



## September Webnews

### Interview with Melissa McNeese

*Melissa McNeese has created a niche for herself within the fitness industry through her writing. She is not a fitness professional, but one who gathers and writes press releases on fitness dvd' for some of the top professionals in the country.*

**Has the study of Public Relations always been an interest of yours? How exactly did you fall into doing what you do?**

I entered college figuring I'd go into advertising. While there I did an internship in PR and thoroughly enjoyed it. The people I knew in PR definitely seemed happier than those I knew in advertising. But I didn't pursue a career in PR. It just happened to turn out that way.

**How did you get involved with representing fitness companies?**

Total serendipity; it was meant to be. My first job out of school was at an in-house ad agency for several video companies. From there I went to another company that was selling Orville Redenbacher popcorn to video stores. The Maier Group went on to work with other brands like Pepsi, Nestle, etc. and then we started bringing videos to video stores, too. One of those just happened to be the very first "Buns of Steel" tape. The success of that brand completely changed the direction of the company. We became a very successful fitness video company. From there, we were bought by our largest competitor. They already had Kathy Smith; Jane Fonda, Tony Little, Tamilee Webb, et al so I managed those brands, too. Then they moved that business to LA, I had my first child and 11 years later, I'm still doing what I love but I'm doing it for myself (and my clients, of course).

**Has representing fitness companies changed your way of living? Do you take the recommendations of the fitness gurus?**

No doubt I'd be twice my size if I weren't working with fitness videos and fitness experts! Yes, I consider myself SO lucky to be surrounded by such wonderful experts.

**Do you take your own advice in the releases that you write? Do you watch the DVDs that you broadcast, and do you take the classes that you publicize?**

I always watch the videos before I start working on a project. A pro can describe their program to me all they want but it doesn't click until I do the workout and experience it first-hand. I get as much of a thrill working out with them firsthand as any of your ECA attendees do at your conferences.

**What are some of the changes you have observed over the years within the market place.**

A big trend is what we're seeing on prime time TV now. "The Biggest Loser" and "Dancin' with the Stars" have gotten a lot of women off the couch and exercising again. What's great about these shows is the viewer can appreciate all the hard work that goes into the body transformations. Unlike the days of "Extreme Makeover", it's clearly NOT easy to lose that weight and yet, here we see people, in prime time TV, sweating it off and changing their lives. Very inspiring, whether it's a celebrity or a regular person. I think it's a great trend. Plus, these shows have translated into successful brands that make the ideas accessible to everyone.

"Dancin' with the Stars" has given a real boost to dance fitness; that whole category is booming. DVD series like "Dance off the Inches", the "10 Minute Solution" dance titles and Zumba classes are clearly sharing in the success.

Another trend is 'going back to what you know'. You know how we go back to comfort foods in rough times? I see fitness legends like Richard Simmons, Kathy Smith and Tamilee Webb enjoying a boost in their DVD sales now. In uncertain times, it's nice to go back to the familiar.

**What do you look for in a fitness dvd, and what are some of the pitfalls you see in marketing them.**

What do I look for in a DVD – an instructor who engages me, production values that make it easy to follow along, a workout that I can almost do and can see myself mastering after a few weeks.

A pitfall in marketing the DVD – a subpar product will get reviews that reflect that. Don't put it out there if it's not terrific. It'll kill your brand.

**Being a PR representative is a very time consuming occupation. Do you ever find yourself overwhelmed with work? How do you find your balance between being a mother while also catering to the needs of your clients?**

I think anyone who says they've struck that perfect balance is lying! I just do the best I can. I work with many editors and writers who also have kids so it all works out. I'm used to getting emails from them on the weekends and evenings. And sometimes, that's when I'm catching up too. And like most women, I wish I had more time to workout!

**Do you plan on continuing your career as a PR representative for the long run? Do you have any other plans aside from informing the public about these companies?**

I'm more of a 'let's see where this road leads' person than a 5-year planner. I absolutely love what I'm doing now. If I helped one person get off the couch today to workout, how great is that? Especially if that person was me!