



## KEEP YOUR CUSTOMERS AND YOUR BOTTOM LINE MORE FIT

BY SHARON LEICHAM

# MAKING THE CASE FOR



**t**he word “fitness” comes from the word “fit.” While one Webster’s meaning for that has to do with why you’re in business—keeping people in shape—the other one has to do with your daily conundrum—“to make a place or room for.” As a purveyor of things to keep you fit, the irony is, it’s hard for retailers to find a “fit” for all those machines and the accessories that go with them. Is there any retailer who doesn’t wish he or she had more room? Does your product inventory seem to expand to fill the available space, no matter how much space you have?

If you’re space challenged and you’re not going anywhere, you have to make the most of the space you have. That’s because, like other types of retailers, you must maintain certain inventory levels regardless of size to create the sales-per-square-foot needed to be profitable. It’s even more important that a small store maximize every inch of each square foot without overloading the finite space. Too much inventory and your customers will feel crowded and confused, too little and your sales goals won’t be met. There’s that conundrum.

The first step—if you haven’t already done this—is to know what your sales-per-square-foot is, and even break it down further to sales for different segments. Divide your store into areas—cardio, strength, accessories or any other breakdowns that are important to you. Take the square footage of each and overlay the sales of the product contained in those areas against the cost of the space. Then compare the areas to one another based on cost and profit.

You will easily see that some areas outperform others and, with this information, you can begin to analyze and understand why one part of the store is a more effective selling area compared to another. It might be that the products are in a better location, they are easier to find, or simply that the lighting on them is brighter.

Once you’ve identified the most valuable real estate in the store, as well as the least valuable, you can make adjustments to your store layout and aesthetics to increase the value of your underperforming areas.

Now that’s all fine and good, but if you’re one of the many fitness retailers frustrated by a lack of space, learning to maximize what you have—especially in high-value store areas—can be your savior. Try some of the following suggestions de-

signed to make your store look larger and work more efficiently.



### FOCAL POINT

Every store regardless of size should incorporate a focal point in its design. Fitness stores, because of the nature of their products, can become a sea of gray and black steel so customers have trouble focusing on one thing. Give them a large graphic, a colorful wall behind the cash/wrap, or a sign with the store name prominently displayed. Focal points will visually expand your space. For example, some stores we’ve seen have painted the store name and colorful logo on a back wall. The large graphic becomes the first thing customers’ notice when entering, so it focuses their attention, as well as adds the illusion of depth to the space. It also reinforces the store’s name in customers’ minds.



### COLOR

Color can make a store seem larger or smaller, depending on the hue. Traditionally dark colors tend to make a space seem smaller, while light colors expand it. Use a light monochromatic (all the same color family) color scheme with different shades on the walls and floors. Keep the ceiling lighter than the walls to give it height. Play around with painting one wall a bright color to add interest. After all, it’s just paint and can be changed relatively easily if it doesn’t work out.

Sharon Leicham Photography

## WITH BETTER ATTENTION TO SPACE, LIGHTING AND ORGANIZATION.



As a purveyor of things to keep you fit, the irony is that it's hard for retailers to find the space to "fit" all those machines and the accessories.

*Place accessories on or adjacent to equipment to make silent suggestions, as seen in examples 1-3. These simple techniques can grow accessory sales and free up wall space.*

Since accessories are often impulse buys, don't miss the opportunity to cross-merchandise them with equipment so a wandering customer gets the hint. Place gloves on the seat of a home gym and book holders complete with books on your treadmills. Position how-to books on your elliptical trainers. Hang a set of earphones next to the bikes. You'd be surprised how those simple techniques can grow accessory sales and free up accessory walls to hold more product.

Also consider putting popular "destination shopping items" such as stability balls in the back of the store so customers have to walk by your other product to get to them.

### LIGHTING


Keep light levels consistent throughout the store. Avoid low-light or dark areas since that also breaks up space, making a small space seem even smaller. If you're using fluorescents on the ceiling, position them so they are in line with the entrance not at right angles to it. This will give the space more depth. Use spotlights to illuminate the products on the walls and to highlight special equipment.



### CASH/WRAP COUNTER

It's also a good idea—and probably good feng shui too—to keep the cash/wrap counter free of clutter. If you need more space for pamphlets, books or impulse items, consider using the vertical front of your counter. Cover that area with yet another piece of slatwall and use attachments like shelves, pegs and acrylic holders to show books, magazines, videos, accessories and other miscellaneous items.

The position of the cash/wrap counter in your store is also not a given. Positioning it at the front of the store gobbles up valuable space that should be devoted to the products you want customers to see easily and sell. If your store is long and narrow, place the counter against the wall on either side in the center of the store. If your store is square, place it toward the rear.

Give some of these suggestions a try to emulate the success of other fitness retailers who use them. Just because a store is small doesn't mean it has to be uninteresting or, for goodness sake, less profitable; it just has to be smart. With attention to inventory, organization, lighting and space management, you can keep not only your customers fit, but also your bottom line. 

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# SPACE



### WALLS

Store walls are important assets. You can mirror them to make the store look as much as double in size, and you can hang slatwall on them to display your accessories. Or you can use a combination of both.

If you utilize slatwall to hold accessories like bars, spring collars, belts, gloves and ropes, break the panels into 8-foot to 10-foot sections to create "breathing spots." A breathing spot is a break in the space between panels where you can hang photos, perhaps of people utilizing exercise equipment, or where you can place information about the products displayed, such as magazine reviews or how-to's. Note, however, that research shows slatwall sections longer than 10 feet tend to overwhelm customers and cause them to lose interest.



### BIG EQUIPMENT

It's a challenge to arrange and show large pieces of equipment such as home gyms or treadmills. Let's face it, some of those gyms are

so big they look like they could change your tires and lube your car. But if you arrange equipment by height, the store can appear larger and won't look like an automobile service department. For example, place your smaller benches, rowing machines and recumbent bikes in the front of the store, treadmills and elliptical trainers in the middle of the store, and the larger and taller home gyms and strength machines, such as Smith systems, in the back. That allows customers a clear view to the rear of the store giving a feeling of more depth and the impression of a larger and more inviting space.



### ACCESSORIES

Consider placing displays of accessories, such as stretch ropes or exercise mats, adjacent to equipment to make "silent suggestions" about buying them together. It doesn't take up more room to position heart monitors on a slatwall adjacent to treadmills, put towels or water bottles on a rack by bikes, or place dumbbells on stands next to the benches