

# **How technology has changed the way of gyms operate**

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There are some industries that require F2F support – one of those is the gym industry. WFA does not strictly apply – although there were some efforts in place during COVID-19 to support members and enthusiasts, but essentially it is a F2F enterprise.

There is little doubt that the technologies in gyms has changed in recent times and there is an argument – we think to be correct – that COVID-19 acted as an accelerant to a number of developments and improvements. What we have seen within the sector is a significant move towards technology based support around the all-important F2F activities. In this paper we share a number of the key technology driven changes and reflect on how these changes are for the better in terms of convenience and efficiency.

## **Class Lists/taking attendance**

Pre-COVID class attendance was taken by way of a printed (paper based) mechanism and then checked after the class was completed. So step one at the front desk was to print the class list and place it in the studio – this was often both time consuming and frequently led to error (often caused by last minute attendees). The Trainer would get the clients to physically put a tick next to their name and after class was completed, the Trainer would give the list back to the front desk staff and they would manually check off the names. Again, another time consuming and often error prone exercise.

Post COVID (staff and trainers) download the “Gym Master” App where the above steps are removed and essentially automated. The Trainer uses their smart phone and automatically marks off all who attended. This technology makes tracking attendance for class so much easier and considerably more accurate. The App also places a considerable amount of the responsibility with the member – and that is a good thing going forward.

## **COVID Check**

Pre-COVID, when the gyms opened up but had restrictions around attendees, most places firstly used paper based systems where people would write down their details as part of the sign in process. This was repeated each time a member attended a session despite the repetition, in the name of good practice.

This was slowly overcome as members were provided with electronic based passes to enter the gym enabling them to swipe in and the record of the swipe would be recorded – another positive technology spin off. Changes enforced by the NSW Government (and other governments in other states) insisted on check in via a QR Code (only recently dismissed) with evidence of a valid COVID Vaccination Certificate. Again, a technology driven issue with much of the responsibility lying with the member. Both could be stored on a mobile phone – and more recently on a smart watch.

Members could email/use their COVID Vaccination Certificate where it would be uploaded to their account so they did not have to show the documentation each time they entered. The member would basically check-in via the NSW Services App (or relevant App in other States) and swipe in using their access pass. Technology driven improvement and streamlining.

## **Placing memberships on hold**

Pre COVID - if a member wished to place their account 'on hold' for a particular reason, they generally had to come to the front desk and fill out the form (paper based) where the staff would add the hold through the Gym Master system for them.

During COVID – all members' accounts were automatically placed on hold and the member did not have to advise as such. This was done automatically due to the 2 lockdowns in NSW (and elsewhere). This is a good example of technology improving systems for the benefit of the member.

Post COVID – members wishing to place their accounts 'on hold' can now do this through the App and it would in turn send the gym an email stating that the member has placed their membership 'on hold' and it automatically updates in their account.

This has had a dramatic, positive impact on the whole process of gym membership change and management.

## **Event applications and hiring rooms in the gym**

Pre COVID – members wishing to book one of the rooms for a particular reason – the process was cumbersome. Once again, the member would have to come to the front desk and check with the staff - get a form to be filled out - and return making the payment via the front desk EFTPOS terminal. Once this was completed the staff member would put the entry into the system and if there was alcohol at the event it was necessary to copy the RSA and attach to the application as proof.

Post COVID – the members now can send an enquiry message via the website, check availability, and if they wish to proceed the events staff will email them back the electronic form and payment details for the member to pay via direct deposit and email a proof of payment. A couple of days prior to their booking they receive the policy again in regards to what they can and cannot do in the booking - everything is done online from start to finish. A much more efficient approach thanks to developed technology.

## **Purchasing items**

Purchasing items was traditionally done using an EFTPOS card (or cash) but now can be achieved through the member's account automatically as well as using the Tap and Go option (through their smart phones or watches). This is proving successful. Gyms sell a range of items such as food, drinks, towels or resources for the classes.

Pre COVID – if the member wished to purchase something it was done either with cash or their EFTPOS card (credit/debit).

Post COVID – Cash/EFTPOS is still a valid way to purchase an item at the gym, but now members can make payments automatically from their nominated card or their bank account. Tap and Go is an easy option - they simply use their smart device (watch or phone) with no need to get their card out or pay in cash. This is proving to be a very popular option – especially with the smart watch (or equivalent) which they wear for both convenience and relevant health and fitness checks. In reality, the modern gym user only needs a smart watch on the wrist to function perfectly well – without carrying other items that could get lost or mislaid.

In all technology has certainly changed how gyms operate on a daily basis - in a good way and making it easier for the members and staff members. Accepting COVID-19 as an accelerant during a difficult time explains why significant change has been achieved in a relatively short time frame. The changes, brought about using technology, have improved the systems remarkably – and made the varied processes for gym members much simpler and expedient.

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