

Streamlining Development In Indoor Climbing Gyms

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Developing is “growing or becoming more mature, advanced or elaborate,” according to Google dictionary. You, your company, and the climbing industry as a whole are all developing all the time, but are you getting the most out of your development process? This article will introduce a set of tools you can use to ensure your development plans are strategic, efficient, and streamlined.

In the well-known [Tuckman model of group development](#) there are four stages of development: forming, storming, norming and performing. Indoor climbing as an industry is currently in the productive, yet chaotic, “storming” phase of development, which means our industry lacks consistent access to long-term cumulative, generally-accepted knowledge and best practices. We are all still pushing boundaries and creating these resources. In the rapidly-evolving, entrepreneurial indoor climbing niche, “[industry standard](#)” is a moving target. As a business you are trying to meet or exceed that standard while learning what is contributing to your success.

If the definition and standard of indoor climbing gyms are not clear, the direction of your development might also be unclear. Using the right tools to direct development in operations, programs, or expansion will move us toward the “norming” phase of development, which allows your company more success, a more positive culture or better customer experience.

As an example, ponder the variety of answers you might receive to the following:

- Ask gym owners: Is indoor climbing a part of the outdoor industry or fitness industry?
- Ask operators: What does risk management include?
- Ask routesetters and coaches: What are the best resources for climbing terminology or standards?

- Ask employees: Who is our target customer?
- Ask every employee: What is your company's mission?

If you can answer each of these questions clearly for your company, then you have done your homework. If any debate or confusion comes up from these questions, there is still room to develop.

What to develop?

Each gym or brand is developing new facility designs and product ideas, testing their viability, building prototypes, deciding on marketing issues such as pricing, packaging, promotion, and positioning. The willingness to self-evaluate and look critically at our organizations can help us reach peak effectiveness in these endeavors.

Consider if there is a way in each of the following areas YOU could make the customer's experience 10% better:

- Mission and Vision
- Company Organization, Management, Staffing, HR functions
- Facility Design & Wall Design
- Routesetting: Commercial & Competition
- Operations and Valuation
- Membership Products, Services, Programming (Adult/ Youth) and Events
- Competitive Analysis, Marketing, Sales, Pricing, Tracking
- Expansion Opportunities

Each of you can undoubtedly talk for hours, if not days, about specifics related to at least one of the topics listed above. In order to keep things simple, determine **3-5 priorities** to focus on each year. Even better, turn those priorities into **Objectives and Key Results** to increase accountability within your company.

Questions to gut check your priorities includes

- Is the idea really part of your company's bigger mission/vision?
- Does it fill a short-term or long-term goal?
- Has a customer or staff member said they want this feature or product?

Tools for Developing

Have you ever stared at a blank document and not known where to start? Me too.

Starting from scratch after you determine the priorities can be daunting. There are several tools available to help the development process feel more approachable.

Piggyback on outside industries. Knowing what business resources are available and which of those can be utilized in climbing gyms helps us not have to develop from scratch. Additionally, utilizing another industry's bones and structure for a project and then substituting indoor

climbing content can help reduce time required on a project. Potential resources include but are not limited to: HR resources and software, fitness industry, data tracking, gymnastics or other sports program structures, project management tools for expansion, case studies from successful businesses, etc.

Utilize existing resources within the climbing industry. Industry-specific resources can help streamline development, and new resources are being created rapidly. If someone else has done the work, it benefits you to not create the same material again. Potential resources include but are not limited to: CWA, USA Climbing, IFSC, podcasts, climbing blogs, outdoor climbing organizations, magazines, books, guiding companies, supporting non-profits, fitness industry resources, climbing-specific vendors, research, etc.

Celebrate competition and know them well. If you have competition, you know your product is in demand. There is an opportunity to utilize the competition's idea and retool it, making it "more better" and specific to your brand. Your job is to LISTEN. People will tell you what they want. Take their feedback, even when hard to hear, and find a way to implement.

Identify stakeholders. Stakeholder identification is understanding who is responsible for executing the development and who is holding them accountable. To do their best work, those executing the development need to feel supported, empowered, and appreciated.

Understand the timeline. Understanding how development fits in with gym happenings, events, ongoing duties, and responsibilities will help minimize stress around each project and keep goals realistic.

Communicate! Communicating what is being developed company- and community-wide increases trust, transparency, and satisfaction with customers/staff and helps them to celebrate the success created.

It takes time and energy to shift a good idea from infancy to execution, but these tools are a great way to ensure your development goals are achievable and align with your overall business strategy. Continuing to learn our best practices, document our changes and progress, and push the boundaries of indoor climbing will take our sport from adolescent to mature.

About The Author



Nicole Brandt runs Cypress Roots Consulting, a consulting company for climbing gyms helping them deep-dive into their company organization, programming, and culture. Nicole earned her degree in Outdoor Recreation with an emphasis in Tourism and has worked as the Program Director of Momentum and as a facilitator and guide across the Southeast and West. Currently based out of Salt Lake City, she spends her free time learning about yoga and herbalism.



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