

Fitness centres MOVE TO MALLS

If it's health therapy you are looking for in organised retail outlets, then you might be the ideal candidate for mall gyms, for this is the new fitness trend that is catching on among fitness freaks who are seeking new locales, away from the bustling marketplace. Mall gyms are the latest addition to mall mania after shopping, eating, and entertainment. **Neha Malhotra** checks out

Initially, gyms were found in the unorganised sector with small gyms in every nook and corner of the country. During the past years, this stage was followed by the opening up of gyms with additional facilities, which were an attraction for people. Today, a new trend seen in health segment is the opening of gyms in malls. But, see that it may be difficult for gym goers to go down to these gyms by resisting

temptations on its way for they need to walk past a McDonald's restaurant, a Ruby Tuesday restaurant, ice cream kiosks and the likes, which are all present in the mall. Is the concept of gyms in malls being successful? The answer is a big 'YES'. **Istayak Ansari, Vice President, Gold's Gym India,** says, "Our first Gold's Gym in a mall in South Asia is in Bashundhara Mall of Dhaka where we enrolled over 2,000 members in the first year of operation.

The gym Thirty thousand square feet in size, the mall is spread across three levels. Currently, it is the largest gym in South Asia. Our second gym in a mall was in Oshiwara of Mumbai with 12,000 sq.ft of space and over 1,200 members. In January'08, we launched a gym in Mumbai - Vashi at Raghuleela Mall, which measures 12,000 sq.ft and has an indoor swimming pool with a membership base of over 750 members that is growing." Giving information

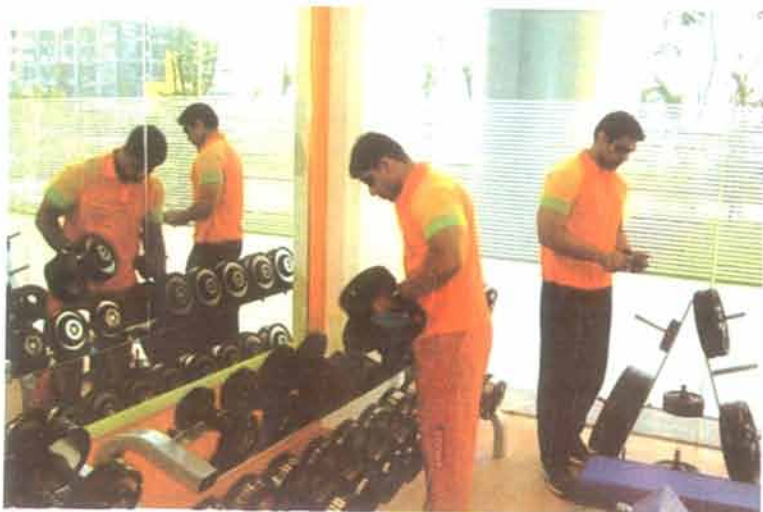
on the issue, Vivekanand, Managing Director, FitnessOne India Ltd, says, "Today, malls are the most visited places due to their entertainment value - food courts, movie theatres, shopping, supermarkets etc. So, why should not we workout at the mall as well?" This gives a clear picture as to what gym owners are thinking of. Consequently, we can say that the concept is a successful format.

Raison d'être

Malls are usually busy and crowded areas and this makes huge footfalls for

retailers present in them. Gyms are also cashing in on this very aspect of malls. More and more gyms are presently coming up in malls. According to Istayak Ansari, Vice President, Gold's Gym India, "Two major benefits of being in a mall are infrastructure and footfall. Infrastructure would include good parking space, space on single floor, air conditioning and power back-up and internal and external branding. High footfall and higher visibility for the gym ensure higher volume of business." Also, malls offer security,

which makes them a preferred location for women. Women with children feel that it is a good concept for when they are working out, their children can enjoy the attractions in the malls. Agreeing to this, Mr Mall says, "Our belief is that mall is a new marketplace and women consumers actually feel that it is better in quality and safer than a high street. Therefore, a fitness centre would be a logical and sensible concept to offer in the mall package. We ran a pilot gym in Mumbai and it has seen the fastest ramp up for Talwalkars in the last 75 years." Besides giving security, malls also provide greater and bigger spaces. Mr Vivekanand feels, "The advantage of opening a gym in a mall is that it offers a bigger space, visibility and acceptance amongst the fitness freaks." From the point of view of mall owners, they prefer to give these



locations to gyms because retailers do not want to open outlets on higher levels of malls. Another reason why mall developers could be housing them is purely in the quest of higher rentals.

Acceptance

Gyms in malls is a concept that has emerged from the popular international markets. Gyms are generally spread over a huge ground area with all the facilities that one can think of. Cardio, weight lifting, spa, aerobics, yoga, water, aerobics, steam, sauna, rock climbing and so on are all found under one single roof. Besides these, fresh juices and café service also form part of these gyms. People were used to working out in gyms in and around their residential area. So, if they are ready for the concept of gyms inside a mall, the location of the mall also matters. Consumers would definitely

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Istayak Ansari, Vice President, Gold's Gym India

not go to a mall that is located far away from their homes. Conforming to this point, Mr Ansari says, "I feel that there are only advantages of being in the mall. The only factor one must keep in mind is the location of the mall and its proximity to residential areas. Unlike shopping where you visit a mall once or twice a week, a Gold's Gym member will visit the gym at least four to five times a week. Majority of the members look out for gyms, which are within 10



minutes' driving distance." With the success of one such gym, others have been tempted to enter this format. Mr Vivekanand informs, "The concept is beginning to catch on. It is being accepted, because fitness is really

getting big these days as the awareness is increasing." Agreeing to this, Mr Mall says, "The typical walk-in to the gym enquiries in the mall is about three to four times what you get in a neighbourhood or a high street gym. This is what we can say after running a gym for a year now." People are grasping the concept and they are liking it also. Parag Aurora, a member of Fitness First Gym in Ambience mall, Gurgaon, feels, "The only part that pinches about going to a gym in the mall is that you have to pay for the



"Over 50 per cent of the purchase of a fitness centre membership is an impulse purchase for the first time user, and from the impulse purchase follows the habitual purchase and lifestyle purchase by people who are already exposed to fitness and fitness centres. It is like buying a colour TV for the first time and then graduating to a LCD with home theater."

Vikram Aditya Bhatia, Managing Director, Fitness First India Private Limited



mall parking, which is an addition to the gym fees. But, the good part is that, after a tiring workout at the gym, you can stroll inside the mall and check out the new clothing that has come out. This further motivates you to get in shape. It's like going in a circle."

Road ahead

The concept of gyms in malls will soon be a winner. Mr Ansari expresses,



"Future gyms will have lots more to offer to their members. They will have dedicated space for health, beauty and fitness related products under one roof. These gyms will offer product and services like spa, salon, skin clinic, health supplements and health products, sports and gym apparels, medical or sports rehabilitation centre and salad and juice bar." The concept of fitness is also fast building up in the country and people are becoming very conscious about how they can stay in

"The investment for opening a gym in a mall or any other gym is the same. The investment depends on where the mall is located. And, in the mall, the gym can be located on higher floors and, therefore, occupancy cost will not be an issue."

**Damodar Mall, Chief Executive Officer,
Innovation and Incubation, Future Group**

shape. Mr Mall says, "The commitment to physical exercise is something that people end up postponing quite often. In a mall, the exercise becomes a very convenient way. For instance, if you are coming to the mall for other purposes, you might end up committing to the fitness regime because of the mall." Gyms have been successful in other formats. So, hopefully, it should do well in malls as well. Mr Vivekanand articulates, "We need to wait and watch. Our gyms in IT parks are doing quite well." Innovations in retail formats have given the much-needed impetus to the retail industry for trying new concepts out and bringing in changes. Gyms in malls is one such innovative concept and this will surely fulfill customers' requirements. Therefore, let's shop, eat and workout, all these under one single roof.



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