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Two no-frills, 24-hour fitness chains based in Minnesota are growing rapidly and setting their sights on overseas expansion.

Pumping up the fitness franchises

By JACKIE CROSBY

Minnesota has long been a hub of fitness innovation and businesses. It's the birthplace of Rollerblades and waterskiing, the headquarters of Life Time Fitness and consistently ranks at the top of polls for its physically active populace.

It's also the home to two of the nation's fastest-growing fitness franchise companies -- Anytime Fitness and Snap Fitness. After years of blockbuster growth in the United States and Canada, both are ready to take their no-frills, 24-hour fitness club concept overseas.

Anytime Fitness recently signed a revenue-sharing agreement to launch up to 350 franchised clubs in Australia and New Zealand, with five centers expected to open in the next year.

The Hastings-based company also recently hired a director of international development, who'll explore markets in Western Europe. But as a recent press release also trumpeted, the company envisions its members someday visiting clubs in Tokyo, Berlin or Dubai.

"We're not even close to saturating the domestic market ... but we just think that most international countries are underserved when it comes to fitness facilities," said Chuck Runyon, president of Anytime Fitness, who started the company with Jeff Klinger in 2002.

Anytime Fitness expects to open its 1,000th store this year, with corporate revenue growing to \$21 million.

Snap Fitness, based in Chanhassen, launched its first outlet in 2004. These days it has about 1,500 franchise agreements and 750 clubs currently open. Last month, Snap announced it had taken on an undisclosed minority investment from Summit Partners, a Boston-based private equity firm, which Snap said will help it move swiftly into international markets.

"We wanted to deepen our bullpen a bit with some of the resources they have available," said Snap Fitness founder and CEO Peter Taunton. Snap has its eye on Europe, India, Mexico, Australia and the Middle East.



Glen Stubbe, Star Tribune

Danny Jimenez, 26, St. Paul, worked out on the weights Wednesday at Anytime Fitness in Roseville, Minn.