

Marketing Advanced Programming In Climbing Gyms

June 23, 2025

Posted By: Kirby Kahl in [CWA Blog](#)



Intermediate and advanced climbing programming can be some of the most challenging gaps in climbing programs to build, sell, and do well. There are several hurdles in the way, including recruiting and retaining talented staff who can teach the material, building a curriculum, filling classes, and narrowing marketing efforts to ensure they hit the target market.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Tuesday 'Kirby' Kahl, an accomplished coach and past presenter at the CWA Summit. She has written for the CWA for two years.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is for owners and programs staff.
- **What Will You Learn:** How to sell your advanced programs to your members.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** The CWA provided an in-depth sidebar inside the article defining key terms and helpful resources. We have a signup form for receiving more marketing assistance from the CWA we'd love for you to participate in.

Segmentation in marketing is usually thought of as a digital-first strategy, but it can be applied to live events just as effectively.

As programming elevates, the target audience will narrow. Each community varies a bit, but the target audience tends to be a lot smaller than the audience for beginner or even intermediate

programming. Established communities with ample access to outdoor climbing, like Salt Lake City and Denver, may have a larger pool of climbers to pull from, but many communities can still run higher-level programming with success.

Sidebar: Determining Your Target Audience

The following strategies in his article explore marketing tactics for getting your target audience to try out your advanced programs. It would likely be helpful to understand who this mysterious target audience is.

But first, let's define what an advanced program even is.

Like your target audience, the definition of an advanced program will likely vary depending on where you are. Folks in Denver or Salt Lake City might not consider a 'Learn to Lead' Course an 'advanced program', but folks in New Orleans might. This should be your first step: to define the scope and breadth of the definition. Make a list of programs that fit the bill for your specific community. Poll your internal staff, especially those who interact with the public, such as front desk employees. They are a wealth of insight into your community.

You can also use external factors, like your community's engagement with LCOs (local climbing organizations), and what courses they may (or may not) already offer. Do they provide field trips to outdoor climbing areas? What about other guiding companies? Getting specific with your definition of advanced programming makes the next step simple. Note that this can include programs you currently do and do not offer. It makes it easy to grow if you have a list beyond what you're already doing.

Once you have a working definition of your advanced programming, create an archetype of the member who would take it.

This can include demographic data and anecdotal data. The only thing to do here is ensure it's measurable. Use your existing member data, based on your archetype, to create a pool of your current members who would fit this definition.

Think of all the tools you have, whether that's your staff (and their interactions with members) or it's data you can use from other organizations (like the CWA) or LCOs. Folks usually have rules around the data, but if you strip any identifying information or contact information, other organizations may be more inclined to help.

At the end of the day, this is for you to use. Whether it's creating a mailing list, or just knowing that there are approximately 'X number' of climbers who may be interested in a

multi-pitch rescue class, it's helpful nonetheless. If all else fails, knowing what you don't know can be just as useful, because it teaches you what you want to learn about your members in the future.

It's about knowing your audience and connecting with them. For the purposes of this article, we'll assume you've got the bases of social media marketing and posting flyers down.

Want More Marketing Tips? Tell us below:

Create your own user feedback survey

Personal Invitation

A personal invitation to a class by a staff member is one of the best ways to encourage folks to sign up. People love getting personally invited and seen by your staff: it's human nature, and in this context, it's a compliment to their dedication to climbing.

As your staff go on patrol and interact with the community, ensure they are aware of the upcoming class schedule. If while walking around, that staff member notices a community member who fits the mold of the aforementioned archetype or is actively working on a skill that's covered in an upcoming class or workshop, that's a great opportunity to forge a connection and make the invitation.

Additionally, management, seasoned staff, and program managers can also make personal invitations to community members who would benefit from the class and be a good fit. The success of this strategy often comes down to how engaged in your community your staff is.

Digital Leads

Previous digital signups are a great resource in this process, as well. Using the data you already have, you can determine and follow up with previous program registrants to see if they're interested in progression. These folks have already demonstrated a willingness to commit to programming with both time and money and demonstrate a desire to grow in their climbing.

Sending 'thank you' emails requesting feedback and linking to future courses is a natural and non-labor-intensive way of feeding your programming.

Timing Considerations

Evenings and weekends will likely forever be the most popular class times unless we see an overhaul of classic working times. More advanced climbers are likely to climb outside, particularly on weekends and during good weather windows. This mostly leaves us with evenings for these courses and weekends during the off-season. It is also worth ensuring your

classes and workshops don't fall on the same day as other large events in your area, particularly those in the climbing realm and those that are climbing-adjacent. Combining your calendar with a calendar of these types of events allows for ease of scheduling.

If large competitions or other climbing events are happening in your area, you could aim to capitalize on the influx of climbers from out of town. Timing this with the existing events can be challenging, but is doable. This year, the USA Climbing Youth National Championships are in Portland, Oregon. The host gym and another local facility are both hosting training camps leading up to the event.

It is also worth noting that different class structures may thrive in different times. A recurring class, such as an adult team or a shorter class (under two hours), will thrive in an evening environment or at any time your gym is busy. Larger workshops may demand the time availability of a weekend. Adult teams and series classes may also do well in the early morning if your gym possesses a strong before-work climbing crowd.

There are many ways to market your programs, from the broader posters, flyers, and social media posts to the more curated personal invitations.

Knowing your audience and where they are at is the key strategy to marketing programs, but especially your advanced programs. Your community base is also likely willing to tell you what kind of classes they would like to take. Being engaged in the community and regularly taking in feedback and ideas from your customer base will give you a leg up in marketing.

Marketing for Marketers

Marketing in indoor climbing gyms has evolved ten times over in the last decade. Are you interested in receiving more resources about marketing for your members? Let us know, and we'll work on it for you!

[Create your own user feedback survey](#)

About the Author



Tuesday "Kirby" Kahl is a movement specialist, passionate instructor, and athlete. She is the Programs Director of Skyhook Bouldering in Portland, Oregon. Kirby has worked every job in a climbing gym, from manager, retail buyer, routesetter, and everything in between, but her true passion is instruction. Kirby's primary populations are youth and adaptive competitive athletes, but she loves assisting climbers of all ages and abilities and helping them reach their goals. She is a student at Portland State University

studying Applied Health and Fitness and minoring in Neuroscience. She has been coaching for the last 15 years across several sports, enjoying a bubbling career as a swim coach before falling in love with climbing. You can find her bouldering, multi-pitching, competing, or backcountry skiing when she's not in school or coaching. Off the wall, she's a dedicated plant mom and painter.



UNDERSTANDING AUTO BELAY MISUSE: PART 2

June 27, 2025

RISK MANAGEMENT IN ROUTESETTING



June 16, 2025