

Blink Fitness' SVP of marketing talks pivoting amid the pandemic and the power of influencer marketing

Article



When Blink Fitness had to temporarily close its doors at the height of the pandemic, the company quickly shifted its focus to where consumers were: online.

We recently spoke with Michelle Horowitz, senior vice president and head of marketing and communications at Blink Fitness, about the online workout classes the company began offering last year as a way to keep members engaged, the role that influencers continue to play in its marketing efforts, and the channels that work best for the brand.

What did Blink learn from 2020?

2020 was an unprecedented experience, and we've definitely seen an acceleration into the digital age for the industry. We spent the first few months of the year prior to COVID-19 with a totally different marketing plan. So, we had to completely pivot and reprioritize our focus.

The shift with gym closures that happened in mid-March 2020 was also unprecedented for our business, which primarily relied on the footprints of retail and our 100-plus gyms. A lot of the shift really went to rethinking how we share our digital content, and it gave us an opportunity to be innovative. Less than a week after we closed, we launched an online fitness class, called "Get Up & Blink," that we did daily on Facebook. It was created by our personal trainers, and each day we had a different trainer focus on a different exercise, from yoga to weightlifting. We did that five times a week and saw a tremendous impact. It was primarily focused on engaging and retaining our current membership base, but we opened it up to everybody. We reached nearly 1.9 million people and are continuing to do so. Now it happens twice a week.

We also have an app that launched in 2019, and it has become a tremendous vehicle for us to stay engaged with our membership base, as well as to invite new members to join.

Tell us more about Blink's mobile app.

There are three components to the app: fitness, nutrition, and a component we call "recovery." We took content that was produced by Blink—as well as some popular fitness partners like Aaptiv and Daily Burn—and included all of those on the app. Members can also use the app to enter the gym, so it's a frictionless and contactless experience.

Additionally, we've introduced two new products. One is a reservation system for our busier gyms, which allows people to think about when they want to come in. We also allow people to find out how busy their gym is. Essentially, it's a capacity tracker that we've tied into the app. We want to make people feel comfortable coming into the gym and allow them the freedom

to plan their experience. The app was always important, but it was secondary. Obviously, at the time of its creation, there weren't plans for the capacity tracker and reservation; that all came out of this time of uncertainty.

Is the app available only to members, or is there an ability to buy a standalone subscription if you're not currently a Blink Fitness member?

There will be a digital version of the app that you can purchase as one of the membership opportunities, we're just not there yet. We still have a three-day free trial where people can jump on, sign up, and experience the app.

Shifting gears, influencers have become a big part of Blink's marketing strategy. Can you speak to how the company is focusing on this particular channel?

I'll step back a bit and say that our content strategy has really become the backbone of our marketing and advertising strategy. It's giving us the freedom to focus on specific audience segments and within relevant channels.

We realized that a lot of our micro-influencers have their own followers and people that count on them for direction on their wellness journey. By engaging with those influencers, we're really focused on making Blink central to that community. If we dig a bit deeper into body inclusivity, we're really looking at influencers at a variety of stages in their life with different rationale for coming to the gym. They may want to lose weight, they may want to gain tone, or they simply just want to have fun.

It's really about how you feel versus how you look. Our influencers acknowledge that going to the gym and working out can often be intimidating—especially for people who are at the beginning of their journey, and they don't know how to begin. Often for women, the weight training area of the gym can be scary. So, helping them soften and ease people into the gym experience is important.

Is there any channel that you've seen the most success on thus far?

I don't believe one channel in and of itself can work well. They can exist, but it's when things work in tandem—whether you call it the flywheel effect or force multiplying—that's when we get some of our best results.

We have optimized each of our channels going from social to email to even pay [for] performance, which is operating at a much higher level than it has in the past. We try to focus on creating integrated storytelling. It's all really threaded together, rather than us looking at

each of the channels separately. That said, across the board, we've seen tremendous improvement in our channels—particularly email and social—and we continue to iterate and explore. We just recently launched on TikTok, which we're super excited about, and it really gives us an opportunity to authentically reach people on that channel.

We're open to exploring and building on the channels that we're currently on. And that goes back to our content strategy, along with how we look at specific audience segments and use those channels to reach people. It's the classic march to the customer: right message, right time, right channel.