

ment Northwest, a four-store chain in Oregon. "And all retailers want more traffic."

HealthStyles Exercise Equipment, a chain of seven stores in Colorado, discovered a spike in business when owners put yoga and Pilates implements in the windows, especially at its outlet-mall locations. Not surprisingly, many of the customers who came in—new ones for the store, mind you—were women.

"I know sometimes accessories are not seen as a value for a fitness dealer because they're not a high-ticket item," said Jeanne Sheriff, co-owner of HealthStyles. "But it's a great way to do add-on sales and bring people into your store who would not come in otherwise."

Another selling point: Mind-body goods are increasingly in use by personal trainers (another growth segment of the industry) and group-exercise instructors and can form a sound basis for referrals to your store. That means of course you need to link up with the trainers in your area, perhaps by hooking up with an area health club, and offer them some benefit too for referring

their clients to you. Small items can be a great entry point for a potential customer.

The result? "They're a small percentage of the total volume, but they're high-margin compared to other items, so they definitely help with the bottom line at the end," said Mark Walsh, owner of State of the Art Fitness in Nanuet, N.Y. He started carrying yoga and Pilates starter kits a couple of years ago, including the Spri yoga starter kit (\$13) and the Spri yoga and Pilates ball kits, which include a stability ball, a mat, a bit of specialized gear and a video (\$40).

SALES SAVVY

Summer is when a lot of people want to be outside, not slogging away on a treadmill or bike inside four walls counting for the 200th time the patterns in the wall paint. Or, with hot and humid weather, traditional sweaty exercise becomes less appealing. Softer accessories can help a fitness retailer make it through the parched business of summer months.

"When you get into the slower months

in terms of hardgoods, a lot of people get into strength-training and stretching, which is when they look at the accessories," said Rob Ignasak, manager of the flagship store of Chicago Home Fitness. "We see a big difference in the bottom line when we carry them."

A Pilates ring or a yoga block, such as Hugger Mugger's Foam Block (\$8) or Stott's Circle (\$60), have one great advantage over an exercise bike: No fitting or fine-tuning needed at purchase, no belts to lube, electronics to tweak, and no maintenance after the sale.

HOW DO YOU DO THAT MOVE YOU DO?

Your staff doesn't need to know the intricacies of Pilates "Hundreds" or a T'ai Chi "Grasp the Bird's Tail" move ... if the product you're selling does that job for you. That's one big reason to carry videos and DVDs for home practice.

Many suppliers, such as educational specialists Stott Pilates and Gaiam, are betting that home-media demand is strong. And growing. The instructional media comes as stand-alone items or packaged with the accompanying must-have accessories. (Think holiday and special occasion gifts.) Among the offerings are "Spri: The Pilates Way," "Basic Pilates" (Stott) and "Yoga for Beginners" (Gaiam), all priced between \$15 to \$30.

Stott, a fast-growing Toronto, Canada-based, instruction and equipment company, is partnering with Lions Gate Entertainment to bring a new set of educational titles to specialty fitness retailers by the end of the year. Those will be added to its line that now includes more than 60 titles covering everything from "Essential Matwork" (\$15) to a two-tape set of advanced moves on specialized equipment (\$53). Spri Products, a long-time go-to for rubber resistance products, has been spreading its wings and adding other products to its lines, including instructional media and accessories in the mind-body arena, including eight new Pilates titles. Those are being released this summer.

In a few years, large Pilates equipment—the chair- and table-sized contraptions that may look like medieval torture devices to some—are expected to make an appearance on your show floor. Don't, however, look for these large pieces to enter the retail mainstream ... yet. Stott, for example, plans to wait on the introduction of large home equipment

(continued on page 37)

FITNESS FUSION

IS THE GYM A WEIGHT ROOM WHERE YOU GET PUMPED, a step class where you get sweaty—or is it a sanctuary? Wait, a sanctuary?!?!?

Don't be surprised to see such lingo on the class schedule at the local health club. So-called "fusion" classes, which combine old-school tools like dumbbells and step benches with the fresh practices of yoga and Pilates, are taking off among instructor-training programs.

And it won't be long before students in fusion classes wander into your store. Understanding their language and needs may help close a sale.

The trend isn't just a few new moves on a sticky mat. Mind-body fitness, as it's coming to be called, goes beyond traditional exercise and explores how movement feels. There's an attention to technique, a focus on the mind's participation, and a quieter approach to fitness that creates room to relax in today's stressful world. Thus, the term "sanctuary."

"Mind-body" now even qualifies for its own educational track at the largest annual conference for fitness professionals and instructors, the IDEA World Fitness Convention, this year held in early July. Mind-body isn't just limited to the practice of pretzel poses with odd names. You even find class offerings under categories ranging from choreography to water-aerobics to cycling and personal training. Examples include "Body Rolling" (using a soft ball that acts to massage the body), "How to Lead a Guided Relaxation," and any number in between that use "yo" or "chi" as part of their name (Yo-chi, Yo-lates and Chi Cycling, to name three). Don't know what chi is? Loosely translated, it's "life energy" but is used in these types of classes to mean anything that has to do with feeling the "inner power."

Suppliers are in on the act, too. Nautilus has launched its own 16-hour traveling "Fusion Fitness Training," created by instructors who are versed in personal training, group exercise, Pilates and yoga. According to its website, www.fusion-fitness-training.com, it is "a program to teach leaders how to find a deeper understanding and to create a sanctuary amidst the chaos of daily life." Of course, the company has a whole line of accessories to complement the program, too.

So turn down the lights in the exercise studio and light a candle in the corner. Let's bring our voices together: Ohmmmmmm.