

PRACTICE PRINCIPAL

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In 2012, Jennifer Dodge, APAM, founded The Office Athlete—a physiotherapy practice dedicated to offering a range of physical health services to a diverse range of workplace settings. Here, *Business in Practice* talks with Jennifer about her experiences constructing and cultivating the commercial venture.

YOU ESSENTIALLY BUILT THE OFFICE ATHLETE OVER A DECADE AGO FROM SCRATCH. DURING THIS PROCESS, WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE THAT YOU ENCOUNTERED?

I had never started a business before, so the fact that I was doing so at a time when I was still finding my feet as a new graduate was a huge challenge. When I started The Office Athlete I was working six days a week, so any spare time I had I would dedicate to the practice's marketing, brand and overall product.

It was a big learning curve for me because it was just myself in on this business and no one was going to do the work for me. I think it was also a very rewarding process too, as I was able to create this brand and business concept all from an idea I had. Seeing it through and looking at where it is today makes those initial struggles well worth it.

CURRENTLY, HOW MANY STAFF MEMBERS DOES THE OFFICE ATHLETE EMPLOY?

I manage the day-to-day operations for The Office Athlete but contract specialty skilled physiotherapists for larger events.

WHAT MAKES YOUR SERVICE UNIQUE COMPARED TO OTHER ON-SITE PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES ON THE MARKET?

The Office Athlete strives to stay unique in its approach to ergonomic assessments, health, and wellbeing and injury prevention seminars. My services are completely adaptable to each respective office's unique setting and employees. Through an introductory questionnaire I am able to find out a little more about the employees seeking treatment and then prepare my approach to them. I aim to get the goals and interests of the

workplace and use the one-on-one time I have with employees to work with their injury history, their role within the workplace, outside interests and presenting symptoms. With such information from an employee's one-on-one consult, I am able

to put together a home-exercise program, at-desk strategies, provide self-checklists for future reference and ergonomic education, as well as set up an on-site physiotherapy treatment space if needed.

A SPECIFIC AREA OF THE OFFICE ATHLETE'S SERVICES FOCUSES ON READYING WORKPLACES FOR PARTICIPATION IN CORPORATE EVENT TRAINING. WHAT DOES THIS ENGAGEMENT INVOLVE?

The rise in corporate event training is a movement The Office Athlete strongly supports. What I have put together is a range of education seminars and workshops for the various running festivals, adventure races, and charity events and swims that corporate settings are routinely involved with. We focus on a break-down of the event, what to expect for first-timers, information on common injuries and training mistakes. We also provide programs with warm-up, cool-down, and stretching education.

THE OFFICE ATHLETE PROVIDES A PROGRAM FOR EACH WORKPLACE AND DELIVERS IT TO STAFF MEMBERS VIA INTERACTIVE SEMINARS. CAN YOU RUN US THROUGH WHAT THESE SEMINARS INVOLVE?

The seminars we hold are based on the specific intervention the workplace needs. I present on a range of topics that aim to educate employees and workplace environments on injury prevention in all facets of their life.



One of the most common seminars is called 'Back to basics', which aims to enhance employee understanding on back care, postural control, injury prevention and back-specific exercises. We have an initial screening and management strategies for employees to use in their daily activities.

Another seminar, entitled 'Event preparation', aims to educate first timers or weekend warriors that have signed up with their corporate team to participate in the next adventure race. This includes a break-down of the event and what to expect, common injuries, training plans, warm-up and cool-down tips along with race-day strategies to stay on top of any niggles.

The seminar 'Ergonomics' includes basic workstation elements and ways to ensure employees are aware of how to self-manage their workstation. We discuss common injuries, preventative strategies and go through a simple take-home checklist of how to set up your workspace and home office. This is a very interactive class, which shows employees how certain postures and strains in their day-to-day tasks can strain their body.

Our session 'Manual handling' focuses on a topic imperative for a range of workspaces that have tasks with an increased risk of injury. I like to have an anatomical approach in these talks to engage workers on their body and the work they do. These classes have many interactive components that highlight how body position and certain loads can cause injury.

THE OFFICE ATHLETE HAS A GREAT SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE, WHICH INCLUDES A REGULARLY UPDATED BLOG. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS THAT YOU HAVE DERIVED FROM USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THIS WAY?

I am able to speak to a larger audience about the common injuries that I am treating, and provide tips and ways for any athlete to ensure they can minimise injury. It is such a great medium to use ... a lot of my patients in the clinical and sports settings never fail to amuse me with a Google diagnosis of their injury. I feel as a health professional it is essential we stay up to date with the medical literature and relay the relevant information to our patients. This way we can help with some myth-busting and keep people educated on their body and injury management.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THE OFFICE ATHLETE? WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE NEXT AREAS OF CARE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE YOUR COMPANY TO EXPAND INTO?

There are a few big projects going on in the background at the moment that will not only expand The Office Athlete's national presence, but also provide our service to a greater number of settings. There are more and more opportunities for The Office Athlete's social media contribution to be available in health publications and collaboration with ergonomic furniture design clients. Future areas of care that we are currently investigating include interactive health plans for office spaces and expanding the rehabilitation space for The Office Athlete in Sydney.

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