

# Connecting the chain

## Staples uses online fitness program for satellite locations

By Chris Silva

The Staples Business Depot headquarters in Richmond Hill, Ontario has a full-service fitness facility on site, complete with treadmill and elliptical machines, free and machine weights, and guest trainers to offer fitness and wellness advice.

The company wants to ensure its workers are following healthy habits outside the office, however, and it wishes to be more connected to the 280 satellite locations across the country. As a result, Staples recently adopted the GetFit@Home regimen — an online circuit training program designed for use in the home for all Staples employees and their families.

“We recognized we didn’t have the physical capability to put the fitness component in all our stores,” remarks David Burt, general counsel at the Staples home office, “so we adopted the GetFit@Home program to provide our employees access to circuit and cardiovascular training.”

### How the program works

GetFit@Home was developed by TriFit, a fitness, health and wellness resources company based in Oakville, Ontario. The goal of the program is to provide simple, easy to administer and cost effective fitness opportunities to employer clients.

“Our target market is the workplace,” says Sue Pridham, a principal with TriFit. “It’s an online, interactive fitness and wellness program that can be used by businesses to create a sense of community within the organization.”

The online program is comprised of more than a dozen circuit training exercises that takes roughly 20 minutes to complete. Each circuit in TriFit’s program contains eight exercises. Participants are encouraged to complete a circuit two to three days a week and complement the program with cardiovascular activity on alternate days.

There’s also a database of exercises categorized by muscle group and fitness level that allows the user to customize their own program. In addition, a video clip of the exercises demonstrating correct technique, a personal fitness assessment tool, weekly e-tips and monthly wellness bulletin, and discussion boards on a range of topics are included in GetFit@Home.

The majority of the exercises are basic and require few resources. Variations of the plank, and squats and lunges, for example, are utilized. Employees can purchase optional equipment on their own — dumbbells, stability ball, tubing and/or a mat — to increase the variation and intensity level of the exercises. Users of GetFit@Home can also e-mail a TriFit health expert if they have questions about a particular exercise in a circuit.

Most companies using the program, including Staples, offer it as a benefit to their employees. “I think a lot of

companies are offering this as a way to attract, recruit and retain employees,” says Pridham. “And I know employees are looking for their employer to support a work-life balance, and this is one way to do this.”

### Internal promotion

Staples adopted GetFit@Home last October when the company sought a way to connect wellness activities throughout the chain. The office supplies firm has aggressively marketed the program to its workers, tapping an employee in each of its stores to serve as an advocate to promote not only the program, but also general fitness and wellness values, such as healthy nutrition and eating, drinking enough water and getting enough sleep.

To help the stores stay connected with headquarters, the general managers are in touch with TriFit representative Lauren Klacza, who operates on site at Staples headquarters. In addition to maintaining online communication with the GMs, Fitness and Wellness Coordinator Klacza also teaches fitness courses at the headquarters and develops programs and physical activity challenges for GetFit@Home.

“I manage a group of volunteer wellness representatives in the stores,” she explains. “When they roll out challenges and events, these are the people we contact with.”

The advocates can touch base with Klacza to get tips on how to motivate employees to participate in a particular challenge. The home office, for example, conducted a “healthy habits challenge” in March and April that promised a \$200 sports store certificate to the winner.

About a quarter of the Staples stores have an advocate, and Klacza confirms that number is increasing. Beata Nila has volunteered for that role at the Orleans, Ontario store. “Our furniture consultant Mike Leduc put together a GetFit@Home manual from the online information that is available to us, and many associates have used it to perform the circuit exercises or read about nutrition,” she says. “I would say at least 40% of the associates are fit, and this number is growing with the awareness of the program.”

### Showing results

According to company data, Staples employees have become more receptive to exercise in recent years. While in 2000, 25% of employees reported getting no exercise whatsoever, six years later that figure dropped to 10%. Also in 2000, only 23% of employees said they exercised more than three times per week, yet by 2006 that number climbed to 48%.



**David Burt, general counsel in the Staples home office, says general managers at satellite stores across the country are “very, very keen” on the GetFit@Home program.**



**“I think a lot of companies are offering this as a way to attract, recruit and retain employees,” Sue Pridham, a principal with TriFit, says of the GetFit@Home program.**

*In 2000, only 23% of Staples employees said they exercised more than three times per week, yet by 2006, that number climbed to 48%.*



Burt, in his role as the TriFit liaison at the home office, often posts exercises and health tips on coffee room bulletin boards, organizes hockey games in the parking lots and generally talks up the GetFit@Home program to anyone who’s interested.

While it’s too early to measure the impact GetFit@Home has had on Staples, he estimates that 1,000 of the company’s 13,000 employees have already signed up for the program, which is covered under their benefits package.

Burt says the program was widely discussed by store managers during the company’s national conference in Toronto this past March. “Our store GMs were very, very keen on the program, and they were going to go back to their offices to promote it.” — C.S.