

Operations

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# The Sales Process: From Leads to Members

The three stages of membership sales take individuals from leads to prospects to members.

**THERE ARE** three basic stages when selling memberships. This three-stage process incorporates planning, teamwork and determination.

### Stage 1: Identifying leads

“Leads” are individuals whose demographics (personal characteristics and behaviors) align with the demographics of your members, and have given an indication that they might be interested in a membership. Examples of leads include individuals who complete a lead card, responded to an advertisement or called because of a direct-mail piece they received. Leads are individuals who, when exposed to the features and benefits of your facility, may become more interested and eventually decide to join.

The process of generating leads should be the top priority of your membership sales team and marketing department. The lead-generation process involves two distinct phases. The first is marketing, which is designed to generate consumer interest and awareness of your fitness center. The second is lead tracking, or database mining, which enables you to place a name with a lead. You should make every attempt to get the mailing address, phone number and email address for each person who calls your facility, responds to a lead card or marketing piece, attends a health fair or visits using a guest pass. Generating leads is a full-scale effort that ties marketing to information collection.

### Stage 2: Qualifying prospects

A prospect is a lead who has

expressed a need for or an interest in your fitness center. Accordingly, a prospect is more likely to become a member than someone who is a lead. Turning leads into prospects occurs in many ways. The most critical factor is talking with the lead

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and identifying his or her desires and needs, and then having the salesperson offer solutions through a facility membership. Core marketing strategies that are likely to be successful at generating prospects include member referrals, guest visits from distributed guest passes and referrals from corporate accounts.

Leads turn into prospects when they indicate, verbally or non-verbally, that your fitness center offers them an opportunity to fulfill a specific need, when they have previously been members of another fitness facility, have a history of exercising and want to resume the activity, are looking for a way to achieve a fitness or weight-loss goal, have contacted the facility based on the recommendation of a current member, have taken a tour of the fitness center or have used a guest pass. When your sales members determine that a lead has become a prospect, it is their

responsibility to move forward with the final process of closing the sale.

### Stage 3: Closing the sale

The process of moving a prospect to membership usually takes place in one of two ways. The first is referred to as “relationship selling,” where prospects choose to become members because the facility has demonstrated that it can fulfill an expressed need. The second method is often referred to as “high-pressure sales,” wherein the salesperson applies pressure for the prospect to join using certain “closing” techniques. The relationship approach is likely to generate the highest closing percentage (i.e., the percentage of prospects who become members) and the highest quality member, while “high-pressure” closing techniques usually produce high closing percentages, but low-quality members.

Relationship selling usually brings in members who will remain members. This method involves an in-depth process of uncovering a prospect’s needs and then connecting your services to those needs. This process does not intimidate the prospect, and it does not employ discounting or other rehearsed processes to move the prospect to membership.

### As easy as 1–2–3

Membership sales — like most things of value — do not occur by accident. Rather, they are a byproduct of a well-thought-out plan. Each stage involves a number of key steps that are an essential part of selling memberships. **FM**



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