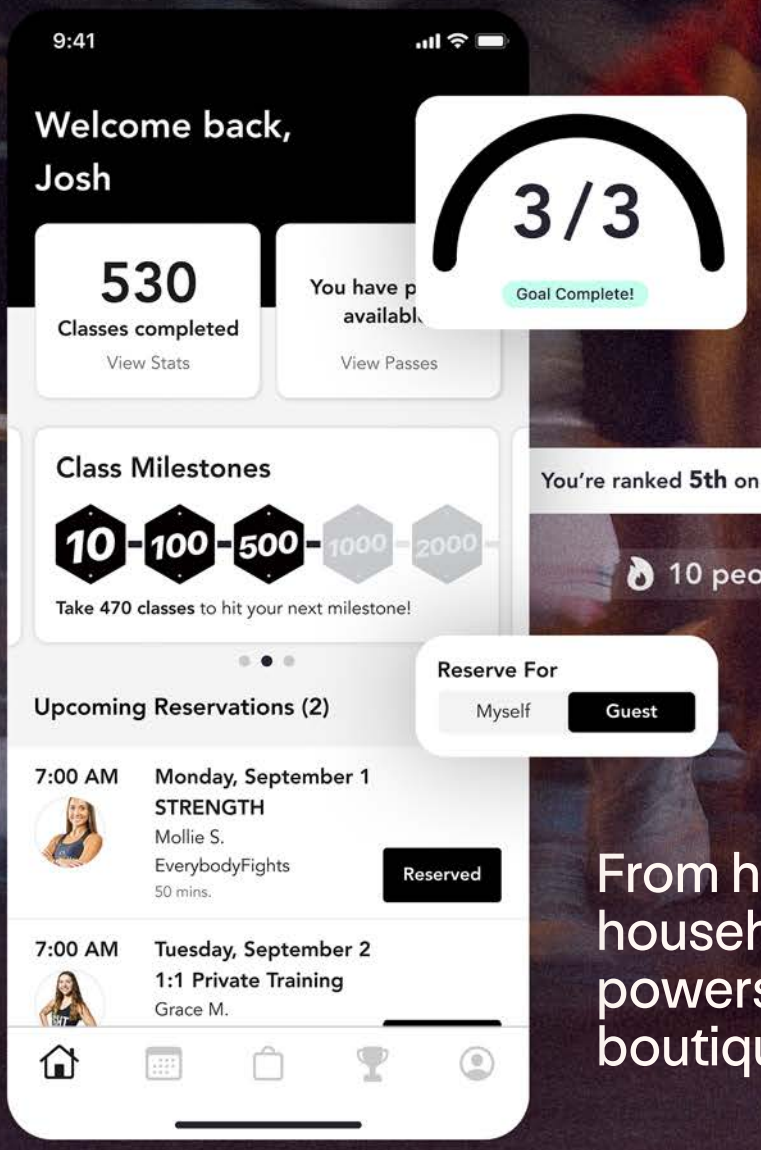
To do so means adapting to the different demographics of different communities to show authentic understanding and genuine interest in the people living there — which keeps them wanting to come back to their Orangetheory studios.

“When you get there, you realize these communities have wildly different attitudes toward fitness and community,” Thomas explained. “So, we have to learn about them. We have to listen. We’ve certainly embraced the idea that we have to adapt to each market...I think that’s the secret sauce, at least for Orangetheory, being hyper locally activated.” ■

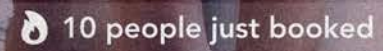
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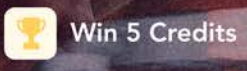
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FROM FITNESS TO HEALTHSPAN: HOW LONGEVITY IS REDEFINING THE BOUTIQUE FITNESS OPPORTUNITY

Mariana Tek points to PVOLVE as one example of how leading boutique fitness brands are building around strength, mobility and long-term health.



LONGEVITY IS EXPANDING the role fitness can play in consumers' lives. As more people focus on maintaining strength, mobility and independence over time, boutique fitness brands have an opportunity to serve members across more stages of life and build longer relationships with them.

Mariana Tek, a technology platform purpose-built for boutique fitness, sees that evolution taking shape across its customer community. One example is PVOLVE, the functional strength training brand built around what it calls "movement longevity," an approach that combines strength, mobility and stability to support how the body moves over time.

"People are far more educated about healthspan today," PVOLVE president Julie Cartwright said. "There's also much more conversation about the role muscle mass plays in longevity. As a result, our members are taking a more active role in their own self-care because they want to live better, longer."

BUILDING FITNESS AROUND THE LONG TERM

For PVOLVE, building a fitness program around longevity means developing an approach that can adapt as members' bodies, abilities and goals change over time.

"PVOLVE has never been about how hard you can go," said Cartwright. "It has always been about how well you move and how long you can keep moving that way, which is what we call movement longevity. Our members still want results they can see, like lean, visible strength, but they also want the mobility and stability to move better in their everyday lives."

The method is progressive and scalable, with members able to adjust resistance, range of motion and complexity as their abilities and goals change. That means whether you're 30 or 70, brand-new to fitness or a seasoned athlete, you'll feel challenged and see results from this workout today, and keep seeing them as you get stronger over time.

Clinical research has also become part of PVOLVE's approach to measuring strength, mobility and function across different populations.

Its Healthy Aging Study with the University of Exeter followed 72 women aged 40 to 60 for 12 weeks. Women in the PVOLVE group completed four workouts per week, ranging from 30 to 55 minutes, while a control group followed standard physical activity guidelines. The PVOLVE group saw a 19% improvement in hip function and lower-body strength, a 21% improvement in full-body flexibility and a 23% increase in daily energy and lower fatigue, outperforming the control. According to PVOLVE, results were seen among women who were pre-, peri- and post-menopausal.

A separate 12-week study with the University of Minnesota examined PVOLVE's Lower Back Support Series among individuals ages 18 to 75 with chronic lower back pain, reporting 80% reductions in pain along with108% improvement in core strength and 373% improvement in functional ability.

> People are far more educated about healthspan today."
> —**Julie Cartwright**, PVOLVE

The studies reflect PVOLVE's broader effort to measure how its programming can support different physical needs and stages of life.

For boutique operators, education can also help build longer-term member relationships. PVOLVE's research found that two-thirds of women over 40 said no one had ever told them they should strength train, while only 15% said they could explain how muscle loss affects metabolism, bone health, balance or independence.

"When you're the brand that fills that gap, you earn a level of trust that lasts far longer than any single goal," Cartwright said.

Other gaps remain. Just 22% of women over 40 surveyed by PVOLVE had their muscle mass or strength assessed, compared with 37% who had a bone density scan. Among women who have used a GLP-1 medication, 31% said their provider never told them the drugs can cause muscle loss and they had not learned it elsewhere.

"Women don't just need encouragement; they need a long-term playbook, and fitness brands can help provide one," Cartwright said.

SCALING MOVEMENT LONGEVITY

As PVOLVE expands its franchise network, the company is also working to maintain a consistent method while allowing studios to reflect the communities they serve.

The common foundation includes PVOLVE's patented equipment, clinical research, programming and credentialed trainers. Its clinical studies use the same equipment members encounter in studios, creating a direct connection between the research and the workout experience.

Franchise owners largely drive local execution.

"Some of our strongest growth is coming from people who have personally experienced the impact of PVOLVE and want to bring it to their own communities," Cartwright said. "Every community is different. What matters in San Diego is different from what matters in Miami or in Chelsea, so we let that shape how we show up in each one"."

PVOLVE handles larger national partnerships while providing franchise owners with tools to develop relationships with businesses and organizations in their markets.

The company is also taking a measured approach to franchise growth. Cartwright said PVOLVE remains focused on the profitability of its early-stage franchisees rather than pursuing a particular unit count.

"Ultimately, franchise success depends on trust," she said. "Our partners know that the Method works, that our team is invested in their growth and that the brand has real staying power."

CONNECTING THE MEMBER EXPERIENCE

Technology supports another piece of the healthspan opportunity: giving members more ways to maintain a consistent practice as their schedules and needs change.

PVOLVE began as an on-demand platform before expanding into physical studios, and unlimited studio members receive access to its digital membership. The company has found that members who engage with both channels develop particularly strong relationships with the brand.

"A member who trains both in-studio and on digital is four times more valuable to that location because they engage more often, deepen their practice and stay longer," Cartwright said.

Digital engagement also gives PVOLVE information that can inform physical expansion. According to the company, 95% of its digital members say they would join a PVOLVE studio if one opened near them, providing another indicator of demand as the franchise network grows.



PVOLVE's longer-term goal is to build a business balanced across equipment, digital subscriptions and studios, with revenue diversified equally among the three by 2030.

Technology will help connect those pieces while giving franchise owners a clearer view of how members are engaging with the brand.

"For owners, technology should make it easier to run a great studio, so they can spend less time on operations and more time in their communities," Cartwright said.

The larger opportunity for boutique fitness may be equally straightforward. As consumers think more about maintaining strength, mobility and independence throughout their lives, fitness brands have more ways to remain relevant to them over time.

"Movement longevity doesn't have a finish line," Cartwright said. "When your promise is helping members move better for longer, you aren't just a stop on the way to a short-term goal. You become part of how they live for decades." ●

THE CASE FOR STARTING SMALL

A Crunch powerhouse, a Purpose Brands' development chief, a Pilates founder and a single-studio owner explain why, in the fitness franchising game, growing well can beat growing fast **by Courtney Rehfeldt**



THE DAILY PILATES

FITNESS FRANCHISING has a size obsession. Private equity money keeps pouring in, and when it comes to units, the mantra is "go big or go home."

So where does that leave the owner with one studio and one lease? Or the prospective franchisee on the sidelines, wondering whether one or two units can still compete?

Here's what one of Crunch's largest franchisees, an emerging Pilates founder and a single-studio owner, has to say.

STARTING SMALL, THINKING BIG

Brian Hibbard, CEO of Fitness Ventures, has built the Crunch-focused group to roughly 120 locations across more than 30 states through steady acquisitions and new openings, including this year's deal to acquire 22 clubs from Harman Fitness, a Los Angeles-based franchisee.

But it didn't start that way.

"When we originally entered the system, we had only bought three rights," Hibbard said. "We had a little bit of a different mindset than most franchisees. We wanted to be diverse in where we open locations."

That meant looking beyond the major metro areas.

"It was a little bit foreign to them when we came in and said, 'Hey, we want to start doing these towns of 100,000 people,'" Hibbard said.

Those first three were a proof of concept, starting with Athens, Georgia. "College markets, military markets, big fish in a little pond kind of strategy," Hibbard said.

Fitness Ventures then moved into secondary markets — smaller metros.

"Now with Harman, we're doing bigger metros," he said. "We're doing L.A. and Houston. I think the (Crunch) brand works everywhere. In terms of starting off with that strategy, yes, I still think it works."

From his perspective, there's still room for single-unit operators.

"Sometimes they've got advantages over us," he said. "They're much closer to the member base. They know everybody in the gym...So a lot of them perform really well, and there's still opportunity for somebody new."



What some don't realize, however, is how much it takes to run a gym. "Some people think it's kind of turnkey and just does its thing," Hibbard said. "It's a little bit more complicated than that."

On the acquisition side, he sees owners sell for different reasons. Some came into the system thinking it would be easier to operate, or that they could run it alongside another business.

"It does tend to be complex," he said. "There are a lot of employees, a lot of moving parts, a lot of personalities."

Fitness Ventures, a Crunch franchisee, has opened in smaller markets like Des Moines, Iowa.

Others set out to open two or three gyms, maximized them and wanted a decent-size exit, he said: "I don't think selling necessarily means failure. I think it can mean a lot of things."

And scaling comes with its own set of challenges.

"It takes a big organization to keep the operations and the culture all sort of where we want them," he said. "Keeping the culture in line, I think, is the number one challenging thing that the small operators don't realize as you grow."

> **"Keeping the culture in line, I think, is the number one challenging thing that the small operators don't realize as you grow."** —**Brian Hibbard**, Fitness Ventures

MAPPING THE MARKET

Patricia Perry, chief development officer at Purpose Brands, said 38% of the company's domestic operators across Anytime Fitness, Orangetheory Fitness, The Bar Method and Waxing the City are multi-unit.

Purpose Brands develops with both single- and multi-unit operators, she said, and lets the map help decide.

"In areas where infill opportunities exist, we typically award franchises to single-unit operators or smaller multi-unit operators," Perry said. "In markets with significant development opportunities, we might focus on larger agreements, but we still explore conversations with single-unit operators as well."

When the company enters a market for the first time, she said, it typically works to find several franchisees to grow with.

FITNESS VENTURES

> **“Starting with one studio gives you the opportunity to learn the business firsthand, develop your team and build lasting relationships within your community.”**
>
> —**Lily Collins-Sak**, The Daily Pilates



“The goal is to scale and realize efficiencies in marketing and operations,” Perry said.

Still, single-unit ownership remains a large part of every brand in the portfolio.

“Single-unit franchisees are typically great operators,” she said.

THE SINGLE-STUDIO ADVANTAGE

Before The Daily Pilates became a 13-location (and growing) franchise, its founder, Lily Collins-Sak, was a personal trainer on the go.

Single-studio owners currently run all The Daily Pilates studios, though some are interested in opening additional locations over time, Collins-Sak said.

“We award territory around one location while keeping future opportunities in mind,” she said. “We consider each owner’s interest in eventually expanding alongside opportunities for new franchisees to serve other communities.”

She sees a “special closeness” that comes with owning one studio.

“You know your clients, what kind of events they want, retail they love, hear their feedback firsthand, and see where your instructors need support,” she said. “We have seen firsthand that studios with operators (owners or whoever is managing operations) who come in, take classes, get to know their community and maintain strong relationships with their team are the most successful.”

In the competitive Pilates market, which is drawing mega-deals, Collins-Sak said Daily Pilates has built a distinct identity around science-backed programming, thoughtful client care and a calming, elevated studio environment.

“Prospective owners have shared that they appreciate how intentional we are about choosing franchise partners, along with the firsthand perspective I bring from nearly two decades in the industry as an instructor and studio owner,” she said. “While we’re an emerging franchise brand, The Daily Pilates has an 11-year foundation.”

She sees multi-unit ownership as a natural next step for owners who demonstrate strong studio performance, a commitment to instructor education and consistent client care.

“As they expand, their role grows into mentoring studio leaders and developing teams who can bring that same personal attention to another community,” she said. “Our goal is to help them grow confidently while preserving what makes each TDP studio special.”

Her advice for anyone deciding between buying one studio and signing a multi-unit deal: “Choose a commitment that allows you to give the business the attention it deserves.”

“Starting with one studio gives you the opportunity to learn the business firsthand, develop your team and build lasting relationships within your community,” she said. “That experience creates a strong foundation for expanding with confidence and bringing the same quality of instruction and care to additional locations.”

For those interested in multi-unit ownership, she’d also highly recommend nearby locations.

“Having studios close together can make it easier to stay involved, develop shared leadership and coordinate instructors, front-desk support and local marketing while building a stronger presence in the community,” she said.

EXPANSION ON YOUR OWN TERMS

Olivia Della Femina, the franchisee behind The Daily Pilates studio in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, sees the payoff of single-studio ownership every day: staying close to clients and making decisions in real time.

“I’m not removed from the day-to-day experience,” she said. “I’m in the studio, building relationships, listening to feedback and understanding what our clients actually want.”

That approach has kept the studio incredibly agile, she said, whether it’s working with instructors to refine classes, introducing new offerings or curating events and partnerships.

“Ultimately, we’re not just delivering Pilates classes,” she said. “We’re continually refining an experience that feels personal, intentional and worth coming back for. And I think that level of connection is a tremendous advantage.”

Still, one studio isn’t the endgame.

“Absolutely, I see multi-unit ownership in my future,” Della Femina said. “But I’m a firm believer in growing with intention, rather than expanding simply for the sake of expansion. My focus right now is strengthening what we’ve built in Basking Ridge while thoughtfully exploring opportunities for a second location.”

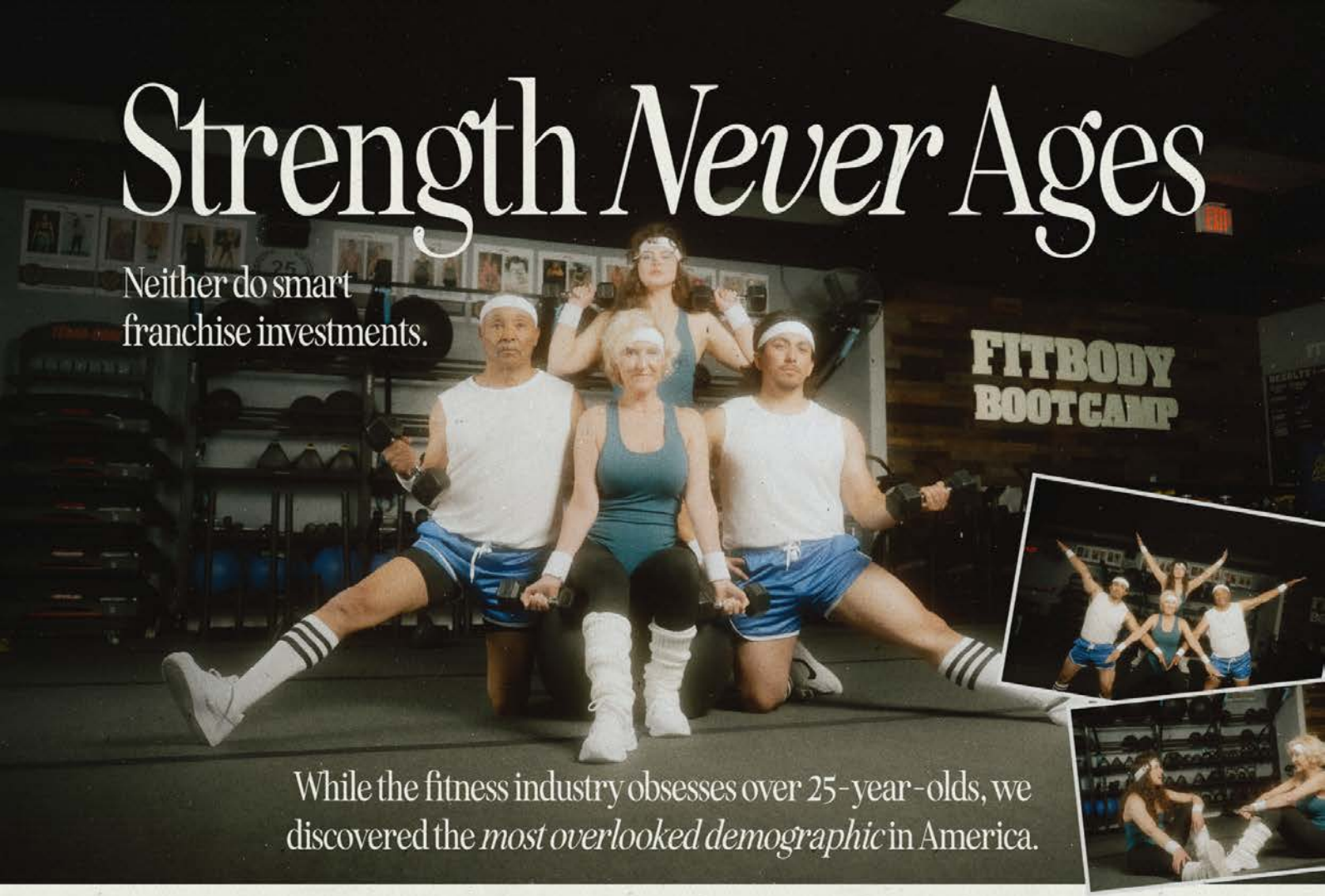
Over the next 6–12 months, she said she will evaluate potential markets and locations as her studio approaches its second anniversary.

“The boutique fitness landscape is increasingly competitive, so finding the right community, location and timing is essential,” Della Femina said. “My goal isn’t necessarily to grow quickly, but to grow well — and to bring the same level of quality, personal connection and client experience to every studio we open.” ■

THE DAILY PILATES

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HOW SNAP FITNESS ADDS MORE WITHOUT ADDING COMPLEXITY FOR FRANCHISEES

As members demand more ways to work out, Snap Fitness is expanding its offerings while giving franchisees a flexible, scalable framework to deliver them



SNAP FITNESS IS EVOLVING the gym experience around a simple idea: give members more options and ways to train, recover and feel good, without losing sight of what makes a great gym work.

Over the past year, that has meant expanding functional training areas, introducing more recovery zones and reinvesting in strength and cardio equipment through partners like Technogym, Matrix and Life Fitness.

Together, these investments reflect how members are using their gyms today. Training is increasingly varied, with members expecting more options to support different ways of working out.

"Members are no longer choosing one way to exercise," said Ty Menzies, CEO of Snap Fitness. "Someone might strength train twice a week, do a reformer class, use a recovery space and then choose something completely different when they are short on time. They expect their gym to accommodate that."

MEETING DEMANDS

As Menzies indicated, variety has gone from a differentiator to a fundamental part of the fitness experience. Modern gym routines rarely revolve around a single form of exercise anymore.

"Strength and cardio remain the foundations of a great gym, but members increasingly want choice around those foundations to help them get the most from their membership," Menzies added.

For franchisees, this demand means creating an experience that can evolve alongside member expectations. The opportunity isn't simply to add more equipment or amenities – it's to make thoughtful additions that complement the core gym experience and give members meaningful reasons to use their club in different ways.

"You want to keep evolving the member experience, but every new product can potentially add another supplier, system, training requirement or operational headache for the franchisee," Menzies explained. "Things shouldn't be added because they are fashionable. They need to make sense within the wider member experience and give people more ways to exercise, feel good and keep coming back."

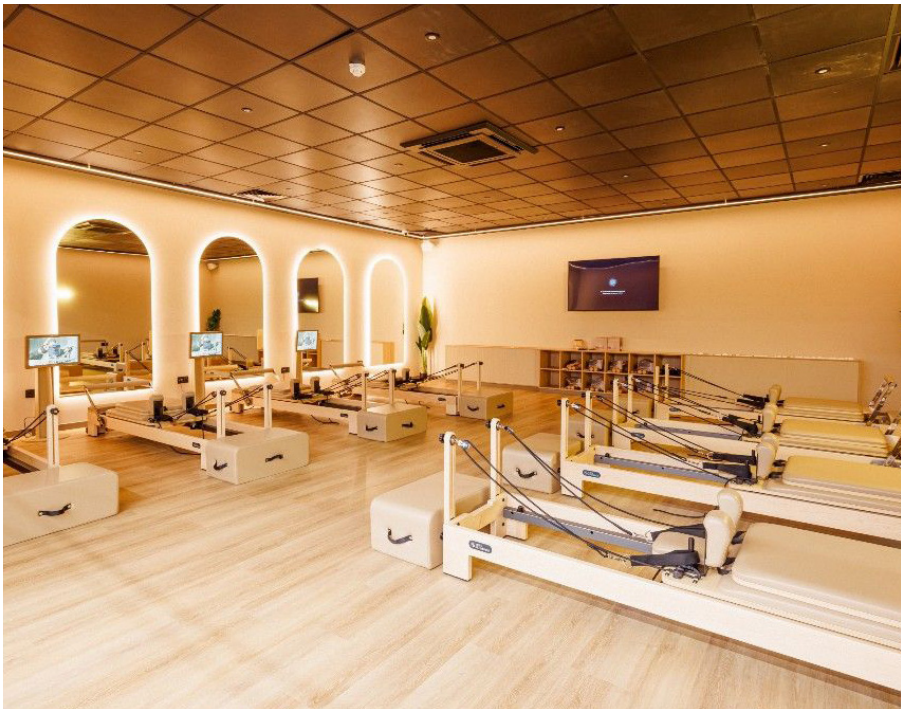
HOW SNAP FITNESS DOES IT

"Our approach is to build on the core product rather than continually bolt things onto it," Menzies said. "Strength, cardio and group exercise are already at the heart of Snap Fitness. Things like reformer and recovery are about elevating that experience rather than creating separate businesses within the club."

This allows Snap Fitness to hit on what's guaranteed to attract members while maintaining the flexibility to test emerging concepts, gauge demand and adapt as preferences evolve.

> Strength and cardio remain the foundations of a great gym, but members increasingly want choice around those foundations to help them get the most from their membership." —**Ty Menzies**, Snap Fitness





Snap also supports those emerging concepts with intentional programming and technology to ensure members pick them up swiftly.

"Simply putting Reformers into a gym doesn't automatically mean members will use them," Menzies said. "If someone doesn't know where to start, what to do or how it fits into their wider training, the value is limited. The same applies to functional spaces and recovery equipment."

Snap Fitness' Reformer Pilates classes are intentionally programmed so anyone at any fitness level can partake in them, whilst also being available 24/7. Reformers also carry digital screens which bring programming directly to the member, providing clear guidance throughout the workout. Different classes exist as well that concentrate specifically on strength, calm and mobility, and high-energy training to meet that demand for optionality.

"This means beginners can feel more confident getting started, while more experienced users still have access to structured, purposeful programming," Menzies went on. "It's a good example of how technology and programming can work together to make the experience more approachable without limiting progression."

Snap Fitness also assists its members with 24/7 accessibility through its Snap App, which features various forms of digital content and consumer touchpoints.

TAKING THINGS A STEP FURTHER

But with growth, there can come a risk of brand dilution. With new locations, potentially adding different concepts outside of strength and cardio, the member experience could easily slip to a point where it's completely different across locations.

However, Snap Fitness guards against that by keeping its workouts, digital content, equipment guidance and support standardized across locations.

"If we can provide these things centrally, it makes it much easier for a franchisee to introduce something new and deliver it consistently," Menzies said.

Nevertheless, there's still some flexibility within that structure, much like the Snap Fitness floors themselves. Franchisees can choose from different programming or content options that might better suit their local market.

"What works in a larger club won't necessarily work in a smaller footprint, and what members want in one territory may be very different from another," Menzies said. "Across our international network, we see differences in everything from preferred training styles and group exercise participation to demand for reformer Pilates and recovery. It's about giving franchisees the right options, rather than expecting every club in every territory to look the same."

LOOKING AHEAD

Menzies argues that the distinction between adding more for your members, and just " adding more", will be pivotal in the coming years as well.

"The strongest franchises will resist the temptation to chase every trend," he said. "The winners will have a very clear core proposition, but enough flexibility to evolve around changing member behavior."

And while Snap Fitness' approach to that will continue to involve positioning fundamental concepts at the forefront of their gyms with emerging modalities built around them, Menzies also expects the lines between those offerings to blur more in the future.

"I also think we'll see less separation between different categories of fitness," he said. "Members don't necessarily think in terms of traditional gym versus boutique versus recovery. They simply want to exercise in ways that work for them. The opportunity for franchise brands is to bring more of those experiences together, but to do it simply." ●

CRUNCH FITNESS CEO TALKS GEN Z, PILATES PUSH & WHAT'S AHEAD



Chequan Lewis, a former Pizza Hut exec, was promoted to Crunch's CEO role earlier this year.
by Courtney Rehfeldt

SHUTTERSTOCK

“I’ve been surprised by how much there’s a similarity between getting someone’s meal right that night and honoring somebody’s body in a session as a personal trainer or in a class that you teach.” —**Chequan Lewis**, Crunch Fitness



Chequan Lewis is sitting at a desk, a skyline shot of New York filling the window behind him. It’s the kind of view that usually means someone has made it.

And he has.

The Howard University alum and Harvard Law grad was recently named CEO of Crunch Fitness. He first joined the high-value, low-price (HVLP) gym franchise in 2024 as brand president, hailing from Pizza Hut, where he served as chief operating officer and the company’s first chief equity officer.

Jim Rowley, the now-former Crunch CEO, has transitioned to executive chairman, a move announced at Crunch’s global franchise convention in San Antonio last month.

Lewis is one of a growing number of fitness chief executives with restaurant and quick-serve backgrounds. He’s in good company — new Vasa Fitness CEO Michael Osanloo and CorePower Yoga CEO Dan Lynn share a similar background.

“Obviously, feeding people and fueling people’s bodies through fitness are two different things, but I’ve been really surprised by how much it needs to be — and in some respects is — experience-driven,” he said. “I’ve been surprised by how much there’s a similarity between getting someone’s meal right that night and honoring somebody’s body in a session as a personal trainer or in a class that you teach.”

It’s a competitive category, he added, but most of all, exhilarating. “It fires me up each day,” Lewis said.

Today, he’s in Crunch’s New York office — but, like many of the young people who make up the gym’s 3.5 million members, he can be found on the floor of a Crunch Fitness.

“Unless it’s Thursday morning or Sunday morning, I’m in Crunch somewhere in America, or sometimes overseas, because we’re now expanding internationally,” he said. “I really pride myself on knowing I can’t do this job very well unless I’m living the member experience, unless I’m with our team members pretty consistently.”

Crunch plans to open roughly 100 gyms this year, building on the brand’s more than 550 locations and 3.5 million members. That includes a new master franchise agreement in Mexico, continued expansion in New Zealand, and entry into India, where Crunch opened its first club in Noida and plans to develop 75 locations across the country.

Any concerns about a pullback in spending among young consumers, in Crunch’s clubs at least, aren’t materializing. The headlines exist: young consumers stretched thin, saddled with student loan debt and priced out of homebuying. But, as findings show, they are willing to prioritize fitness and wellness spending.

“You absolutely are seeing Gen Z come to us in droves,” Lewis said. “That’s a generation that doesn’t look at their fitness spending as discretionary. They view it as a critical part of their lives.”

Lewis and the broader Crunch organization have a phrase for this group: “young, strong and social,” which describes what he sees on his visits to Crunch clubs.

“It’s a good reminder: if we show up for them, they’ll show up for us,” he added.

It runs both ways, in his view.

“When someone honors you with dues each month, there’s a relationship that we’re in,” he said. “We have a responsibility to help you get in touch with the best version of yourself.”

The brand is leaning hard into building boutique-style studios within its gyms, rolling out four studio concepts inside its new Crunch 3.0 prototype: Crunch Reform Pilates, Pump Strength Training Studio, Spar Boxing Studio and an Abs & Glutes studio, alongside enhanced investments in Crunch’s Relax & Recover space.

Pilates, in particular, has been well received since its announcement. Twenty Crunch locations across California, Florida, Texas, Arizona, Nevada, Illinois, Colorado and Michigan added Crunch Reform Pilates this summer, tapping into a category that, according to ClassPass, leads fitness reservations.

“We think that invites us into something interesting, and so you’ll see our offerings continue to evolve with that,” Lewis said of Pilates.

Meanwhile, a new premium membership tier, Crunch Select, is set to debut in Long Beach, New York, later this year, combining what the company describes as boutique-inspired studios, enhanced recovery experiences and premium amenities with elevated finishes.

Though the pace of announcements may look sudden, the groundwork has been underway for quite some time.

“It really is a part of a vision that we have been activating for the last couple of years that we’re really excited about, and we’re in the middle of it, so it’s not vaporware,” Lewis said. “You’re going to see it come to life very soon.” ■

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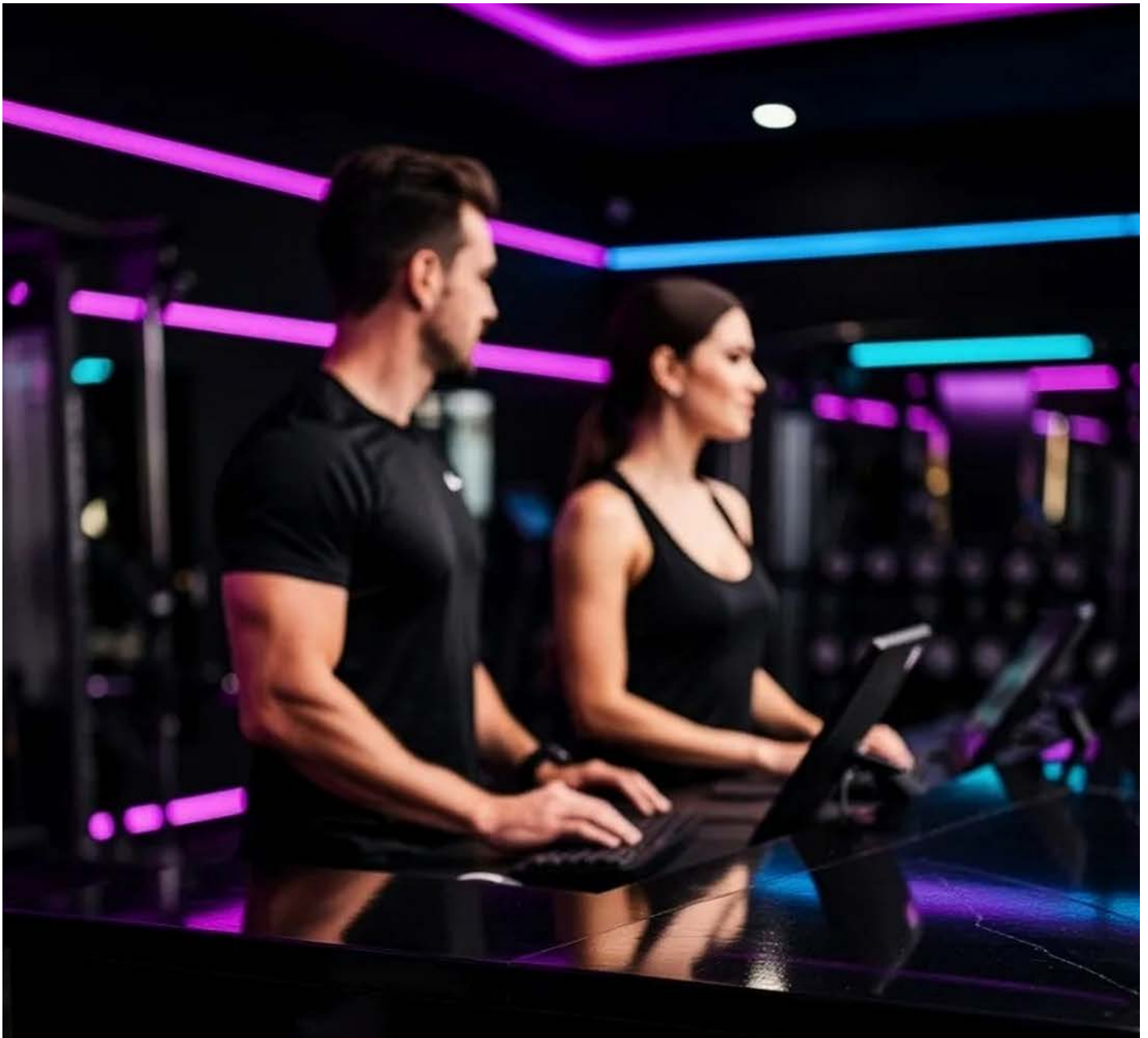
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PLANET FITNESS REBRANDS AS RIVALS GAIN GROUND

The low-price gym giant, which has struggled to maintain its spot as top dog in the HVLP category it helped pioneer, is rolling out a refreshed look and app redesign.

by Courtney Rehfeldt

SHUTTER STOCK



PLANET FITNESS has unveiled an updated logo and color palette, and an app upgrade, in hopes of smoothing over a couple of bumps the low-price gym giant has faced this year.

Planet's iconic gear design got a refresh meant to reflect "movement, progress and the collective energy" of the fitness chain, paired with a new font and an updated purple and yellow palette with cooler, more modern tones.

The move follows Planet's admission that its recent marketing push around strength training landed as too aggressive for the gym newcomers the budget-friendly chain tends to reel in.

"We probably over-torqued," Planet Fitness CEO Colleen Keating said of the campaign, conceding it spoke to the already-fit rather than the beginners Planet has long courted.

The gym giant cut its guidance and paused a planned price hike to its Black Card premium membership, while also engaging in a national test of its $10 base membership — the entry rate Planet abandoned in 2024 for $15.

A proposed securities class action filed in July accuses Planet Fitness of overstating how well the strength campaign was landing before its guidance cut in May that sent the stock down about 31% in a single day.

The fitness franchise's updated app, live as of Wednesday, includes a redesigned member profile that syncs with the major wellness platforms, a home screen that shifts once a member is inside a club and equipment-aligned tracking to log weights, reps and sets. The Crowd Meter (the tool that reads how packed a club is) — also got a real-time upgrade, Planet Fitness said.

The logo and app refresh are two of Planet's more recent moves as the high-value, low-price (HVLP) lane it helped invent fills up with rivals. Crunch, EoS, Vasa and Amped are all expanding and stacking on Pilates and other boutique-style perks. Planet is inching the same way, though more cautiously, piloting a handful of recovery amenities that reach past its longtime massage chairs and loungers, tanning and red-light booths. Overseas, it's already made a bold move. Planet Fitness Australia struck a deal this month to put reformer Pilates in its 32 clubs Down Under.

And while it might seem there's little turf left in the U.S. to conquer — Planet says one of its clubs already sits within 10 miles of 77% of the population — the growth story is far from over.

In August, Planet signed three area development agreements with Ian McClure of Gulf Coast Hotel Management. A Dallas hospitality operator with more than 30 extended-stay properties in the works across Texas, Florida and Colorado, McClure will bring more than a dozen Planet Fitness gyms to Florida's west coast, according to Franchise Times.

> **"We remain focused on disciplined expansion, identifying the right markets and partnering with operators who have the expertise and long-term commitment."** —**Chip Ohlsson**, Planet Fitness

The agreements mark the first time in more than a decade, per the publication, that Planet has opened area development agreements to a newcomer who didn't enter the Planet Fitness orbit via acquisition. McClure may be the first in a long while, but he likely won't be the last.

Chip Ohlsson, Planet's chief development officer, said the company expects the momentum in its franchise development to continue.

"We continue to see interest from experienced developers and multi-unit operators who recognize the strength of our capital-efficient, recurring-revenue model and the broad appeal of our high-value, low-price offering," Ohlsson said. "Looking ahead, we remain focused on disciplined expansion, identifying the right markets and partnering with operators who have the expertise and long-term commitment to bring Planet Fitness to more communities." ■

PLANET FITNESS

Club Pilates: Scaling Growth *Without* Compromising Quality

Club Pilates recognizes that sustainable growth requires more than getting instructors on the floor—it requires developing highly trained talent equipped to deliver a safe, effective, and consistent Pilates experience.



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TRAIN WITH CLUB PILATES

STRENGTH FOR WHAT COMES NEXT: PVOLVE'S APPROACH TO TRAINING THROUGH MENOPAUSE

A smarter approach to strength training can support women through menopause and the decades ahead.



WOMEN KNOW STRENGTH training is important. Many still aren't doing it.

PVOLVE's recent Movement Longevity Report, which surveyed 1,000 women over 40, found that 78% recognize the importance of weightlifting, yet 60% do not do it weekly. Why? Twenty-seven percent said they don't know where to start, 20% cited fear of injury and 9% said they find weight training intimidating.

During perimenopause and menopause, strength training becomes particularly important. Getting more women to embrace it may start with changing how they think about this stage of life.

"Menopause shouldn't signal a decline, a time when your body and life slow down," said Antonietta Vicario, Founding Trainer and Chief Training Officer at PVOLVE. "Menopause is a biological evolution. While hormone loss has a physiological impact on our bodies, we can push back by prioritizing strength training."

The challenge for the fitness industry is giving women a clear and approachable way to do it.

"The fitness industry is incredibly noisy with conflicting advice on reps, ideal weight loads and 'bulking,'" Vicario said. "I want women to know that countering muscle loss doesn't have to be intimidating or unsafe."

Her advice is straightforward. "The best strength routine is simply one that challenges you, fits your fitness level and is enjoyable enough to keep you consistent."

> We're not training just for what our bodies can do today. We're building the physical capacity we want to have 10, 20 and 30 years from now."—**Antonietta Vicario**, PVOLVE

TRAINING FOR A CHANGING BODY

Understanding why strength training is important during menopause starts with what is happening in the body.

As estrogen levels decline, women can find it more difficult to build and maintain muscle and preserve bone strength. Estrogen plays a role in muscle repair, blood flow and the protection of lean tissue, among other functions.

Muscle loss is already part of the aging process. Vicario says women typically lose between 3% and 7% of muscle per decade after age 30. "With muscle supporting our metabolism, fueling our energy cells, helping with blood sugar regulation, supporting our joint health, and improving daily function and overall strength, building and preserving it becomes a must," Vicario said.

That makes regular strength training central to PVOLVE's approach. Vicario also recommends short intervals of plyometric or impact training to provide additional stimulus for bone health. She says higher-intensity intervals can also support brain health, mood and sleep, areas that can be affected during menopause.

Ultimately, workouts need to evolve along with the body. Women who have spent years focused primarily on cardio, or who have never developed a regular strength practice, may need a different training framework for their 40s, 50s and beyond.

STRENGTH BEYOND THE WEIGHTS

Building strength for everyday life requires more than traditional weight training alone.

"Strength shouldn't exist in a silo," Vicario said. "If women want to live better, longer, they need to integrate mobility and stability training into their routine."

Traditional weight training often relies heavily on movements in the sagittal plane, moving the body forward and backward through exercises such as squats, lunges, leg presses and bicep curls. PVOLVE incorporates those movements while also training the body in multiple directions and integrating mobility and stability.

Vicario says the goal is strength that translates into daily life.

"Every day we're reaching, twisting, carrying groceries, lifting children, climbing stairs, getting on and off the floor," Vicario said. "Those movements require dynamic strength, mobility and stability working together."

Progressive training is part of the equation, too. PVOLVE's approach expands the concept of progressive overload beyond continually adding weight.

"The goal is a consistent, progressive routine built for the long haul," Vicario said.

Once someone develops sound mechanics, the training can progress through changes in tempo, mechanical angles, range of motion and sustained muscular tension, along with additional resistance. Vicario says a movement can become more challenging by slowing it down, performing it more explosively, changing body position or working through a deeper range.

"It is never just about hitting a rep count," Vicario said. "It is about the quality of those reps."

PVOLVE's Healthy Aging clinical research also suggests that strength gains do not necessarily require extremely heavy loads. Women training with weights ranging from five to 20 pounds gained roughly 20% more strength over 12 weeks than a control group following standard U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines.

MAKING STRENGTH TRAINING SUSTAINABLE

A program still has to be something women can realistically follow.

Vicario recommends three to four strength sessions each week, structured so major muscle groups receive regular training and adequate recovery. PVOLVE also encourages women to work at a level that feels challenging while leaving roughly two or three repetitions "in the tank."

Recovery is part of the training strategy too. Muscles need time to repair following demanding sessions, and Vicario says PVOLVE will shift clients toward mobility and active recovery when stress and exhaustion are high.

That philosophy is particularly important for women who are new to strength training and may feel pressure to suddenly start lifting heavy.

"The best way for someone to begin a strength training routine is to start exactly as they are," Vicario said. "I always say slow and steady truly does win the race. I also think they need to follow a structured plan that they enjoy so they stick with it."

PVOLVE is reinforcing that approach throughout October with Strongtober, a month-long focus on weight training. Members are being challenged to complete 10 weight-training classes during the month, with finishers receiving a 30-day supply of Thorne Creatine. The company is also using the month to educate women about muscle and the physiological changes associated with menopause.

The idea is to give women tools they can continue using long after October ends.

In the end, PVOLVE members may have different goals, but Vicario believes the underlying objective is much the same.

"We're not training just for what our bodies can do today," Vicario said. "We're building the physical capacity we want to have 10, 20 and 30 years from now." ●



INSIDE WORKOUT ANYTIME'S ACQUISITION-LED GROWTH STRATEGY

The fitness franchise aims to reach 400 clubs in five years by acquiring existing gyms.

by Courtney Rehfeldt

Somewhere, a gym member has used the same locker for six years and tries for the same parking spot every visit — the small attachments that form when a place becomes routine. That person may not know it yet, but their gym could be for sale. And whether they stay or walk out the door is, increasingly, a Workout Anytime problem.

The 24/7 fitness franchise now operates nearly 200 locations across the U.S. and spent the year growing by purchase. A capital-efficient strategy, it says, of buying existing gyms and converting them under the Workout Anytime brand.

Ten clubs have opened this year, with 10 more due by year-end. Workout Anytime's leadership bench has also grown with the appointments of Peter Stipher as chief operating officer, Tim Hicks as vice president of franchise development and Savannah Bananas baseball player and influencer Kyle "KJ" Jackson as "chief aura officer."

The fitness franchise aims to reach 400 clubs in five years, but as Workout Anytime CEO Jerry Pugh puts it, "it is not just about putting dots on a map."

Once the brand's largest franchisee with 19 locations, Pugh took the CEO job last April after a deal that gave him an ownership stake alongside private equity firms Skyline Global Partners and Peninsula Capital Partners.

"We want to grow the right way, with the right franchisees, in the right markets," he said. "A big part of our strategy is continuing to build density throughout the Southeast while expanding into markets where we know our model can win."

Pugh sees some of Workout Anytime's greatest opportunities in secondary and tertiary markets — areas he said are often underserved by the larger fitness brands but filled with people who want a high-quality fitness and wellness experience.

"That has always been a sweet spot for Workout Anytime," he said, adding that he sees a "tremendous runway" outside the major metropolitan areas.

To that end, the company is putting greater emphasis on multi-unit and enterprise-level franchisees who have the capital, infrastructure and experience to grow with the brand.

"Five years from now, I see a much larger Workout Anytime footprint, but more importantly, a stronger and more consistent system," he said.



Though domestic growth is the immediate priority, Pugh said international expansion is an area of interest.

"We believe the Workout Anytime model has the potential to translate very well internationally," he said. "When we do move internationally, we want to do it thoughtfully. It has to be the right market, the right partner and the right infrastructure."

Pricing varies by club, but across a sampling of locations, basic memberships run roughly $27 to $32 a month and premium about $37 to $39. Premium amenities include red light therapy, dry heat and infrared saunas, PolarWave, RedZone, tanning, HydroMassage, massage chairs, a posing room, CryoLounge+, Theragun and luxury locker rooms, though the amenities vary by location.

The fitness chain has invested heavily in its premium offering, a push Pugh said has let it draw a clearer distinction between basic and premium memberships and give members a compelling reason to move up a tier.

"We have been very encouraged by the response," he said of the added amenities, indicating that more may be on the horizon.

"Looking forward, we are constantly evaluating new recovery and wellness technologies," he said. "I believe the line between fitness, recovery and wellness is going to continue to disappear, and we want Workout Anytime positioned right in the middle of that evolution. There are definitely some things we are interested in testing, but anything we introduce has to improve the member experience and make economic sense for our franchisees."

Acquisitions can ramp up growth, but Pugh is quick to puncture the idea that buying a gym is the easy part.

"You inherit everything: the facility, equipment, membership base, staff, culture and sometimes years of deferred maintenance," he said. "You really have to understand what you are buying beyond the financials."

The safeguard, Pugh said, is enough capital and discipline behind an acquisition to bring a club up to Workout Anytime standards.

"You cannot simply put our sign on the building and call it a Workout Anytime," he said.

The grow-by-acquisition strategy has also turned up something Pugh did not expect.

> **"A big part of our strategy is continuing to build density throughout the Southeast while expanding into markets where we know our model can win."** — **Jerry Pugh**, Workout Anytime

"What surprised me most is how emotionally connected members can be to an independent gym," Pugh said. "You are not just acquiring memberships. In many cases, you are walking into a community that has existed for years. Members have relationships with the staff, their favorite equipment, their routines and even their favorite spot in the gym."

It has meant walking a fine line between improving a club and erasing what made people love it.

"We learned pretty quickly that you have to respect what was already working," he said. "Our goal is not to walk in on day one and erase the identity of the club. We want to listen to the members and the team, understand what they value, and then begin introducing the things that make Workout Anytime better."

If executed correctly, members eventually realize they did not lose their gym.

"Their gym just got better," he said. ■

WORKOUT ANYTIME

HOW REVL TRAINING IS BUILDING A BOUTIQUE FITNESS MODEL THAT LASTS

With a focus on member progression, adaptable programming and efficient studio operations, REVL is becoming a leader in the boutique fitness scene



PUSHING THROUGH a 45-minute sweat session packed with burpees and box jumps, closing a workout with a max bike effort or grinding through a synchronised dumbbell finisher are not easy tasks. Running a business around them isn't either.

Most boutique concepts are built around one modality or trend. While that makes it simple for owners and operators to market, package and distribute their offerings consistently, it also limits their ability to engage with members once their initial interest dissipates or cheaper competition arises. It's an uphill climb that never tapers off, even if it takes a while to reveal its verticality. That's where REVL is different.

"When that trend cools, or a cheaper version opens down the road, there's nothing keeping members there," said Ben Woolford, co-founder of REVL. "Add rising rents, expensive fit-outs and a model that depends on constantly replacing members, and margins get very thin very quickly. A lot of these brands simply haven't evolved with the industry, and today's member expects a lot more."

That shift is reflected in where REVL's franchise partners come from. According to Mildren, around 20% of the network are direct gym conversions, 35% have come from competing brands, and 30% have come from within REVL's own community of members, coaches and managers.

"It's not about revelling in other brands closing," Mildren said. "It's about giving coaches and operators who share our passion for building communities a product and brand they're aligned with, and finding them a new place in the industry rather than watching them fall out of love with it."

Woolford and Mildren launched REVL during the COVID-19 lockdowns, one of the boutique fitness industry's most challenging periods. By building a business capable of thriving when conditions were at their worst, they've established a model that's proving even stronger today.

REVL'S DIFFERENT APPROACH

As Woolford indicated, boutique brands that avoid over-relying on a singular, trending concept and instead focus on what's offered beyond classes alone are better positioned for long-term success. Prioritizing member progression through structured programming is a particularly effective way to achieve that.

> The brands that last have a few things in common. Members can see themselves progressing, so they have a reason to stay once the novelty wears off." —**Ben Woolford**, REVL



"The brands that last have a few things in common," Woolford said. "Members can see themselves progressing, so they have a reason to stay once the novelty wears off. The training is built on principles rather than trends, so it doesn't date."

REVL's includes 13-week training blocks designed to build community and create what Mildren called a "genuinely sticky" environment. Members train in cells of up to four, sharing equipment and pushing each other through every session. The programming is also hybrid style, allowing members to build a base level of strength and conditioning that positions them to do more as time goes on.

"The progression is real," Mildren said. "Members who have trained with us for six and a half years are still hitting one-rep and three-rep max PRs. So, we know our program works."

REVL still invests in what's hot among members. For example, few industry verticals have more momentum than fitness competitions right now. So, when REVL's data reflected a significant interest in them among their members, the brand built its own events infrastructure for franchisees to host contests.

As long as you follow the analytics, adapt to them quickly and still maintain an emphasis on structure and progression, topical additions to programming can be of value.

"Data is pivotal to every decision we make," Mildren added. "That's where a lot of brands have fallen over, accommodating only what their members used to value. We stay focused on where our members are heading, and we evolve with them."

ADDITIONAL REVL ADVANTAGES

Mildren and Woolford take this commitment to long-term success seriously, aiming for studios to recoup their initial investment within 18 to 30 months. Their approach to studio development reflects that ambition, which emphasizes efficient use of space and avoids unnecessary upfront expenses.

"You don't get the same purpose-built feeling in other boxes," Woolford said. "You might walk in and it feels boutique because the fit-out is expensive and lush. You sit on a nice bench with a cushion and grab a coffee. That's great, but then you get on the gym floor and it doesn't flow. We don't overcapitalize on expensive reception desks, waiting areas or amenities that don't add revenue. We prioritize the training space and getting as many members into classes as possible, so we drive revenue with lower front-end costs."

REVL equips franchisees with high-end equipment as well. Woolford shared that REVL has re-evaluated what they provide owners with every year since their launch to ensure quality and durability.

"Look after it and it stays fresh for a very long time, keeping ongoing costs low," he said. "If you're making a return within two years on a 10-year term, that's eight years of driving profitability."

GROWTH TODAY & TOMORROW

Proof of the model's success can be found in the brand's worldwide footprint as well, with REVL reporting 70 franchise territories sold across the globe in early August of this year, and the emergence of multi-unit operators.

"That only happens when the model works and returns cash," Woolford said. "Our franchisees wouldn't be opening second, third and fourth locations if their studios weren't performing."

REVL's owners see expanded promise in strength, particularly with women, and fitness being used as a platform for social interaction in the future as well. With a model already built to support both, the brand is excited for what's to come.



"Over the next 5-10 years I think we're really going to see it take off, and we're thrilled to bring those new clients into the REVL world and get them up to speed with what we do," Mildren said.

That, paired with the widespread, general interest in health and wellness, gives prospective franchisees plenty of reason to take a closer look at REVL.

"When we look at our global statistics, our studios are averaging over 200 members, and anyone who knows boutique fitness knows that's a strong, profitable studio," Mildren said. "At the same time, the whole health and wellness space is booming. More people are training than ever before, and they're connecting socially through it. So, for anyone looking to invest, it's a huge opportunity to diversify their investments and back a brand and model that's already proven to work across eight international markets." ●

THE 90-DAY PRESALE PLAYBOOK

Only about one in a 1,000 studios opens fully funded. Two operators who beat those odds lay out the 90-day presale playbook, from setting your target to signing founding members before the space is ready. **by Klaudia Balogh**



SHUTTERSTOCK

> **Most of a boutique's revenue rides on memberships, and that's the line that matters in presale because it is recurring."**
>
> —**Tom Jacobson**, SABRE Business Consulting



The boutique studio boom shows no sign of slowing down. It has been the strongest-performing segment in US fitness for six straight months in 2026, with year-to-date visitation up across eight of the nine US Census divisions, according to the Health & Fitness Association.

Additionally, a record 81 million Americans now belong to a gym or studio, and consumers are projected to spend an estimated $60 billion on health and fitness in 2026. Studio Grow founder and CEO Lisa Kuecker has projected that Pilates alone would account for roughly 46% of new studio openings, part of a boutique sector she pegs as growing about 30% faster than routine fitness operations.

With such a crowded field, the studios that open strongest are the ones that spent the months beforehand being strategic, building a community and signing members who are prone to stay. Two operators who coach owners through that runway, Tom Jacobson, Principal of SABRE Business Consulting, and Kuecker, agree most owners underestimate what it takes.

"About one in a 1,000 studios" hits a fully funded presale, Kuecker told Athletech News, "but about 88% of our incubator clients hit it, so we know it's very doable."

Here's how they'd set your studio up for success during those three months leading up to the grand opening.

HOW TO SET YOUR PRESALE TARGET

Kuecker told ATN that a presale should ideally cover the facility's full monthly operating expenses with the team included. For studios under 10,000 square feet, she calls that reasonable, though demanding. Larger facilities, which carry heavier class, equipment and recovery loads, get a longer runway. "The larger the facility, the more that breakeven point stretches out," she said, though even the biggest should reach breakeven within nine to 12 months.

Additionally, she said the number is only right if it maps to the business. "The only rule is that it makes sense with your P&L, your pro forma and your projections," said Kuecker. "If you're doing anything outside of that because you're trying to match someone or meet a rule, you're going to find failure."

Jacobson works the same target from the membership side, since recurring dues are what the presale is really building. "Most of a boutique's revenue rides on memberships, and that's the line that matters in presale because it is recurring," he told ATN. "Figure out how many members you need to break even. For most studios, that lands around two-thirds of your projected membership at full ramp. If the presale gets you to 45% or 50% of ramped memberships, you open with a real path to profitability, and you cross breakeven inside the first three to six months. That's the north star."

SHUTTERSTOCK

90 DAYS OUT: BUILD THE WAITLIST AND THE VISION

Neither operator opens founding sales this early. The 90-day window is for building a waitlist and pulling people into the story. Kuecker starts building it 12 to 16 weeks out and works it intimately across social, email, SMS and the phone.

"This is the calm before the storm, because we don't typically start presale until six weeks out. But this is where an enormous amount of back-end work is set up, so that when we open founding memberships, we have a flood."

That waitlist becomes a way of involving future members in the building process. "We're asking people, 'hey, we're picking between two classes. We're thinking about naming this room. Can you guess which mood board we went with?'" Kuecker said, noting that it's about getting people invested not just in the studio, but in the vision.

Jacobson adds pop-ups as another lever worth pulling. "Get your instructors teaching at a park, a rooftop, a partner's space," he said, adding that community partnerships are the multiplier. "The run club, the coffee shop, the physical therapist near your site all have the audience you're trying to reach, and a trusted local partner vouching for you does more than any ad you can buy before opening."

6 WEEKS OUT: START SELLING TO A WARM LIST

Founding sales open around six weeks out, and if the waitlist work was done well, the early sales close themselves. "Our goal is that 12.5% of people on the waitlist convert to memberships," Kuecker said, "and a lot of those convert very quickly, in the first three days to the first week.

Jacobson's numbers for a nurtured lead list convert even higher, closer to "25% to 35% versus around 10% left alone, and early-paying founders show up at better than 95%."

HOW TO STRUCTURE THE FOUNDERS' RATE TO REWARD BUYING EARLY

There's no universal founders' offer, both operators stress. Kuecker structures it by tier. A luxury facility may offer no discount at all, only early access, unique events, even partnered retreats. A premium facility mixes limited access



with a hard cap that creates real scarcity. Mid-range facilities run waves.

"The first wave has the most discounted initial pricing and the biggest amount of benefits, and then they get a little smaller," Kuecker told ATN.

However, whatever the tier, the reward has to feel significant. "A discount alone isn't the reward," Jacobson said. "It's the best price that nobody will ever get again, first access to the schedule, an apparel discount, a complimentary first two weeks, whatever fits the brand. People need to feel they're getting something real for buying before there's even a room to walk into."

Then make waiting expensive. "Publish what the price goes to the day founding closes, and post updates as spots fill," Jacobson added. "Scarcity is a powerful tool, and so is inclusion."

30 DAYS OUT: TALK TO PEOPLE, AND WATCH THE LEADING INDICATORS

The tactic both say outperforms expectations is human connection and experiences. "When people go digital-only, none of them ever hit their goals," Kuecker said. "You have to be willing to pick up the phone. And wildly, people answer, in all of our markets."

Jacobson added that getting prospects to physically train with the instructors before opening day continues to overperform. "A person who has sweated with your coach has already joined, they just haven't paid yet," he said.

As for the numbers, according to Jacobson, you should watch paid founding memberships per week, over the running total. "Weekly velocity tells you the truth about whether all that activity and excitement is actually converting," he said. "Two flat weeks in a row means the message has stopped landing and it's time to fix it."

Kuecker tracks the funnel a step earlier, watching engagement daily. "When our click-through rates drop precipitously, we immediately assume that's going to impact sales and change it," she said.

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

Launch week, Kuecker said, is all about stress-testing systems and running a soft opening to surface friction first. Her sharpest warning is about the uncontrollables. "When it's executed well, you have plan B, C and D," she said.

Jacobson adds that by this point everything should be buttoned up. "Your staff is hired, trained, and confident, and construction has hit every milestone it needed to open on time," he told ATN. "Founding members are getting structured and purposeful communication that works them into their new normal. Your automated journeys keep running in the background, converting leads into paid members. When the plan and the systems are both doing their jobs, what you get is a crescendo of excitement and hype that peaks exactly when the doors open." ■

SHUTTER STOCK

HOW STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS® IS RETHINKING THE WELLNESS FRANCHISE

A diversified service mix and practitioner ownership model are helping Structural Elements address some of wellness franchising's biggest challenges

THE LONGEVITY MARKET has grown rapidly, bringing diagnostics, recovery, nutrition and personalized health services further into the fitness and wellness landscape.

But Doug Bertram, founder and CEO of Structural Elements Franchising, believes one fundamental piece of longevity is often overlooked: the ability to move well.

"Most of the longevity boom is metabolic: blood work, supplements, nutrition. Very little of it is mechanical," Bertram said. "But if you can't move without pain, none of the rest matters much."

Structural Elements' focus on the mechanical side of health began long before longevity became a broader wellness focus.

Bertram trained in myofascial release with John Barnes in 1995, work that eventually led him into Chinese medicine. Over the next three decades, he developed a clinical system that blends the two, with a focus on explaining the approach through the language of modern science.

Along the way, he saw a gap in how people accessed care for their bodies.

"If you hurt, you had two choices: a massage chain that felt good but wasn't clinical, or a PT or chiropractic office that treated you after something broke," Bertram said. "Nobody owned the space in between, the proactive, preventative care that keeps people moving well before they become patients."



Structural Elements® began as a clinic designed to fill that space. Today, its model combines manual therapy, acupuncture and physical therapy with a Recovery and Performance Lab featuring cryotherapy, infrared sauna, red light, compression, PEMF and vibration therapy.

A MORE COMPLICATED WELLNESS BUSINESS

That broader approach to wellness also shapes the business model behind Structural Elements®.

Bertram sees franchisees navigating a more challenging operating environment, with labor among the biggest pressures. Skilled practitioners can be difficult to find, retain and compensate, while turnover can disrupt client relationships and hurt the business.

He says single-service models can create another point of vulnerability. "A concept that does one thing well is exposed when that one thing becomes commoditized or a competitor opens down the street," Bertram said. "Then add rising occupancy and buildout costs, and a consumer who is more discerning about where their wellness dollars go. Operators are feeling squeezed on margin from both sides."

At the same time, those consumers want efficiency and consistency.

> When providers can earn a living, they stay, and when they stay, clients stay."
> —**Doug Bertram**, Structural Elements



"People don't want to piece together a chiropractor here, a massage there, and a cryo studio across town," Bertram said. "They want a team that talks to each other and a plan that ties it together."

DIVERSIFYING THE MODEL

Structural Elements® gives clients multiple entry points while allowing each service to feed others. Someone who first visits for a recovery session, for example, may later work with an acupuncturist or another practitioner within the clinic.

"The model diversifies revenue, and it deepens the relationship with every client," Bertram said. "Each service line feeds the others, so acquisition cost gets spread across a much larger lifetime value."

Membership and corporate programs add recurring revenue that is not tied to an individual appointment.

The service mix is also designed to support practitioner retention. Bertram said Structural Elements® deliberately built complementary service lines so providers have a larger ecosystem in which to develop their practices.

"When providers can earn a living, they stay, and when they stay, clients stay," he said.

Structural Elements'® ownership model is also unique. The clinic franchisee owns and operates the facility and is typically an experienced business owner or multi-unit operator. Within the clinic, licensed practitioners can operate their own practices as micro-franchisees, with independent contractor arrangements providing an entry point for providers still building their businesses.

Bertram says the structure addresses both regulatory and operational challenges. "In many states, corporate practice of medicine rules limit the ability of non-licensed owners to employ medical professionals," he said. "Structural Elements'® model allows non-medical operators to own the clinic business while licensed providers remain responsible for care."



It also separates two jobs that require very different skill sets. "Running a business and delivering great care are very different things, and most practitioners struggle to do both," Bertram said. "We let each party do what they're best at."

Practitioners gain ownership and business support, while clinic owners build a team with a direct stake in the success of the location.

BUILDING FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

Bertram expects several forces shaping the wellness franchise market today to become even more significant over the next three to five years.

He believes longevity will continue moving into the mainstream, with mobility becoming its next frontier. The practitioner labor shortage will keep pressure on concepts to offer providers stronger career paths. Employer investment in proactive health could create new corporate channels, while continued consolidation may favor brands with diversified revenue and stronger unit economics.

Structural Elements® has been building its franchise system around those expectations. Its service-line SOPs and training are complete, its practitioner ownership structure is designed to support recruitment and retention, and membership and corporate programs add recurring revenue to the model.

As the wellness market expands, he believes the opportunity lies in meeting consumers across more of their health needs in one place.

"The winners will be concepts that combine credibility with convenience," Bertram said, "clinical enough to trust and accessible enough to make part of a weekly routine." ●

YOUR BEST-PERFORMING STUDIO MIGHT BE A TERRIBLE PROTOTYPE

Sabre explains why it's important to let your most recent launch tell you how to plan your next one, and why your first shouldn't be in a major metro area

SABRE, the boutique real estate advisory firm, can't take Frank Sinatra at his word. While the brand believes that if you make it in New York, Los Angeles or Miami, you certainly can make it anywhere else, it argues that doing so isn't quite as certain as the famed musician makes it sound.

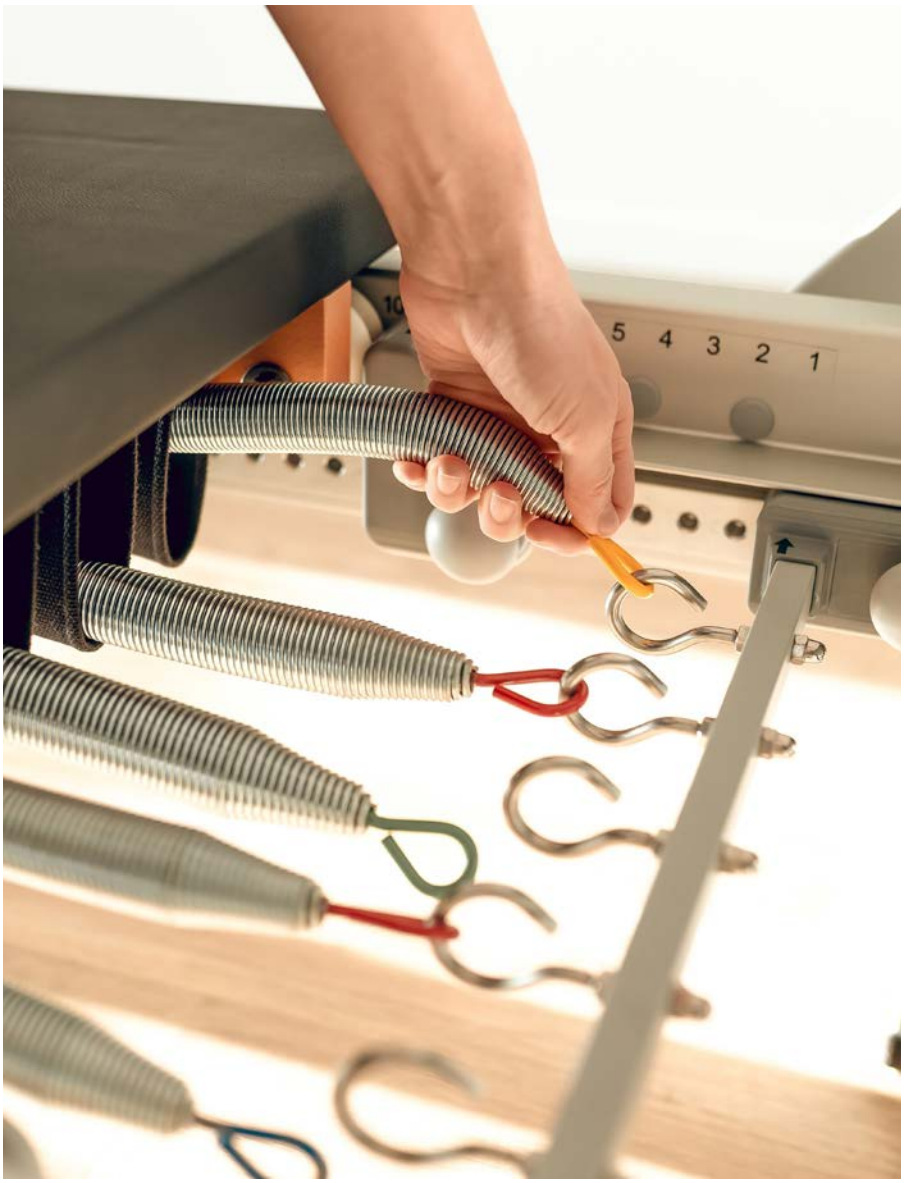
"Experiencing success when launching a new brand in one of the country's gateway markets does not mean you have a scalable concept," said Douglas Jerum, principal at SABRE. "A super dense market like Manhattan, with a population always looking to try new brands and modalities, can mask all kinds of mistakes."

Those potential vulnerabilities, especially in an ambitious operation eager to expand, can threaten to take down an entire business upon surfacing as well.

However, by taking a more extensive look at concepts and their consumer appeal, SABRE gauges scalability more accurately before helping brands expand. In doing so, SABRE saves them time, capital and channels growth that lasts.

WHY SUCCESS ISN'T TRANSFERABLE

High rents and other living costs are brought up quickly in conversations around major metropolitan markets. Owners often reckon that if consumers are willing to pay for their gym or studio membership even with those additional burdens on their budget, so will everyone else.

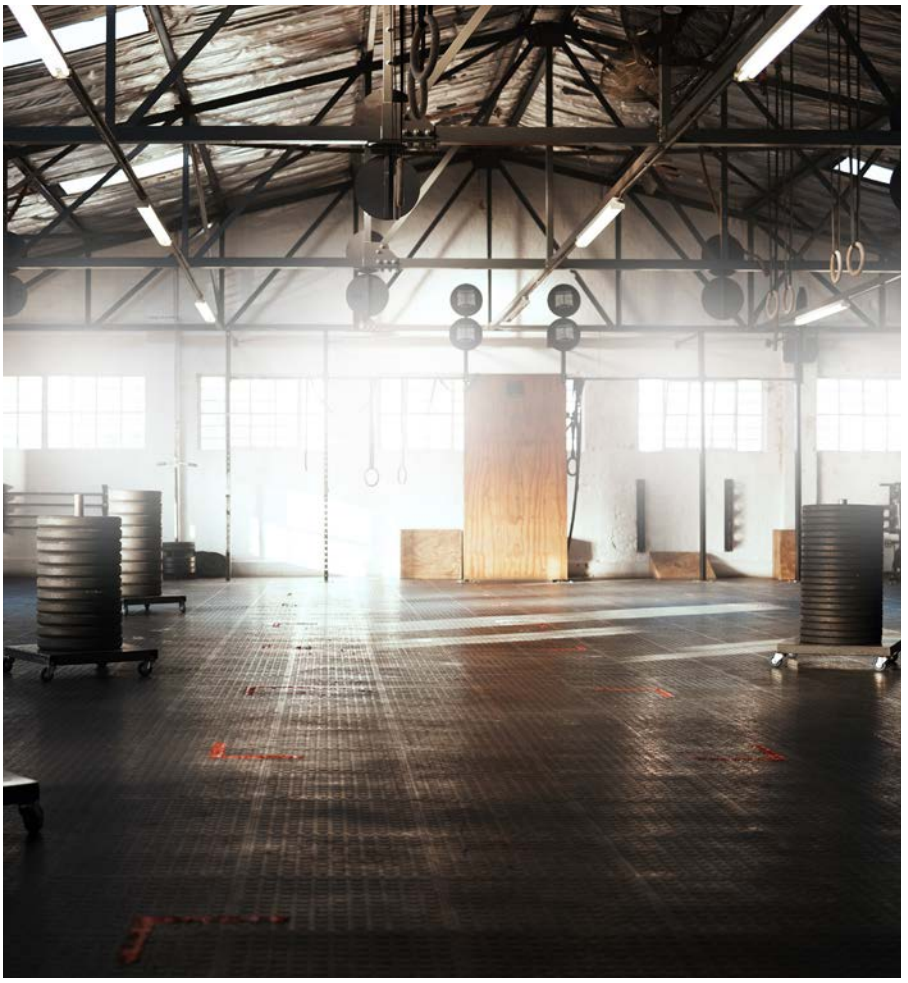


However, SABRE argues that logic is flawed. Owners should concentrate on how their concept resonates relative to its audience, and in non-city locations, the margin for error is greater.

"Even though rents are high, those markets support ultra-premium pricing," Jerum said. "The depth of population lets you fill classes or appointment slots throughout the day, but that may not be the case in a suburban market. It can also mask high rates of churn. A great national prototype is one that has been proven to work in a variety of geographies and market sizes."

> Success or failure is built on the foundation of good unit economics.
>
> —**Douglas Jerum**, SABRE





WHAT ELSE SABRE LOOKS FOR

Investing in multiple locations across territories before testing success can spell disaster for business owners. When a potentially weak model is replicated across several locations, losses compound and begin to eat away at the entire operation.

For these reasons, SABRE works with brands to properly examine their broad market appeal by pressure-testing unit economics and consumer demand in secondary or tertiary markets before targeting growth.

"Success or failure is built on the foundation of good unit economics," Jerum said. "If your business generates good margins in Tulsa, OK, or Richmond, VA, those same market conditions can be found in dozens or hundreds of other locations across the country. If you're looking to scale to 100 or more units, you have to be able to be profitable in secondary and tertiary markets. The most investable or saleable brands are the ones with this kind of upside."

SABRE preaches patience when it comes to expansion from a general standpoint as well. One successful studio or gym, even if it's in a secondary or tertiary market, shouldn't be the blueprint for your 20th. Instead, owners need to take things step by step, building each new site based on the intel they learned from the prior.

"Each new location, until you reach about five to 10 total, continues to answer questions about the concept, about the operator and about the company," Jerum said. "With each one, the concept is refined, the process and operations are made more robust, and the customer is better understood."

Only after you get into the double digits, with your concept thriving in multiple regions, does SABRE endorse more aggressive expansion.

"At this point, you can pour gas on the scaling fire with a reasonable amount of confidence," Jerum added.

REAL WORLD EXAMPLES

This approach recently helped Cleo Skin + Laser, a laser tattoo and hair removal company, take its operation across several state lines.

"They came to us before they had opened a single location," Jerum said. "They were very clear about their long-term goals for scaling. They understood if they had a concept which, in a second-tier city, had a four-wall model with strong profit margins and a short payback period of the initial capital invested in each location, they would have a brand with the potential to scale to hundreds of locations across the country."

SABRE partnered with Cleo to secure its initial two locations, the first of which opened in Minneapolis in July, 2024. In the time since, it's spread out with additional sites across Michigan, Missouri and Georgia.

"We worked with them to perfect a real estate model that could be replicated over and over," Jerum said. "We expect to reach 20 open locations by the end of 2027."

SABRE is also responsible for contributing to the growth of healthy lifestyle brands like [solidcore], Orangetheory Fitness, Sweat440 and countless others..

"We approach every engagement not as consultants but as co-pilots," Tom Jacobson, principal at SABRE, said last year. "We're in the trenches with our clients – guiding, challenging and empowering them to build businesses that scale with intention." ●

WHEN IS YOUR FITNESS CONCEPT READY TO FRANCHISE?

Matterhorn Fit's co-founder and a franchise attorney with 20 years in the industry explain the economics, systems and legal groundwork a brand needs before it sells its first unit **by Klaudia Balogh**



GUTTER CREDIT HERE

> **We spent two and a half, almost three years systematizing everything in our business so the process could be replicable."** —**Ryan Vesce**, Matterhorn Fit



When former professional hockey player Ryan Vesce and strength coach Sean Sullivan opened Matterhorn Fit in Estero, Florida, in 2018, franchising wasn't part of the plan. Four years of client results changed their minds.

"When we started, we weren't thinking franchise at all, but the success of our process started having us think about how we can get this into as many communities as possible," Vesce told Athletech News.

Matterhorn opened its first franchise in January 2025 and now has eight locations, though the groundwork started years before that first sale.

"We spent two and a half, almost three years systematizing everything in our business so the process could be replicable," Vesce shared.

A franchise attorney with more than 20 years in the industry says readiness requires multiple steady pillars. A brand is ready to franchise when it has proven demand, attractive franchisee economics, a repeatable business model, teachable operations, the resources to support franchisees, and a leadership team prepared to build and manage a franchise system.

Here are five signs that your brand is ready to scale.

1. YOUR CONCEPT WORKS FOR CLIENTS & THE BOTTOM LINE

Matterhorn's original studio drew clients of every age and ability and earned revenue from both rehab and personal training. That mix gave the founders confidence the model could hold up in other markets.

Before selling a franchise, however, Matterhorn modeled corporate and franchise growth side by side, which tested what a franchisee could earn after fees at 10, 20 and 100 locations.

"If the numbers didn't work, there wouldn't be much to sell going forward," Vesce said.

According to the attorney, the business must produce consistent profits, with sufficient margin for franchisees to pay royalties and advertising fees to the franchisor and still earn a profit and a return on capital. If company-owned locations are barely squeaking by, it's going to be even more difficult for a franchisee to be successful given the fees a franchisee must pay to the franchisor off gross sales.

According to the attorney's experience, royalties typically run roughly 4% to 8% of gross sales and marketing fees between 1-4% of gross sales, in addition to other fees franchisors often charge franchisees.

SHUTTERSTOCK



2. YOUR SYSTEMS TRAVEL WITHOUT YOU

Vesce and Sullivan built the Matterhorn Method around their own coaching, so in order to take it into other studios, they built custom software that runs every location from session programming to KPI tracking.

"It connects all the pieces, so franchise partners follow the right path and the right order of operations," Vesce explained. "The pieces of equipment correlate with our software, so they're not just going out buying random stuff."

The attorney's benchmark is whether a complete outsider could run the business after training. Many franchisees arrive with neither fitness nor business experience, so training has to cover the books as well as the method.

At Matterhorn, that test is an intensive training week at headquarters for owners and their first hires. Then there's continued oversight. More on this later.

"We won't let anyone open a facility unless they pass training week," Vesce said.

3. YOUR LEGAL GROUNDWORK IS IN PLACE

Trademark registration with the US Patent and Trademark Office should be a top priority. For example, you wouldn't want to end up in a situation where you've already opened multiple locations only to find out that there's another business using the same name.

The franchise disclosure document (FDD) comes next. Federal rules require franchisors to give prospective buyers this 23-item disclosure at least 14 days before they sign. It covers fees, the initial investment, the franchisor's litigation history, audited financial statements and any earnings claims the brand chooses to make. A number of states, including California, New York and Illinois, also require franchisors to register the document before selling there.

Building the operations behind the FDD is usually a team effort. Franchisors often hire consultants for the operational work and keep attorneys on the legal documents. Matterhorn did the same.

"We never had experience in building an FDD," Vesce admitted, noting, 'which is why we really let them guide us on that, making sure we're protected and the brand is protected."

Timing matters too. The FDD describes how the system works, so the attorney cautions against drafting it before the operations behind it are settled. You can start drafting portions of the FDD anytime, but at some point it's premature if the franchisor hasn't done the behind-the-scenes homework to create systems.

The document is also less private than many founders expect. Many registration states make FDDs available for public viewing.

4. YOUR SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE EXISTS BEFORE THE FIRST SALE

The costs founders often miss, the attorney told ATN, are ongoing ones, such as training, travel grand openings, and the other expenses associated with franchisee support. The worst thing that can happen is that you sell a number of franchises and then recognize that you don't have the financial wherewithal to support your franchisees.

Additionally, oversight continues long after opening day. Vesce added that infrastructure plays a big role in making sure the franchisee operates and grows in alignment with the brand.

"If the infrastructure is not there, it can get out of control quickly, and then you end up losing the essence of the brand," Vesce said. The attorney calls part of the job "policing" the system to make sure they're doing what they're supposed to do.

5. YOU KNOW WHEN TO SLOW DOWN

Vesce told ATN their strategy is to "go slow to go fast," which is why they are focused on their next three to five partners, each vetted through a three-month process of weekly calls.

Many of Matterhorn's first franchise partners were local to Southwest Florida, which is what the attorney said would be an ideal early strategy. He would advise emerging brands to sell first within reach of headquarters, because early franchisees need a franchisor that can show up in person. "It doesn't always make sense for a franchisor in Florida to try to sell the first franchises in Hawaii," the attorney said.

Whether you're aiming to scale locally, regionally or nationally, Vesce's advice applies, and it comes back to where Matterhorn started.

"The biggest thing is to have systems in place," Vesce said. "If you don't have the systems in place, you can very easily see how it would fall apart quickly."

This article is for informational purposes only and doesn't constitute legal advice. Readers should consult a qualified franchise attorney about their own circumstances. ■

SHUTTER STOCK

BUILDING THE BUSINESS OWNER

A new entrepreneurship training course is helping franchisees sharpen the financial, sales and leadership skills required to grow.



FITNESS FRANCHISING has gotten very good at developing systems. Operators receive a brand, operating model, established processes, marketing support and all the tools designed to help them replicate a proven concept.

What those systems cannot automatically create is a strong business owner.

That gap has become a significant focus for Sequel Brands, the fitness and wellness franchisor behind concepts including BODY20, beem Light Sauna, Ultimate Longevity Center, iFlex Stretch Studios, MOVE powered by SEQUELai and Pilates Addiction. The company recently launched an internal entrepreneurship training course designed to develop franchisees beyond the mechanics of operating their individual brands.

To develop the program, Sequel partnered with one of the world's largest business coaching organizations to create a first-of-its-kind, 12-week curriculum tailored specifically to its franchise system. The curriculum is fully funded by Sequel and offered at no cost to franchise owners, with a focus on strengthening business fundamentals, leadership and operational performance.

The premise is simple: franchisees need to understand the system they bought into, along with the financial, sales and leadership skills required to build a successful business.

> The system removes the guesswork on operations, which frees an owner's time and energy for what actually drives growth."
> —**Molly Crimmins**, Sequel Brands

"The brand can hand an owner every system and guideline, but success still comes down to the person running the business," said Molly Crimmins, vice president of PR and communications at Sequel Brands. "This course invests in that person on two critical fronts, the hard business skills and the mental and leadership side."

The program covers financial management, sales and conversion, team building and time management, along with confidence, resilience and leadership. Crimmins says it's an investment in the "whole entrepreneur," giving owners the tools to understand their businesses and the ability to use them when circumstances fall outside the franchise playbook.

FROM OPERATOR TO ENTREPRENEUR

Successful franchisees need more than a willingness to follow the model. They need to understand what drives the business, recognize where their attention is needed and make sound decisions when the answer isn't spelled out in a manual.

Crimmins says the strongest owners learn to think beyond execution and approach the business like entrepreneurs.

"What separates the ones who become strong entrepreneurs is both what they know and who they are: they know their numbers cold, understand what drives leads and conversion, and build systems that don't depend on them standing in the room. They also have the judgment and self-leadership to make calls the manual can't anticipate," she said. "Operators execute what's handed to them. Entrepreneurs build on it, financially and personally."

That philosophy shapes the curriculum Sequel has developed.

Financial mastery and sales strategy receive the greatest emphasis, including understanding break-even points and margins, lead generation and conversion, lifetime value, average sale and repeat business.

Staffing and leadership follow closely. Sequel's franchisees need to know how to hire and develop a team, while also becoming leaders capable of setting expectations, building trust and holding people accountable.

"A strong leader with weak financial discipline struggles just as much as a numbers-strong owner who can't lead a team," Crimmins said.

Sequel's program is designed to develop those skills alongside the operational training franchisees receive.

"Systems and process manuals tell an owner what to do," Crimmins said. "They don't build the financial fluency to read their own numbers, the sales skill to convert a lead, or the leadership to hold a team accountable when it matters."

DEVELOPING OWNERS AS THEY GROW

The skills a franchisee needs also change as the business expands.

A first-time owner may be learning how to execute a launch, generate leads, hire an initial team and manage the financial fundamentals of a single location. Growth into multiple units changes the job.

Crimmins says multi-unit ownership requires greater delegation, consistent performance across locations, capital allocation and managers capable of running individual businesses without the franchisee being present every day.

"Both the business skills and the person have to grow," she said.

That evolution is why Sequel designed its entrepreneurship training to support owners at different stages rather than treating franchise education as something completed before opening day.

The investment extends to Sequel's own leadership team. Every brand CEO across the portfolio completed the same 12-week curriculum, an approach intended to align leadership around the training and create a consistent experience for franchise owners across the system.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITHIN THE SYSTEM

A strong franchise system gives owners a proven framework for running the business. Sequel's approach is to use that foundation to give franchisees more room to focus on the decisions that drive growth.

"The system removes the guesswork on operations, which frees an owner's time and energy for what actually drives growth: sharper financial decisions, smarter marketing bets, and building a team that extends their leadership rather than requiring their presence," Crimmins said.

That freedom is supported by training, coaching and access to other franchisees working through many of the same challenges.

"Sequel's course turns that freed-up capacity into action, combining real business training with coaching and a community of other owners doing the same work, so initiative gets built with both the skills and the confidence to act on it," Crimmins said.

As fitness and wellness franchising continues to attract new concepts and owners, Sequel believes franchisors will need to think beyond how many territories they can award.

"The franchisors who lead the next chapter of this category will invest in their owners on both fronts: real financial and sales training, and real leadership and mindset development," Crimmins said. "Territory growth means nothing without owners equipped to run what they've bought." ●

LES MILLS ON WHY FRANCHISES WIN WITH GROUP TRAINING

Group training delivers three things every franchise needs to scale successfully: stronger retention, greater consistency and a proven playbook that rolls out easily



IN THE INCREASINGLY competitive fitness market, growth is no longer based solely on equipment or new locations. Franchise operators need strategies that improve retention, maximize profitability per square foot and offer social-first experiences that compel members to return. Group training is strongly positioned as one of the most effective ways to achieve all three.

With retention, profitability and member engagement becoming new drivers of success, the way clubs allocate their floor space is also becoming a critical strategic decision.

Considering how floor space is divided up is key when forward planning for franchise growth. Every area of the club plays an important role in the member experience, but determining which areas directly contribute to member priorities like community and diverse fitness experiences helps operators determine how much space should be allocated to each. According to the 2026 Mid Year Wellness Watch report from ABC Fitness, 57% of active consumers agree that fitness communities significantly impact their long-term commitment to an active lifestyle. Les Mills' own 2026 Global Fitness Report found that 64% of younger generations seek new workouts and ways to get fit.

Group training studios are uniquely positioned to solve this challenge. They provide a ready-made environment for members to connect, build routines and celebrate shared goals. They're also where franchises can showcase how they're keeping pace with member preferences and trends, through a timetable that delivers satisfying workouts across modalities.

THE GROUP TRAINING RETENTION HACK

With the right programming mix and supportive, motivating instructors, group training participants can quickly become a club's most loyal members. Les Mills' Most Valuable Participant (MVP) Report found that members

> For franchises, the ability to replicate success underpins confidence to expand."



who participate in group training visit more frequently, stay longer, are more likely to be active after 12 months and have a higher lifetime value (LTV) than gym floor only members.

For franchise operators, these traits provide compelling evidence that group training should be at the center of strategic growth and member acquisition plans. The more members that franchises can attract to group training, the stronger the foundations are for building a reliable member base that they can confidently plan around.

WHO'S TAKING PART IN GROUP TRAINING?

Group training attracts a broad range of demographics – the majority of whom cite community and overall wellness as primary motives for movement. Within these demographics, there is scope for franchises to appeal to a cross section of fitness fans, by tailoring their offerings to align with the training styles and goals currently driving the strongest engagement. Les Mills believes some of the training formats offering the biggest opportunities are:

Strength

Strength is a must-have for franchises designing a group timetable for growth. Les Mills research identifies it as the most popular group training category – attractive to younger generations seeking challenge and older members targeting longevity. Building muscle and overall strength consistently shows up as a top member goal globally, and offering strength workouts in your studio helps members accelerate their progress, fueling motivation, results and ultimately, retention.

Fitness racing

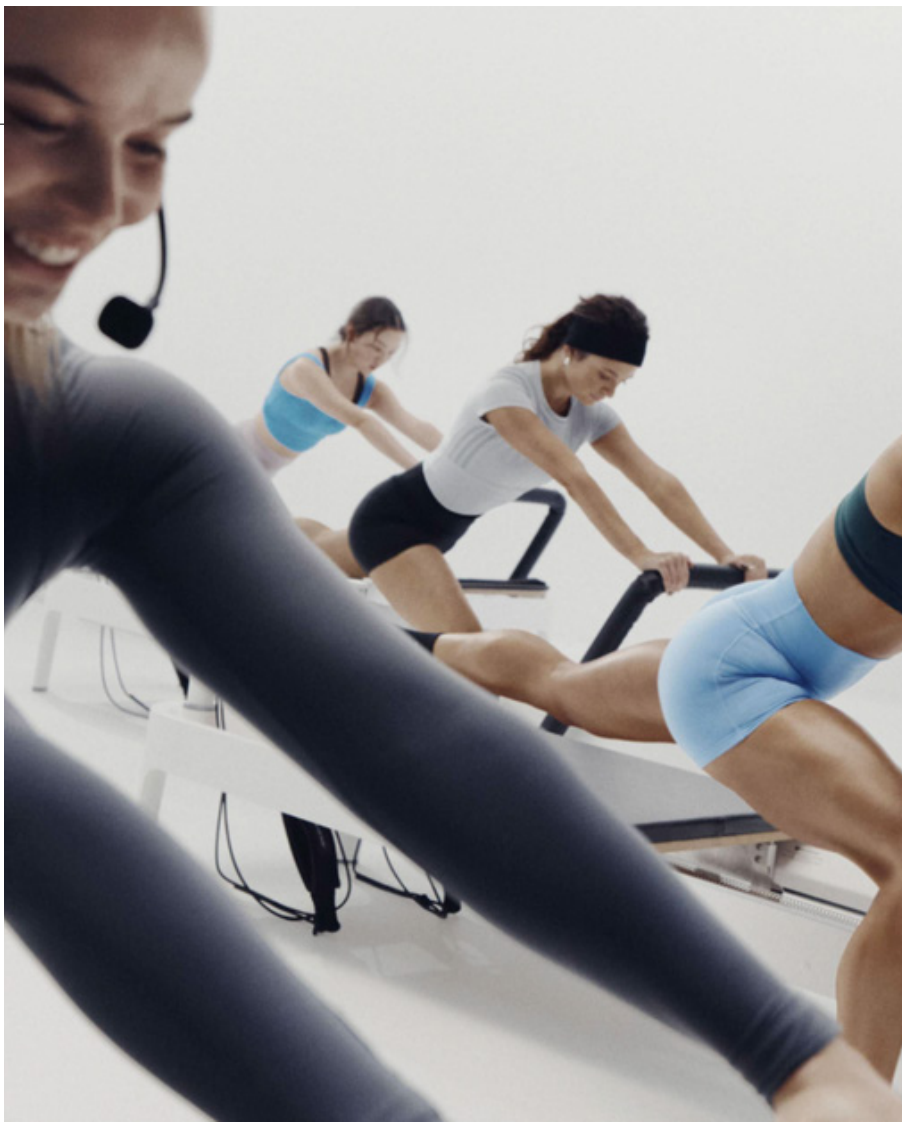
1.6 million people will take part in HYROX events in 2026, with the hybrid training format holding mass appeal, especially among younger members driven by challenge. Whether members are training for everyday life and functional fitness, or levelling up to prepare for a HYROX race, functional training circuit workouts hold broad appeal.

Mind-Body

Reformer Pilates is a globally-trending workout with broad appeal thanks to the low barrier to entry. Its ability to serve mindful movement while building strength and stability with a low-impact, high-intensity format allows participants to personalize the workout to their comfort level, building confidence from day one.

THE WORKOUTS THAT POWER FRANCHISE GROWTH

The Les Mills Innovation Collection was created to help operators win with workouts that fulfil trend-based demand. Programs like Bodypump Heavy, Ceremony Hyrox, Les Mills Reformer, Les Mills Shapes, Les Mills Yoga and more are all designed to help franchises maximize latent opportunities at speed.



WHY GROUP TRAINING SUPPORTS CONFIDENCE TO EXPAND

For franchises, the ability to replicate success underpins confidence to expand. The brands scaling quickest and most effectively are those built on systems that can be implemented consistently across every site, delivering the same high-quality experience across locations.

Group training offers a powerful advantage here, providing a playbook for success that's rolled out simply and at pace. With proven programming, clear operational frameworks and standardized delivery, group training provides a repeatable model that helps clubs maintain consistency at scale. The result is a reliable member experience that strengthens retention and gives franchise operators confidence to expand.

INSTRUCTORS ARE THE SECRET SAUCE

Starting with a standardized group training program from a well-known expert is a win for both franchise operators and instructors. It removes the pressure of having instructors design workouts, freeing them to focus on what matters most: coaching, motivating and connection.

For franchises, it provides confidence that every class is delivering a safe, science-backed experience that upholds brand standards, across their entire estate. While programming may attract members through its proven results and consistency, it's the instructor who ultimately builds loyalty.

Great instructors do more than lead workouts. They build confidence, create community and help participants succeed. Combined with results-driven programming, they enable franchise networks to deliver a consistent experience at scale. Investing in instructor development helps maintain quality as demand grows. The result is a scalable model that supports retention, strengthens brand trust and helps new locations succeed from day one.

BECOME THE BLUEPRINT OTHERS FOLLOW

Franchise networks thrive on proven success. When an operator demonstrates a concept that delivers strong results, they often become the blueprint others look to replicate. For franchisees, that creates a compelling opportunity. Successfully implementing a high-performing group training offering doesn't just validate business decisions, it positions you as a leader within the network and strengthens your relationship with the master franchise.

While gaining traction in established franchise systems can take time, momentum can build quickly once a solution proves its value. Franchise networks are designed to scale what works, and successful concepts tend to spread rapidly through existing playbooks and peer recommendations.

By becoming an early success story, operators not only create a competitive advantage for their own facility, but also help lift performance across the wider network, sharing a model that others can follow with confidence. As more locations adopt the approach, everyone benefits from stronger alignment, greater consistency and a clearer path to success. ●



THE GLOBAL FITNESS GIANTS: WHO HAS THE MOST LOCATIONS?

Anytime Fitness leads HFA's global ranking with 5,810 locations, while boutique brands including Club Pilates, F45 and Orangetheory demonstrate the scale of specialized fitness

SHUTTER STOCK



> **“Having the most locations doesn’t necessarily mean serving the most members.”**

ATHLETECH NEWS / INDUSTRY DATA

2026 REPORT

Fitness’s Biggest Franchise Brands

Top 10 by global location count • 2025 data

5,810
Anytime Fitness locations

2.0×
The footprint of No. 2 Planet Fitness

RANK / BRAND	TOTAL LOCATIONS
01 **Anytime Fitness**	**5,810**
02 Planet Fitness	2,896
03 Curves (Japan)	2,001
04 Club Pilates	1,414
05 F45 Training	1,403
06 Orangetheory Fitness	1,378
07 Snap Fitness	1,017
08 HOTWORX	876
09 Pure Barre	625
10 Gold’s Gym	548

HOW TO READ THIS RANKING

Total brand locations, including company-owned sites. HFA includes brands with at least 70% franchised units. Figures generally reflect Dec. 31, 2025; Curves (Japan) reflects Nov. 2025. This is HFA’s reported ranking, not a census.

SOURCE: Health & Fitness Association, 2026 Global Report

“Market Segments & Leading Players” • Survey data and public filings

FITNESS FRANCHISING has room for both sprawling gym networks and specialized studio concepts. The Health & Fitness Association’s 2026 Global Report shows just how large those businesses have become — and how different their paths to scale can look.

Anytime Fitness tops the report’s ranking of mainly franchised brands with 5,810 locations worldwide, roughly twice the footprint of second-place Planet Fitness. Curves’ Japan business ranks third with 2,001 locations, followed by Club Pilates with 1,414. The figures largely reflect year-end 2025 operations.

The accompanying infographic captures the top 10 brands by total location count, offering a snapshot of the companies bringing fitness to consumers across markets and modalities.

A BIG FOOTPRINT TAKES DIFFERENT FORMS

Planet Fitness finished 2025 with 2,896 clubs, including 2,604 franchised locations and 292 company-owned sites. Its membership base reached 20.8 million, underscoring the distinction between having the most locations and serving the most members. A location ranking measures physical reach; it does not account for differences in facility size, pricing or member capacity.

That distinction matters when comparing full-service gyms with boutique studios. Both can build substantial networks, but the operating models, real estate requirements and customer experiences behind those numbers differ considerably.

Specialized concepts nevertheless claim a substantial presence among the leaders. F45 Training ranks fifth with 1,403 locations, narrowly ahead of Orangetheory Fitness at 1,378. Snap Fitness follows with 1,017, while HOTWORX, Pure Barre and Gold’s Gym round out the top 10 with 876, 625 and 548 locations, respectively.

THE COMPANIES BEHIND THE BRANDS

Looking beyond individual brands reveals another layer of scale.

Purpose Brands, whose portfolio includes Anytime Fitness, Orangetheory and The Bar Method, reported 7,270 locations across its network. Xponential Fitness, the parent company behind Club Pilates and Pure Barre, reported 3,097 franchised locations. These portfolio totals should be viewed separately from the individual brand rankings to avoid counting the same locations twice.

For prospective franchisees, that creates two levels of evaluation: the appeal of a particular concept and the organization supporting it. Brand positioning, programming and local demand sit alongside questions about training, technology and franchisee support. ■

ANYTIME FITNESS

NOT JUST ANOTHER PILATES CLASS: HOW FS8 IS CHARTING ITS OWN COURSE

FS8 is pairing a distinct 3-in-1 workout with consistent execution as it expands to more than 100 studios worldwide.



PILATES HAS become one of boutique fitness's biggest growth stories, bringing new consumers into studios and fueling expansion across the category.

FS8 has carved out its own approach.

In five years, the brand has grown from a single studio in Australia to more than 100 studios across 18 countries. Its approach combines Pilates, yoga and strength training into a 50-minute workout, giving members a way to build strength, mobility and flexibility in one class.

"There is room in this market for many concepts and many spins on Pilates," said Jo Gomez, director of athletics, Pilates for FIT House, the parent company of F45 Training, FS8 and VAURA.

That philosophy is central to how FS8 has positioned itself within a crowded boutique fitness category. Rather than following one Pilates method, the brand has built its own format.

"FS8 is strength reimagined," Gomez said. "We believe that every class is designed to have members leave feeling stronger, balanced and more confident as they move throughout their day."

THREE MODALITIES, ONE WORKOUT

FS8's signature 3-in-1 format combines Pilates, yoga and what the brand calls Tone. Each serves a specific purpose within the workout. Pilates builds the core and improves alignment, yoga incorporates mobility, breath and mindfulness, and Tone uses resistance to build strength.

"Blending all three means each person receives a full-body workout, without needing to piece together three separate classes on three separate days," Gomez said.

The approach is reflected in the FS8 name. The "F" represents functional training designed to support everyday movement, while the "S" refers to the style of combining Pilates, yoga and Tone. The "8" represents the core elements behind its approach to low-impact movement.

Members can experience that foundation through three signature class formats.

FS8 Original combines reformer and mat Pilates with strength and yoga-inspired movement, with approximately 60% to 70% of the class taking place on the reformer. ReformX stays entirely on the reformer, emphasizing control, precision, stability and core engagement. Ignite is the brand's

> We designed this experience to meet you exactly where you are and help you leave feeling stronger, more capable, and already looking forward to your next class." —**Jo Gomez**, FIT House

most athletic format, adding heavier dumbbells, resistance work and bursts designed to elevate heart rate while maintaining a Pilates foundation.

Across the formats, programming emphasizes muscular endurance, unilateral stability, mobility and fundamental movement patterns. Gomez says the balance also shifts across FS8's training week and six-week programming phases, giving members different ways to develop those qualities over time.

Instructors are trained to modify movements and resistance in real time, allowing beginners and advanced members to take the same class while working at different levels. New members are also introduced to the equipment and class flow before their first session.

"No Pilates experience, no reformer experience, no problem," Gomez said. "We designed this experience to meet you exactly where you are and help you leave feeling stronger, more capable, and already looking forward to your next class."

STANDING OUT THROUGH EXECUTION

A distinctive workout can establish a brand's position in a competitive category, but Gomez believes what happens around the workout is just as important to whether a studio ultimately stands out.

"Honestly, I think it comes down to execution more than concept," Gomez said. "Very few studios fail because their idea wasn't good enough. They struggle because of the gap between what they intended and what a client actually experiences."

Gomez says execution comes down to the details.

"The build-out. How easy it is to book. How you're greeted when you walk in. The class itself,



above all. And then the follow-up afterwards," Gomez said. "Every one of those touchpoints either builds trust or quietly erodes it."

Gomez also says consistency is what turns a brand concept into something members can recognize each time they walk through the door.

"The studios that become the obvious choice are the ones with clear SOPs across every department, executed consistently," Gomez said. "Not occasionally. Every time, by every person on the team."

The physical environment plays a role in that execution as well. Gomez focuses less on creating a particular aesthetic and more on whether a studio is clean, easy to navigate and aligned with the experience the brand promises. Members should understand where to go and how the space works without unnecessary confusion, particularly during a first visit.

MAKING ROOM FOR DIFFERENT APPROACHES

As more consumers discover reformer-based fitness, Gomez would like to see less judgment around what does and does not qualify as the "right" way to practice Pilates.

"There is space for classical Joe Pilates. There is space for contemporary Pilates. There's space for modern Pilates, and there's space for using the reformer in ways Joe never imagined," Gomez said. "These things can all coexist, and they all serve different people."

FIT is beginning to see that coexistence within its own franchise network. Gomez says more F45 franchisees are investing in FS8 studios and opening the two concepts side-by-side, giving members access to higher-intensity functional strength training as well as mobility, control and Pilates-based strength.

For Gomez, that reflects how consumers are approaching fitness more broadly, incorporating different forms of movement into their routines based on what they need on a given day.

FS8 is continuing to build on that opportunity. After reaching more than 100 studios worldwide this year, the brand is expanding in the U.S. with new locations including Seattle's South Lake Union neighborhood, Stamford, Connecticut, and Sea Girt, New Jersey. Internationally, it recently entered Germany with a Munich studio and has another location confirmed for Regensburg.

As the Pilates category grows, Gomez sees knowledge, consistency and connection as the fundamentals that can help studios build lasting relationships with members.

"Knowledge earns trust. Trust and consistent execution build your confidence," Gomez said. "Confidence lets you stop watching competitors and start being present with people. And presence is what creates connection, the thing that actually keeps employees and clients." ●

HOW CLUB PILATES BUILDS TALENT QUICKLY ENOUGH TO SUPPORT GROWTH

The Xponential Fitness brand prioritizes instructor quality and comprehensive education, ensuring its rapidly expanding franchise network is supported by highly trained, knowledgeable instructors

MOST STAKEHOLDERS in the fitness industry see generating consumer demand as an inherent challenge, but those operating Pilates businesses aren't a part of that crowd.

For example, Club Pilates, the Xponential Fitness-owned brand, recently surpassed 1,500 locations. Part of that growth has included sites abroad as well, involving new studios in Bangkok, Thailand, and Mexico City.

But while the resistance-based fitness modality is booming, it's leaving operators with a different problem: finding enough qualified instructors to effectively keep up.

Although Club Pilates has the support and infrastructure to facilitate positive, consistent consumer experiences amid their growth, its competitors can't always say the same. It's another factor establishing Club Pilates as a differentiator in the space, and a benchmark other brands should turn their attention toward.



GROWTH CAN LEAD TO DILUTION

The surging demand for Pilates has forced an understandable, yet scrambled response from owners and operators. Rather than following the modality's established guidelines, some brands have developed their own training methods or chosen to leverage alternative equipment to quickly accommodate the influx of participants. In doing so, they've created inconsistencies in instructor knowledge and how it's applied.

"In the past, Pilates apparatus training was very expensive and often required more than 500 hours to complete, if it followed NPCP guidelines," explained Jenna Morris, Club Pilates' VP of Training and Experience. "That typically stood in the way of fitness professionals continuing education in this modality. While that's still true today, we're also up against brands creating their own training on their proprietary equipment, which doesn't always translate well to studios that have traditional equipment and are leading more contemporary classes."

This means that as growing brands look to bring on new instructors, they need to navigate around individuals whose experience doesn't align with their business, which promises to create operational challenges and hinder growth.

"Studios that have traditional equipment need instructors who are trained on it to lead safe, effective classes," Morris said. "When you have an instructor coming from a "modern Pilates" studio that's stocked with megaformers and Xformers, the training and choreography are in different languages."

> With nearly 14,000 instructors nationwide and in Canada, our consistency is incredibly important to us."
> —**Jenna Morris**, Club Pilates



CLUB PILATES KEEPS IT STANDARD

To guard against that, Club Pilates only hires instructors from its Teacher Training program or program equivalents that adhere to NPCP standards. Club Pilates' curriculum takes 450 hours to complete and features two apprenticeship pathways. Apprentices must also complete online and in-person coursework before getting on the floor, pass a test and remain under continued mentorship throughout the entirety of their training and apprenticeship. Club Pilates pays apprentices for their time worked and allows them to count those hours toward their program quotas as well.

"85% of our graduates become instructors at Club Pilates," Morris said. "It's a natural funnel into our teaching team and they receive additional onboard training that prepares them to teach all of our formats and levels."

Morris added that Club Pilates will sometimes hire individuals who've only completed mat and reformer training, but does so with the intent to continue their education so they can eventually teach the brand's full suite of classes. It also gives established instructors the flexibility to tailor their teaching styles to local communities as long as the experience preserves the core elements of Club Pilates' programming.

"Following industry standards allows us to maintain quality across our 1,500 locations," Morris said. "With nearly 14,000 instructors nationwide and in Canada, our consistency is incredibly important to us. Instructors learn our 'secret sauce' of how we program classes, which gives a skeleton for each format, but still allows teacher autonomy and creativity, so long as it fits within our level-appropriate guidelines."



TAKING THINGS A STEP FURTHER

Club Pilates also continues to support its instructors past their initial training, apprenticeship and mentorship phases, releasing new educational content each month via its learning platform. It also brings in outside talent to lead monthly workshops.

"We recognize the importance of keeping our classes fresh and our experience in steady, thoughtful evolution as member needs change and the industry advances," Morris added. "We take great pride in offering opportunities to expand instructor skillsets."

WHY TALENT DESERVES YOUR ATTENTION

Club Pilates argues talent development should be viewed as a portion of the scalability equation that's equally important to market selection or unit economics. Ultimately, they all depend on each other.

"Having enough qualified instructors on staff means you can add more classes to meet the demands of membership growth; qualified instructors also mean a quality experience, which directly impacts member retention, attrition and membership gains," Morris said. "Our member experience is a huge focus of ours, and it starts with our incredible team of instructors."

Additional evidence of Club Pilates' emphasis on investing in talent lies in the resources it provides to help staff elevate the hospitality experience. Morris referred to them as "an abundance," as the brand believes hospitality directly impacts retention and engagement.

"Members come back because of the warm, welcoming smiles, the fact that the instructor remembered their back injury or the way the staff supported them during a challenging time," Morris said. "The way instructors are teaching and connecting with each person in the room is a crucial piece to the puzzle, especially when members now have more spaces to practice than ever before."

It all comes back to Club Pilates' refusal to prioritize anything, even another 1,500 locations, over its consumer experience.

"What we've learned in our nearly 20-year tenure is that the business cannot scale and thrive without the product and member experience being superior," Morris said. "Yes, our mission is to grow, but never at the cost of education and knowledge. That's why we continue to stand firmly in our position of hiring and training top-tier instructors who will provide a safe class for our members while focusing on providing results." ●