

# LIFELAB CASE STUDY



## VIRGIN ACTIVE, SOUTH AFRICA

### BACKGROUND

"In line with Sir Richard Branson's outstanding support for world AIDS relief, Virgin Active South Africa has implemented an Employee Wellness disease-intervention programme, covering not only HIV and AIDS-related staff training and development, but the cost of associated medical treatment and drugs. As one of corporate South Africa's most comprehensive HIV and AIDS education and treatment initiatives, Virgin Active's programme was designed to help eradicate the disease from the 2,500-strong permanent labour force working across its 85 health clubs and offices nationwide.

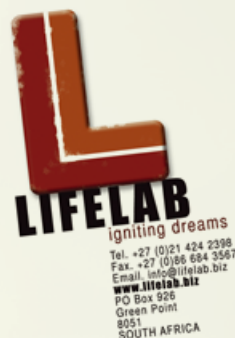
This follows Branson's recent '0% Challenge' to the Companies in the Virgin worldwide group, intended to achieve: 0% of HIV/AIDS deaths, 0% new infections, 0% mother to child transfer of the disease and 0% discrimination against its victims."

Two phases of this educational drive were designed and delivered by LifeLab between 2005 and 2008. Phase one was a national train-the-trainer programme and in phase two a staff member at each club was trained as a wellness coach to support staff with HIV/AIDS and wellness related issues.

### METHODOLOGY

The facilitation methodology was designed to respond to the upbeat Virgin Active culture, and created the opportunity for employees to explore their personal response to HIV/AIDS in an active way. HIV/AIDS was presented within a wellness framework as a chronic manageable disease. This served to reduce fear of being tested as delegates understood that knowing one's status allows for adaptation resulting in realistic immune enhancement. The importance of a multi-faceted approach incorporating ART together with nutritional and psycho-social strategies was highlighted.

Most workplace wellness and HIV/AIDS programmes do well at knowledge transfer but stop short of affecting behaviour change. Virgin Active in partnership with LifeLab has forged new ground by blending coaching and facilitation approaches to wellness interventions. Coaching was selected as a methodology as it is effective in helping staff to identify a variety of active responses to difficult situations.



LIFELAB  
"igniting dreams"

## HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY

The workplace wellness intervention was launched originally on the Virgin Active website as the V-Sex programme and received the most hits in the history of the company's intranet. This innovative marketing approach, which has become characteristic of the Virgin brands, was a positive factor in enhancing staff enrolment in the programme.

The programme was subsequently rebranded as V-Wellness and evolved to a broader spectrum wellness programme where a blend of coaching and facilitation was used to increase impact.

Key to the success of the V-Sex and V-Wellness interventions was the use of professional internal training staff to facilitate the programmes. The complexity of wellness programmes that must deal with sexuality makes it important that they have a high level of facilitation skill.

A staff member at each club was trained as a wellness coach, acting as a support to staff on HIV/AIDS, TB and other wellness related issues. A further indicator of success was a high uptake at the company's national Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) campaign.

Virgin Active Press Release, 2007