

A grayscale photograph of a Pilates studio. The room is filled with rows of reformer machines, which are specialized exercise equipment used in Pilates. The machines are arranged in a grid-like pattern, and the studio has large windows in the background, letting in natural light. The overall atmosphere is clean and professional.

9 PROVEN STRATEGIES

TO HELP YOU GROW YOUR PILATES BUSINESS

(whether you are a pilates instructor or studio owner, you must read!)

“The value in an idea lies in the using of it.” - Thomas Edison

1 Don't Believe The Big Myth

One single area where most pilates instructors take the “wrong turn” in their business is accepting the common misconception that being good at your profession (teaching pilates) will be good enough or even lead to eventual business success. This is simply not true and it isn't true in any profession (doctor, plumber, you name it). As soon as you begin to accept this your eyes will open to all sorts of opportunities and new skills to learn beyond just pilates teaching skills. Yes, absolutely, you should commit to being the best pilates instructor you can be but not at the expense of learning good business practices (which aren't nearly as complicated as some of the most advanced pilates moves by the way!) and a handful of marketing tactics proven to generate more clients that you could ever teach.

For ten years I have known a pilates instructor who is a brilliant teacher, undeniably gifted and she has obtained an incredible wealth of knowledge. She is one of the “Greats” and I learn just by being around her! But guess what, she has crummy people skills and even worse business acumen so her business is suffering tremendously and she is having to take desperate measures just to make ends meet. And this has been going on long before the economic mess. In all of her “pilates wisdom” she completely neglected developing her very basic business skills (think customer service, sales conversion, marketing 101) and will likely have to leave the pilates industry behind just to make ends meet. This is beyond sad, it is a tragedy, and you can avoid making this same mistake! So read on!

2 Systems Will Save You

There is no time like the present to evaluate and fine tune (or create if necessary) ALL of your business systems. Now, when I say business, remember this still applies even as an individual instructor who happens to be an independent contractor. The importance of systems is greater for a pilates studio owner but certainly it applies to an individual instructor. What do I mean by systems? Basically any interaction or potential interaction a prospect or client has with you should have a system. For example, how is the phone answered? What is said in email inquiry replies? How is the 24 hour cancellation policy explained and enforced? Any interaction should have a system behind it. One place to start is just by “walking” through the process as if you were a customer shopping around. Start asking yourself questions that your potential clients would ask. Or, consider having a friend / neighbor “shop” you and give you feedback. I have owned my own business for 10 years and still do this! The importance lies in having systems, not so much in having them be perfect as they really do evolve and change through time (similar to a pilates journey, huh). A great book to read on the subject is Michael Gerber's The E Myth. Read that and you'll be convinced systems will make any business run smoother, give clients the confidence of what to expect each and every time they visit and you'll sleep better at night knowing you are putting the right ingredients in to the recipe instead of random items from the pantry du jour.

My friend, Lindsey, is a gifted esthetician and I swear she gives the best brow shape and wax possible. She can make anyone look rested and like they are 5 years younger just by changing their eye brows! Her business is doing well but not well enough. One area where she could certainly improve is having a system for scheduling appointments. This is such a frustrating experience that I don't come nearly as often as I would if it were more convenient and some times I consider not going back -- even though she is fantastic at what she does! Since she has inconsistent hours of operation I never know if someone will be there to answer the phone and even when I do get a call back it isn't effective with just a “call us back” type message. With the internet these days there are so many easy tools she could employ to help her clients schedule more conveniently and ultimately her sales would increase. I know I'd spend twice as much with her if I didn't have to jump through hoops to reach someone to schedule.

What does this mean for you? The hidden VALUE in just updating one single system in a business can be profound. It can literally make the difference between doing OK and doing really well. Imagine what your business could be like if you were able to tackle 3 systems -- watch out!

3 Remember “Know, Like & Trust You”

Realize that the greatest chance for making a sale is by focusing on clients or a community who already know you or know of you in a positive light. Think about this. How often are you focused on getting new clients when you could be selling more to your current clients? What products or services are complimentary to pilates that you know they want and need? What hidden gem are you sitting on that has an established community where you are already known? (School, church, community, business group, club or hobby group, etc.) The odds are much better of finding and keeping a client if the client already knows, likes and trusts you. When you are always going “out there” to meet and get new clients without any pre-existing relationship or tie, it is much more difficult. Certainly not impossible, but more difficult. Take a moment right now to write out 2 ways you can add to what is already being offered to your current clients and 3 groups that already know of you that you could market your pilates services too. See any gold coins in there?

I used to work with an instructor who was a natural networker and she made everyone feel at ease with her friendly personality. Because she was never pushy or “salesy” when people would ask what she did for a living and she answered “pilates” they couldn’t help but be inclined to ask more and find out how they could come in and try it. This was all because of how the instructor handled herself and didn’t put on and off her “business” hat. She simply recognized that a part of who she is is a pilates instructor and many people came to her because she was comfortable with that identity.

4 The 80 / 20 Rule is Key

Learn the 80 / 20 rule (originally called Pareto Principle) which states that 80% of the effects will come from 20% of the causes and figure out how to use it to your advantage. Look around your life and business and you’ll find how often this is true! For example, in my pilates studio 80% of our referrals each year come from the same 20% of clients. Knowing this, I can educate my staff and make sure that these 20% of clients are given VIP service and thanked for their support! Once the 80 / 20s in your life get exposed it is empowering and it becomes much easier to find solutions to problems and nurture the areas that are doing well.

I have to confess that I am not particularly a “numbers person” by nature and my husband will attest that he earns the CFO title in our household and studio. But when I learned of the Pareto Principle, the philosopher in me was intrigued and I was fascinated by asking “why?” and “how is this possible?” whenever I uncovered another 80/20 relationship. I’m not sure I have the answers still but I do have much more confidence that these are important numbers to unearth in your own business and life to be able to prioritize on where to commit your resources (time AND money). Remember, knowledge is power and knowing what forces are at play in your business will help you be head and shoulders above your competition!

5 The Power of YOU

It is time to celebrate your “You-ness”! More than any single thing I try to impress upon recent pilates certification graduates is that people will come to them for pilates initially but inevitably the clients will stay because of YOU. It is up to you to figure out what your “you-ness” is and how that can work for you (while still being a professional) in the pilates arena. I often suggest you start by grabbing a notebook and writing out 50 things that you know make you special and unique -- yes, 50! Don’t hold back even if they seem random, trust me on this. Some things on my list are “closet disco lover” and “self help junkie”. My closest friends and family members know this about me but more than likely my clients don’t know unless I open up and expose my unique-ness to them. I’ll give you two examples. I used to go to a local coffee shop in Pacific Beach and the owner was really into Astrology and horoscopes. She took her passion and uniqueness and found a way to professionally infuse it in to her coffee business. Hanging on the wall above the coffee condiments were the daily horoscopes and if she knew a client’s birthday she would write it on the blackboard celebrating their birthday sun / moon sign. Simply having fun and engaging the clientele without being too “in your face” or unprofessional. Another example from the pilates world is an instructor who used to work for me that was an avid reader. Over time she discovered she was reading and trading the same books with her clients and they formed an informal book club and book sharing system. It was fun, social and completely professional while adding value to her client’s experience with her. Remember, you do have to be good at your craft (teaching pilates) but you also have to bring more to the table to be a success. Be willing to share your “You-ness” and I promise great things will happen! You’ll be more fulfilled and your clients will respond very well to the personal touch you decided to share so they get the chance to get to know you just a little bit more. Maybe you end every class with a quote of the day, or you have a mix cd you burn for clients each month. Doesn’t matter what it is, but just give of yourself and your retention will be much greater had you kept your distance.

6 Work ON Your Business And Not Just IN It

It is essential to spend at least 4 hours each week working ON your business and not IN it. I can’t emphasize this enough. Read that first sentence over and over and make it a priority each week. In order to be successful and really make a living teaching pilates you absolutely have to spend time working ON your business. Plain and simple. If you are not taking this time to tend to your business like a garden, it is very likely no one else is either (unless you have a wonderful business partner). This means non-negotiable time when you are not teaching, but away from the typical business environment planning ahead, reflecting on what is working, what isn’t and then fine tuning it all. If this is done each and every week the progress you can achieve is beyond what you could imagine! I always recommend that these 4 hours be in one sitting rather than parceled out over the week. It was my friend and mentor, John Assaraf, who first introduced this concept to me and it has been an essential component to my success as an instructor and studio owner.

7 Ask For And Get Help

One of my pilates mentors, Kathy Corey, used to say “Just because you can do something doesn’t mean you should” while guiding me for how wide a leg circle should be. This same statement applies in your pilates business and it relates back to working ON your business and not just IN it. What I want you to take away is for you to be truly successful, you’ll need to be a leader of yourself and others by determining what are the highest value activities that you must absolutely do and the low value activities which must be delegated or outsourced. No one can decide these tasks but you, but the truth is that none of us can do everything and most pilates instructors I know are very high achievers and still learning to ask for help. Once you evaluate your strengths and weaknesses (during one of those hours working on your business perhaps) and you are

able to admit to yourself that you are doing tasks that others can and should be doing, the decision becomes very easy to make. For example, I know that hiring or bartering with a bookkeeper is a much better decision than me laboring through my receipts and Quickbooks each month. Could I do it? Certainly. But I don't anymore because this isn't my forte and my time is better spent on more important areas of the business. A good rule of thumb is to work on what you 'play' at and hire or barter with others for what you 'work' at. Another great tip from John Assaraf! I'll share one more example. Each week for the past 4 years I have been the one solely responsible for keeping my pilates studio vacuumed, cleaned with fresh towels and supplies. My studio is my pride and joy after my son (check out www.bellaformapilates.com) and I have always enjoyed my time there cleaning and making sure everything is in its place, etc. Recently I had someone ask if I'd be open to trading pilates in exchange for their cleaning of the studio and now that I am no longer responsible for this each week it is just one more opportunity for me to use my time more wisely.

8 Make Pricing A Priority

Whether you are a certified instructor or studio owner you should take a very close look at your pricing and make sure you are giving every opportunity for your customer to say "which one?" instead of "yes or no". If too few options are presented it makes it much easier for a prospect or client to simply make the decision based on price alone and say either "yes or no". This is the situation you want to avoid. When multiple price points are offered by using packages (think of monthly unlimited, bundled pricing, discounts for buying bulk, etc.) the odds are much greater that a prospect will select a mid-level package rather than just say "no" and walk away. This is true in industries outside of pilates and you can learn a bunch by studying what other businesses are doing. Look at everything from yoga studios, carpet cleaners, auto mechanics - the successful ones are all using package pricing to give their clients enough options and reasons to say "yes"! I'll admit I was very slow to embrace this as originally I felt so strongly about having simple pricing that I over looked the value to bundles and options. I used to get frustrated when I'd go to other studios who had so many different prices for apprentice level, master level, duets, reformer classes - you get the picture. When I opened my first studio 10 years ago I intentionally kept the pricing simple but as I've evolved as a studio owner and businessperson I now know the value in giving clients more options -- just keep it simple and organized at the same time and you'll be fine!

9 This Isn't Just The Pilates Business

One last concept every pilates instructor and studio owner needs to know is that they are not just in the pilates business. You may think this is your business but you are also in at least 2 other businesses as well (I really think 4 and cover them all in my book but will keep it to 2 here for simplicity sake); the arithmetic business (as my mentor Joe Polish reminds me) and the marketing business (a la Dan Kennedy). The arithmetic business is a no-brainer as at the end of the day you need to be making money for any business to stay open. Certainly at the beginning of any business venture turning a profit doesn't happen over night, but at the end of the day if the business is not making money it either needs a major overhaul (I can help you with this!) or it needs to close. Being in the marketing business really means that marketing is happening all the time with every exposure your prospect or client has with you. Since marketing is really just selling in advance, you can position yourself and your pilates expertise as the undisputed choice in your community so the selling part comes naturally. Besides, pilates is such an incredible service that it "sells" itself if you will (we all know how beneficial it is to everyone!) but you need to sell yourself and your skills. This is done through marketing and when it is done well it is easy and automated so you can focus on what you love which is likely teaching. But until you get the system in place (remember that word?!) you've put the cart before the horse and will always struggle even if you are a good, if not great, pilates instructor.



10 **BONUS:** You Must First Believe

Ok, I just had to throw in a bonus tip!

You may have heard a lot about the Law of Attraction these days and I am certainly not an expert in this arena but I felt it important enough to mention on this last tip that nothing incredible, exciting or profound will ever happen until you at first BELIEVE it is possible! Without this belief you may as well pack it up now. This doesn't mean you throw in the towel the first time something doesn't work right or you give up before you even got started. Having belief and I mean "know it in your gut belief that anything is possible" is what I know will not only get you through the rough patches we all inevitably encounter but will also propel you to where you want to go - all because you believed it was possible. Remember this as you work with clients struggling to overcome their limitations and encourage them to believe incredible things can happen with pilates.

Remember this as you reflect on your pilates journey and what it may have been like getting certified - you first had to believe it was possible. Now I want you to dream big and write out what you want your pilates career to be like and go for it!

Want more of these tips? Be sure to check us out online at www.thepilatesbiz.com and 'Like' us on facebook for all the latest offerings.

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