

Orangetheory Fitness calls itself “more than a gym” and even a cursory look at the fitness chain shows that statement to be completely true. Founded in 2010, the fitness chain has experienced explosive national growth, earning recognition as the country’s [top woman-owned business in 2017](#). This year, Entrepreneur ranked Orangetheory as the [fourth-fastest growing franchise brand](#), well ahead of industry competitors Planet Fitness and Club Pilates.

Orangetheory achieved this explosive growth with an aggressive franchise model and personal connections with each of its customers. No matter the location, Orangetheory prides itself on being equipped to customize workout experiences for any customer at any time.

While it’s good for the overall brand, this hyper-customized approach made for a marketing challenge. When the Toledo and Perrysburg Orangetheory locations began a relationship with Communica in early 2019, account executive Ben Lawton and director of data integration Deanna Lawrence had their work cut out for them.

Localizing a national brand on a budget

Though Orangetheory does a significant amount of national-level social media advertising, each Orangetheory franchise location also has its own marketing budget, albeit a small one. Orangetheory tasked Communica with localizing their national brand in such a way that it both raised Orangetheory’s Toledo-area profile and attracted potential new customers.

Lawton and Lawrence decided on a two-part social media marketing strategy aimed at extending the Orangetheory brand beyond the workout itself, demonstrating that Orangetheory was both an effective part of their customers’ fitness plans but also their life as a whole. The plan hinged on identifying what Lawrence calls “adjacent spaces,” that is, social media audiences one step removed from Orangetheory’s core fitness audience.

“That’s probably the best way to grow the brand,” said Lawrence, “because they have their core. They know who that is. But now, what are the areas on the periphery, like nutrition, that we can target to grow that brand?”

The first part of extending into those adjacent spaces came by targeting “micro-influencers,” other people or businesses with target markets related to Orangetheory’s core fitness demographic. The most significant of these micro-influencer connections came through a chance encounter with Dr. Emily Hayman and David Schmenk, the co-founders of Toledo-based Neuroflex Juice Co.

“I knew David and Emily from when I used to go to yoga,” said Lawton. “Neuroflex Juice Co. serves an adjacent health and fitness space we find appealing. For example, they are well-connected in the yoga community in the Toledo-area and their loyal customers fit the target audience Orangetheory is after.”

With significant overlap between their goals, a partnership between Neuroflex and Orangetheory seemed to make sense as a part of the joint program. Neuroflex created an orange-colored, signature juice blend, designed to enhance the post-workout burn experienced through an Orangetheory workout. By purchasing a bottle of the new blend, branded “Theory”, customers will receive a discount on select monthly membership levels at Orangetheory Fitness Toledo or Perrysburg.

In turn, Neuroflex held juice clinics on two consecutive Saturdays at Orangetheory, exposing the brand to Orangetheory’s client base.

Now, Communica is exploring other partnerships with local businesses that can raise the profile of Orangetheory while also building partnerships with other like-minded businesses.

Marketing by listening

The second prong in Communica’s two-part Orangetheory strategy involved connecting with Orangetheory customers on a person-by-person basis, also known as “nano-influencing.” This approach of showcasing and boosting user-generated content like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts in such a way that it demonstrates the core qualities of the overall brand. While it can sound time-intensive, Lawrence quickly identified an efficient time-saving strategy: listening.

“We always want to start there,” she said, “Because we always want to understand a brand’s target market before we jump into the space thinking we know everything about it.”

By listening to what users were saying and amplifying their positive experiences, Orangetheory could easily position itself as a key part of their users’ lives, a crucial goal for this campaign. A Listening first response strategy has also resulted in another key benefit: even more user-generated content.

“When a brand is responsive, then their organic content really begins to grow,” said Lawrence.

While social media marketing can fall into a cookie cutter pattern of stock images and graphics, this user-generated content has consistently helped Orangetheory stand out, offering a significant improvement over their previous marketing strategy.

Targeting user-generated content can also allow for Orangetheory to branch into adjacent spaces without a business partner. A Perrysburg Orangetheory customer’s recent trip to Mount Everest is a key example.

“The customer had climbed Mount Everest and had an Orangetheory sign with them and they posted a picture to Facebook,” said Lawrence. “We took that Mount Everest post and boosted it,

targeting people who like climbing in the Perrysburg area. That way, our relevance and engagement are really strong.”

Orangetheory rewards a hands-on approach

Though this two-part approach is more hands-on than other marketing strategies, both Lawton and Lawrence feel the returns have justified the time investment, maximizing the return on a limited marketing budget.

“We’ve had to focus on every dollar that we’re spending and think about how can we make the most of it in terms of engagement within this community on this budget,” said Lawton. “It’s a different feel than some other clients and it can be humbling, but it shows the benefits of a strategic, data-driven approach.”

Lawrence believes Communica’s experience with Orangetheory also backs a data-driven approach. By utilizing a hyper-focused, hyperlocal approach to marketing, Communica can quickly adapt based on near-instant data returns identifying consumer interests.

“The data is driving everything that we do. If things aren’t good, we change them. We shift,” she said. “And that reminds us the consumer is in charge. No matter what.”