

# Riding the Wave

## Exploring the use of water massage beds in fitness clubs today

Perhaps you've tried a water massage bed at IHRSA, or seen the line of people waiting to get a few minutes of relaxation at the end of a long day of meetings.

The experience on one of these beds feels similar to getting a warm shower massage, minus the part where you actually get wet. And when turned up to pressure level 10, you'll find a massage that is surprisingly strong. For years, water massage beds were predominantly used in chiropractic and physical therapy settings to help with muscle stiffness and tension.

Today, it's tough to ignore the number of clubs using them. Well known industry brands Anytime Fitness, Charter Fitness, Chuze Fitness, Crunch Fitness, In-Shape, Planet Fitness, Snap Fitness, Workout Anytime, and World Gym are among some of the operators using this amenity to enhance the bottom line.

### MEMBER USAGE

In gyms, water massage beds are used for 10 minutes, most often to relax after a workout.

Convenience and daily accessibility are key reasons for their popularity with members.

While many people might not have the extra time or money to see a massage therapist regularly, anyone with sore muscles can jump on a water massage bed for 10

minutes before leaving the gym.



Cory Brightwell,  
Chuze Fitness

"People love these things. We have several beds in all of our clubs now", says Cory Brightwell, co-founder of Chuze Fitness. "As a result of strong member demand, we actually bumped the number up to seven beds in our newest Garden Grove location."

Similar to tanning beds, the units are unattended. They're controlled from the front desk, which limits usage to those with access included in their membership.



If you already have a good hands-on massage therapist, water massage beds won't likely serve as a replacement. Rather, they're an efficient way to offer more massage bandwidth to a larger number of members, evident by usage rates of 10+ hours per day.

### "HEALTH" IN HEALTH CLUBS

It's interesting to note that the increase of clubs using water massage beds coincided pretty closely with tougher new tanning bed legislation.

The Affordable Care Act imposed new taxes on UV tanning revenue in 2010, and in recent years, states have also enacted more restrictions on tanning bed usage.

With approximately the same space and electrical requirements, it appears water massage beds have become a good option for those looking for a tanning bed replacement that appeals to a broader membership base.

Matt Remick, President of Rochester Athletic Club realized it was time for a change. "A few members had made comments about tanning beds" says Remick. "We realized we probably needed to go with a more health-oriented focus than tanning beds in our clubs. We replaced tanning with three HydroMassage beds and are now on pace to make 3-4X the money we were making from tanning".



Matt Remick  
Rochester Athletic  
Club

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## PREMIUM PACKAGE SALES

The preferred strategy is to include water massage beds in premium membership packages to drive more upgrades. According to HydroMassage, clubs can expect to see an average increase of 8% - 15% to their closing rates on premium memberships, which already include 2-3 other amenities, after adding massage.

"We make it part of our Peak membership in our Crunch franchise locations," says Mike Feeney, Executive Vice President of New Evolution Ventures. "It's been a great benefit for our low cost model clubs. Members are very surprised when they actually try it, and feel that it is a great value."



Mike Feeney,  
Crunch Fitness

New clubs aren't just dedicating full-time space for these units, they're also setting them up in the temporary presale locations before the club opens.



Steven Strickland,  
Workout Anytime

Steven Strickland, CEO of Workout Anytime notes, "No doubt they have helped with our Premium membership sales, but the results are the best when our franchisees set up a bed in a presale location. In those situations, we see higher closing rates across the board; not just in our premium packages."

## LESSONS LEARNED

Beyond the expected bump in revenue, operators have also come up with other creative ways to use water massage beds to benefit their businesses.

Anthony Burton, owner of several Anytime Fitness locations in South Carolina, added beds in his clubs and capitalized on an opportunity to get more guest traffic.

"In our advertising campaigns, we offer 10 free massage sessions, and people can't believe it," says Burton. "It's a great tool for sales. It helps loosen people up for the kill, and then we close them on a package. So not only does it bring in more guest traffic, it also helps me close more members."

When asked, club owners with water massage beds all repeat a common theme when discussing how to make them successful in your clubs.

Member awareness is best achieved by making water massage bed trials part of the new member sales process.

"The best practice is to make sure it's used at the very end of clubs tours," says Tracy Childress, owner of Riviera Fitness clubs. "If you get people to demo it, you'll convert seven or eight out of ten members. If not, you'll convert one or two."

Josh Schaubach, owner of three Snap Fitness clubs, agrees with this strategy.

"On the tour, we have every single member try it out, and selling it is that simple," says Schaubach. "Three out of five people in my clubs are buying."

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