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Fitness Centers

By Bryan Green

Consider location and safety before creating a workout facility

For contactors and developers building in the hospitality industry, it's certainly critical to carry a solid understanding of the operational model and how design, layout and functionality will serve to support the revenue and customer service goals of the property. For most professionals working in this realm, the long-standing ratios around heads and beds and keys-based projections is nothing new to you.

However, one area within the hospitality industry that's evolved significantly in recent years is fitness. Usage rates for hotel/resort fitness centers have

increased steadily, increasing the priority that hotel operators are placing on these environments as a source of both customer satisfaction and revenue generation.

In the ongoing effort to meet the demands of your customers, it is important to consider some of the basic considerations that can make or break the success of a hospitality-based fitness facility. With project budgets always being of paramount concern, overlooking these considerations in the early going can prove extremely costly.

Spatial planning

First and foremost, it's critical



It is critical that the fitness center layout afford enough space to accommodate the volume of end users – a good example of this is shown in this Hilton property fitness center.

that the fitness center layout afford enough space to accommodate the volume of end users. This is one of the most common miscalculations made in advance of construction. Whether due to outdated data, poor availability of data or just inaccurate projections, professionals consistently underestimate fitness center usage rates at around five to 10 percent. In reality, due to so many fitness-conscious consumers, usage rates are typically at anywhere from 15 to 20 percent (roughly one in five guests).

Fitness center planning needs to anticipate this and accommodate it with the appropriate dimensions

and layout. It will be critical to do the math using the capacity of the entire hotel/resort facility and use realistic usage rates to develop accurate projections of your space needs. As is always a wise move, give the fitness center room to grow and evolve as usage rates increase and customer demand changes.

Electrical feed placement

It's critical to anticipate and carefully chart the layout of electrical wiring and feed locations for the fitness center. Tearing up concrete to adjust an electrical layout after a mistake in placement is something

Animated 3-D renderings like this are utilized by fitness design consultants and development professionals during the initial planning stages of a fitness center project.

that can take your budget into the stratosphere. This has become an increasingly significant consideration with the rapid growth of fitness entertainment amenities.

Back in the day, it was enough to suspend a television in the corner of the room. Today, consumers expect to enjoy personal viewing screens, audio headsets and other entertainment features. This requires direct cable or satellite feeds to each treadmill or elliptical trainer that features personal audio or viewing screens.

Just because a given facility isn't planning extensive entertainment amenities immediately, customer demand can create the need to upgrade to these features. Don't limit the ability to adjust and make additions in the future. Be sure to anticipate and account for this possibility and avoid significant costs and business interruption if and when a decision to upgrade is made down the line.

Location

The location of the fitness center within the greater confines of the entire facility is a critical decision. Gone are the days where the fitness center can afford to appear as an afterthought or a simple conversion of a guest room or two. If the room doesn't promote activity, vitality and enthusiasm, usage rates and likely a significant percentage of the hotels repeat bookings will suffer considerably. No one wants to feel cramped or suffocated when exercising. Expanded floor space and ceiling heights to increase air circulation and mobility are essential.

With individual exercise it's well-known that motivation is a key factor to success. A drab and lifeless environment will only encourage guests to find another place to exercise off site. Expansive windows that feature compelling views and easy accessibility from anywhere in the facility — these are



just some of the staples that should be provided to ensure that the fitness amenity is a successful one.

Safety

The dimensions and layout of the fitness center need to promote a safe environment for exercise. Keep in mind, a fitness center with all its activity and traffic can be a hotbed for potential accidents and liability nightmares. The importance of planning to reduce the odds of such problems cannot be over-emphasized.

Sufficient room between strength stations and cardiovascular equipment will assist in the makings of an efficient traffic-flow plan. Delineated areas for stretching and movement-based exercises will go a long way to increasing the safety of the environment and decreasing potential for accidents or liability exposure.

It's also important to consider the location of the fitness center within the overall layout of the hotel/resort. For example, female guests in particular will appreciate a well-lit, high-traffic location for the fitness center where they will feel safe and secure regardless of when they may choose to exercise.

Revenue generation

Spatial planning, electrical designation, location and safety are all critical elements in the construction of the fitness facility. But offering clients an opportunity to generate revenue from a fitness facility

is often an untapped area of consideration. Will the fitness center offer personal training services, group exercise classes or a merchandise/retail component?

Most development professionals never get beyond the brick-and-mortar issues, but these potential revenue sources should be addressed in the design and development stage. The facility will need a compartmentalized approach to accommodate things like private personal training rooms, group exercise areas and retail.

These considerations only serve to scratch the surface of the myriad of details and considerations unique to a hotel-based fitness facility. Hopefully, they will begin to equip you with some basics and ultimately, increase your attention to such details when approaching a new hospitality development project. Whether you choose to secure the support of consultants like these or to go it alone, do yourself a favor and don't overlook the unique considerations and challenges posed by this growing sector. In the end, where budgets and revenues are the measuring stick of success, you and your clients will be glad that you did. ■

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