

Group Mentality

Studies show that Millennials make fitness a group affair

by Alaina Brandenburger

One of the goals that remains on the forefront for parks and recreation professionals is helping to reduce the obesity rates in their communities. While fitness programs typically conjure up images of people lifting weights or using cardio machines solo, research suggests that the Millennial generation (people born between 1980-2000) prefers group oriented fitness opportunities such as adult sports leagues, instructional sports lessons and other group fitness classes. According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers of America's 2012 Topline Participation Report, "More than 30 million Millennials ... participate in team sports."

The report goes on to state that, "So-called Generation Y is more 'group-oriented' than its elders, and for those ages 12-30, playing sports is 'as much about socialization as it is about perspiration.'" This would seem to make sense, as a majority of this age group uses smart phones and other digital communication technology on a regular basis. Group activities provide an outlet for face-to-face interaction in addition to fitness. Popular adult sports programs include baseball, basketball, football, volleyball, and soccer.

These programs also allow adults to blow off steam and burn calories while having fun. Rather than spending the hour focusing on reps and calories burned, they spend it concentrating on their game and fighting for bragging rights on the court. These sports leagues also offer a period of down time in which Millennials can hang out and catch up without their usual distractions. They also provide an environment in which these individuals can thrive.

According to a report entitled, *Millennials in the Workplace* by Jessica Brack, Program Director of Executive Development at the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School,

"[Millennials'] early (and constantly supervised) exposure to team sports has made them the best team players and collaborators in generations." This age group brings their collaborative skills into their fitness routine, participating in organized sports and group fitness classes.

Millennials have also taken a group approach to some sports which have traditionally been thought of as individual activities. Running clubs emerged as a popular recreation trend in 2012, in which a group of people meet at an identified time and run together. These clubs offer extra motivation, accountability and a social setting in which to get fit.

While Millennials tend to prefer working out in a group setting, they are not the only interested participants. The Topline Participation Report notes that 10.6 million Gen Xers and 5.4 million Boomers also participate in team sports. Your agency can utilize this social mindset to attract new users to its programs, as users who value the social experience will tell their friends to come with them. By conducting a demographics analysis along with a Services Assessment, you can focus your marketing to those who likely have an interest in these activities and help unite the community through fitness.

