



It All STAKs Up

Three fitness specialists join forces and find a winning formula for business

SUCCESS BY KATHRYN KORCHOK

STAK Fitness was founded 10 years ago by Karim Toupin-Chaieb, a Montreal businessman whose family was in the product import/export business. A fitness enthusiast employed by Énergie

Cardio as a procurement specialist, Toupin-Chaieb saw an opportunity in the supply of premium commercial fitness equipment to Quebec. It was expensive and difficult to obtain, and the timelines, payment terms

and customer service standards were lacking.

His entrepreneurial instincts kicked in and he founded STAK Fitness, with two partners, to source and supply high quality, yet well-priced studio training items – like stability balls, steps, mats, bands and tubes – to fitness facilities throughout the province.

Over the next six years, the company grew to become the supplier for



L to R: Karim Toupin-Chaieb, Greg Lawlor, Serge Juteau

more than 150 fitness organizations in Quebec.

A new team

But Toupin-Chaieb envisioned a bigger organization with an expanded product line and more clients. When his partners left to pursue other ventures, he connected with two long-time business associates who also believed STAK could grow beyond its regional base.

Before long, Serge Juteau and Greg Lawlor were on board as co-owners and managing partners of the Montreal-based organization, each contributing his own perspective and area of expertise.

Juteau, with a background in



STAK Head Office, Montréal, Québec

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finance and business operations, specializing in starting, running and operating businesses, specifically fitness clubs. Lawlor, a former physical education teacher, was a fitness industry educator, consultant and customer service specialist.

Marrying their skill sets with Toupin-Chaieb's experience in equipment sourcing, procurement and logistics, the three set out to grow the company in a way that united their business philosophy and their commitment to creating positive exercise experiences.

“Our driving force is really to support healthier lifestyles in our society,” says Lawlor.

First order of business

The name STAK was originally an acronym of the three original founders' first names. Since the company was already strongly branded and

experiencing success, the new partners decided to keep the name but find new words to fit the letters. They decided on solutions, trust, accountability, and knowledge – the four cornerstones of their business philosophy and customer service focus.

While the core business continued to be high-end equipment supply and service, the three expanded the company's business and educational offerings to reflect their own know-how, the growing needs of their customers and the increased sophistication and demands of their customers' clientele.

STAK set the bar high. Its equipment brands had to meet specific criteria: a proven track record of innovation, quality, durability, support and ease of use. Brands like Precor, Interactive Fitness, Total Gym, TRX, and Dynamic Fitness & Strength fit the bill. The brands also had to align philosophically with the company, with strategies >>

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STAK Fitness supplies high-end brands including Precor, Interactive Fitness, Total Gym, TRX, and Dynamic Fitness & Strength



that would, in turn, help STAK's customer base grow, learn, prosper and change.

"We found that the traditional model of opening a fitness club, creating an inviting room, letting folks pay membership to access that room, and expecting them to get results as part of a self-discovery model wasn't working very well," says Lawlor.

Services expand again

The STAK partners realized that they needed to do more than just

supply equipment. They wanted to create a new role, that of partner and trusted advisor. Today, the company's expanded role includes providing club consulting and planning, equipment leasing/financing, business assessments and educational programming. It added a national sales and support team in 2010 and now services more than 2,700 organizations, including fitness clubs, universities, municipalities, YMCAs, hotels and recreation centres.

The company also supplies branches



of the Department of National Defense, and it just set up a Hockey Canada-endorsed sports academy fitness facility with the Windsor-Essex Catholic School board in Ontario. Other projects are on the horizon as the company continues to grow.

Looking ahead, Lawlor sees STAK on the forefront of future innovations as the industry continues to evolve.

"We're transitioning from an industry that's been focused on aesthetics for the longest time and is now more focused on helping users to move and feel better," says Lawlor, noting that the fitness equipment industry is spending more money on research and development with a focus on bio-mechanical correctness and utilization. "We're continually observing, experiencing, listening and learning about solutions to help our customers." FBC

Kathryn Korchok is a freelance writer whose current passion is tennis. She also loves yoga, dance, hiking, and seeking balance in life.



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