



CASE STUDY:

INNOVATIVE WAYS OF INCREASING
PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP

NATIONAL SQUASH CENTRE



SQUASH
NEW ZEALAND

OVERVIEW

Being connected to the next generation is a must for squash clubs in today's environment. Unfortunately the perception of squash has been allowed to stagnate as an older man's game from the 1980's. Although this perception is far from the truth, it has served to encourage the decline in participation ever since. As a result those aged between 18-34 years generally consider traditional sports club offerings as something for their parents' generation. Instead they want to be around like-minded people of the same age and want to get in, have fun and get out (maximum value for money and time).

Located on Unitec campus, the National Squash Centre is a modern facility featuring 6 squash courts with moveable wall technology. However, with low squash participation and no appealing programmes in place for younger people, the centre is putting initiatives in place to attract new players, engage existing ones and increase court usage with a specific focus on its largest community market: the Millennials (also called Generation Y).

CHALLENGES

Engagement

The Millennials are the biggest generation (consumer audience), and will be so for a long time to come, but aren't currently engaged with current squash offerings as these don't meet their needs (squash is not considered to be cool).

Time

Many young people in tertiary education or work state that lack of time is a large barrier for them to stay involved in sport and recreation when they leave secondary school.

Experience

The transition period between secondary school and university or work is a critical point where young people need to have a positive experience in order to stay involved later in life.

SOLUTIONS

Personnel and Understanding

In 2015 the centre hired a new manager, Robbie Yam, who has come up with fresh ideas to attract younger people to the facility. Robbie has teenage kids of his own and has attended some coaching modules so knows how to connect with and encourage younger people.

Promotion and Technology

During student orientation week the centre offered free squash trials for all new Unitec students as a way of giving them a taste. Equipment and basic coaching was also provided.

Millennials are more digitally educated and clued up than most so Facebook is heavily used to promote the centre's news and activities. The key messages highlight having fun and getting and staying in shape together.

Convenient Programmes and Activities

Robbie has introduced new social initiatives on Mondays and Fridays with flexible pricing options to make squash trendier and more attractive to younger audiences. These provide challenge, rewards, improvement, empower, social connection and have generated some excellent results so far.

RESULTS

2

Free Have a Go days offered every year for Unitec Students.

25

Players (on average) taking part in each of the social programmes on Monday and Friday evenings.



Court use and social atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

The transition between school and higher education or the workplace causes a significant drop-off in sports participation. Research shows that health and appearance matter a lot to this age group – which presents a huge opportunity for squash (as the world's healthiest sport) – to play a leading role. The Millennial age group is a key demographic and needs to be targeted in a different way. Evidence suggests that having a younger person who can connect with that demographic and can easily communicate in their language is key to the success.

The centre now runs a Monday Fun League from 7-9pm at \$7 per person and a Friday Funday from 4-7pm at \$8 per person. Players are matched on a white board with others and scored matches are played for 15 minute periods – meaning quick turnover, plenty of social interaction and lots of play for everyone. Robbie has also invested in getting the necessary training in social media to ensure it is cleverly done so he can reach the intended audiences for years to come.