

Success becoming a habit

By NICK CHURCHOUSE - The Dominion Post | Monday, 17 September 2007

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In a muscle-bound industry, a Wellington-based gym network is carving out a niche with more finesse than flex.

Habit Platinum, one of three gyms run by Habit owners Ben Teusse and Steve Pugh, was named top gym in the North Island with fewer than 750 members at the recent New Zealand Fitness Life Awards.

Only three years old, the gym was Habit's first and remains its flagship branch as the fitness centre brand has grown slowly.

Gyms are nothing new, and there are always new ones popping up bigger and better, with cheaper membership fees, more equipment and more mirrors.

But Mr Pugh said Habit, the only Wellington gym to be named in the award finals, had a different philosophy to the big names, and it was working. Combining physiotherapy and fitness training in the Habit formula had meant the gyms did not need to discount or shoot for massive memberships to make it in the tight market.

Using the revenue stream from physiotherapy kept pricing consistent and service levels up, he said.

Also key was attracting the right members.

"We have a real quality type of member, members who want to go to a gym, rather than using a sales team to sell gym memberships to those who will not use them."

With Mr Pugh's background in developing fitness centres, Mr Teusse's physiotherapy experience and team of eight physiotherapists have helped Habit to become the biggest provider of public and private rehabilitation services in Wellington.

With gyms in Wellington's Majestic Centre and Auckland's Vero Centre, the cbd location is integral in Habit's success too. The gyms are where workers can get in and out quickly, Mr Pugh said.

"A lot of members just want to do their thing and get out, they want a nice environment to do it in."

The formula works well for their landlords in the Majestic and Vero towers too. They recognise the benefits of an in-house gym to their other tenants and look after Habit accordingly, Mr Pugh said.

With firms lining up to sign their staff up as an employment benefit, busy corporate members enjoyed the smaller floorplans, smaller fitness classes and tailored high-end service ethics, more akin to a personal gym than a workout factory, he said.

Based daily in their Wellington clubs and in Auckland once a week, the Habit owners have a feel for the memberships and Mr Pugh said that was why they had pipped the other Wellington gyms in this year's awards.

"We are small enough to be hands on and have all the little things ... once you get too big and the owner is not around, you start diluting quality."

Getting broader rather than bigger was the prevalent technique in their workout plan. "If we do another club we will be looking at Sydney or Melbourne."



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HABIT FORMING: Ben Teusse and Steve Pugh's Habit gym chain is going from strength to strength.

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