

Yoga in Ireland

**A summary of market research
and strategic marketing applications**

By Pamela Butler

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Any yoga teacher or studio owner will recognise the questions fundamental to an effective marketing plan:

- Who is the target client?
- How can the client be helped?
- What attracts the target customer?
- What new market segments can be developed?

These are not the first questions that pop into mind when you think of “yoga”, but they are important to sustainable business success. Original research I undertook in 2014 provide some quantified answers.

The Irish Market

There is no raw data on the yoga market in Ireland, but a reasonable benchmark is that Ireland has 70,000 practitioners (1.5% of the population) including 1,500 teachers.

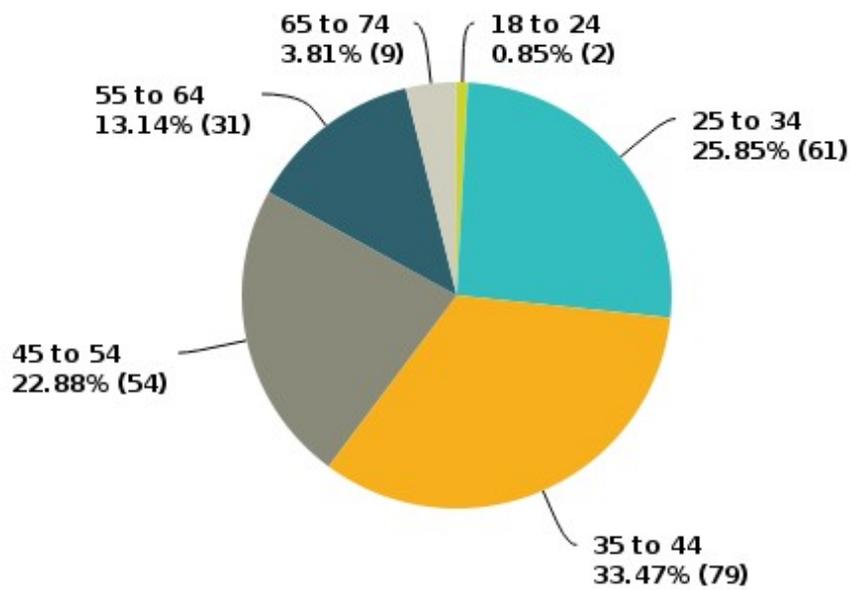
Within the yoga market, there is a great imbalance in the gender participation rate, as anyone who's witnessed an average yoga class will have observed, with only 12% males. To give some context, male participation rates in American and Australian¹ are higher:

	America 2012	Australia 2013	Ireland 2014
Female	82.2%	85%	88%
Male	17.8%	15%	12%

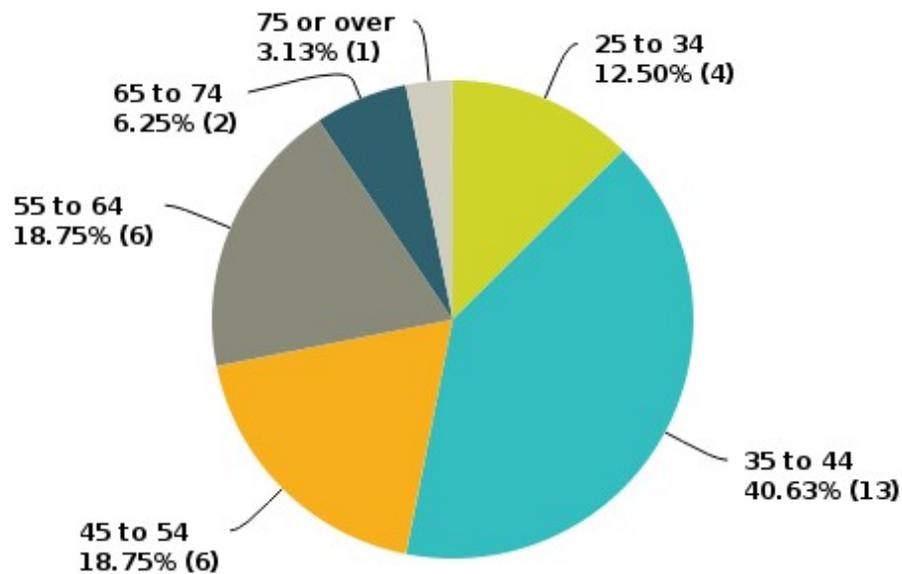
Bikram yoga appears to be more popular with men (it shows up as the most popular form practiced by men at 66%). These studios operate only in larger urban centres.

Women tend to take up yoga at a younger age than men, as illustrated in the charts below.

¹ There is no comparable research for the UK.



Female participation by age group



Male participation by age group

Ireland's population is aging, yet participation rates among the older age brackets at 14% is also lower than in America or Australia. This age group defaults to a more “present” rather than “future” temporal view, so to appeal to their sense of happiness, calm colors and a classes timed appropriately (late morning) may work best. Social interaction is appreciated, so encourage it and build a sense of community. This can create loyalty in your customers.

The majority of respondents in Ireland fall in the mid income range, earning €25,000-49,999, followed by slightly higher earners (€50,000-€74,999). These results are slightly different to American research which suggests that higher earners (US\$75,000-US\$124,999) tend to take up yoga. One interpretation of this data is that the approach to yoga is more down to earth in Ireland and less attached to brand names and social status as it might be in the US.

Motivation

Given the modern association of yoga with youthful athletic physiques, it is interesting to note that word-association was strongly geared to feelings of peace and calm. A free-association question (no words were suggested) produced these results: “Peace”, “relax/de-stress” and “calm” made up 37% of all responses. The most popular word suggesting physicality was “stretch/stretching”, offered by 6% of respondents. Other words were “breathe”, “strength”, “wellness”, “balance” and “mindfulness”.

Paradoxically, a separate question asking what the strongest motivator for starting yoga produced “flexibility” as the top motivator for 56% of respondents, with mental health (52%) and relaxation (50%) highly ranked as well.

Marketing applications

Once the market profile is understood, it can be acted upon.

The *Journal of Consumer Research* (2012) published an article “How Happiness affects Choice” (Moglner et al). Very briefly, the summary indicates the importance of color in marketing to your target audience. Hot yoga class might try red/ orange images to fire up those wanting athletic yoga; whereas blues and greens will speak to those seeking mindful, calming yoga.

Happiness type	
Calm	Excited
Temporal Focus: PRESENT Colors: Blue/Green Activities: walking, reading, yoga People: spouses, parents Brands: lululemon	Temporal focus: FUTURE Colors: Red/Orange Activities: dance, run, sex People: friends, children Brands: Apple, Nike

Compiled from Mogilner et al (2012)

New customer segments

Several teachers interviewed for this research commented on how seasons can inexplicably turn up huge numbers one year and small numbers the next. While some things may be beyond the scope of this research, tactics for developing new customer segments are available.

For example, knowing that male participation rates are low may encourage teachers to develop this segment by offering stronger classes timed for after-work or evening students. Engaging with athletic clubs and university teams may offer direct routes. The research also shows that men tend to start yoga later than women, so targeting men through men's sheds or other community

organisations may yield older (ages 35-44) male participants.

Advertising within schools (to teachers and staff) would yield results for early evening class to catch teachers leaving school at 4:30.

Using one's personal network was cited as a valuable approach to marketing within organisations. A personal contact could provide access to an organisational network (corporate, academic or public) that is not available to those on the outside.

Communication

What methods are most effective in reaching the consumer? Targeting teachers may involve a flier in the teacher's lounge of your local school; spreading the word within an organisation might be via email; but word of mouth is the most cited way people find out about classes, at 56%, through "friends," "pals" and "fellow teachers" (over 30% of respondents were teachers in this survey). Internet searches (47%), facebook (37%) and emails (37%) follow. Fliers account for 18%, but are considered a meaningful way to communicate in small urban centres and when aimed at older market segments. Twitter informs less than 3% of respondents and other apps just over 1% - though this may be on the rise.

Recommendations

- Use simple language for broad appeal.
- Create long-term customer loyalty by creating a sense of community within and outside your class.
- Use appropriate colors and images to target the customer you want.
- Build your brand: If you have a website, business cards and a facebook page, develop a logo or use the same color scheme and images across all platforms.
- Identify potential new segments and develop tactics to target your segments – including tailoring your offering.
- Market with *satya*, truthfulness, taking care to offer only what can be delivered well.

Yoga@astraea.net. Comments on this article are welcome. Original research available from the author. Thanks to YTI for their support.



About the author

Pam Butler has been living in Ireland for fifteen years and lives in a nature sanctuary and ancient woodland in Carlow. Qualified to teach yoga in 2000, she has instructed beginners and those establishing their own practice for 15 years. She holds an MBA in Professional Arts Management and is editor of *Common Sense: a book about people, planet and profit by a venture*

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