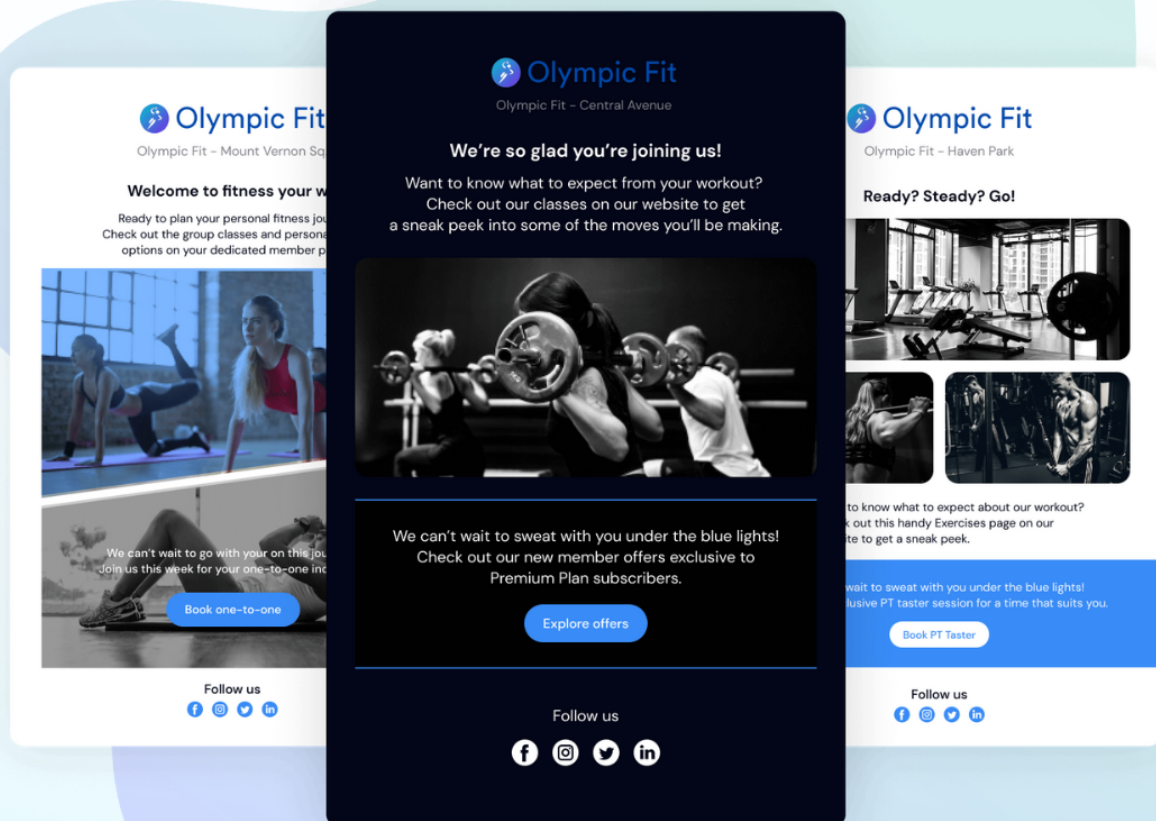


# Boosting Gym Email Engagement Rates

## Best Practice Guide



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## Introduction

Over 347 billion emails are sent every day, that's a 4.3% increase against 2022 and *experts predict* that number will increase to over 361 billion in 2024.

So, despite the variety of communication channels at our disposal in modern business, email, it seems, continues to dominate as the primary channel.

This places a great deal of pressure and expectation on senders as audiences are becoming increasingly savvy about what makes a good email.

Especially from the perspective of relevance and personalization.

Ten years ago generic emails were the norm. Segmentation was painfully manual and limited to core demographical data like gender and age. It was accepted that the majority of sales emails weren't going to be relevant.

The purchase history, product search results, interests, and survey responses lay dormant in a data purgatory, left unused. This was despite the growing demand for more personalized emails, even back then.

Today, if executed correctly, email marketing can be the most effective source of lead generation, membership engagement, and driver of ancillary sales in your gym's marketing toolkit.

This guide will show you how.

## Covering the Basics

Before you can create an effective email marketing campaign you need to understand what success looks like.

All email marketing tools will include some form of reporting to give you an idea of how your campaigns are performing. The type of campaign and the sophistication of the tool will dictate the amount of information you can gather.

**But the core numbers you need to pay attention to are:**

- **Delivery Rate** — how many emails were successfully delivered to your mailing list.
- **Bounce Rate** — this is split into hard and soft bounces.
  - *Hard bounces* — are email addresses that no longer exist or you've been blocked from sending to
  - *Soft bounces* — occur when an inbox is full or an out-of-office is turned on. In the case of soft bounces the email tool will usually attempt to redeliver at timed intervals to maximize your delivery success rate
- **Open rate** — how many of your emails have been opened
- **Clicks** — how many click-throughs your campaign had
- **Unsubscribes** — members of your audience who don't want to hear from you anymore
- **Report** — whether any of your recipients have reported you for spam. This number is only a concern if the numbers are unusually high as there is fairly strict legislation in place around data acquisition.

This last metric is important as it's a direct indicator of how relevant the content of your emails is to the recipient. Low clicks suggest you're not hitting the right mark with your audience, but more on that later.

*Industry averages in the fitness industry* are a 19.2% open rate and a 1.01% click-through rate which gives you something to aim for. However, it's important to recognize the flipside of those numbers. 80.8% of recipients don't open the email. Equally, of the people who do open, only 1% click through.

Creating relevance for your audiences will allow you to drive up open rates, increase clicks, and reduce unsubscribe rates.

## Click to Open Rate

This is an important number to work out. Open rates are good, as are click-throughs but click to open tells you the percentage of your audience who actually clicked on something.

This is the percentage of your audience who are actually engaging with your email.

Annoyingly, depending on the email marketing tool you use, this information isn't always easy to find, despite it being an essential part of your analysis and decision-making.

If you can't find anything in your reporting, you can calculate your click-to-open rate by:

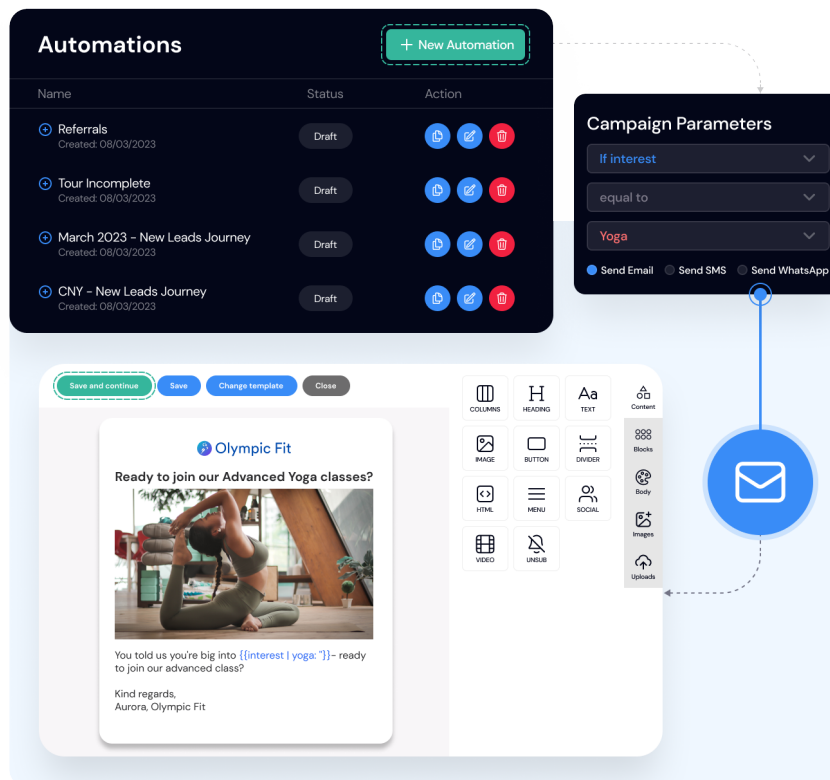
$$\text{CTOR} = \frac{\textit{num of unique clicks}}{\textit{num of unique opens}} \times 100$$

$$\text{CTOR} = (\# \textit{ of unique clicks} \div \# \textit{ of unique opens}) \times 100$$

# Personalization and the Value-based Mindset

The modern marketing landscape has changed a lot and so have the wants and needs of your club's members. Their experiences with other businesses, such as retailers, have strongly influenced their expectations and so they judge every communication they receive with the same discerning eye.

That means you have to work twice as hard to get your members to read your emails, let alone take actions you present them with.



This isn't inherently bad. Putting more thought into your communications will inevitably lead to a better response rate.

However, where things get powerful is when you start to leverage your membership data to personalize your emails.

Personalization used to mean using the member's first name. While that's important, it's the tip of the iceberg.

Personalization goes far beyond getting a member's name right. Rather it's presenting members with the information, services, content, products, and promotions that are relevant to them.

Two key things create a personalized and relevant communication experience. The first is data. You need to have the information about members before you can put it to use.

The second is the drive to deliver value. While the temptation is to push products or services you want to sell, it will come at the expense of relevance and engagement.

An engaged audience is directly proportional to engagement rates.

Focus on delivering value through personalized and relevant content and your audience will respond. What's more, they will feel valued by you, and the trust factor balloons.

By adopting a value-based mindset you can start to use your membership data to create a uniquely engaging experience for each member of your fitness center.

## Understanding your Objectives

Before you create any email campaign you need to know what you want it to achieve. Communicating because you feel you should or because every other fitness center out there seems to be sending a lot of emails is not the best motivation.

Every time your members or your gym leads hear from you it needs to be for a specific reason, with a clear message and clear calls to action.

Assuming you're leveraging membership data, you're in a position to run multiple campaigns, each targeted for different audiences and outcomes.

The more you segment membership data, the more focused each of your campaigns can be.

But, fundamentally, before you create your campaigns, you need to have a clear understanding of what you want each of them to achieve. And set some metrics against that.

According to MailChimp, the industry average open rate sits at 21.48%, and an average click rate of 2.69% for fitness brands. But more than that you need to have set revenue and/or sign-up targets, depending on what you're trying to achieve.

Ultimately, your email marketing needs to be revenue-generating, whether that's through gym membership sales, membership upgrades or ancillary sales.

Tracking these conversions and benchmarking them is essential to measuring the success of your email marketing activity.



## Creating Engaging Email Journeys

Just as you need to understand your objectives, you need to understand the journey you want your members to take to get there.

While some campaigns are a single send, the majority of the time campaigns will be multistage, designed to nurture (or nudge) members toward a desired action. While still keeping one eye firmly on delivering that targeted value.

A useful way of thinking about email journeys is like telling a story. Each email shares a little bit more of the story (information) nudging them closer and closer to the desired outcome. Whether that's joining your gym or upgrading their membership, or any other desired action.

Depending on the nature of your campaign the kinds of emails you need to create will vary significantly.

A member engagement sequence, for instance, focuses on delivering consistent value without necessarily asking for anything in return. These campaigns are about keeping in touch with members and reinforcing their place in your gym community.

Engagement sequences can include anything from tailored workout plans to lifestyle tips and dietary information. Whatever would be most useful to each member, based on their data.

Service or product lead campaigns (sales nurturing sequences) are a little more involved.

For a start you need to make sure you're offering something members and prospects are going to respond to. This isn't about throwing gym shorts at the wall and seeing what sticks.

**Products, offers, services, and upgrades should be appropriate to your members based on the marriage between the zero-party data they have provided and the first-party data you possess and generate consistently.**

**Zero-party data is information members have willingly volunteered. This can be anything from demographic information to their specific fitness goals, expressed interests, and fitness history. It can also include information about their health, any medical conditions, their weight, and their BMI.**

First-party data is related to actions members have taken at your facility, such as how often they attend, how long they spend on-site, what classes they book and those they attend. And whether or not they have purchased additional services or products.

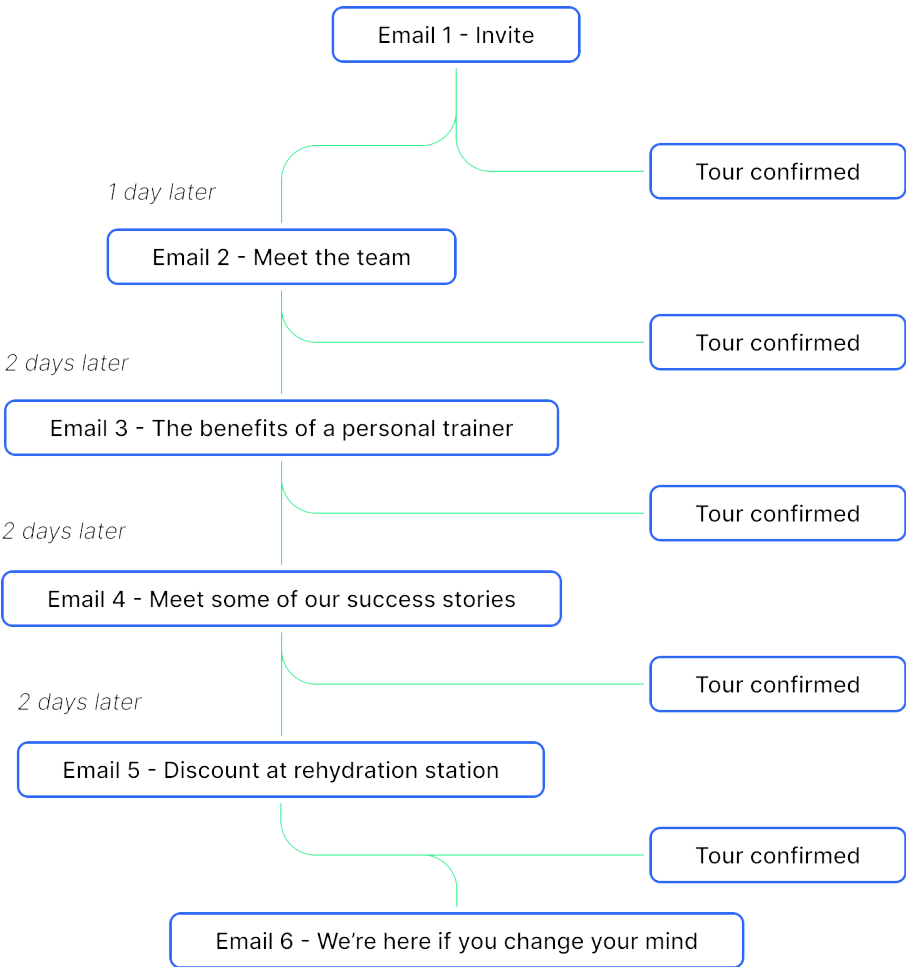
For gym prospects this is a little trickier to determine, but the focus should be on converting them to a member.

Your email journeys can vary in length and complexity. Below are a couple of examples:

### Gym Lead Journey Example

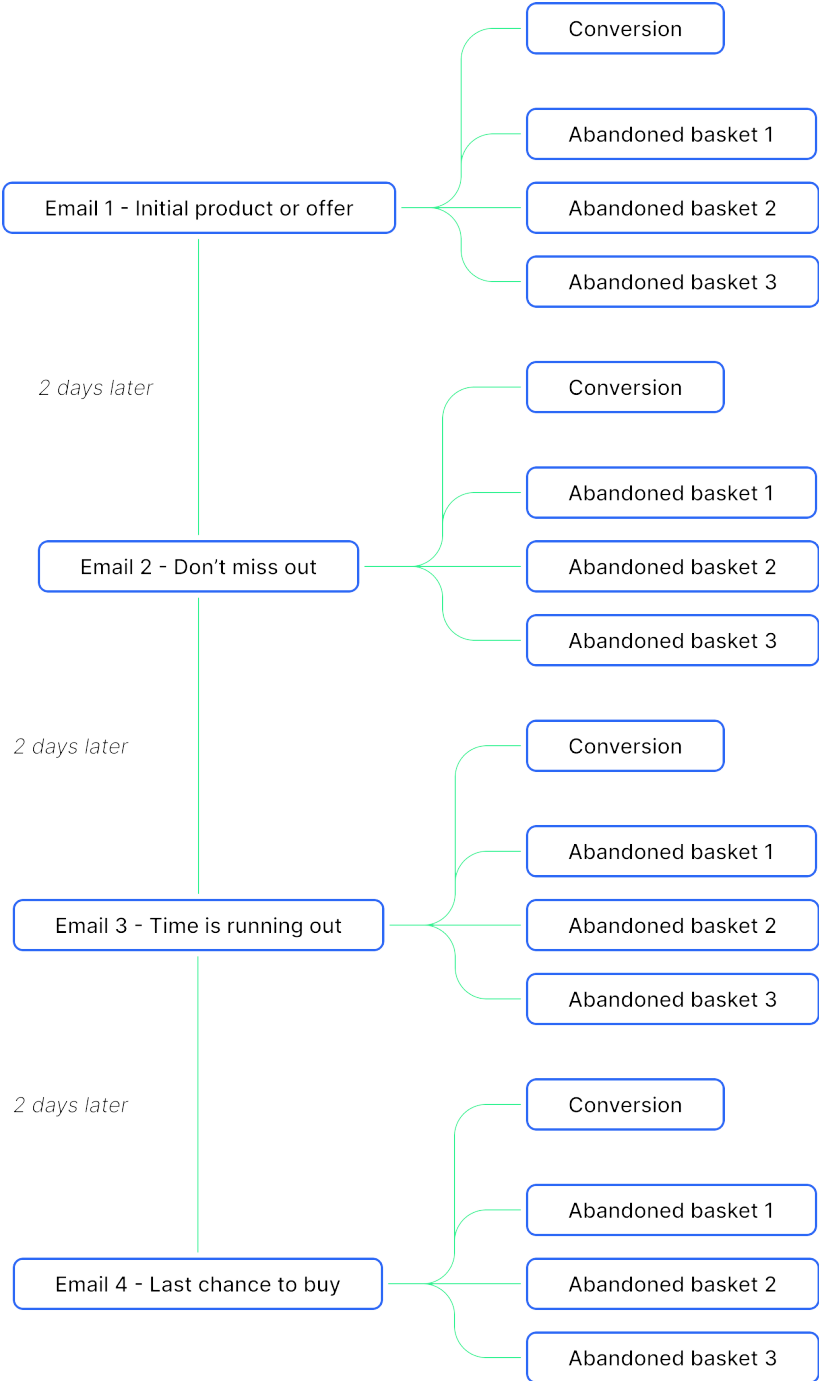
This is a very basic journey and can be expanded significantly. Once the tour has been completed, the lead can be dropped into a trial journey.

Or if they didn't turn up to their tour they get dropped into a new nurture to get them to rebook and attend.



# Product or Offer Journey Example

The length of these journeys can vary greatly and you need to take into account things like shopping cart abandonment if the campaign is for a product that they can buy on your website, or collect in the fitness center.



Depending on what you're offering your members, you can also include discounts, free shipping, or some other incentive to get them to take up the offer you're presenting them with.

Although missing the mark with a campaign isn't the best outcome, it also teaches you something about your audience.

If they don't engage with an offer or promotion it could mean it isn't right for them or they're not interested. Or the timing could be off.

Showing offers towards the end of the month when funds are likely to be on the low side may not perform as well as the same offer being sent at the start of the month.

Testing is useful when it comes to creating campaigns that are offer or product-led.

## Test and Iterate

Maximizing the performance of your email campaigns can only come through testing, learning, and improving.

Assuming you're leveraging your membership data you should already have a reasonable idea of what is going to resonate with your audiences.

However, nothing is a certainty and while the offer may be strong the approach may not be as effective.

### Split Testing

Also known as A/B testing, it is a useful method of determining which messaging - or even offering - generates the best results.

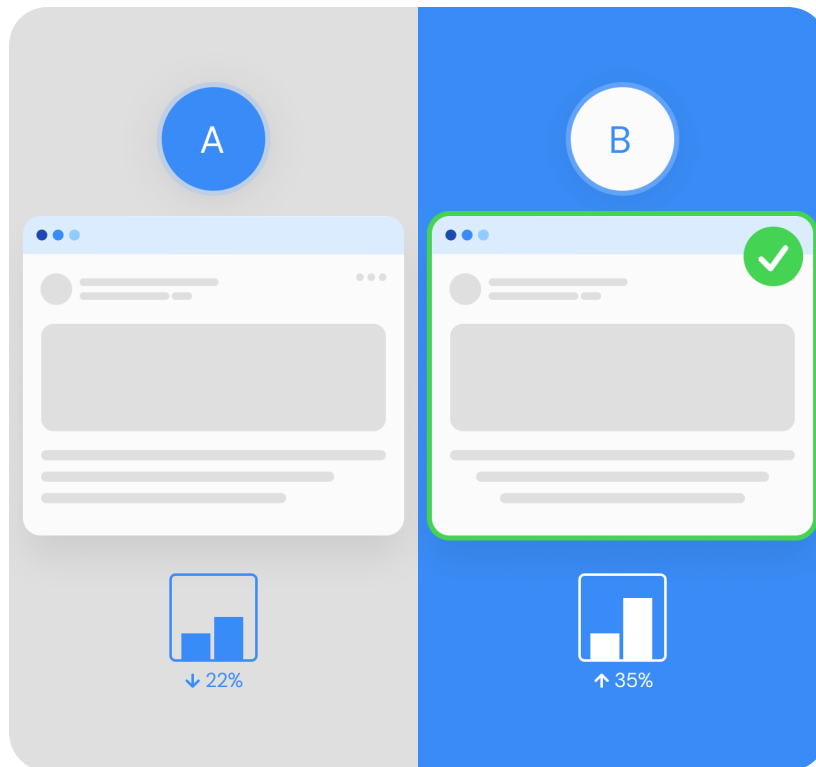
Creating two or more versions of a campaign means you can see what works best for your audiences. By testing different elements, you can refine your emails over time to get the best results possible.

It's important to understand it's not a quick process. Trial and error are all part of the learning process. So while you're just starting with your new email marketing strategy, allow for this test and iterate stage.

**It will prove invaluable in the long run as you will end up with a much clearer understanding of:**

- How your gym audiences like to be communicated to
- What offers or promotions work the best
- What content or value-adds they respond to
- How many touchpoints prompt conversion
- How frequently they like to be contacted

When you also factor in demographic data like gender, age, income, and even membership type, you'll start to get a really clear picture of how your audience responds to your communications.



## Starting Your First Split Test

If you're new to email marketing or your experience to date has been more generic campaigns, then start small. Simple changes can be made that can yield valuable insights.

Something as simple as a call to action like **'Join Now'** versus **'Start Today'** could make the difference between leads converting or not.

Split your list into cohorts and send your different versions out. Most email marketing tools have a split test or A/B test function built in. This makes analyzing results much easier and will usually communicate which email performed the best.

With each split test, you'll learn a little more. Testing subject lines, for example, is a useful way of gauging what messages, tone of voice, and writing style your audience likes.

Again, you may find different demographics respond to different messages so it's one you'll have to test and retest. From there you can create campaigns segmented by those different groupings, as well as interests and activities.

## Optimizing Email Performance

As you start to hone in on how to structure your email campaigns, what to include in them, and how to talk to your audience, you need to turn your attention to maximizing your email performance.

Thanks to years of abuse by less reputable organizations in days gone by, email providers are understandably protective of their service users. Layers of protection have been brought in to protect users from getting spammed with irrelevant or potentially fraudulent emails.

This presents challenges for legitimate businesses that want to communicate with their audiences.

There are certain things you can do to give your emails the best chances of hitting inboxes and getting open.

### Sender Reputation

Your sender reputation tells email providers whether or not you can be trusted. The higher your reputation is the more likely your emails will be delivered safely into inboxes, rather than spam folders.

There is an element of chicken and egg to sender reputation. You need recipients to open and engage with your emails to increase your sender reputation. But you can't get your emails into inboxes without a good sender reputation.

However, there are things you can do to improve your sender reputation. Firstly, consistency matters. Create a schedule and stick to it. This may take some time to establish but you'll quickly learn what time your emails are more likely to be engaged with.

Keep your initial email batches small. If you send out thousands of emails all at once you're going to get flagged as spam. If you're going to be creating different campaigns for different services or offers anyway, sending smaller batches shouldn't be an issue.

**Finally, creating, relevant and engaging emails with subject lines that catch the eye makes it more likely your emails will get opened. See below for more on this.**

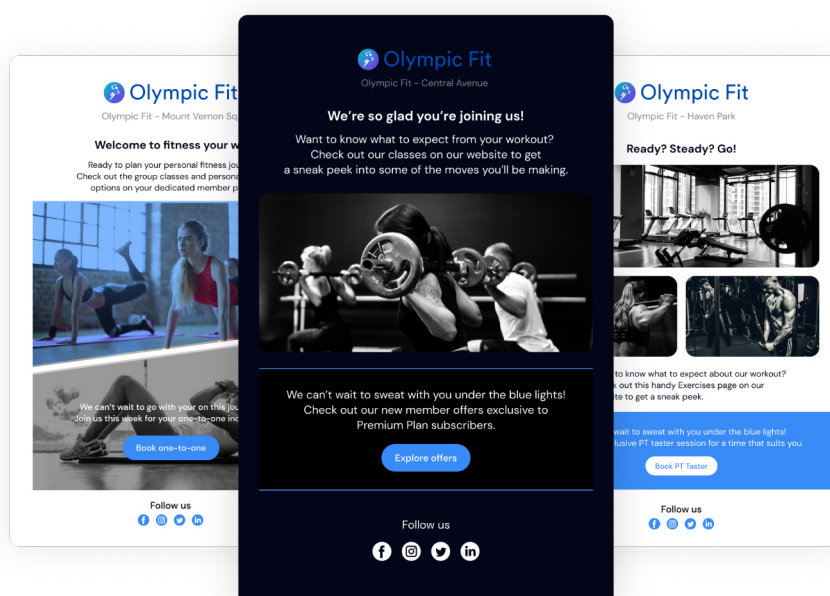
## Subject Lines

While it's tempting to create intrigue, clear concise subject lines tend to perform the best. It is also considered best practice for your subject line and preview text to clearly state what the email is going to be about so the recipient has the choice to determine its relevance without opening it.

This may seem counterintuitive but operating honestly and transparently increases email performance.

### Other things to be aware of:

- Avoid all caps
- Avoid spammy language like **FREE**, **Urgent!**, or **Win!**
- Avoid questions and exclamations in the same subject line
- Use direct language such as calls to action
- Localization works - if your audience is in London, make it clear you're talking to Londoners
- Get personal - if you have the functionality, include their name in the subject line





## Constructing your Email

Just as with your headline, you need to choose your words carefully. Email providers will 'crawl' the content of your email for spam markers. The more your emails get flagged as spam the lower your send reputation gets.

The lower your sender reputation gets, the more likely your emails will hit spam folders automatically, no matter how well-optimized they are.

Providing you're emailing your audiences with a legitimate business reason and the content is relevant, your reputation score will increase over time.

## Creating Relevant Copy

The word relevance gets used a lot because it matters. To put this into perspective - relevance is the primary driver behind Google's ranking algorithm. It determines relevance based on the content, not just keywords because Google understands that's what its users want. Relevant content.

Your audience is no different when it comes to receiving communications from you. Whether you're telling them about new classes or promoting an Under Armour sale, the content needs to be relevant to your audience.

Creating relevant copy doesn't start with an ability to write. Although that certainly helps. It starts with the data. The more data you have on your members the easier it is to create relevant and engaging emails.

### **Let's take that Under Armour sales as an example**

A generic campaign would see that go out to everyone in your database. While that may generate some clicks and either online purchases or an increase in footfall to your on-site shop, there will likely be a low open rate and/or a high unsubscribe rate. That's because not everyone wants Under Armour products.

Using data to analyze spending habits, and factoring in things like age and gym activity will help you to build cohorts of recipients who might be interested in Under Armour products.

Notably, it will ‘qualify out’ those who aren’t interested. While this may seem like a loss of opportunity, it’s quite the opposite.

Firstly, you can create an email that specifically speaks to the kind of members who engage with the Under Armour brand. Engaging titles and relevant content are more likely to get opened and clicked.

Secondly, by creating these different data sets, you can create other offers and email campaigns for your other member groups.

Two relevant, targeted campaigns are far more likely to drive an uplift in revenue than one generic one.

There is also the added benefit of your members feeling understood and ‘seen’ by you which builds trust. Members who trust are far more likely to open your emails.

## Build Connections

With trust in mind, humanizing your content can do a lot to boost engagement. Again, your data can help with this. Depending on what your members’ preferences are you can create campaigns that introduce them to different members of the team.

Helping your members identify the colleagues they need to speak to about spin classes, martial arts, or nutrition, boosts member confidence. It enables members to approach those colleagues knowing that they’re talking to the person who can help them.

Similarly, you can create campaigns to mark occasions. Sending an email celebrating a 100th gym session is a great way to create a connection with your members. Moreover, these campaigns can be automated, provided your systems are integrated.

Managing your data in this way makes it even easier to create campaigns that focus on delivering added value, over something more sales-focused.

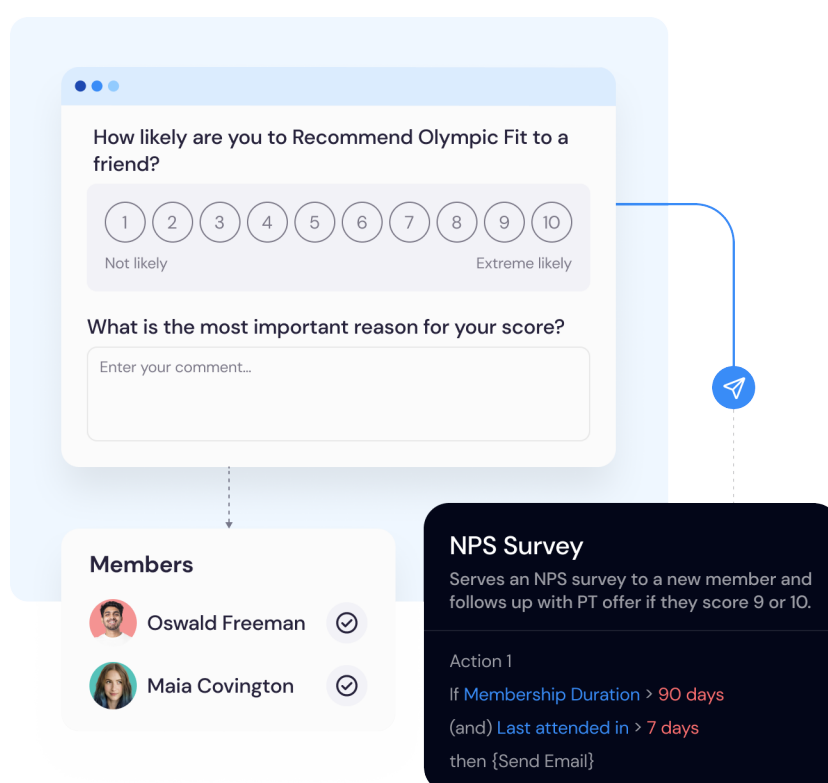
## Surveys

The added benefit of cultivating an engaged audience is it’s much easier to ask them for feedback. Whether you want to gauge how well a particular class is going or general

feedback on the quality of the facilities, an audience you have a relationship with is far more likely to respond.

Moreover, they're also far more likely to respond to surveys with questions about themselves. Capturing zero-party data is invaluable to any business. Especially those where one-to-one relationship building plays such an important part in the sales and retention processes.

By building a trusting relationship with your members you are ideally placed to learn more about them, their fitness goals, and what interests them. You can then use this data to create even more personalized and targeted communications.



## Optimizing Images

An often overlooked element of emails are images. The majority of users upload an image into their email marketing tool and call it good.

In reality, images can directly impact your email performance and it can even harm your gym's brand.

## Things to consider:

### Image dimensions

The email tool will usually tell you the size your image needs to be. If you don't have tools like Photoshop at your disposal, a free Canva account can assist you here.

### Image file size

If the images in your email are too big it can cause the email to go to spam or get blocked altogether. If it does make it through the spam filters the load speed can be affected. Slow-loading emails rarely get read.

Consider compressing the image to improve load speeds. Some email tools have image compression baked in. If not there are free tools out there like [tinypng.com](https://tinypng.com)

### Image file names

It's considered best practice to give your images descriptive names. This helps platforms like Google understand what the image is however, there are some rules attached that we recommend you follow:

- File names should be all lowercase characters
- Do not use spaces or underscores
- Use hyphens to separate words only
- Avoid words like 'for', 'in', and 'the'
- Don't keyword spam
- The first five words should accurately describe what the image is about in decreasing order of importance.
- Everything after the fifth word can be identifying information like a serial number, date, resolution, photographer name, or source
- Use only **.jpg** images

## Alt text

This is used to tell email providers what the image it's being asked to download is. It's also useful for accessibility software to tell individuals with a visual impairment what the image is.

Again, there is a rule that's advisable to follow:

*Be clear in your description and avoid keyword stuffing. By all means, reference your gym but it should be the last word, not the first.*

For example your alt text might be:

'Black wall with a mural that says 'sweat' on at the Globo Gym, Long Beach, CA'

From a descriptive perspective, the important information is the wall, not the brand.

## Other things to consider

Two final things to improve your email performance and stay out of spam folders.

Firstly, ask people to add your email to their safe list or contact list. Security settings can be set incredibly high so unless a user manually adds you to a safe list, your emails will forever hit their junk folders.

It's a reasonable thing to ask, especially if they've knowingly signed up to hear from you.

Secondly, avoid sending high volumes of emails over a short period. This won't just get you in spam folders, this will get you blacklisted by both ESPs (email service providers) and ISPs (internet service providers).

While it's possible to get taken off the blacklist it's a laborious process that can take days or weeks. It's not a position you want to get into.

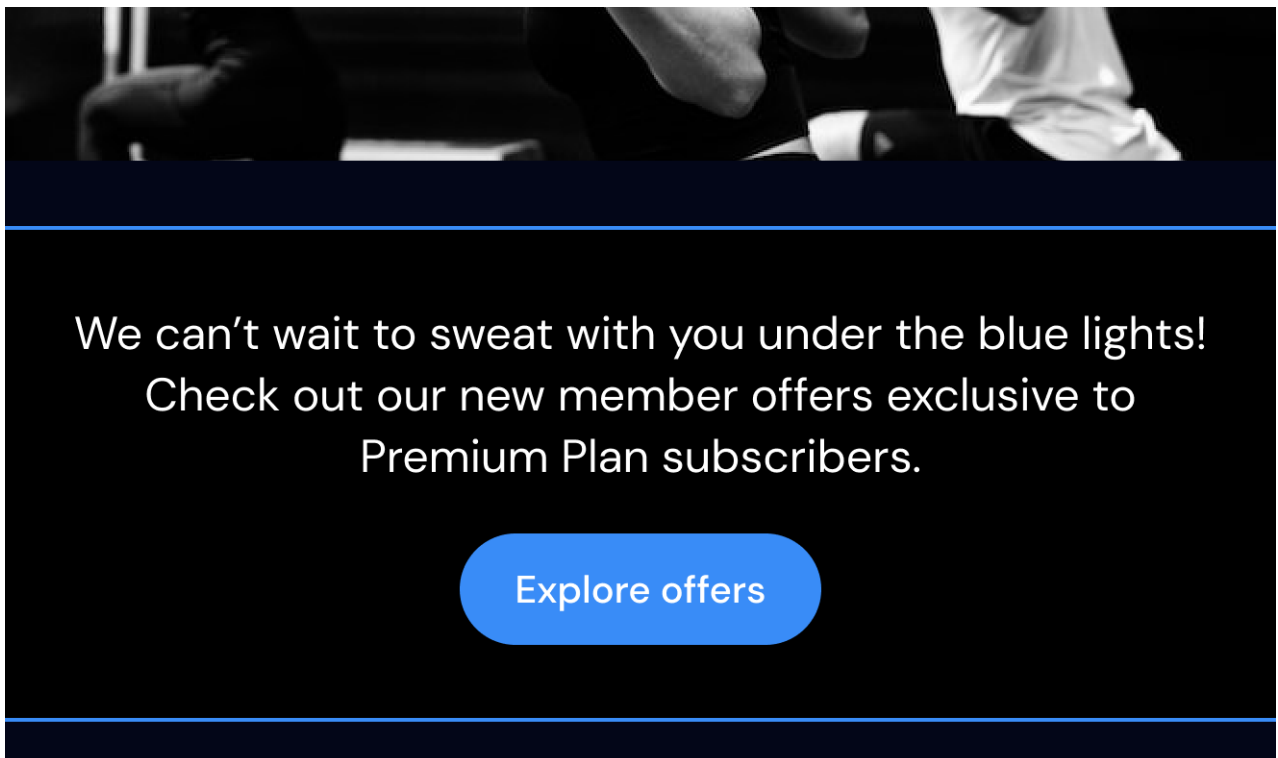
## Adding Links - Dos and Don'ts

At the risk of stating an obvious fact, you need to include links in your emails. Your emails need both strong and clear calls to action and links to direct your audience towards useful content such as blogs.

No links means no action by your members so all the effort you've gone to by engaging them with your email is wasted.

Even if the email campaign is to make them aware of a change in service or an adjustment to opening times, use the opportunity. Include relevant offers, product suggestions, or calls to action for class bookings.

It's not unreasonable to include this information in your communications and members understand that sales is part of the vernacular of email marketing. The essential element is keeping them relevant.



## Here are a few things to consider when adding links:

- Link your logo to your website, it's an effective traffic driver
- Make calls to action clear - use buttons or images to make the desired action clear
- Position the most important information and links at the top of your email so readers don't have to scroll down
- When adding links, avoid terms like 'click here' or 'read more'. Instead, use descriptive text that relates to the subject of the link. For example: 'read more about how martial arts help with focus, as well as fitness'.
- Use tools like Bitly to create unique links with UTM parameters for each of your campaigns (including social media) to keep track of what links are being engaged with on which channels
- Don't add too many links. Some spam filters are more aggressive than others so you should not have more than **five** links in the body of your email.

# The Importance of Data and Segmentation

Your fitness center has a lot of data you can leverage to better engage with your audience. Aside from demographical data, you should have access to attendance/activity data, purchase history, interests, preferences, and fitness goals.

All this data can be used to create highly engaging content and email campaigns. The more data you have the more you can understand your members and the easier it is to talk to them about what matters the most. And, ultimately, to market to them.

The key data you can collect is split into two categories:

## First-party data

**First-party data is the data you collect on your members. This includes their activity, purchase history, their membership duration, etc. Essentially any time they interact with your gym, you should be able to capture that data.**

First-party data is incredibly useful because it's historical data. It's a living record of everything your members have done. This gives you a lot of information to leverage when creating content and relevant email marketing campaigns.

The downside is because it's retrospective, you always need more. The second a member stops engaging with your gym the data stops and the accuracy of your communications will decrease over time.

## Zero-party data

**Zero-party data is the information members give to you. This includes their initial membership form when they joined your gym. Or the inquiry form if they're a prospect.**

Zero-party data can include survey responses, competition questionnaires, and any other information they knowingly and willingly provide.

This data includes their demographic data, their geographic location, their goals, interests, and preferences.



This information is excellent for creating aspirational content as well as identifying upsell and cross-selling opportunities.

The only thing to be aware of with zero-party data is it's not always 100% accurate as mood, expectation or incentives can impact responses. Despite that, it's still invaluable to create engaging content.

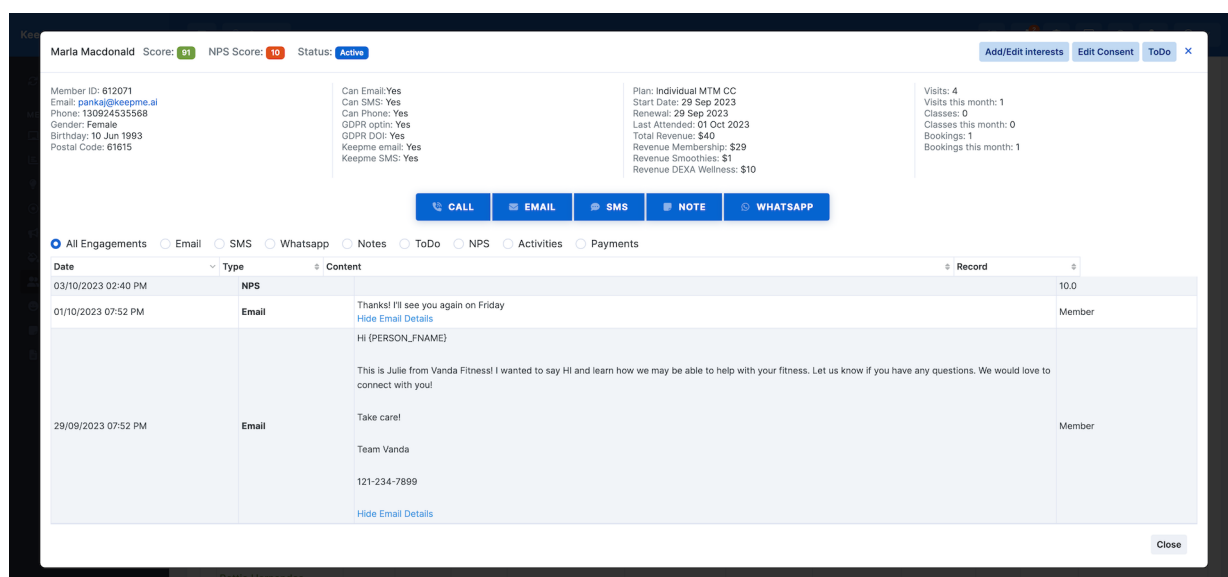
## Blending and Segmenting Data

Ideally, you want to pool both data types into a single membership profile. Being able to analyze intent and action gives you a far clearer picture of your members and will make your marketing activities more accurate.

Consolidating this data also allows you to segment the data. Segmentation lets you break down your members into smaller groups based on specific criteria. Like age, interests, classes booked, classes attended, and so on.

**The more you can segment your audience the more personalized and targeted your email marketing can become. This is the silver bullet of email engagement.**

If you can create campaigns that are built around the things you know your members are interested in both anecdotally and preferentially, then your engagement rates will increase dramatically. Not only that but your unsubscribe rates will go down too because your members won't feel spammed or, perhaps most importantly, ignored.



# Re-engaging High-Risk Members

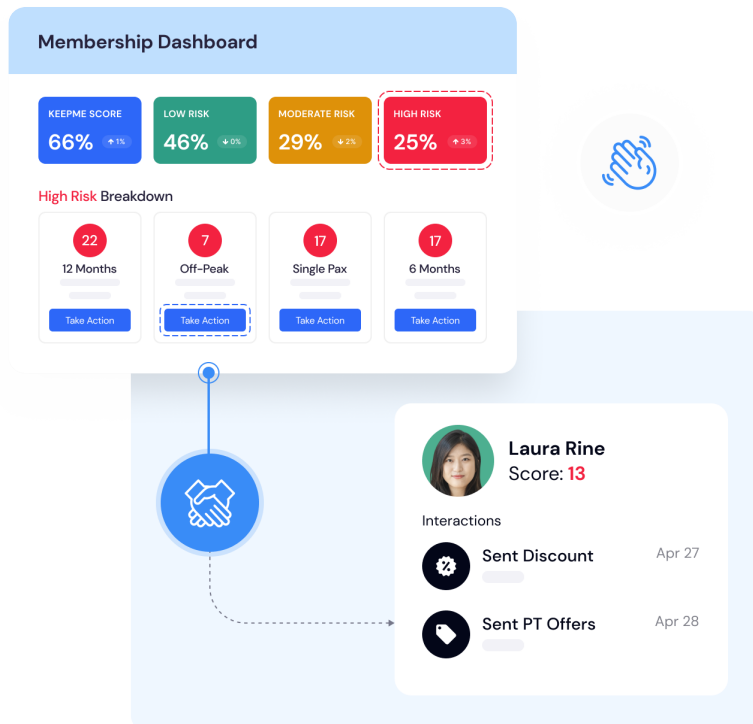
Members who are thinking of leaving are doing so because they don't see the relevance of attending your gym. Sometimes this is for a legitimate reason, like moving out of the area. But the majority stop attending because they have lost sight of why they went to the gym in the first place.

When relevance starts to decline the value exchange (what they get for their money) drops with it. So, essentially, members question both why they bothered going and why they're spending the money.

Re-engaging with these members is key. Fortunately, you have all of that member data to fall back on. Now, remember, third-party data has its limits. If the member hasn't attended for some time the reliability of that data will have decreased. However, their zero-party data such as their fitness goals are still likely to hold water.

Using the data you have available, coupled with incentives such as discounts, specialized check-ins, and access to loyalty programs you can reignite their interest.

You want your data to work as hard as possible to make these campaigns as relevant and as engaging as possible.



# Generative AI and Email Testing

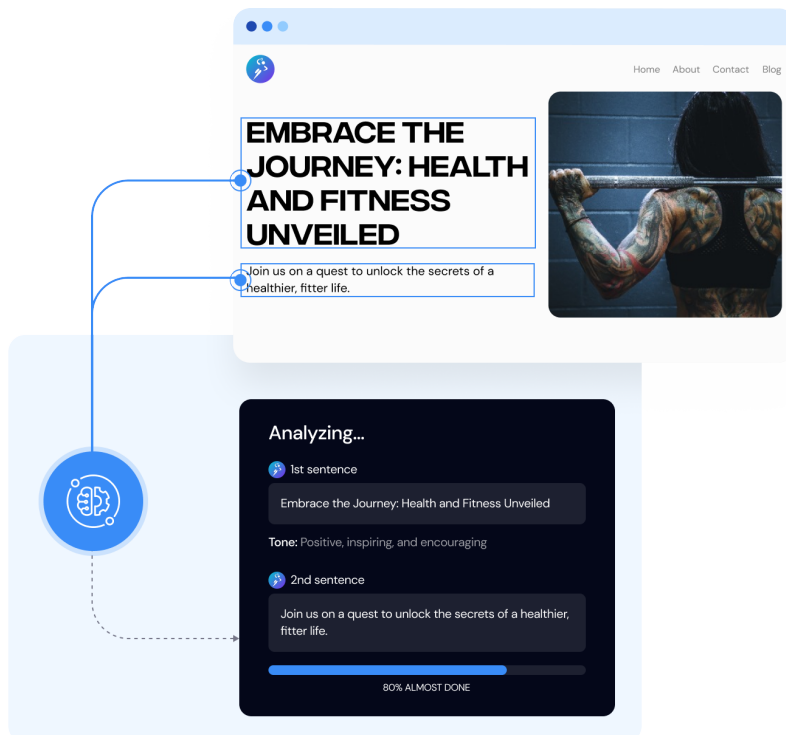
Generative AI is a rapidly developing technology that can *create written content* based on the prompts it's given. These tools can create entire blogs in minutes and emails in seconds.

They represent a step-change in the ability of fitness businesses to engage with their members at scale, regardless of their internal capacity. It also frees you up to focus on servicing your members.

Feed the AI-powered content creator tool key data like your member demographics, interests, needs and wants, the theme of your communication, products you want to promote, the calls to action, and how many emails you need.

It can then create tailored content for each email in the campaign and even provide A/B versions for split testing. Creating campaigns in this way allows you to do more and go faster.

The more you use these tools, coupled with some robust analysis of the results, will allow you to iterate your campaigns so each subsequent campaign is better than the last.



## Putting it all together

The fitness industry is changing. The application of technology on the gym floor, wearable tech, and an app for everything has turned health and wellness digital.

Member expectations have dramatically changed in line with an always-online, real-time data lifestyle. Fitness centers and gyms need to evolve with these changing behaviors or risk being left in the dust.

By marrying established marketing practices, cutting-edge AI, membership data and personalized and relevant content, gyms and fitness operators can position themselves at the forefront of this digital change.

Creating engaging communications that make members feel heard, valued, and understood puts your gym at the front of members' minds. Front of mind is 'tip of tongue'. Tip of tongue is relevant. Relevant is valuable.

When your members see your gym as valuable your relationship becomes stronger and sustainable long term, motivating them towards a healthier future.

## A Word from Keepme's Director of Marketing



**Hilary McGuckin**  
Director of Marketing,  
Keepme

*“As the Director of Marketing at Keepme, I've had the privilege of witnessing a remarkable transformation in the fitness industry's approach to member engagement in the last year alone. Thanks in part to the smart technologies now available but also as forward-thinking operators embrace it to optimize tried and tested strategies that have been fuelling growth for other sectors.*

*Today, hyper-personalization stands as the fundamental pillar in a fitness operator's pursuit of excellence, be it for member acquisition or cross-selling ancillary services to your membership base.*

*By embracing the smart strategies in this guide, fitness operators can achieve a new level of email engagement where members feel not just like customers, but valued participants in a thriving community. This not only creates happier members but also enthusiastic advocates, who create a flywheel of referral, potentially lowering your acquisition costs and ultimately resulting in revenue growth.*

*This guide exemplifies our commitment to guiding fitness operators towards a future where considerate personalization and delivering exceptional member experiences at scale are one and the same. And we're proud to say all of this is made possible through the smart technology that Keepme offers.”*

## A Word from the Author



**Phil Spurgeon**

Content and SEO Manager,  
Keepme

*“The fitness industry is on the edge of seismic change. This is saying something considering how much has already changed since the pandemic.*

*Operators are waking up to the immense potential of AI-powered membership engagement solutions to build more robust gym communities. These smart technologies allow operators to transform their marketing and communications strategies without having to increase headcount or take team members away from building relationships on the gym floor.*

*This innovation in membership engagement technology also means operators have access to more membership data than ever before. They can not only find out how often their members attend the gym, and for how long, but what classes they attend most often. They can even determine their favorite flavor of smoothie at the Hydration Station.*

*Leveraging this data, combined with these smart technologies, operators can create the hyper-personalized experience their members expect.*

*But personalization alone isn't enough. This guide not only lays out the best practices for operators to create personalized and engaging email campaigns, but how to adopt a value-based mindset.*

*By focusing on delivering personalized experiences underpinned by what matters most to club members, operators can deliver an authentic and memorable experience that makes members feel seen and valued. Changing the relationship from transactional to personal, building trust, and deepening the relationship.”*



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and a unique automations engine, Keepme  
supercharges and streamlines your team's efforts  
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