

Futurist Climbing

DESIGN FAQs

1. How much wall should I build relative to my building's footprint?

This will depend upon the business model, layout, building height, amenities and non-climbing service space allocations which determine the optimal distribution of climbing terrain between lead climbing, TR, group rooms, kids areas and bouldering. Our full service facilities conform to 1:1 or less and our bouldering facilities come in between .5-.75:1 (square feet of climbing wall surface per 1 square foot of building footprint) depending upon the height and overall steepness of the climbing terrain. A vast majority of facility designs that we review from other providers tend to be over-saturated with climbing wall surface (approximately 1.5:1–2:1, with the climbing surface far exceeding that of the footprint of the building).

2. The more wall I have, the more climbers I can service, right?

This perception, which has been promulgated by most climbing wall suppliers, is the biggest misconception espoused by the conventional view of climbing gym capacity by prospective gym owners. The notion of capacity (and therefore potential revenue) as a direct correlation to the number of “climbing stations” is a commonly utilized means of justifying a requisite amount of climbing wall surface to increase the size of a sales transaction by many wall suppliers. The use of the climbing station as a quantifiable metric is oversimplified and incomplete as it neglects many significant determinants of facility capacity and throughput including climbing wall height and angle, bouldering fall/landing zones, egress for pedestrian transit, standing/viewing space, belaying stances, social spaces and other amenity space allocations.

3. What is a “Climbing Station”?

The commonly accepted concept of the “climbing station” has been developed by wall suppliers as a quantifiable unit of capacity represented by the notion of a “climbing lane” which is assumed to provide sufficient climbing wall space (traditionally defined as 2-2.5 meters/6-8 feet in width) for a participant to engage in the activity of indoor climbing in a presumably safe manner and unimpeded by other participants simultaneously using adjacent climbing stations.

Simultaneous use: As the practice of indoor climbing - bouldering in particular - has progressed, what is regarded as the total number of climbing stations in a given facility is no longer equal to the number of stations that can be used simultaneously. Example: it is not uncommon for climbing wall designs produced by climbing wall suppliers to allot 25-30 climbing stations to a bouldering amphitheater measuring 160 linear feet along the base of the wall. In practice, only approximately 1/3 of these climbing stations would be simultaneously usable in a safe and practical manner by participants in consideration of the following factors: bouldering falling zones, the presence of spotters below, diagonally traversing route lines and dynamic and lateral movement common to modern bouldering route setting.

Turnover: This is an important factor that contributes to the determination of capacity, and one which is not addressed by the concept of the climbing station at all. Bouldering generally has higher climber turnover; in other words a climber occupies the wall for less time per attempt than a climber on a roped route. Remember also that the higher your walls - especially in the lead and top rope areas - the longer a climber will occupy a single station, another reason that the notion that climbing stations = capacity is faulty.

Terrain variety: There is nothing wrong with wanting a higher number of climbing stations to offer variety in your terrain in an effort to provide more opportunities for your customers to enjoy their climbing experiences. However, do not be misled into believing that a higher number of climbing stations directly translates to a gym's ability to accommodate a higher number of customers at one time. You can also create more meaningful diverse climbing options by providing an intelligently laid out, non-redundant climbing wall design and by offering higher hold density, higher route density and regularly changing features and volumes.

4. How much bouldering vs. roped climbing should I have?

This ratio is dependent upon the business model of the facility. Traditionally, most full-service climbing gyms offered 80-85% rope climbing terrain / 15-20% bouldering terrain. Modern facilities are offering 60-70% rope climbing terrain / 30-40% bouldering (remember this also depends upon facility height and building constraints). Many modern bouldering facilities have no roped climbing terrain whatsoever and hybrid facilities offer 80% bouldering /20% top rope or auto belay terrain.

5. How does the layout of my gym save/cost me money?

Infrastructure: Building less of the most expensive items - climbing wall and climbing flooring products - will save you a very significant amount of money, leaving more budget for important accessories like climbing holds and auto belay devices. Also, oversaturated/overbuilt spaces are more expensive to outfit with lighting, climate control and air filtration.

Timeline: Overbuilding a space often makes the building process more cumbersome for suppliers and subcontractors engaged in the project, resulting in setbacks to the project timeline. If you've ever been involved in a home improvement project, you know that setbacks almost always result in additional expenditures, and in the case of a commercial facility, loss of revenue as well.

Ongoing expenses: You'll save money in the long term with smoother operations, faster customer processing, lighting, climate control, air filtration and janitorial upkeep if your layout is open and efficient.

6. Why should I consider independent design for my facility and climbing walls rather than use a wall company to design my space?

Independent designers consider all aspects of your project: distinguishing your facility from others and designing infrastructure specifically for your business model, budget allocation, build timeline and operations. Clients receive unbiased representation through a design process that places their priorities first.

Conversely, climbing wall suppliers have an inherent conflict of interest as they are incentivized to layout a maximum amount of climbing wall surface area in your facility design resulting in them earning more money on your project in the form of climbing wall sales. Further, most climbing wall suppliers design in a manner that most well suits their own ease of engineering, manufacturing and assembly above the client's aesthetic, branding, programming and operational needs with relative disregard for the overall project budgeting constraints. Allowing a climbing wall supplier to design your gym is about as rational as inviting a fox to design your henhouse.

7. Won't it cost me more money overall if I pay an independent designer to design my gym?

On average, a responsible independent climbing wall designer who considers all of the crucial design parameters necessary to create the physical infrastructure for a modern commercial climbing facility will save a client up to 20-30% on climbing wall square footage and up to 15% on climbing flooring costs due to waste and labor associated with design complexity, as well as untold amounts in air filtration and lighting costs. When it comes to design, not only do you get what you pay for, but you may lose many fold on what

you don't pay for. In a nutshell, the cost of intelligent independent design is a small fraction of what you would spend on excessive build-out and operating expenses.

8. What is "Service Design"?

"Service Design as a practice generally results in the design of systems and processes aimed at providing a holistic service to the user." – *The Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design, 2008*

"Service Design is a holistic way for a business to gain a comprehensive, empathetic understanding of customer needs." – *Frontier Service Design, 2010*

Service-based design is the future of our industry.

Service design thinking endeavors to create a physical infrastructure that provides a platform for a business model which allows you to service your customers in a way that is proprietary to your brand and distinguished from your competitors. This is achieved through reverse-engineering the facility layout and wall design. The result of a well-conceived service designed gym provides an aesthetic of an impactful presentation, an intuitive customer experience, supports captivating programming offerings and efficient operational flow.

Ironically, this facet of business development has been the most neglected aspect of commercial climbing gym projects. In terms of the development of the ideal commercial climbing gym, service-based design is a managed and deliberate orchestration of interdisciplinary collaboration influenced by specialists who possess the following areas of expertise: architecture, conceptual design, project management, branding, operations and management, sport-specific training, coaching instruction, route setting, programming service delivery and most importantly, the practice of indoor climbing itself as a discipline (a crucial component lacking from most industry suppliers and aspiring gym owners alike).

9. I want a high quality bouldering flooring system that will last as long as possible. Will my facility layout and wall design affect the cost and longevity of my floor?

Absolutely. Flooring systems can cost up to 15% more due to material waste and labor associated with overly complex designs. Besides the quality of the flooring materials and proper cleaning and maintenance, the single most important factor in bouldering flooring system durability is the facility layout/wall design. A cleaner facility layout will increase the longevity of all climbing flooring system products by avoiding the following: pinch points, hot spot landing zones, wear and tear from pedestrian traffic across padding systems during transit.

10. I want a gym that looks modern and sexy. How can I ensure that it won't be out-dated in a few years?

Avoid the temptation to over-design by over-saturating the space with climbing wall elements. Present your climbing wall from the customer's perspective of discovery with an open floor plan that offers an impressive view of that sexy wall. Don't dilute your most striking elements with redundantly occurring, boring or extraneous elements ... let them breathe and flaunt them!

Consider designing the wall with articulating elements and in such a manner to receive interchangeable macro-features.

Yield to the light! Don't block windows and bay doors. The climbing wall elements should compliment natural lighting opportunities and pedestrian flow. Layout and design for reconfigurability and long term facility expansion. Select or build-to-suit a building that allows for expansion. Always master-plan the first phase for potential expansion.

Design for the future, not the past!