

Technology & Innovation Outlook 2023



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About Athletech News

Athletech informs and inspires those who are out to disrupt the future of our rapidly evolving industry.

Launched in 2020 at the intersection of fitness, wellness and technology, we cover topics as diverse as brick-and-mortar gyms, connected fitness products, boutique formats, outdoor exercise, equipment innovations, emerging technologies, wellness trends, and consumer insights.

Our writers set out each day to deliver proprietary content and analysis that will help spark ideas and shape agendas for decision-makers in the fast-paced fitness space.

We provide comprehensive and multi-platform coverage of the most impactful news and trends shaping the fitness and wellness segment, bringing together innovators, influencers and executives with content that sparks ideas, uncovers opportunities, and drives growth.

<https://athletechnews.com/>





Dear Reader,

You've likely heard the tired old refrain that the fitness and wellness industry is behind the times when it comes to embracing technology.

The cliché may have been true at one point in time, but things are changing. The pandemic helped spur a new wave of innovation and digital embrace among fitness and wellness companies that's endured in our post-COVID world.

As you can tell from our name, at Athletech News, we believe in the transformative power of technology and its ability to make the fitness and wellness industry smarter, faster and more appealing to consumers.

For Athletech's inaugural Technology & Innovation Outlook report, we sat down with industry leaders whose companies, products and ideas are revolutionizing fitness and wellness. Mindbody CEO Fritz Lanman shares how the software company plans to use AI and machine learning, Meta's Director of Metaverse Content Anand Dass spoke candidly about the tech giant's plans for VR fitness, and Technogym founder and CEO Nerio Alessandri explains why the future of fitness lies in hyper-personalization.

A few key themes emerged from our conversations with these executives and many others:

The AI revolution is here, although the exact ways in which the new technology will shape fitness and wellness are up in the air. Some startups believe AI has the ability to make the personal trainer all but obsolete, while others tout AI's ability to improve the human touch. With AI, fitness and wellness companies have a newfound power to leverage the vast amounts of data they collect on customers into better business insights and more effective products, but there are privacy concerns to grapple with as well.

Gyms that don't embrace the digitalization of fitness will be left behind. Hybrid fitness is a must in the post-COVID world, and leading gyms and studios are adopting innovative ways to engage with their members 24/7, inside the four walls of their brick-and-mortar spaces and at home. Additionally, gyms and studios must be strategic and forward-thinking about how they use software to automate back-office tasks and gain actionable insights into their members.

Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and Mixed Reality (MR) are poised to shake up the way people work out, as leading tech companies and app developers look for innovative ways to appeal to the 80% of Americans who don't exercise regularly, whether that's boxing on a mountaintop or meditating on an island, all from the comfort of your living room. Along the same lines, gamification has become a potent tool in motivating people to get moving.

As we confront an exciting but unknown future, Athletech will be there to keep you abreast of the latest news and trends impacting our industry. We invite you to reach out and share your perspective with us. Help us keep this community of executives in tune with the pulse of the consumer.

Stay curious and keep innovating,

Josh Liberatore



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Meta Pushes Into Fitness. Why the Tech Giant Is Just Getting Started

Anand Dass, Meta's Director of Metaverse Content, shares why the tech giant has decided to make fitness a priority. Dass also discussed Meta's acquisition of Supernatural and the future of VR fitness.

By Josh Liberatore



Photo courtesy of Meta

When Meta released its first Quest virtual reality headset back in 2019, fitness wasn't a priority for the tech giant.

In 2023, Meta completed its acquisition of Within, maker of the popular VR fitness app Supernatural, for a reported \$400 million, cementing the tech company's entry into the space.

In the four years between its first foray into VR and its decision to shell out big bucks for a digital fitness company, Meta noticed something interesting about the VR games its customers were playing on Quest devices: they were helping people get into better shape.

"People started coming in to play games, but they stayed for the fun and they stayed because they were seeing their health outcomes improve," Anand Dass, Meta's Director of Metaverse Content, told Athletech News. "There was an unexplored variable around

fitness that was allowing people to improve their health outcomes. The unexplored variable was fun."

Dass explains that people got so wrapped up in the immersive VR experiences of apps like Supernatural, FitXR and Litesport, that they didn't even realize they were burning calories while gaming.

"If you go look at the reviews on FitXR, Supernatural or Litesport, people are saying, 'I didn't realize I was actually working out, but I was sweating by the end of my playtime and over time I lost ten pounds,'" Dass says. "Or their biomarkers improved, like blood pressure and blood sugar levels."

That realization was enough to get Meta interested in making fitness a priority in its VR plans.

"When we saw that consumers were truly able to change their health outcomes and lead a healthier lifestyle, we knew we should try and do something to

“

There was an unexplored variable around fitness that was allowing people to improve their health outcomes. The unexplored variable was fun.”

— Anand Dass, Director of Metaverse Content, Meta

serve this audience better,” Dass says. “That was the genesis of our fitness thrust.”

Meta Goes After the 80%

Most people don't like working out – and most people don't. It's an unfortunate fact that the fitness industry has been trying to change for years, without a ton of success. Statistics still show that around 80% of Americans don't exercise regularly.

Meta believes that making fitness fun – through immersive VR experiences – will finally get that silent majority of the population moving.

“We think this will expand the wellness market significantly because it's creating an opportunity in a segment of the population that didn't work out before,” Dass says of VR fitness.

VR's ability to alter time and space and transport people into a fantasy world makes the prospect of working up a sweat a lot more palatable to the average person. Strap on a Quest headset and fire up Supernatural, for example, and within minutes, you can be moving around and dodging virtual objects on the Galapagos Islands or the surface of Mars.

“You can be on top of volcanoes and you can have an instructor in your living room,” Dass notes. “It can be 10 minutes between your work calls or it can be a bite-sized HIIT workout. All these things that displace space and time in interesting ways, and then you infuse it with fun and joy, and suddenly people lose themselves in their workouts and they come out of it with the endorphins they need.”

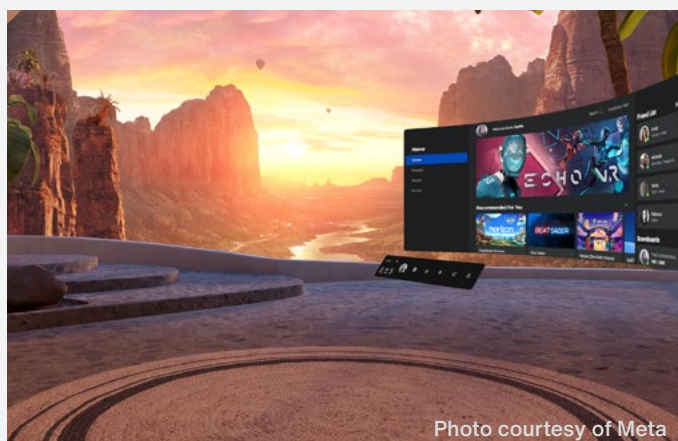


Photo courtesy of Meta

VR fitness also appeals to groups that want to stay active but don't traditionally go to the gym. Working parents often prefer to work out with a VR headset, Dass noted, since it's more convenient for them than finding time to drive to the gym. For older people, the headset presents an opportunity to work out without having to endure the physical and emotional issues that the modern gym presents for people above a certain age. And for beginners or those intimidated by the traditional gym setting, VR is a much more welcoming environment.

“You're not judged at all if you're in your living room,” Dass says.

However, Meta is also targeting the fitness enthusiast with its VR plans. Dass describes what he calls a “blended” approach to working out, with some days in the gym, some days working out with connected fitness equipment like a Peloton bike and some days spent working out in VR.

“It's very much a complimentary experience to traditional fitness options,” Dass says of VR. He notes that even dedicated gym-goers sometimes run into dry spells of motivation or deal with time constraints that make it infeasible to travel to the gym or studio for a long workout.

“There are two audience cohorts that we think about,” Dass says, referring to the larger group of people who don't exercise regularly as well as the 20% or so of the population already dedicated to fitness.

A Strategic Acquisition

Dass described Meta's decision to buy Within (Supernatural) as a strategic acquisition so it could better understand the fitness space.

“It's really hard to innovate and serve an industry unless you know what it is,” he said. “We're a tech company, we don't have trainers, we don't understand how to speak the language of fitness. So for us, the Within acquisition was about building domain knowledge.”

For example, in probing Supernatural's tech stack, Meta learned how the fitness app incorporates beat-mapping, a phenomenon where music beats queue the physical actions that users need to perform during a workout. The tech company also learned about the highly important role human coaches can play in motivating people to work out.

“I distinctly remember this from one of the Supernatural experiences I tried, where one of the coaches talks about loss and grief in her life,” Dass shares. “She's talking about processing her grief and being resilient and persistent. In that moment, I'm thinking, ‘If she can do that, I can persist for another 20 minutes and hit a bunch of targets.’”

“That's art, not algorithms,” Dass says.

“

We're a tech company, we don't have trainers, we don't understand how to speak the language of fitness. So for us, the Within acquisition was about building domain knowledge.”

— Anand Dass, Meta

Better Together: Meta's Collaborative Approach

Despite regulatory concerns about Meta's acquisition of Within – the FTC sued to block the deal over antitrust concerns – Dass assures that the tech giant plans to take a collaborative approach to VR fitness.

“We're going to take the stance of partnering and being more open in how we build this as opposed to taking the more vertically integrated approach that we've seen taken in the mobile world by some players,” he said.

Dass noted that Meta has partnered with companies like Les Mills, FitXR and others to build VR fitness experiences, and will continue to do so despite its ownership of Supernatural.

“The magic is to pair that fitness science that the fitness industry knows with the underlying technology that serves that science to deliver life outcomes,” he said. “That's how we think of our strategy.”

What's Next for VR Fitness?

As Meta works to better understand the fitness space, the company is committed to innovating in ways that promise to make VR fitness even more immersive and fun.

“We have to push hard on the underlying technology stack,” Dass said. “For example, headsets currently don't work outdoors because they require the bounding box of a room.”

Meta is also looking into how it can add lower-body workouts to its VR fitness offerings. Currently, the Quest headset only captures head and hand movements.

“There is innovation we can do with machine learning and AI,” Dass said. “Supernatural released a prototype for knee strikes. Now they've figured out a way to do ground-based exercises and combine them with hand movements. We'll push on things like that.”

Meta also plans to push forward on Meta Reality, its version of mixed reality, where the physical and virtual worlds interact to form one experience. Meta Reality offers some exciting possibilities for strength training, including potentially adding weights to VR workouts, a feature that's not currently available. Moves like wall sits could also be possible using Meta Reality.

“There's some amount of combining science with research, but that's the kind of stuff we want to push on,” Dass says.

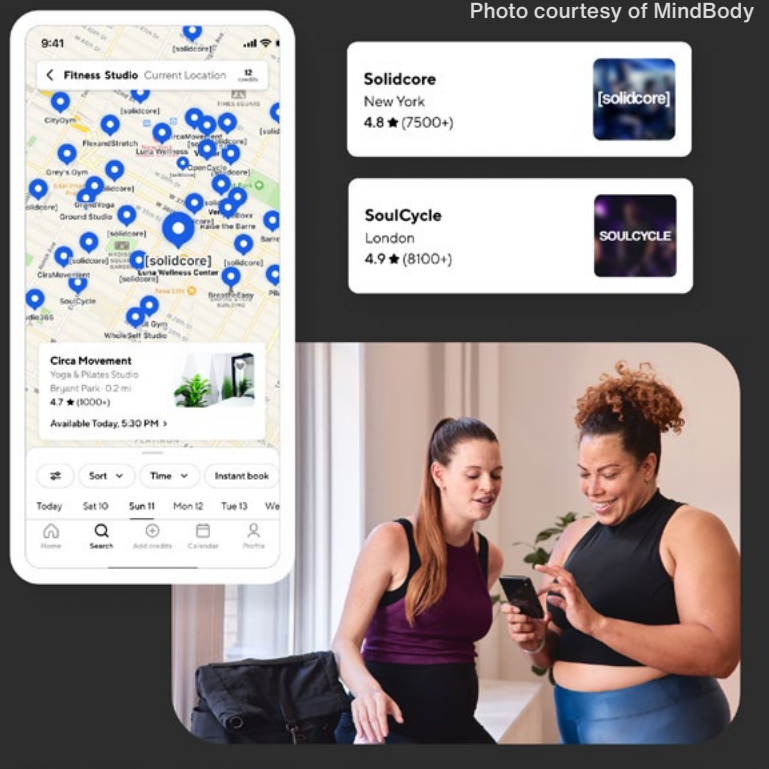
True to its spirit of building with others, Meta plans to make as many of its VR and MR innovations as possible available to its outside partners.

“Whatever we're building that's more universally usable, we're just going to put it into the platform and give it to anybody who wants to build a fitness experience,” Dass said.



Photo courtesy of Meta

Photo courtesy of MindBody



Mindbody Bets Big on AI, Machine Learning

Mindbody CEO Fritz Lanman spoke with Athletech News about how the software company is using AI and machine learning to help boutique fitness studios grow revenue.

By Josh Liberatore

Mindbody CEO Fritz Lanman has a compelling answer when asked why the software provider is trusted by so many health and wellness companies, including some of the biggest names in boutique fitness.

“You make more money from Mindbody than you make from any other platform,” Lanman says. “The average business grows 36% after they join Mindbody in their first six months.”

A key reason for that growth is that Mindbody’s customers get access to the 1.9 million active shoppers who use the software company’s consumer-facing app to book wellness services like boutique fitness classes. According to Lanman, it’s the largest concentrated pool of active wellness shoppers on Android or iPhone.

“If you want to get your business in front of that many

people, the alternative would be to pay Facebook, Instagram or Google for ads,” Lanman says. “For that spend, the ROI isn’t guaranteed. In our system, we have tools that drive discoveries for you. If we can prove through a consumer survey that we discovered a person for you, we’ll take a fee on that purchase. But it’s guaranteed ROI, since you’re only paying if you get discovered.”

In 2021, Mindbody acquired ClassPass, a monthly subscription service that allows users to book last-minute seats in gyms, studios and spas. The deal gave Mindbody’s customers access to even more potential members. To alleviate any concerns studios may have about selling seats for less than full cost, Mindbody offers its customers a 90-day ClassPass guarantee: if using the subscription service doesn’t make them money, Mindbody promises to pay them back twice what they lost.

Since the acquisition, “a lot more of the Mindbody customer base is taking advantage of ClassPass to grow their businesses,” Lanman says.

“The key is, which players have enough data to make the AI good? Mindbody has the biggest platform. Because of our scale, we have the data to do things with AI that our competition can’t.”

— Fritz Lanman, CEO, Mindbody



Photo courtesy of Mindbody

A Competitive Advantage

Looking ahead, Mindbody has its sights set on a new way to help its customers grow their businesses: AI and machine learning.

“We’re starting to layer in a ton of features that help you grow your business even more, including machine learning and AI-powered tools that help business owners do things like convert more prospects, retain their audiences better, drive more purchases and get more bookings,” Lanman says.

Mindbody’s size makes it uniquely positioned among fitness and wellness software platforms to leverage the powers of AI, Lanman believes.

“With these large language models, businesses that have huge datasets don’t have to invent new math, we all can use the same techniques and open-source models,” he explains. “The key is, which players have enough data to make the AI good? Mindbody has the biggest platform. Because of our scale, we have the data to do things with AI that our competition can’t.”

Mindbody’s AI Plans

Lanman shared some of Mindbody’s current and upcoming initiatives around AI and machine learning.

Already up and running is a feature called Messenger[ai], Mindbody’s AI-powered front-desk assistant, which automatically responds to missed calls, fields questions and helps clients book and buy services.

“At its core, it’s a chatbot,” Lanman explains. “It’s a widget that you put into your site. So on your business webpage, when a prospect comes in, it can ask them questions, like, ‘What availability do you have for an appointment?’ A client can actually go all the way through the booking process just by interacting with the chatbot.”

The Messenger[ai] feature should prove popular with Millennials and GenZers, who typically prefer a human-free purchasing experience online.

“Younger consumers want to be able to just chat, they don’t want to have to pick up a phone to book an appointment or a class,” Lanman says. “It also means you don’t need to have somebody manning the front desk to get a booking.”

Another feature Mindbody has started rolling out to some customers is called Clients At Risk, which essentially uses AI to identify which members are likely to stop coming into class.

“The AI shows customers the folks it thinks are losing their motivation before you’ve actually lost them,” Lanman explains. “That gives you time to act. Go have an intervention with that person, give them a phone call, send them an encouraging text or give them an offer for a discounted personal training session or appointment to hook them back in.”

“It’s essentially retention AI,” he adds. “In the fitness industry, especially in wellness, retention is as big a priority as customer acquisition, because people lose their motivation for wellness and fall out of their routine.”

For Mindbody’s customers using the Clients At Risk tool, the early results have been “spectacular,” Lanman says.

“The businesses using the feature are seeing 30% of those clients be more engaged after just exposing the feature to them,” he notes.

“

Younger consumers want to be able to just chat, they don't want to have to pick up a phone to book an appointment or a class.”

— Fritz Lanman

Mindbody is also using AI and machine learning in its consumer-facing app to drive more people into studios.

“We're using machine learning on search and navigation,” Lanman says. “How can we better match wellness shoppers to wellness businesses and drive as many purchases as we can?”

Another AI feature Mindbody is working on is called “big spender analysis,” although it hasn't yet been released.

“When a prospect walks into your door, how do you know if they're going to be one of the big spenders, one of the people who really buys into your business

and stays active?” Lanman explains.

Mindbody also plans to use AI to help studios evaluate which of their instructors are likely to become successful in attracting clients.

Beyond AI, Lanman says he's excited about the progress Mindbody is making in improving the speed and reliability of its software in general.

“Mindbody is a little old. It was built a long time ago,” he admits. “So most of our engineering calories are actually going into just making Mindbody incredibly performant, reliable, fast and responsive, and modernizing the UI.”

Those updates, combined with the company's push into AI, have Lanman excited about what the future holds for Mindbody.

“We already grow businesses more than any other platform, we already have more features than any other. We also have AI that no one else can do because they don't have our data scale,” he says. “And then you add to that, software that's getting faster, more reliable and more usable.”

The screenshot displays the ENZO FIT dashboard for user Jane M. The interface includes a sidebar with navigation options like Home, Services and Products, Bookings, Clients, Staff, Point of Sale, Insights, Marketing, and Settings. The main content area features a 'Great to see you, Jane!' greeting, an 'Insights snapshot' with three key metrics: SALES (\$15,593,201, up 2% since last month), CLIENTS SERVED (93, up 3% since last month), and UTILIZATION (65%, down 1% since last month). Below this is a 'Today's schedule' section with a list of classes: 'Go Go Cycle!' (8/10 spots), 'Spin & Arms' (Full), and '6 Week Bootcamp' (0/10 spots). A 'Clients at risk' section highlights three clients: Nicole Wilson, Carla Walters, and Alexander Shaw, with a note that heads up these clients might not come back. On the right, a 'Notifications' panel shows three items: 'Expiring intro offers' (3), 'Expiring cards for autopays', and 'Failed autopays' (2). A 'Yesterday's summary' for Wednesday, June 22, lists: \$15,994 in sales, 45 products sold, 3 new clients, 46 clients served, 43 appointments, and 12 classes. A 'Fitness Trends' section offers to read an article about industry trends.

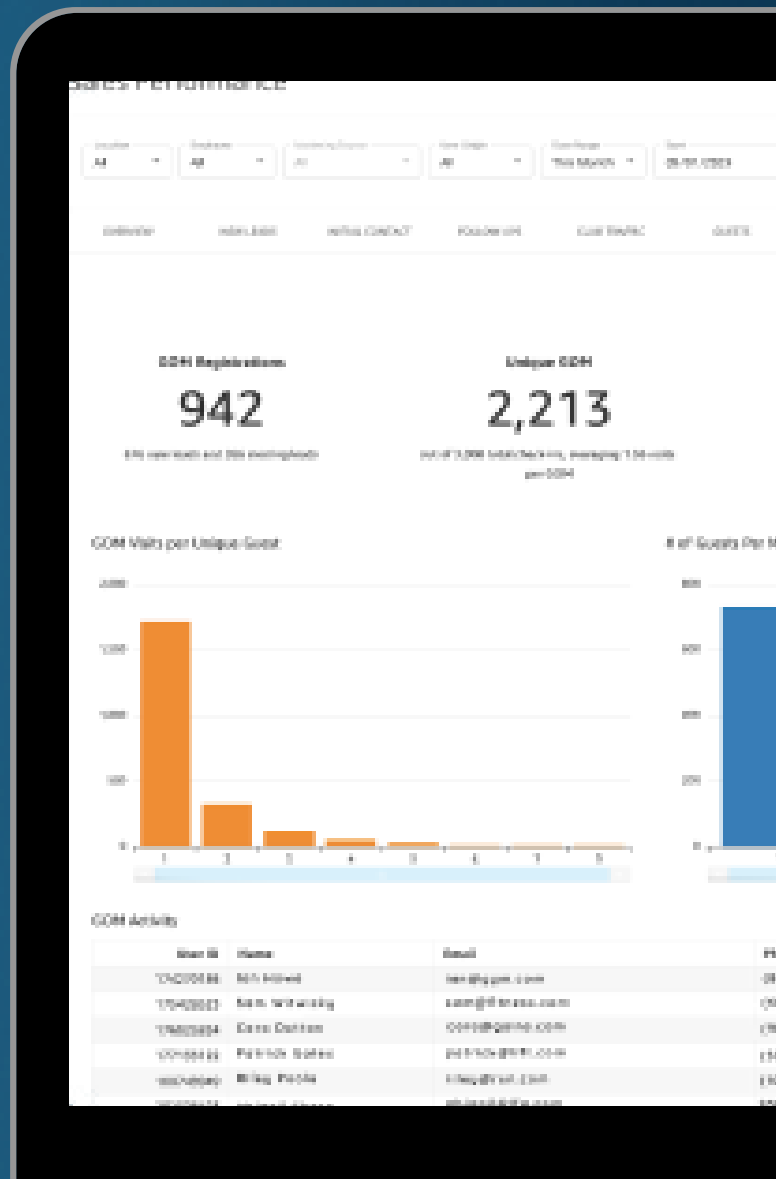
Photo courtesy of Mindbody



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Gym of the Future: How Tech Is Changing Brick-and-Mortar

By Courtney Rehfeldt



Photo courtesy of PreCor

A digital transformation is occurring right now in fitness clubs across the globe, and, as is usually the case when advanced technology is in play, change can occur seemingly overnight.

As technology served an essential purpose when gyms were forced to close during the pandemic, fitness operators are using the latest innovations to lure members into clubs while embracing the fact that many consumers, tethered to mobile devices, have adopted a hybrid routine.

It begs the question: what will the fitness studios and clubs of the future look like? And how are some of the biggest names in the fitness industry looking to cultivate an environment that embraces technology while keeping people engaged in in-person fitness?

“

Consumers look for personalized experiences fully bespoke to their lifestyle, passion and needs in everything they do — on how they shop, travel and communicate. The same applies to fitness and wellness.”

— Nerio Alessandri, founder and CEO, Technogym

Technogym Embraces Personalization

Technogym, which had a [record-breaking 2022](#), is looking to top last year. The fitness company reported double-digit revenue growth in Q1 and was announced as the [official supplier](#) of the 2024 Olympics in Paris.

Encouraged by the resiliency of the industry, the iconic wellness brand says the future is about an ecosystem that provides consumers with a seamless, tech-forward experience.

“The future is about personalization,” said Nerio Alessandri, Technogym founder and CEO.

“Consumers look for personalized experiences fully bespoke to their lifestyle, passion and needs in everything they do – on how they shop, travel and communicate. The same applies to fitness and wellness,” Alessandri added.

To deliver this level of hyper-personalization to every member, Technogym advises gyms and clubs to get digital and leverage AI.

Technogym’s continued (and future) success derives from the ecosystem it has developed, which consists of connected equipment spanning different formats to deliver different experiences in strength, functional, cardio and classes, as well as video workout content.

It’s a model that Technogym says it’s been investing in for years with the objective of growing the industry, making it more attractive to end users and making it more credible to institutional stakeholders such as the insurance and medical industries.

“Technogym’s ecosystem is an open platform that can easily integrate software applications (membership software, marketing and payment platforms, body analysis and assessment devices) and fitness equipment (from any manufacturer) already used by the club,” noted Alessandri.

The open platform also integrates consumer apps and wearable devices, allowing fitness clubs the ability to accelerate their digital strategy, improving the member experience and increasing ROI.

“Looking to the future, at Technogym, we believe fitness clubs will be able to compete by focusing on the value of service and experience,” said Alessandri.

For fitness operators looking to enhance fitness offerings for the future, Technogym says they should consider quality, design, digital technologies and a variety of training experiences.

Life Time Goes Digital

Life Time’s [luxury athletic country clubs](#) have successfully embraced technology, with results that speak for themselves, recently reporting net

center memberships up 40,000 in Q1 and increased revenue.

One of Life Time’s rollouts includes a digital check-in and reservation system to ensure its members can reserve their space, and the luxury club operator expects an increase in membership to continue through the summer. Another major step [Life Time](#) took was the recent development of Life Time Digital.

“Life Time Digital provides our members access to a vast amount of wellness content and resources including virtual workouts, nutrition coaching, hundreds of weekly livestreamed group studio classes, wellness articles through The Source, and more,” a Life Time spokesperson shared.

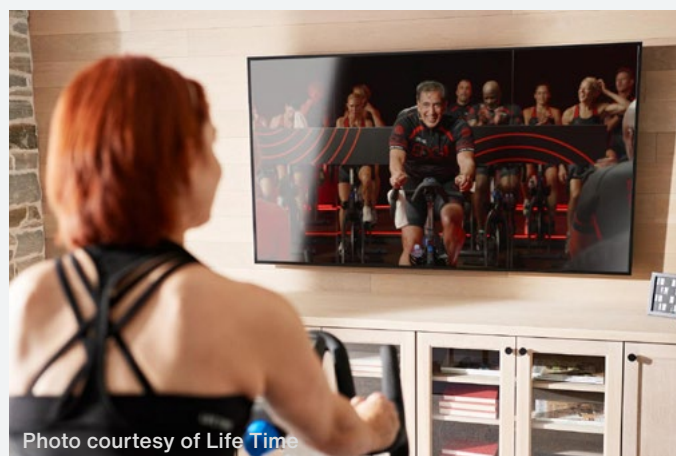


Photo courtesy of Life Time

Life Time reports that as it’s been improving its processes and technology, members of the luxury club aren’t demonstrating any resistance. Aside from tech enhancements, Life Time is listening to consumers as they design facilities that attract members in high numbers.

As consumers have returned to in-person fitness, Life Time overhauled and revamped its small group training, increased the number of fitness classes it offers and added pickleball.

Les Mills: Targeting Gen Z

Global fitness leader Les Mills has set out to revolutionize omnichannel fitness, with 2023 signaling a big year of new programs, products and initiatives.

The company has recently partnered with Adidas and ABC Fitness and has set its sights on “Generation Active,” excited for what lies ahead.

Despite a challenging few years for the fitness industry, Sean Turner, CEO of Les Mills US, looks back at prior predictions as he assesses what’s on the horizon.

“At the height of the pandemic, everyone was proclaiming the death of brick-and-mortar clubs

because the connected fitness boom would see everyone working out at home in the future thanks to the advances in hardware and software,” he said. “As we know, things didn’t play out that way, with clubs coming back strongly and connected fitness companies finding life a lot tougher.”

Turner sees this as proof that consumers love community and forecasts that successful fitness operations will implement that need for socialization with emerging technology.

“I expect the most impactful hardware and software advances will be those that enhance our social workout experiences, rather than replace them,” he said. “There’s always a place for great design and smart products to reinvent areas of the gym and dial up the motivation factor.”

Turner points to the development of the Les Mills Virtual Bike as an example of impactful hardware.

“We’ve seen how it’s possible to bring some of the buzz and excitement of the studio into the cardio area,” said Turner. “By leveraging great content, we’ve been able to breathe new life and bring engaging exercise experiences into an area of the club where people are often found watching the news.”

As Les Mills looks ahead, the fitness company says part of its commitment to helping clubs stay “fit for the future” means winning with Gen Z.

“Gen Z will have a bigger impact on the fitness market than any generation before them, presenting a transformative opportunity for clubs to drive record growth,” said Turner.

Turner points out that Gen Z is the largest generation and the next big global spending power. Les Mills is looking to attract this segment for fitness operators.

“We’ve developed a new series of innovative programs designed specifically to help clubs win with this key demographic,” said Turner. “We recently launched the first of these programs – Les Mills Strength Development – and throughout 2023 (and beyond) we’ll be introducing further programs to help clubs unleash an entire generation of new members. Watch this space!”

For gyms of the future to be successful, Turner advises that Gen Z is now the key battleground. “If the pandemic was defined by clubs’ use of technology to keep members moving, the next phase of club growth will undoubtedly be driven by operators’ ability to win their share of Gen Z,” said Turner. “Our new report, [Gen Z Fitness: Cracking the code](#), is the biggest-ever study into Gen Z fitness, examining the generational shift sweeping fitness.”

Turner emphasizes that the time to start is now. “The next five years will see Gen Z become the dominant fitness demographic, so this report is the

“If the pandemic was defined by clubs’ use of technology to keep members moving, the next phase of club growth will undoubtedly be driven by operators’ ability to win their share of Gen Z.”

**— Sean Turner, CEO,
Les Mills US**



Photo courtesy of Les Mills

perfect starting point for any operator building a five-year plan,” he advises.

Precor Plans for Mobile

Precor, a stand-alone [subsidiary](#) of Peloton centered on commercial fitness hardware, has observed fitness enthusiasts focused on longevity and energy-boosting exercise, concentrating on strength training.

“The gym still has an important place in many people’s exercise routines, but it’s now one of many places where workouts and wellness happen,” said Erica Tillinghast, Director, Wellness Science and Programming at Precor.

Tillinghast noted how cellphones have begun to play an even more significant role in fitness habits, from tracking and follow-along apps to inspiration from influencers. Members are also now looking to lift heavier, try new and optimized strength motions, and are open to exploring new equipment categories. “Many gyms are also seeing an uptick in younger exercisers socializing and lifting in the strength area,” said Tillinghast, adding that Precor has noticed exercises and equipment that train the glutes —

like squats to deadlifts to hip thrusts — are in high demand.

She assures that while strength training has gained in popularity, cardio hasn't been forgotten — it's just that the expectations for cardio in facilities are changing.

On the technology side, Tillinghast shared that Precor is introducing new ways to embrace mobile devices as a core part of a workout.

"[Fitness consumers] want to bring in their own fitness or media content and engage with it in the gym in a frictionless way, and our next generation of touch screen cardio consoles will allow them to do just that," she said. "We've reimaged what a personalized workout experience looks like in a world where fitness can happen anywhere."

Matrix Encourages Clubs To Stay Connected

Matrix Fitness, a global fitness brand that produces premium fitness equipment, is on the front lines when it comes to emerging fitness technology and offers actionable insights for fitness operators to consider.

Andrew Kolman, Vice President, Global Product Development and Technology for Matrix Fitness, foresees hardware and software continuing to evolve where the support for the commercial customer and their end user is a priority.

"Screen sizes continue to increase, and hardware will evolve in a way that facilitating passive experiences will become more common," he said, providing examples such as leveraging an end user's phone or smartwatch to log into fitness devices.

He predicts that the hardware and software will continue to support customers and end users alike in ways that allow for more customized and personal experiences on equipment.

As Matrix Fitness looks to the future, the company will continue to emphasize product development. Kolman also offers some insight on what gym operators should contemplate when planning a fitness facility that meets the needs and trends looking ahead.

"A gym operator should focus on connectivity and flexibility as they plan gyms for the foreseeable future," he advises. "Connectivity is an expectation of end users, whether that happens via member Wi-Fi networks or connected equipment."

He also suggests flexibility in layout as trends change and user behaviors shift.

"It is critical when laying out a facility to build options into the design," said Kolman. "For example, most facilities don't run power or cabling to their strength training areas. While it may add cost during a build out to do so, it is far less costly than doing it as part

of a remodel in the future."

Considering the impact of connected offerings is an area that shouldn't be overlooked, as others have learned.

"As more connected strength options enter the market, we hear from customers that they regret not being able to support new, connected offerings without disrupting their facility floor with a remodeling project," shared Kolman.

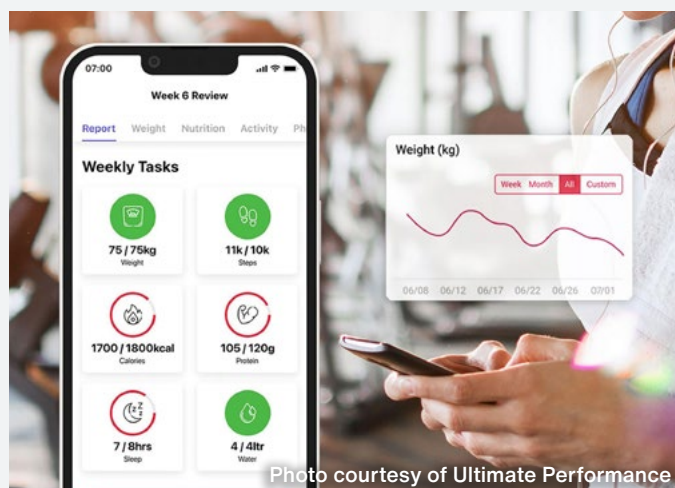
Ultimate Performance on AI

Nick Mitchell, founder and CEO of Ultimate Performance, an international personal training company, is eyeing AI for health and wellness, diving even further into the possibilities of the fitness industry's future.

"The biggest wellness trend of 2023 will be the attempted incorporation of Artificial Intelligence into helping manage lifestyle choices for following a healthier and more productive life," said Mitchell, who founded Ultimate Performance in 2009.

The personal training company has over 20 private PT facilities across the globe.

While Mitchell is doubtful that AI will be able to entirely change the game this year in terms of achieving tangible success, he adds that he believes there will be a "veritable flood of investment" in such technologies.



Mitchell explained that AI algorithms can analyze data collected from self-tracking apps, combine it with information gathered from medical records and other sources and generate tailored recommendations for fitness consumers. Another avenue? AI-powered virtual health assistants, which he said will help to identify potential health risks and alert users to preventive measures.

He's honest about the power of AI when it comes to certain facets of the job economy, but overall, he

is encouraged by the potential it has for health and wellness.

“While AI is going to cause a technological disruption that will rightly cause enormous job dislocation across a huge swath of industries, in the wellness space I think it will be almost entirely additive,” said Mitchell.

Despite emerging technology, Mitchell is secure in his belief that personal training won’t become redundant.

“It would not replace the key thing that a good trainer will do with someone, which is partner with them with their diet and their exercise, help them keep accountable both on and off the gym floor and show them that you are walking hand-in-hand with them on their fitness journey,” he said. “Because that is the most important thing.”

Life Fitness on Hardware Trends

Life Fitness, a leading American fitness company specializing in producing and distributing cardiovascular and strength training equipment, has seen it all when it comes to fitness trends over the years.

The company, which oversees its namesake fitness equipment brand as well as Cybex and Hammer Strength, has noticed the shift in consumer demand.

“In recent years, several circumstances have driven more and more people to adopt and find value in strength-based training,” said Greg Highsmith, Vice President of Product Management, Strength, Group Training and Accessories at Life Fitness.

Highsmith points to Hammer Strength, a Life Fitness performance brand with several products designed to help fitness consumers adopt, enhance and evolve their strength training regimens.

“And recently, we introduced the Insignia Series Glute Drive, a selectorized machine that is more approachable, especially for those who are just starting glute-focused training,” said Highsmith.

As for the trend where gyms are reducing cardio spaces in favor of strength training zones, Life Fitness leaders say there could be new opportunities for the future of cardio.

“The fitness industry — like other industries — is cyclical. Yes, we’ve seen a progression toward strength training, but cardiovascular exercise remains critical. Treadmills are still a club staple, but we’re also seeing an increased interest in higher intensity cardio, like spin bikes and rowers,” said Dan Wille, chief product officer.

As for technology, creating a great digital experience on the console is vital in engaging fitness consumers on cardio machines, he added. The company launched its SE4 Console, a 24-inch, edge-to-edge touch screen that includes Life Fitness On Demand+, offering 400+ instructor-led workouts and more than 100 runs and rides on interactive terrain.

“It gives club operators the freedom to easily create customized training content, so that they can deliver their brand, their way,” said Wille.

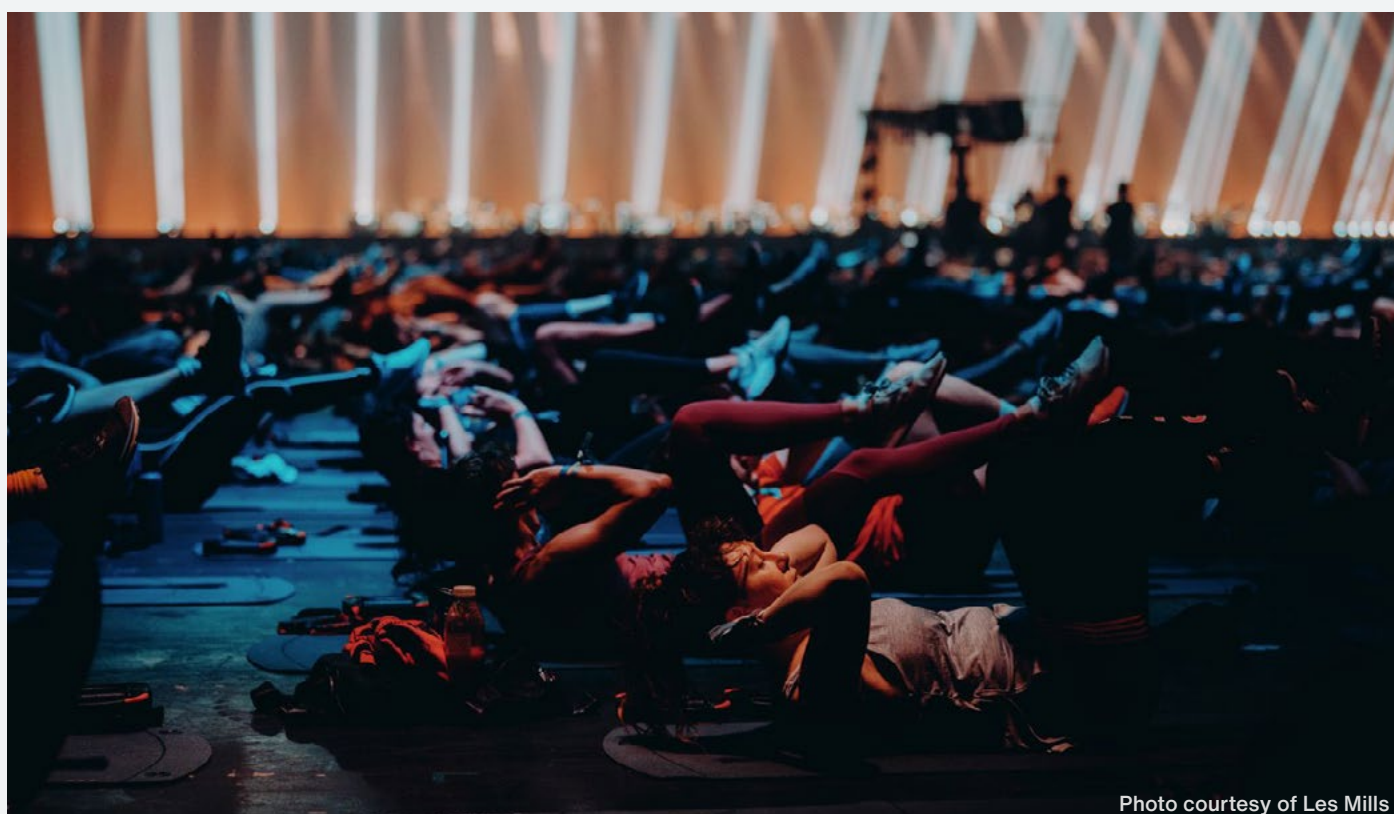


Photo courtesy of Les Mills

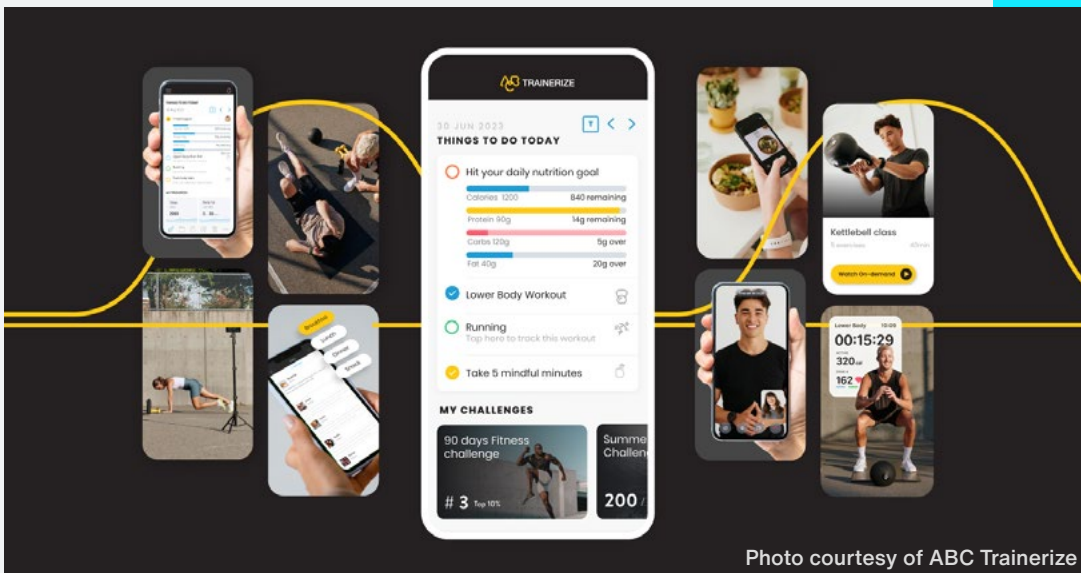


Photo courtesy of ABC Trainerize

For ABC Trainerize, Engagement Is Everything

By Josh Liberatore

Sharad Mohan and Trevor Chong co-founded ABC Trainerize back in 2012 with a clear goal in mind: help personal trainers become a bigger part of their clients' lives.

The typical personal trainer only sees each individual client face-to-face once per week, whether in-person or online in the case of remote coaching. That equates to about 26 days a month without any interaction. That's a lot of missed opportunity—and revenue.

ABC Trainerize, which was acquired by ABC Fitness in 2020, is designed to help personal trainers better engage with their clients so they can become a daily companion on the journey to better health. Today, nearly half a million coaches are using the platform.

“We believe the best way to foster engagement is through the concept of 360-degree health and wellness,” explained Mohan, who currently serves as Platform President of ABC Trainerize. “It's not just about workout programs, it's about all the things people need to do every day.”

To that end, on top of its robust Training and Video Coaching features, ABC Trainerize has expanded to include Nutrition Coaching and Habit Coaching. The platform will also soon give personal trainers the ability to create Challenges among groups of clients and monetize further on digital memberships through dedicated e-commerce tools like payments and PT appointment booking features.

“We believe the best way to foster engagement is through the concept of 360-degree health and wellness. It's not just about workout programs, it's about all the things people need to do every day.”

— Sharad Mohan, Platform President, ABC Trainerize and ABC GymSales



Photo courtesy of ABC Trainerize

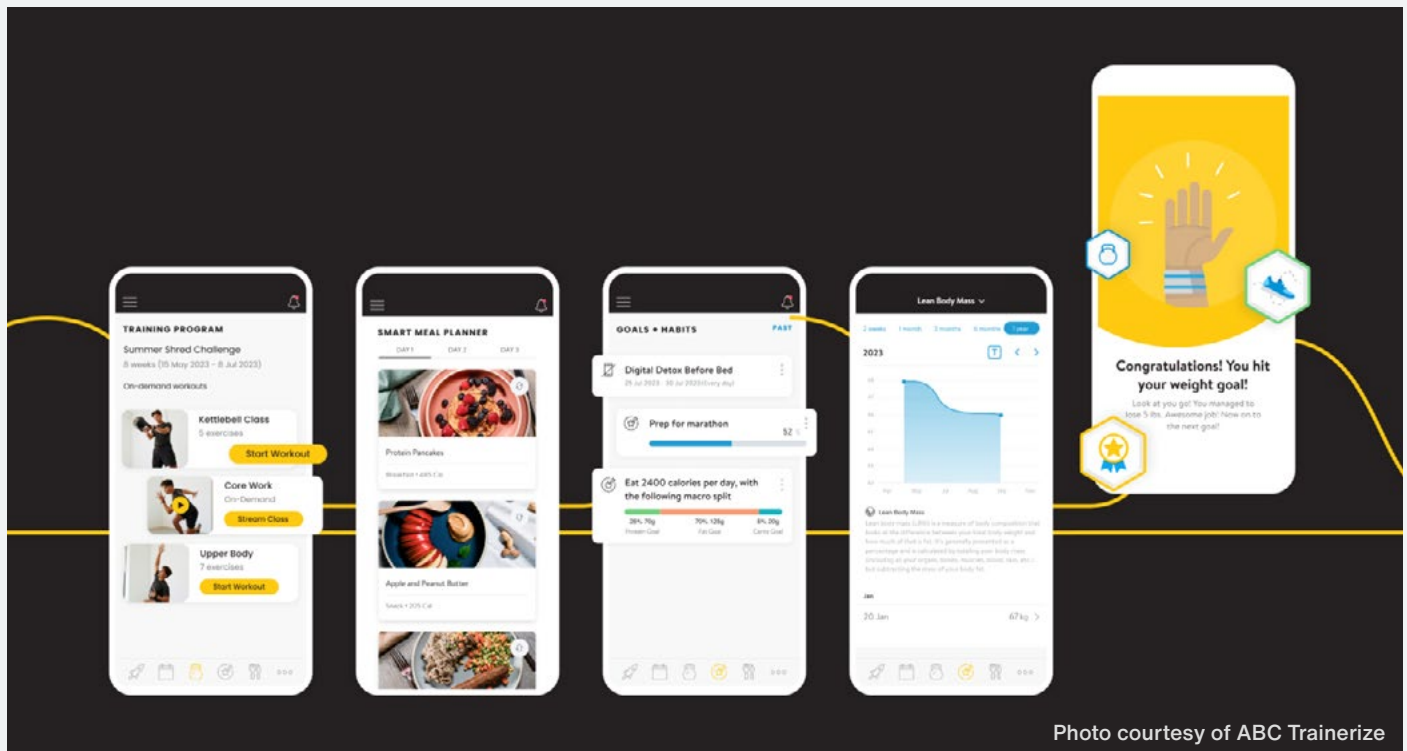


Photo courtesy of ABC Trainerize

The habits, nutrition and challenges feature sets were intentionally selected by the ABC Trainerize team for their abilities to drive engagement by motivating people to use the ABC Trainerize app every day, not just when they have a gym session on the calendar. In other words, they were chosen because they make a real difference in clients' lives.

"Trainers tell us time and time again, 'Our clients love using ABC Trainerize,'" Mohan says.

Habit Coaching To Drive Daily Change

Through Habit Coaching, trainers can encourage their clients to adopt small, daily practices related to health and wellness that over time can add up to big results.

Chong, who is Vice President of Design and Product Strategy at ABC Trainerize, said he and his team realized several years ago that the fitness industry was trending more towards a holistic view of health and wellness, prioritizing things like mental health, recovery, and sleep in addition to just hitting the weights or going for a run.

"We've seen a lot of people who hop on a meal plan for four weeks and they lose a lot of weight, but then they gain it all back," Chong says. "We started incorporating habits, and we've received a lot of positive feedback from our community saying they really want people to have lasting changes. Coaches want to see their clients healthy; they want to change lives. It's been a very powerful tool."

ABC Trainerize features a library of habits that personal trainers can encourage their clients to adopt, ranging from taking a more active route to work to eating protein with each meal to practicing a

nighttime routine before bed. For an added layer of personalization, Trainers can also prescribe custom habits to clients.

Interestingly but perhaps not surprisingly, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when people were stuck at home, abstaining from alcohol was one of the most-prescribed habits on ABC Trainerize.

Currently, habits based on nutrition are popular, Chong notes, mentioning eating enough vegetables and eating mindfully as two examples. "Reducing screen time before bed is another common one," he says.

Nutrition Coaching To Make Eating Healthy Fun and Easy

Eating right is an integral part of overall health and wellness, so ABC Trainerize recently rolled out a Nutrition Coaching feature set, intent on living up to its 360-degree approach and driving daily engagement between personal trainers and their clients.

"Our data told us we needed to be there," Mohan says of nutrition. "We were seeing about 150,000 workouts every single day on the platform, and we had a workout product. We didn't have a nutrition product yet, but we had 1 million meals tracked a day through our partner MyFitnessPal. We knew we needed to move in this direction."

With Advanced Nutrition Coaching, trainers can enter a daily caloric range and ABC Trainerize automatically generates a meal plan for clients.

Another important feature is photo food journaling—ABC Trainerize allows users to send pictures of the

“We’re trying to find the things that are boring or labor-intensive for the client or trainer, and use AI there.”

— Trevor Chong, Vice President of Design and Product Strategy, ABC Trainerize



Photo courtesy of ABC Trainerize

food they eat directly to their trainer for real-time nutrition feedback.

Photo journaling helps with diet compliance by encouraging clients to be more mindful and transparent about what they’re eating. Sending pictures is also a lot less tedious and time-consuming than manually tracking every calorie on a food-tracker app, making it easier for clients to stick with their plan.

“I tested it out as a client with my online trainer for six months, and it was some of the best compliance I’ve ever had with food tracking,” Mohan said, noting that his trainer could give him advice on what to eat for dinner based on what he ate for breakfast and lunch that day.

Challenges To Build Community and Attract New Clients

In response to feedback from its users, ABC Trainerize is adding Challenges to the platform—a new feature that gives personal trainers the ability to organize competitions or other fun games among groups of clients.

Since not everyone is the competitive type, ABC Trainerize offers two types of Challenges: leaderboard and participation-based. In a leaderboard challenge, a personal trainer’s clients are ranked based on their performance in specific fitness activities, like a race on an exercise bike, for example.

The participation-based Challenges don’t rank players and instead encourage people to commit to certain actions, like healthy eating. For example, a trainer could challenge their clients to eat at least two servings of vegetables a day. Clients would earn points for every day they eat their greens, with the goal being to achieve 90% compliance over a given period.

Challenges build community, but they’re also a potential revenue-generating tool for personal trainers, who can use them to engage with clients who might not yet be ready to purchase a personalized coaching program.

“Challenges can drive the growth of a trainer’s business by converting their social audiences into training audiences and then ultimately into paid training clients,” Mohan says.

Some trainers even opt to make their Challenges pay-to-enter. For personal trainers with large social media followings, that alone can be lucrative.

E-commerce To Help Coaches Run Successful Businesses Online

In addition to its client-facing features, ABC Trainerize has a dedicated e-commerce team that’s constantly building features designed to help trainers build their online businesses.

With ABC Trainerize Payments, for example, personal trainers can sell digital products online, such as a 60-day boot camp or a recurring monthly training program. The process is fully automated, so once a client buys a product, ABC Trainerize delivers the programming or content and takes care of the entire onboarding process, saving a lot of time for the busy personal trainer.

Further amping up its e-commerce and funnel-building capabilities, ABC Trainerize recently introduced a feature called Basic Clients, which allows trainers to offer content and free products to prospects and leads who haven’t yet purchased a coaching program.

“Through automation, trainers can upsell their Basic Clients into personalized programming over time,” Mohan explains. “That’s a powerful feature because as trainers are building online businesses, the concept of freemium will help them get more paid clients over time.”

Book, Buy, Train: The Future of ABC Trainerize

ABC Trainerize has been part of the ABC Fitness ecosystem for several years now. Mohan and Chong are excited about what the future holds not only for the platform they created, but for ABC as a whole following the acquisition.

ABC Fitness is bringing together tailored solutions and services dedicated to supporting fitness professionals at every stage of their growth. ABC Trainerize's expertise and mobile platform has become integral to ABC Fitness' wider delivery. As a result, the ABC Trainerize solution is already integrated and available to clients of ABC Ignite, the company's platform for high value low price (HVLP) gyms and clubs, as well as ABC Glofox, its lead platform for the boutique fitness and studio space. Together the company supports over 31,000 businesses globally.

With the seamless integration of the platforms, users will be able to book classes, buy memberships and engage in personal training all on the same mobile app.

The all-in-one solution will mark an important milestone for the industry, according to Mohan.

"Up until now, for the B2B SaaS providers, it's always been (just) booking and buying," he notes. "Now we can collectively say, 'Book, buy, train.' That's the combined value proposition we're selling."

The integration also presents exciting possibilities for the future of AI, as ABC Trainerize will be able to leverage millions of data points from 38 million members of gyms, clubs and boutique studios.

"We can start being very specific on how AI can complement everything a club operator does with a member in personal training, what a personal trainer does with their client, or even what a class-based studio does with someone coming in for a session," Mohan says.

"Our new ABC Fitness mission is to turn our clients' fitness visions into seamless realities," he adds. "We think AI can be the next way in which we deepen that element of our mission for seamless reality in terms of how clients and coaches engage with each other."

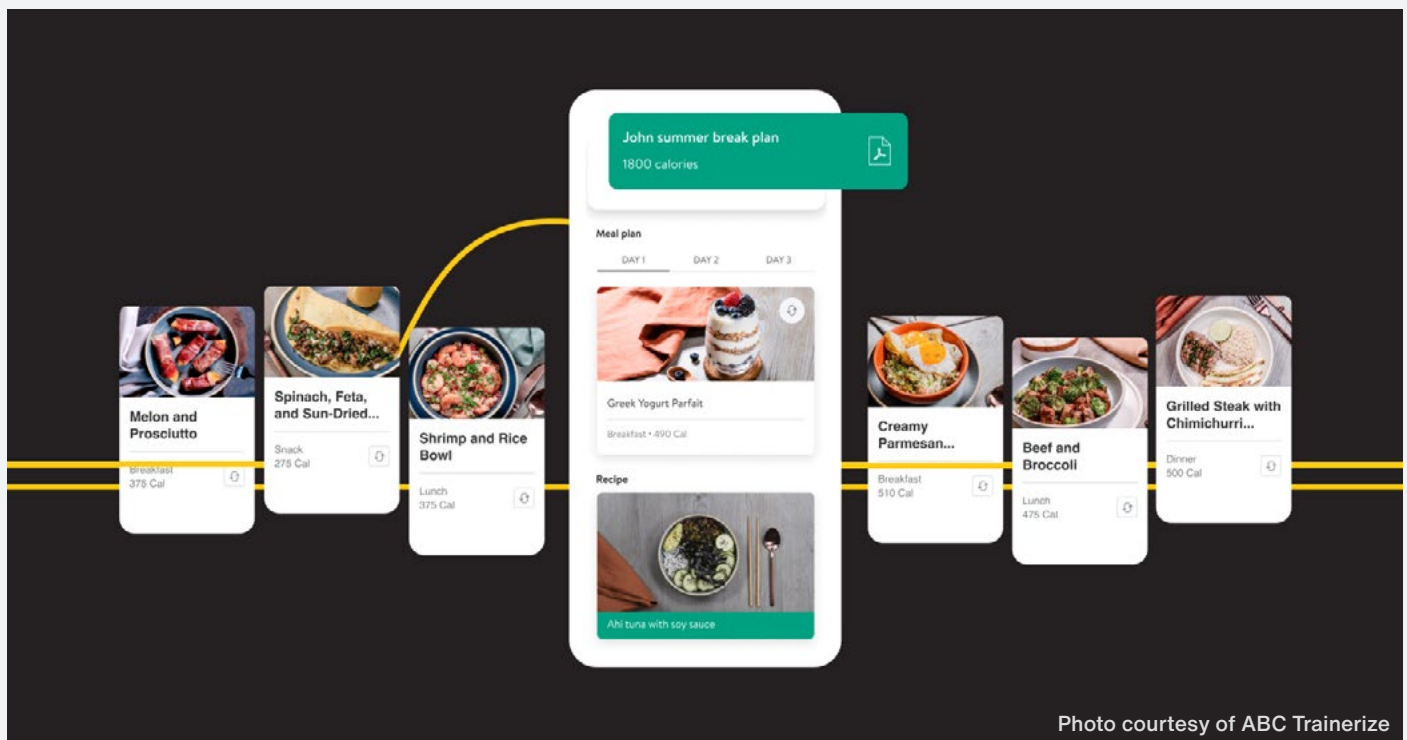


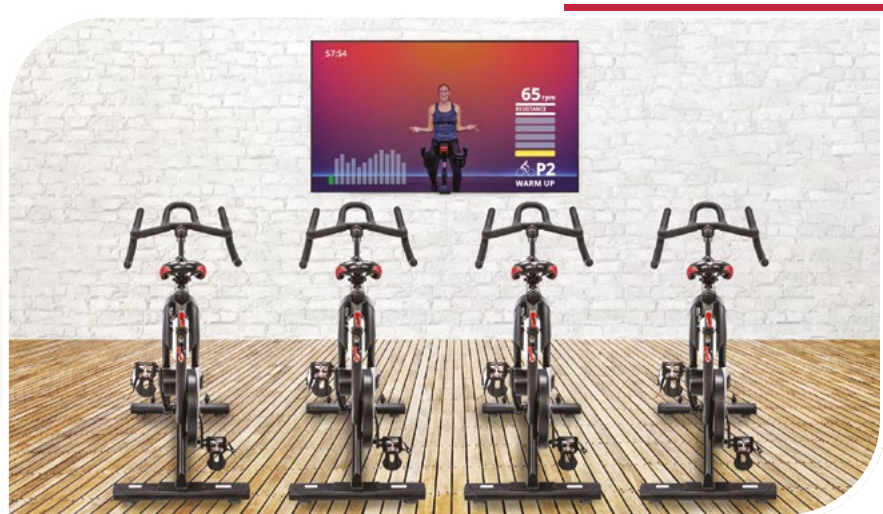
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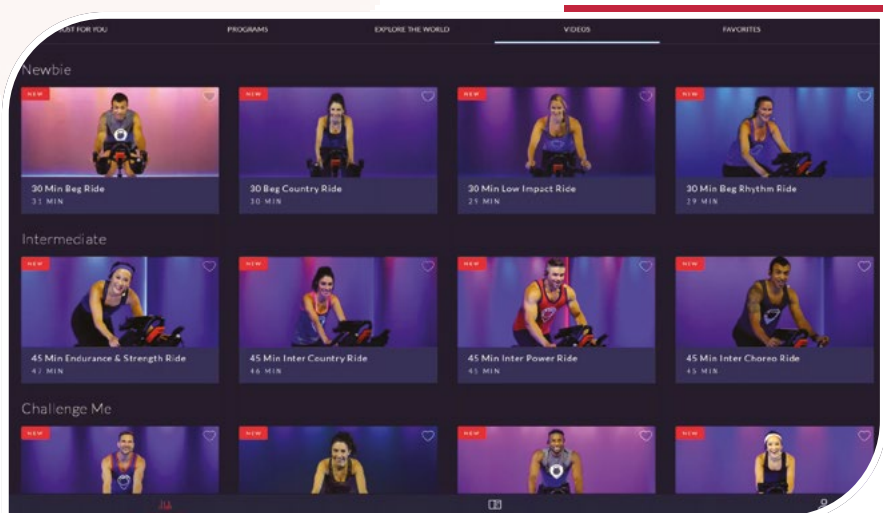
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Beyond ChatGPT: How AI Is Transforming Fitness & Human Performance

By Josh Liberatore



Photo courtesy of Tempo

Artificial intelligence has thrust itself into the mainstream in recent months, as tools like ChatGPT have made their way into the hands of the masses and sparked a media frenzy.

In the fitness industry, AI has become something of a buzzword, resulting in varying levels of unbridled enthusiasm, cautious optimism, apprehension and downright fear depending on whom you ask.

New direct-to-consumer apps pop up seemingly every day touting their plans to leverage the transformational powers of AI and machine learning to improve areas like coaching, motivation, nutrition and mental health.

Software providers, meanwhile, are announcing plans to use AI to help gyms and studios find new

customers and keep their current ones from leaving. While most in the industry seem to agree that ChatGPT by itself isn't going to make the personal trainer obsolete, there are companies in the fitness space working on more advanced AI projects that, if taken to their logical conclusions, could do just that.

At the same time, other firms are employing AI with the goal of making personal trainers better, equipping fitness coaches with better insights into the human body and enhanced capabilities to do their jobs.

As with any new technology, AI presents opportunities and possibilities, but also downsides.

While it's still early, here's a look at how a few innovative companies are using AI to disrupt the health and fitness space.

Gyms can have a lot of problems. You're often waiting for weights to become available, which means you can't be very efficient. At home, the whole weight set is yours, you can change the weights quickly and move from exercise to exercise."

— Moawia Eldeeb, co-founder and CEO, Tempo



Photo courtesy of Tempo

uses AI and machine learning to help people strength train with proper form while using personalized workout routines.

From the consumer's perspective, the Tempo system is pretty simple: users receive a set of smart weights – dumbbells and a barbell – that are tracked by AI-powered sensors. The sensors track the way your body moves during various exercises, allowing the Tempo to deliver real-time feedback on form.

Tempo can also track how fast you're moving the weight, which helps the system decide if you're going too light or too heavy.

"It constantly gives you the optimal weight," Eldeeb says. "If you're pushing at a certain speed, we know that weight is too light for you, for example."

The science powering Tempo's AI, however, is anything but simple. Over five-plus years, Eldeeb and his team placed 3D cameras in gyms around the globe to collect thousands of hours of video of people performing various strength-training exercises.

It was a long and laborious process, but by 2020, Tempo had enough confidence in its AI model's ability to diagnose and correct people's form that the company officially launched its smart home gym product to the public.

Tempo's launch, coincidentally, came as the pandemic was in full swing, making at-home fitness a necessity for those looking to stay in shape.

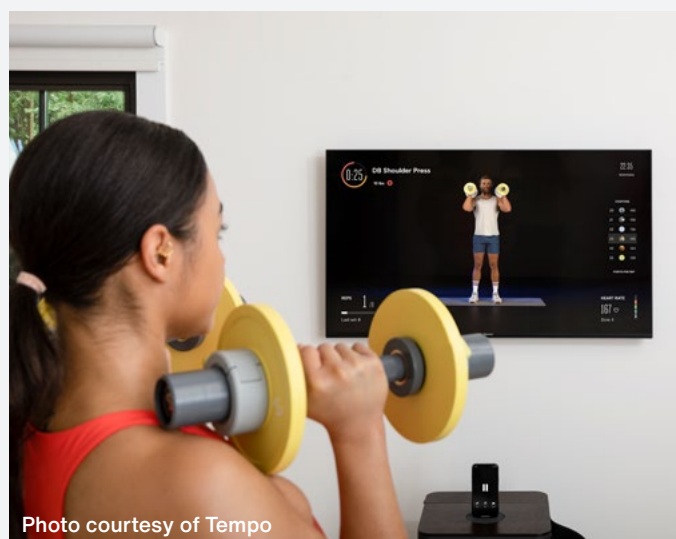


Photo courtesy of Tempo

Tempo Wants To Build the 'World's Best Personal Trainer'

Tempo co-founder and CEO Moawia Eldeeb got introduced to fitness as a homeless teenager, learning the ropes from personal trainers at his local YMCA who let him workout for free in exchange for a promise: he had to finish high school.

That arrangement paid off in more ways than one. Eldeeb discovered his lifelong passion in fitness and would go on to study computer science at the prestigious Columbia University.

As a college student who was personal training clients on the side to pay his bills for school, Eldeeb didn't have to wrack his brain too hard to figure out what he wanted to do with his Ivy League degree.

"How can I build the world's best personal trainer ever, and then make it affordable, so I can get it into the hands of as many people as possible," Eldeeb says of his reason for starting a fitness company.

The result: Tempo, a smart home-gym system that

Eldeeb doesn't view owning a Tempo and going to a physical gym as mutually exclusive – he says the at-home fitness company is well-suited to the growing number of people who prefer a hybrid approach to working out. But he says working out at home, with Tempo, offers some important performance benefits.

"Gyms can have a lot of problems. You're often waiting for weights to become available, which means you can't be very efficient," Eldeeb explains. "At home, the whole weight set is yours, you can

change the weights quickly and move from exercise to exercise.”

In 2021, Tempo received \$220 million in Series C funding to help the company scale. That same year, it dropped the price of its Move product from \$2,000 all the way down to \$495. That was an important step in helping Eldeeb realize his ultimate goal of democratizing access to personal training through technology.

“That was always the goal, build the world’s best personal trainer, but also make it affordable so everyone can access it,” he says.

In June, Tempo rolled out new features that Eldeeb believes makes the AI-powered system better than any human personal trainer ever could be.

Tempo can now leverage biometric data like VO2 max, heart rate and heart rate variability (HRV) to prescribe workout plans that are custom-made to how your body is feeling on a particular day.

“Let’s say, biometrically, you’re just a stronger person in the morning on a Wednesday. That’s the day we’ll tell you to go for a PR,” Eldeeb says.

Tempo’s AI model also figures out how your body responds to different exercises, rep ranges and rest periods, and then prescribes a workout routine that’s tailored to those findings.

“We call these dynamic training plans,” Eldeeb explains. “They keep adapting, so every week you’re working out (with Tempo) is a smarter, more effective week for you.”

Tempo further leverages biometric data to make in-workout adjustments to your training plan. For example, Eldeeb says the system can analyze your heart rate and tell you whether you should be pushing it harder or dialing it back during that session.

“Say your heart rate is getting too high, too quickly. We might have told you initially to do 12 reps, but today we’ll move it back to eight reps,” Eldeeb explains. “Or we thought 45 seconds would be a great rest time, but based on how your body is today, we’ll change that to 60 seconds.”

Eldeeb sums up his confidence in Tempo’s ability to deliver the ultimate personal training experience rather succinctly.

“Give us 30 minutes and we’ll give you the best workout of your life,” he says. “And it happens every day.”

Asensei Uses AI To Capture Movement

If the success of a company like Tempo spells bad news for personal trainers – and potentially the gyms they work for – the work of asensei should be more

reassuring for traditional fitness industry players.

Co-founded in 2014 by tech entrepreneur and karate coach Steven Webster, asensei creates software that allows health and fitness companies to motion-capture customers while they’re working out, whether at home or in-facility.

Powered by 3D computer vision, Asensei’s motion-capture software opens up a host of intriguing possibilities for the creative gym or studio, including increased personalization. That’s because in addition to just capturing motion, asensei uses AI to provide real-time coaching feedback on the movement it captures.

“Asensei doesn’t just classify what you’re doing, but understands how it should be performed,” Webster says.

Gyms and studios can utilize motion-capture to create what asensei calls a “smart warm-up” experience.

“You can be warming up in the gym or studio, and somewhat unbeknownst to you, asensei technology is recognizing the exercise you’re doing,” Webster explains. “If you’re doing a squat, at specific moments in that exercise, like the bottom of the squat, we’re measuring things like your hip flexion, your knee flexion, your torso position.”

Asensei can also teach people how to correctly perform strength training exercises, rowing strokes or yoga and pilates moves through its “instructional learning” feature.

“Lots of people say, ‘Oh, I’d love to do Pilates or yoga, but I don’t know any of the moves,’” Webster says. “It’s a great at-home experience that can be used to drive people into a studio, allowing them to make mistakes in the psychological safety of their own home and then come into class knowing a little.”

Connected fitness companies can use asensei’s instructional learning feature as a way to onboard new members and make sure they know how to perform movements safely on a new machine.

Another asensei solution is “real-time coaching,” which provides immediate feedback on form. For those using the technology at home, they could interface with a coach in VR who would be giving them feedback on how they can improve their form on a particular exercise or movement.

In the studio, asensei’s real-time coaching insights would be routed to the instructor leading a group fitness class. The instructor then has the discretion to meet with individual students to discuss their form.

“Imagine you’ve gone to a rowing class and you’re one of 20 people in a dark room with music. The instructor can’t see you, and you’re rowing incorrectly.

“

You can be warming up in the gym or studio, and somewhat unbeknownst to you, asensei technology is recognizing the exercise you're doing. If you're doing a squat, at specific moments in that exercise, like the bottom of the squat, we're measuring things like your hip flexion, your knee flexion, your torso position.”

— Steven Webster, CEO, asensei

You're going to go home sore and probably having not enjoyed the class very much,” Webster explains. “But if asensei sees that, asensei can route that to the instructor on the floor and say, ‘Steven on Erg number four, this is the mistake he's making, remember to tell him to push not pull, use his legs rather than his arms.’ And the coach can walk over and give that instruction.”

For gyms, Webster envisions a world where asensei technology is used in an entire connected fitness room. In the room, members can have their entire workouts digitally tracked, including sets and reps, as well as receive feedback on their form.

Personal trainers can monitor the connected fitness room and offer guidance to members struggling with their form.

“You could imagine an experience where you're just doing your gym workout, and then all of a sudden, a personal trainer walks over to you and says, ‘Hey, I've noticed you could use a little help on your kettlebell swing. Can I teach that to you for a moment?’”

Asensei technology can be used for a lot more than just teaching proper form though, Webster notes.

“Imagine walking into a boutique fitness studio, and at the end of your workout, instead of just getting an email with what heart rate zones you're in, now it tells you, you did x reps of this exercise and y reps of that exercise, or you were in the top three in the class for this segment of the workout.”

Another example: HIIT studios and connected fitness companies can use asensei to track how many reps each individual class member completes in an AMRAP (as many reps as possible) contest.

“There's so much content that the system is capturing,” Webster says. “It's up to the brand how they want to deliver it. But it doesn't have to all be about nuanced form correction. It can just be about fun.”

Asensei is currently piloting the room-scale version of its motion-capture technology with brick-and-mortar gyms, boutique fitness studios and Division 1 sports teams.

“Our pilot program offers these customers the opportunity to inform the priorities of the final solutions,” Webster says. “The solutions are typically room-scale implementations of solutions we're already delivering in an at-home environment.”

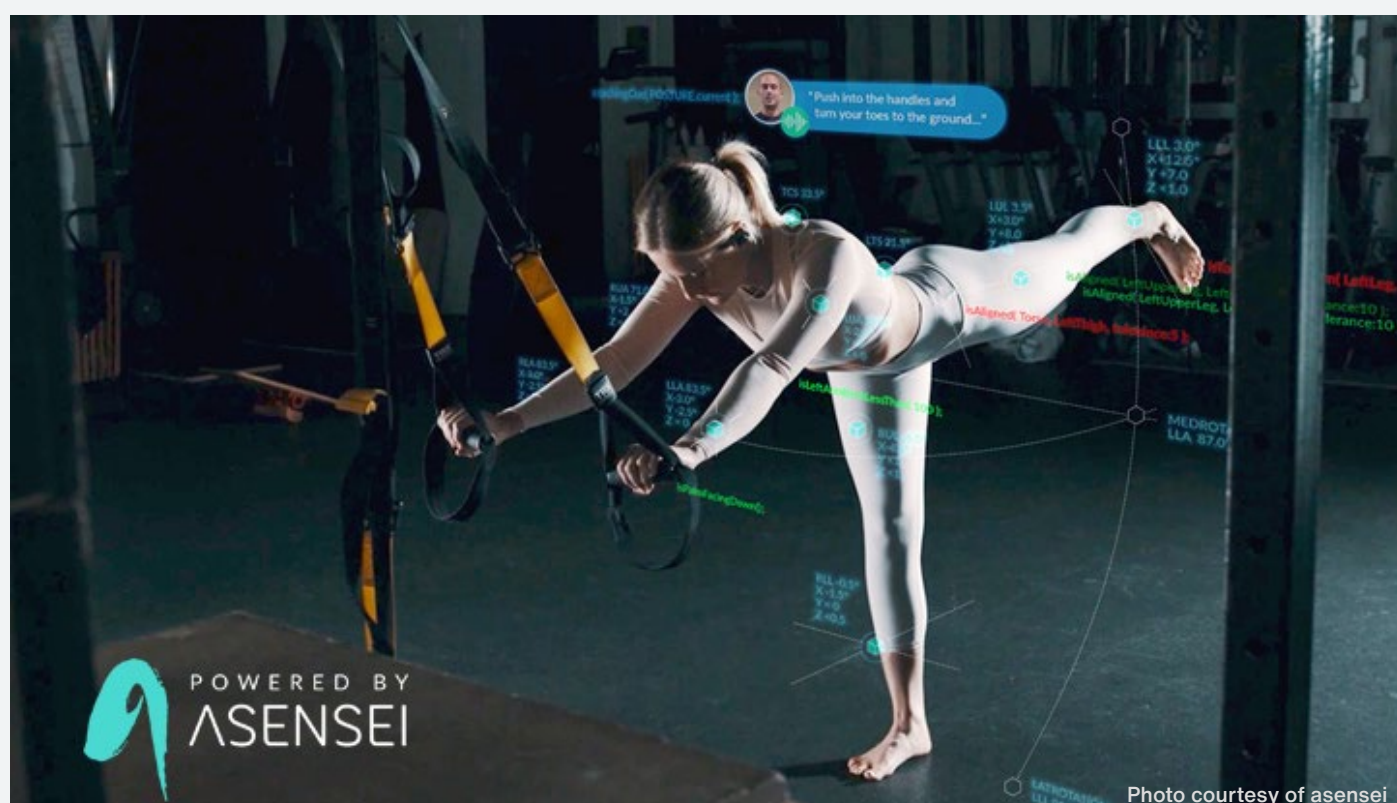


Photo courtesy of asensei

Zone7 Is at the Vanguard of Human Performance

An important and often overlooked part of training smarter is injury prevention. You can have the greatest workout plan in the world and the best tech guiding your form, but it's all for naught if you're physically unable to perform.

AI can help there, too.

Zone7, an AI platform designed to reduce injury risk and optimize performance in athletes, is laying the groundwork for what could become the next wave in human performance.

The Silicon Valley company has worked with teams from Europe's top soccer leagues, as well as with the NFL and the NCAA, to give coaches and medical staffs the information they need to lower the risk of injury to their players.

Zone7 notably worked with Liverpool FC during the 2021-22 season, helping the English Premier League club reduce by more than one-third the number of days it lost to injury compared to the previous season despite playing more matches than just about any other club on the planet.

Zone7's founder, Tal Brown, says the work his company is doing to mitigate the risk of injury in pro athletes – and the vast amounts of data it's collecting on player health and performance – is applicable to health and fitness.

"What we do now has an immediate crossover to the weekend warrior community, or folks who are closer to pro on the training regime," Brown says. "Over time we hope to take that to the broader fitness community."

The biggest hurdle to using AI to help everyday people mitigate their risk of injury while working out is getting enough quality data, Brown says.

Zone7 decided to start its human-performance journey with pro sports because it's relatively easy to obtain large amounts of data on players, including information about their health after games.

It's harder to get that kind of "post-workout" data for fitness, although the proliferation of wearables over the last few years has been a positive evolution.

"A lot of the fitness experiences out there now have access to a lot of data," Brown notes, mentioning wearables like Oura and Garmin and connected fitness companies like Peloton and Strava.

As fitness data becomes more plentiful, Zone7 could look to partner with companies, products or technologies in the fitness space that are looking to incorporate AI-generated advice into their experiences.

"We would be ideal for environments where folks are pursuing a specific goal," Brown says. "It's one thing if you're just trying to be healthy or just trying to sleep better, but if you're pursuing a goal, then you need to push yourself. We can help determine the optimal intensity ranges and timing of when and how to push yourself and when and by how much to pull back."

In terms of AI's ability to positively impact people in their health and fitness goals, Brown believes the fitness industry should focus on becoming "hyper-personalized."

"The industry is evolving from generic advice like, 'You should run less tomorrow' or 'You should get more sleep,'" Brown says. "The trend is towards more specific insights like, 'We know you're trying to run a 5K in under 25 minutes and your race is in three weeks. Here's what the next two to three days could look like to help you get there safely.'"

"If you ask ChatGPT to suggest a three-month plan for a person to hit a 5k run in under 35 minutes, it's probably going to come back really fast with a pretty good response. But if you come to it and say, 'I'm one month away from my 5k race, I just had this nag on my knee, and I haven't been out there for several days, what should the next workout look like?' Then it's probably not going to do a great job."

— Tal Brown, founder, Zone7



Photo courtesy of Zone7

That type of hyper-personalization is something basic tools like ChatGPT probably can't help with, so it will take AI experts like Zone7, working in conjunction with human experts, like personal trainers, to come up with a solution.

"If you ask ChatGPT to suggest a three-month plan for a person to hit a 5k run in under 35 minutes, it's probably going to come back really fast with a pretty good response," Brown says. "But if you come to it and say, 'I'm one month away from my 5k race, I just

had this nag on my knee, and I haven't been out there for several days, what should the next workout look like?' Then it's probably not going to do a great job."

For those interested in a more in-depth discussion on the differences between AI experts like Zone7 and generative AI products like ChatGPT, Brown discusses that and more on the Zone7 Performance Podcast, available on Spotify and Apple.



Photo courtesy of Zone7

A fitness studio with people exercising. A woman in a black sports bra and maroon leggings is in the foreground, performing a jump with her hands behind her head. In the background, a man in a black shirt and shorts is also exercising, and another woman in a white tank top and maroon leggings is visible on the right. The studio has large windows and gym equipment.

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How To Build a Great Fitness App, With Mutual Mobile

Mutual Mobile has helped Under Armour and Nike build best-in-class apps. Its experts share their wisdom on how fitness brands can win the digital game.

By Josh Liberatore

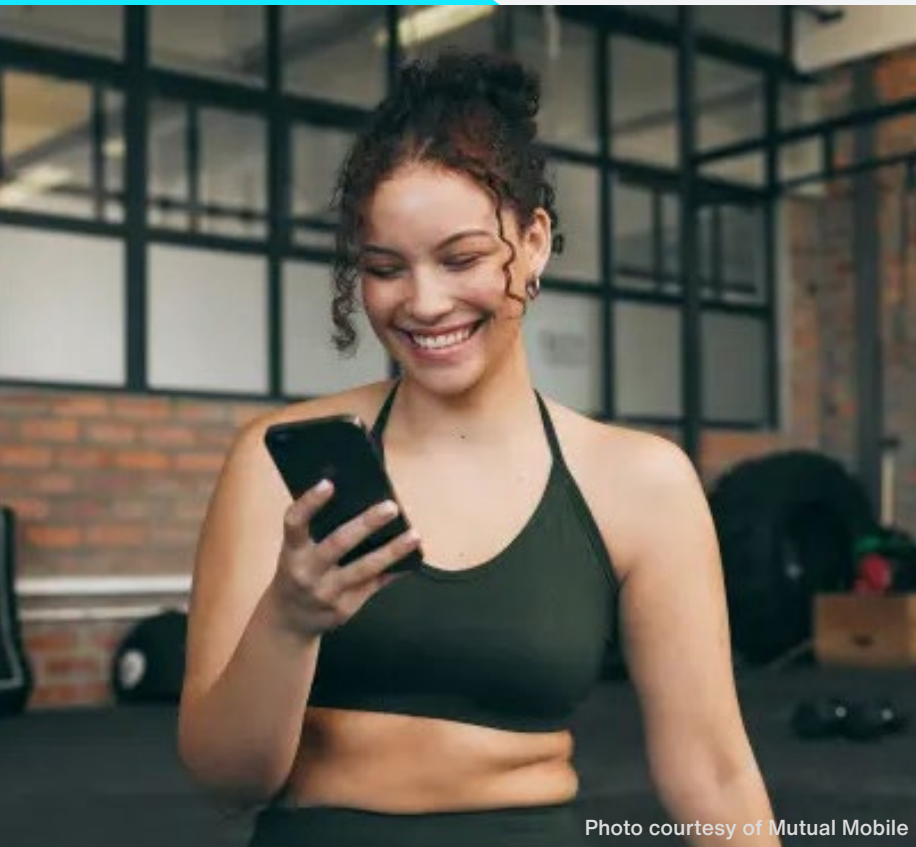


Photo courtesy of Mutual Mobile

The digital experience is everything in 2023. For fitness brands, having an app that's well-conceived, intuitive and engaging can make the difference between a successful business and one that flops.

Mutual Mobile, an innovation consultancy that helps companies design, build and manage digital products, has worked with some of the leading brands in fitness, health and wellness, including Under Armour and Nike.

Among its successes, the Austin, Texas,-based firm helped Under Armour create Record, an app the sportswear company launched to drive sales for its HealthBox, a connected fitness product designed to track sleep, fitness activity and nutrition via a heart rate monitor, wristband and scale.

The Record app, introduced in 2016, was used by 1.94 million users and saw over 2.6 billion workouts and activities logged. Under Armour won eight awards at CES 2016, including the Wearable Best in Show, for its Record and HealthBox products.

Mutual Mobile worked closely with Under Armour on virtually every aspect of Record from start to finish, including the app's name itself, noted David Garlinski, Mutual Mobile's Senior Director of Strategic Accounts.

"It was a real collaborative effort," Garlinski said, adding that Mutual Mobile has done other projects for Under Armour since then, including helping to overhaul the company's online shopping app, UA Shop.

“They still come back to us periodically,” he says.

Mutual Mobile has also designed apps for a social fitness company that encourages people to be active through team movement challenges and a sports tech company that makes a calf compression sleeve that tracks users’ metabolic activity and lactate threshold.

Garlinski and Prasanna Tolasati, Mutual Mobile’s Lead Project Manager for fitness tech, spoke with Athletech News about how fitness brands can build apps that attract users and ultimately drive sales.

Understand Your Users

Fitness brands, like many companies, often underestimate the vast amount of market research that’s needed in order to build a great app, according to Tolasati.

“It’s something we’ve had to assist almost every client with,” he says. “You need to do that research to understand the problem you’re trying to solve and who you’re trying to solve it for, because fitness has its own answers for different types of people.”

Market research needs to be deep enough to glean meaningful insights into an app’s users and potential users.

“I’ve seen quite a few instances with fitness influencers who have blue checkmarks on Instagram and Twitter, and they’re basically just putting out an open question on their stories asking, ‘What features would you like to see?’” Tolasati says. “That’s too vague to understand what users actually want.”

Instead, brands should take the time to carefully consider the demographics of the user base they’re targeting with a particular product, including age, socioeconomic status and geographic region. Something as fundamental as the optimal subscription price for an app or service can vary significantly depending on those factors.

Talking to industry experts can be a useful way for fitness brands to get data that will ultimately improve their apps.

For brands that intend to offer tracking services, “asking a coach or a personal trainer how they like to track their clients’ workouts or how their clients want their workouts tracked is important,” noted Tolasati, who is an ACE-certified personal trainer himself.

True to its mission of providing clients with an end-to-end solution for apps and other digital products, Mutual Mobile can help fitness brands perform market research.

“We have product owners and product managers who know what queries you need to run, what surveys you need to conduct, the type of frameworks that

you have to implement to get that information and translate it into building a minimum viable product,” Tolasati explains.

I’ve seen quite a few instances with fitness influencers who have blue checkmarks on Instagram and Twitter, and they’re basically just putting out an open question on their stories asking, ‘What features would you like to see?’ That’s too vague to understand what users actually want.”

— Prasanna Tolasati, Lead Project Manager, Fitness Tech, Mutual Mobile



Photo courtesy of Mutual Mobile

Function and Form

Functionality is key; the fun stuff can – and should – be added later.

When Mutual Mobile was working with a U.K.-based social fitness app, the first thing the firm did was make sure the app worked the way it was supposed to for users every time they turned it on. Mutual Mobile also planned for the app’s future growth.

“When they came to us, they were experiencing major issues; it was crashes or specific bugs, and notifications that weren’t firing properly,” Garlinski said of the social fitness company’s initial app.

Mutual Mobile ironed those issues out first and then went to work on building out new features and enhancing aesthetics. For every app, there needs to be a solid foundation to build upon.

The U.K.-based company had a great app with a rough back-end, the foundation, noted Garlinski. But the work Mutual Mobile proposed to their executive team set them right and established a way forward to building past their MVP (Minimum Viable Product).

The social fitness app is designed around team movement challenges where people can join together with friends, family and colleagues to set goals for physical activity and healthy habits, all with the objective of reaching the top of a mountain for a specific challenge. An example would be a group of friends setting a team goal of burning 10,000 calories in seven days.

To drive engagement and make users want to open the app on their phones every day, Mutual Mobile built an array of features that added “little pieces of delight” throughout the app, Garlinski said.

“Each time you worked out, you got a notification about the summary of your workout, and it gave you some delight with confetti falling on the screen, and the guy had his arm raised because he was excited,” he noted. “Once you got to the top of the mountain, you got to plant your flag.”

Reduce Friction

You can build the best app in the world, but if users don’t stick around long enough to appreciate its features, that won’t matter.

“Friction is a big deal,” Garlinski says. “A good portion of people fall off during the tutorials or the onboarding because it takes too much time.”

Mutual Mobile has worked with clients to shorten their apps’ onboarding duration, or even give users the option of skipping onboarding initially and coming back to it later instead.

“If you get to test drive a car, you should be able to test drive an app,” Garlinski says.

And a 7-day free trial might not be long enough if an app is packed with features, especially those that may take longer than a week for users to fully appreciate.

“A lot of apps don’t give you the opportunity to completely see what the app does before they make you buy,” Garlinski noted, adding that it’s important for brands to carefully balance monetizing an app with the need to build a solid user base.

Be Realistic About Budget

Like prospective homeowners, companies planning an app often fail to account for maintenance costs.

“A lot of folks that come to us have the idea to design their Ferrari or their multimillion dollar home, and they have the funds to buy it, but they don’t have the

funds to maintain it,” Garlinski says.

“Code isn’t perfect,” he notes. “You have to make sure that you have the right resources in place to handle bug fixes, handle the person who comes and says, ‘Why doesn’t your app do this?’”

In addition to bug fixes, Garlinski says companies should plan for software updates that Apple and Google roll out for the iOS and Android operating systems, new devices and updates to core software like Apple HealthKit and Google Fit, among other potential maintenance considerations.

“It’s not a build once, deploy and forget process,” Garlinski says of a fitness brand’s mobile app.

A lot of folks that come to us have the idea to design their Ferrari or their multimillion dollar home, and they have the funds to buy it, but they don’t have the funds to maintain it.”

— David Garlinski, Senior Director of Strategic Accounts, Mutual Mobile



Photo courtesy of Mutual Mobile

Focus on a Few Key Features

Fitness brands looking to score high on user experience should resist the urge to cram a million and one features into an app, according to Tolasati.

“Fewer features that are more valuable to users is definitely better than 150 features that most people hardly use,” Tolasati says.

He mentioned the Nike Training Club App as a good example of what most brands should be shooting for. The NTC App integrates data from fitness wearables like the Apple Watch, but doesn't overwhelm users with an abundance of features, Tolasati noted.

“It's a very well-defined product,” he says. “It may not have as many functionalities as something like the Garmin App, but it doesn't need to, because it's not meant for sport-specific users.”

Going Beyond Apps

While building best-in-class apps is Mutual Mobile's

bread and butter, the firm helps companies, including fitness brands, with all aspects of their digital ecosystem.

“Apps only work if back-end works,” Garlinski noted. “We're not a one-stop shop for mobile apps, we do a lot more.”

Mutual Mobile can help fitness brands build admin portals, for example. The firm also provides strategic advice to companies on which third-party chat or notification providers they should work with if they want their apps to have those kinds of functionalities.

“If your product is simply a POS system at the gym, we can help you build that out too, or integrate the POS into your custom app,” Garlinski adds. “White-label services are fine, but they're not customizable. We're custom, and we can help you build out custom (mobile) applications, desktop applications or anything like that.”



Photo courtesy of Mutual Mobile

BODY20 Aims To Transform Your Workouts With EMS

The boutique fitness concept uses Electrical Muscle Stimulation to deliver the muscle-building benefits of a full strength-training program in one 20-minute workout

By Josh Liberatore



Photo courtesy of BODY20

Getting all the benefits of several long, intense gym sessions in one 20-minute workout might seem too good to be true, but for BODY20, it's all a matter of science.

The boutique fitness concept puts members through 20-minute long workouts while wearing an FDA-cleared electrical muscle stimulation (EMS) suit. EMS essentially works by using electrical stimulation to create frequent muscle contractions, mimicking the natural action potentials your body sends to your muscles to tell them to move.

The whole-body EMS technology used by BODY20 produces over 150 times more muscle contractions than a conventional workout. That allows users to build muscle and burn calories in a fraction of the time, all while promoting better recovery through increased blood flow and other advantageous physiological responses.

"It's biohacking you and your body," explains Christopher Pena, BODY20's president. "That's where we get our tagline, 'Every.Body.Unleashed.'"

During a typical BODY20 workout, members perform compound, strength-training movements, like squats, without weights while wearing an EMS suit.

"We do offer cardio, but at our foundation, we're a strength training concept," Pena explains. "We don't replace spin class, we replace lifting weights."

The EMS-induced muscle contractions activate opposing muscle groups in the body, turning BODY20 exercises into full-body movements.

"You go down into a squat and when you go to stand up, your body says, 'Nope, I'm staying right here,' and it's contracting to stay there," Pena explains. "You have to use opposing muscle groups to fight that."

The EMS makes it feel like you're working against external resistance even though most BODY20 workouts are bodyweight only.

"If I'm going to do a bicep curl with EMS, it feels like I have weight in my hands because my triceps are saying, I would like to keep the arm straight. I'm essentially fighting my triceps," Pena says.

“

We're for the person who says, 'I know that I have to pick up weights to look the way I actually want to look, but I don't want to spend three to five days a week in the gym lifting.'"

— Christopher Pena, president, BODY20

Performance and Recovery Benefits

Among several benefits, BODY20's whole-body EMS workouts are designed to increase blood flow and circulation in the lymphatic system. That helps you recover quicker from the body's natural inflammatory response to strength training.

"Whole-body EMS helps get you less sore, faster," Pena explains.

Whole-body EMS has also been shown to increase the amount of testosterone and human growth hormone (HGH) your body produces in response to strength training.

"With EMS, we're training every major muscle group in your body at the same time, which is going to lead to a significantly higher rate of release of testosterone and HGH, typically about three to four times higher," Pena says.

According to a 2007 study in the Journal of Applied Physiology that measured the effects of electrical stimulation training on the quads during isometric movements, EMS exercise resulted in significantly greater HGH response and muscle damage than traditional, non-EMS exercise.

HGH helps with muscle growth, known as hypertrophy, meaning BODY20 members can build significantly more muscle per minute during EMS workouts than they can with traditional strength training.

"Since HGH is the primary factor of tissue remodeling inside of the muscle, we're creating three to four times the ability to create hypertrophy in your body, which is typically why people are going to lift weights," Pena notes.

HGH also helps with muscle repair, so whole-body

EMS helps you recover from your workouts faster.

The physiological changes EMS produces can also help higher-level athletes with performance.

"We have bodybuilders come in – we're not going to replace weightlifting for a bodybuilder – but when you hit a plateau that you just can't get past, come train with us for six weeks, once a week, and all of a sudden you just blow past your plateau," Pena says. "Because we've increased the amount of muscle fiber you can contract naturally."

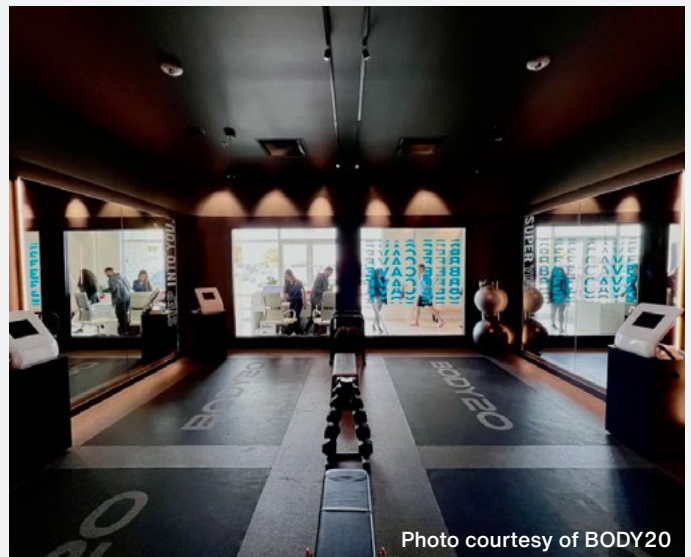
Targeting a Specific Female Demographic

EMS can certainly benefit gym-goers on the higher end of performance, but BODY20 classes are primarily designed for clients who want to get the aesthetic and physiological benefits of strength training without spending hours a week inside of a gym hitting the iron.

"We're for the person who says, 'I know that I have to pick up weights to look the way I actually want to look, but I don't want to spend three to five days a week in the gym lifting weights,'" Pena says.

Since the typical BODY20 member can get all the strength-training benefits they need from one 20-minute session per week, they regain valuable time to focus on fitness activities that bring them joy.

"BODY20 allows you to go do that spin class five days a week or go hiking three times a week," Pena says.



"Because you only have to come here once." The average BODY20 customer is a 40-plus-year-old female, according to Pena.

"We like to say we're on the 'Mom loop,'" he says. "That's not to exclude any strong, professional women, but I say 'Mom loop' because that's where we try to place studios. It's somewhere close to home and convenient to everything in a mom's busy and demanding day."

Expansion Plans

BODY20's strategy is paying off so far.

The boutique fitness concept currently has 50 studios opened in 18 states across the country. It expects to have 30 more locations up and running by the end of the month. All locations are franchised except for one corporate-owned facility in Houston.

Expect to see more BODY20 studios pop up in spots around the country soon. The boutique fitness concept has already sold around 280 locations, and it's just getting started.

"This has all happened in the last 18 months," Pena says of BODY20's franchise growth. "We just started scaling the brand."

BODY20 is on pace to have 100 locations open by the end of 2023 or the first quarter of 2024.

The boutique fitness concept has specific plans to expand or increase its presence in locations including New York, Chicago, Seattle and California.

While BODY20's core customer base may be approximately 70% women, EMS training is proving popular with people of all genders, ages and fitness levels.

"We walked into our studio in Boca Raton one day, and there was an NFL pro athlete training next to a 92-year-old woman, and they're getting the exact same workout, doing the exact same movements," Pena says. "Where else can you find that?"



Photo courtesy of BODY20

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Is XR the Future of Fitness?

FitXR's mission to get people off the couch, and how XR, or Extended Reality, will change the workout game.

By Judith Russell



Photo courtesy of FitXR

Sam Cole didn't have to think about exercise very much when he was growing up playing sports in New Zealand. For him, being active was a byproduct of getting into the flow of competitive team athletics.

It wasn't until after he stopped playing rugby post-university that the FitXR founder and CEO had to find other ways of keeping fit. He found that boutique group fitness classes offered a great way to get into what he calls a "flow-like state," in which the experience is so immersive that he forgets he's working out.

He began to think about the different elements of high-quality group fitness – a great instructor, engaging environment, motivating music and the opportunity to synchronously work out with other people – and how it could be delivered in a new way to more people.

"When we launched FitXR in 2016, many in the

industry were talking about immersive fitness, but not in connection with VR headsets, which were still associated with video gamers. I thought a lot about how to combine a great soundtrack, great lighting effects, a great instructor and great environment. What's the next thing we could do? We could bring in the visual layer. I kind of merged these two thoughts in my head and was pretty sure you could deliver an amazing experience helping people to get into a flow-like state around exercise via a virtual reality headset."

Cole and his partners carried the core belief that immersive fitness would get people into a flow-like state into its first product, a boxing app, and soon added four additional modalities: high intensity interval training; dance; combat; and sculpt.

FitXR's aim is to deliver a holistic and varied fitness experience similar to that of a club with different studios and modalities that target different muscle

groups and give different fitness experiences, keeping people engaged and coming back for more.

Cole is particularly excited about the variety part.

“In the FitXR boxing experience, for example, you are transported into a virtual environment that has been purposefully designed to deliver its proprietary boxing content, with cues flying towards you on the beat of the music representing different punch moves. The dance studio, by contrast, is a different environment that’s been purpose-built to deliver its dance content. At that studio, you are modeling an instructor who is completing the moves in front of you. And then through body recognition, it’s able to infer how you’re doing those moves against what the instructor is doing, and you are scored accordingly.”

Going With the Flow

Cole identified the four key elements of the FitXR workout that make it so engaging and send customers into a flow-like state. The first is the sense of being transported to another place.

“Our customers report that they put the headset on and are transported to a separate location. This satisfies a lot of customers’ needs around the separation between home and gym. Especially during COVID, many of our customers said that was a really big factor for them.”

The second is the feeling of community. All of the FitXR modalities have asynchronous avatars, which means when you take a class, you look to your left and right and see people who have done that class in Avatar form before you at earlier times. The instructor avatars speak to you and interact with you as an individual, giving a hybrid experience of group fitness and personal training. You have the feeling of doing this together with other people, while getting almost one-on-one coaching, all while being transported to another place.

The visual and gamification elements, in Cole’s opinion, contribute most to the immersive experience. The FitXR boxing classes, choreographed by a team of instructors from places like Rumble, Equinox and Barry’s Bootcamp in New York are, he says, “Like taking a class in a Manhattan boxing studio, except that cues are flying towards you on the beat of the music in a virtual environment, so it’s even better than standing in a studio and punching a bag. Many of our customers will tell us they get lost in the experience when they put the headset on. They stop looking at the clock and 30 minutes later are drenched in sweat and feeling fantastic, a feeling they never got doing exercise before.”

From Gamers to Grandmas

FitXR has successfully shifted its customer base from predominantly 18-year-old male gamers to an audience that is now 35-plus and skews female. It

“Many of our customers tell us they never found exercise engaging until they tried FitXR and were able to transport themselves into a virtual world in which the experience feels so fun and engaging that they start to realize that they can exercise. For a lot of people, it’s just about finding the right movement for you at whatever point in your journey that you’re on.”

— Sam Cole, CEO and co-founder, FitXR



Photo courtesy of FitXR

serves a broad range of ages and fitness abilities, from the 13-year-old kid who hates exercise to the 65-year-old who has been exercising her whole life but uses FitXR as the most fun part of her existing routine.

This demographic shift has helped the headset companies expand their customer base as well. FitXR invests a lot of time and effort into its relationships with the hardware suppliers. “If you were in London in early April, you would see FitXR billboards and bus shelters that Meta are paying for, because it’s mutually beneficial for them to drive awareness of FitXR and to promote fitness in general as a use case for the underlying hardware.”

Gaming still represents somewhat of a gateway drug for VR fitness, however, and Cole attributes some of FitXR’s success to newer video games that get people moving.

“You’ve gone from gaming on your PlayStation using your thumbs to the most popular game in virtual

reality today, which is Beat Saber. Think of Guitar Hero with lightsabers. It's great. And what many people do is they'll buy a headset to play Beat Saber, and they'll be slicing away at these musical cues and having a great time and suddenly realizing that they're getting a little bit of a workout. And then this sparks the thought in people's heads about using a headset for fitness, to get a workout. Then they wonder what specific fitness product they could exercise with and check out FitXR."

Cole thinks people's impressions of what a gamer is have already started to change.

"I think as more and more gamers use virtual reality to game using their entire body, whether it's lightsabers or running around virtual spaces, I wonder whether you get to this world where e-sport athletes in the future will more closely resemble athletes of today, because they'll have to be so fit and strong to be able to perform at the highest level in these active virtual reality games. So I think there could be a very interesting crossover point."

Is This the Answer for the 80%?

Cole feels that many FitXR customers were previously conditioned to think that, because it's always been something that they've struggled to engage with, exercise isn't for them.

"For those customers, I think this is where we really start to see the impact of the power of immersive fitness. Because you can present fitness in a way that feels easier, that feels more engaging, that has all of the same efficacy as traditional fitness. Many of our customers tell us they never found exercise engaging until they tried FitXR and were able to transport themselves into a virtual world in which the experience feels so fun and engaging that they start to realize that they can exercise. For a lot of people, it's just about finding the right movement for you at whatever point in your journey that you're on."

At around \$10 a month, FitXR, like others in the VR workout space, is extremely affordable. People who don't already own a Meta Quest II or similar headset, however, need to make the additional hardware investment. Considering the cost to buy high-quality exercise equipment plus a subscription, or the monthly cost to belong to a boutique fitness studio, it's still a good value.

Said Cole: "We've tried to not just serve the 20% who exercise regularly, but also serve the 80%. We're ready to serve everyone. With a mission to broaden the amount of people who are exercising, we want it to be priced accordingly."

The Future

Technology is continuously evolving, and FitXR, whose name contains the acronym for "Extended Reality," is keeping pace. Said Cole: "We are seeing technology moving from pure virtual reality, or VR,

where you're entirely immersed in a virtual world, to a thing called mixed reality, or MR, where you can start to bring in elements of your surroundings."

He explained that with mixed reality, you could have a headset on but also see, if you wanted to, some or all of the things in the actual room you are in. This combination of VR and AR enables an experience in which you take your real surroundings and add a visual layer to it that transports you to a different place which, according to Cole, opens up many possibilities from a modality perspective.

“

We are seeing technology moving from pure virtual reality, or VR, where you're entirely immersed in a virtual world, to a thing called mixed reality, or MR, where you can start to bring in elements of your surroundings.”

— Sam Cole

"With these mixed reality headsets, you can suddenly bring in the bike, you can see your actual feet, you can see the resistance toggle, you can see the handlebars, and then on the top half, instead of looking down at a screen, everything above the handlebars can be wrapped in a completely virtual environment. So we're really excited about what this enables us to do. It's not just bikes we could integrate with, it's kettlebells, dumbbells, elliptical machines, Pilates reformers, TRX machines, anything."

He said that his company has no intention of getting into the equipment business, so is having conversations with many different potential hardware partners.

"There are many amazing companies out there for whom we can come along and build virtual reality content that could take this to the next level or just provide additional value for their existing customer base."

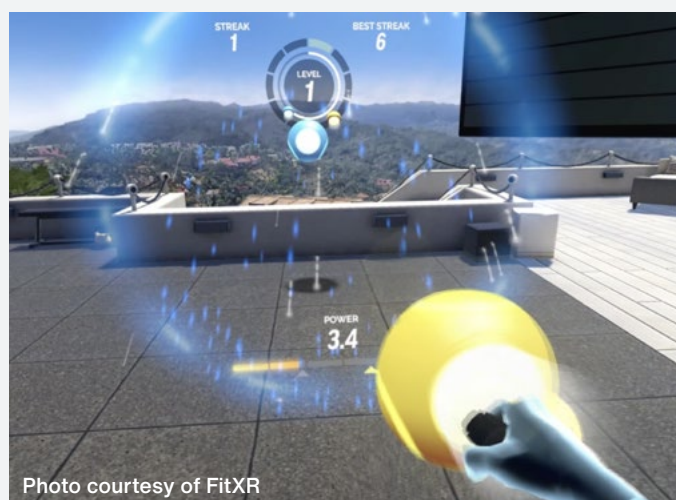


Photo courtesy of FitXR

Many Fitness Players Entering the Space

Connected VR Fitness platform Holofit, by Swiss Company Holodia, is another popular VR fitness platform that connects a headset with compatible hardware made by Technogym, WaterRower, StairMaster and others.

Litesport, formerly known as Liteboxer, just added a VR-enable strength training app to its portfolio. The Les Mills BodyCombat VR has a huge following. Win Reality's VR app that helps improve baseball and softball skills is extremely popular among younger customers. And the roster keeps growing. Many large gym chains are adding virtual workouts using VR headsets to their hybrid workout offerings.

Earlier this year Meta acquired Within, whose VR fitness product Supernatural differs from FitXR in a few key ways, according to Cole.

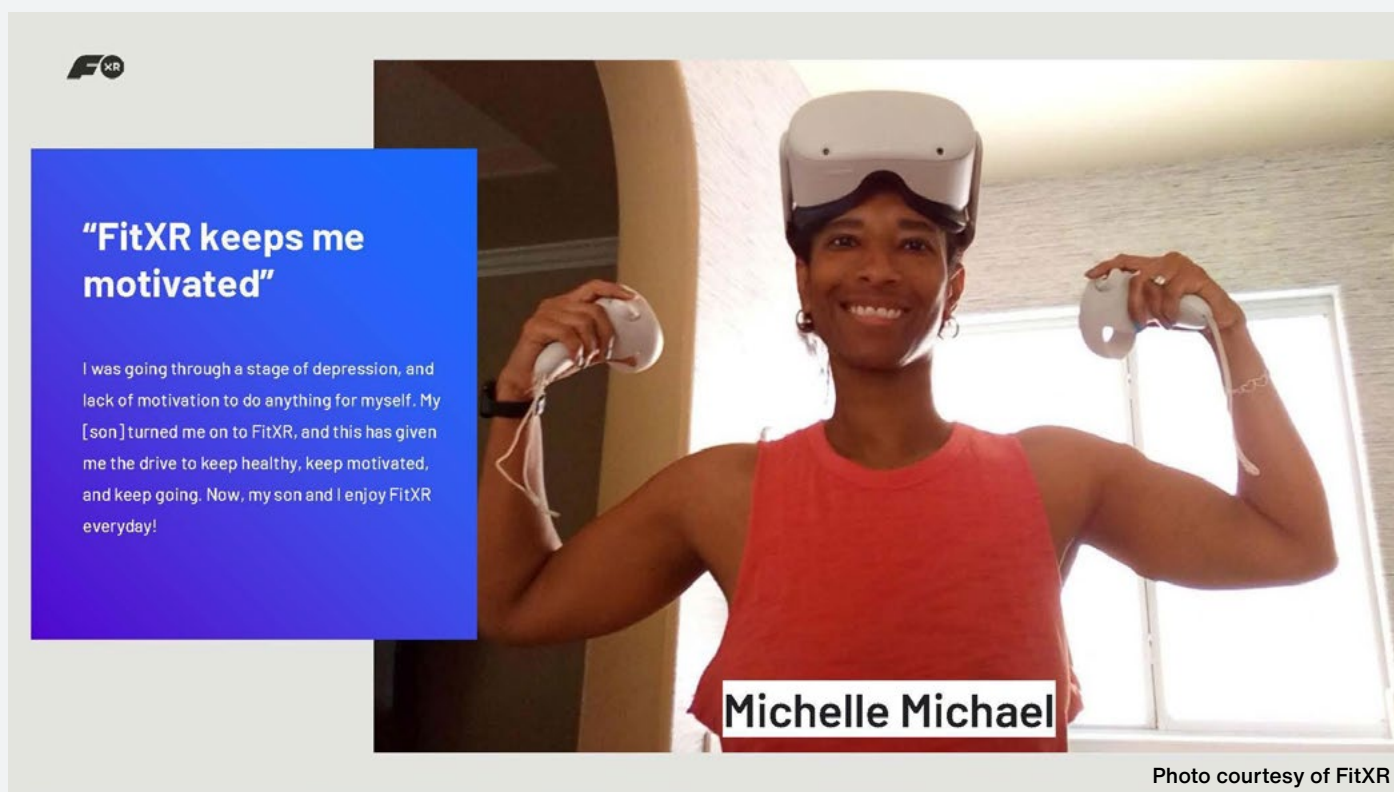
"Supernatural has real-life instructors represented by video format and a slightly different and narrower range of classes than FitXR. They have one core experience, which is their slicing mode, and then they have a boxing module, which they added on top

of that. So we feel like Supernatural is our closest competitor in this space, but we're going in pretty different directions."

And then there's Apple. The Cupertino, California-based behemoth recently announced it will begin selling a mixed reality headset early next year for a cool \$3500. Many believe the headset debut will accompany enhanced offerings from Apple Fitness+ and strengthen the Apple Fitness ecosystem. As with most new technologies, however, the more options people have, and the more innovation happening, the more people will begin to participate in XR Fitness, offering growth opportunities for the entire industry.

Cole and his team like to say that their competition isn't other fitness brands, it's the couch.

"It's a really hard challenge. But it's also a really great mission. People in our company, many of whom come from video game backgrounds, get really engaged with this, and they love coming to work, knowing that we're trying to make the world a better place by giving people more access to fitness and trying to get more people to have a habit around fitness."



FitXR

"FitXR keeps me motivated"

I was going through a stage of depression, and lack of motivation to do anything for myself. My [son] turned me on to FitXR, and this has given me the drive to keep healthy, keep motivated, and keep going. Now, my son and I enjoy FitXR everyday!

Michelle Michael

Photo courtesy of FitXR



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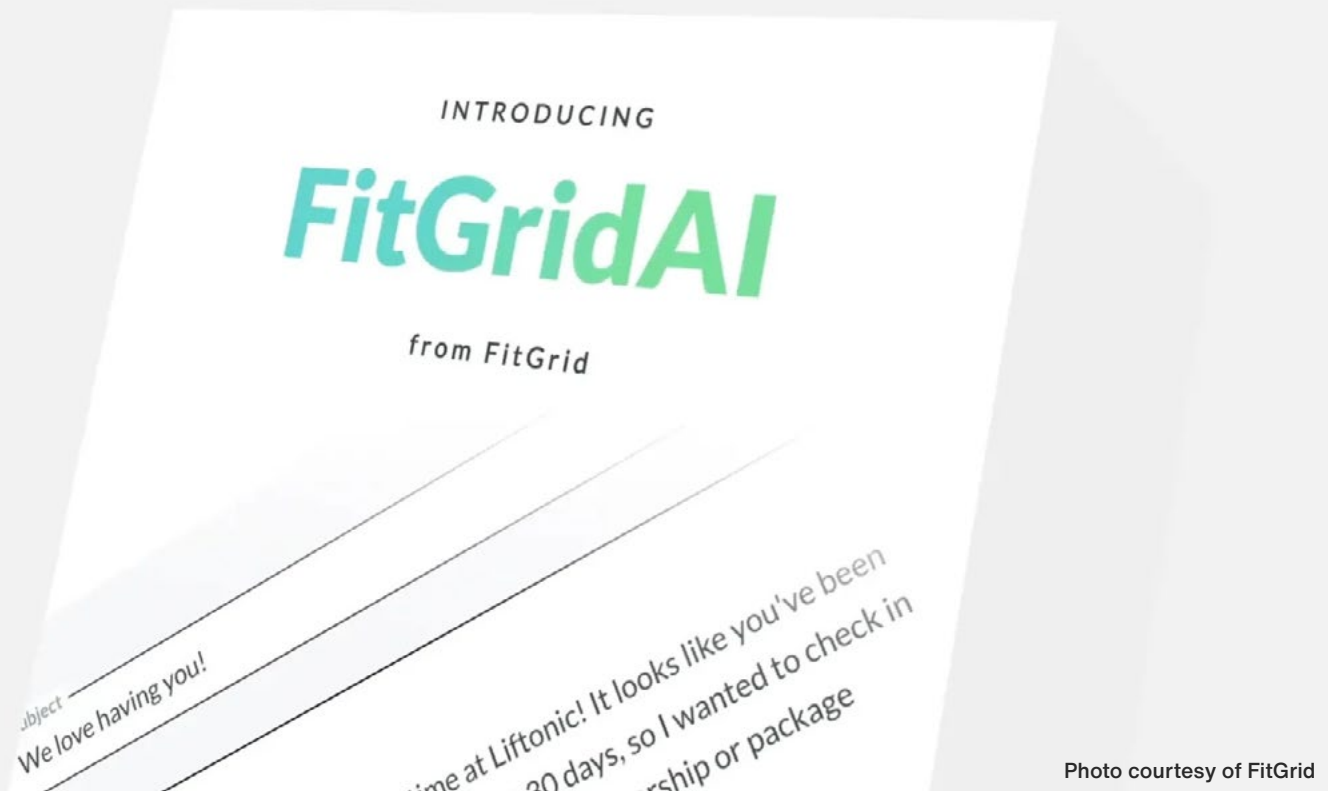


Photo courtesy of FitGrid

How FitGrid Is Using Software, AI To Help Studios Build Community

FitGrid's software is used by over 1,000 boutique fitness studios. It's helped them increase client returns by 35%.

By Josh Liberatore

For FitGrid founder and CEO Ntiedo Etuk, most of the boutique fitness industry is failing to fully leverage its chief selling point: community.

Etuk came to that realization while he was fervently attending Pilates classes in New York City during his recovery from a foot injury.

"After about three months, I realized I still didn't know 70% of the people in the community," Etuk said of his Pilates experience at the time. "I thought, 'This is really weird, because if I did know them, I'd be more likely to stay.'"

"Fitness is all about the people," he explained. "You're more likely to return to class the more connected you are to the other clients, to the instructor that's motivating you, to the front-desk person who's

greeting you. That's revenue for these studio owners, but there was no community-engagement software that helped with that."

So, in 2018, he decided to create it, and to make sure he completely understood studio management dynamics, Etuk created a pop-up fitness studio of his own – and it was rough.

"One of the big problems I had was that I didn't know who I should be contacting each day," he recalled. "Every day, I had this feeling in the pit of my stomach that there was someone, somewhere, who I should be talking to and drawing back in because they were about to stop coming to the studio. I just didn't know who."

“Fitness is all about the people. You’re more likely to return to class the more connected you are to the other clients, to the instructor that’s motivating you, to the front-desk person who’s greeting you. That’s revenue for these studio owners, but there was no community-engagement software that helped with that.”

— Ntiedo Etuk, founder and CEO, FitGrid



Photo courtesy of FitGrid

Today, FitGrid’s software is used by over 1,000 boutique fitness studios in more than a dozen countries. It’s helped studios increase client returns by 35%, increase the amount of revenue they generate off first-time clients two-fold within the first 90 days and keep their members for at least 3 months longer than they used to.

FitGrid gets those results by helping studios foster what Etuk and his team call “community engagement,” which in turn drives revenue. The idea is that FitGrid’s community engagement software activates all the members of the community (staff, instructors and clients) towards the business’s goals.

If the goal of a traditional marketing campaign was to get a client to stay, a message saying “please stay” would go from the studio to the client. With FitGrid’s community engagement software, a “please stay” message would go from the studio; a high-five and a “please stay” would be encouraged from the instructor; and a connection request showing the client is a welcome member of the community would come from other clients they’d been in class with.

Three Products Working Seamlessly Together

To accomplish such a feat, FitGrid created three main products: Studio, Pro and Class, which are designed for studio owners, instructors and consumers, respectively.

Through the Class app, consumers can purchase classes from different FitGrid-affiliated studios, track their workouts, chat with each other, connect with other users and even keep tabs on what classes their friends are taking.

When someone buys a class through the Class app, they get a prompt asking if they want to invite a friend. That helps drive customer acquisition for studios, since members are often eager to bring their friends to classes they enjoy.

“You’re the best referral mechanism for your studio,” Etuk says. “If you like it, you probably have friends or know other people who would like it as well.”

With FitGrid Pro, a boutique fitness studio’s instructors get access to class rosters, statistical overviews of their classes (including age breakdown, experience levels, injuries, etc.), note-taking capabilities and helpful data on the people attending their classes. They also have the ability to send personalized messages after class, to groups of people or individuals.

“That drives huge engagement and return visits because people can’t believe that the instructor actually noticed them,” Etuk said. “We’ve made personalization really simple from that perspective.”

As part of its Studio app, FitGrid offers a tool which gives studio owners and their staff members a list of clients they should be reaching out to. Clients are split into different categories, including newly engaged clients that studios may be looking to convert into full-time members, clients with low levels of recent engagement who are at risk of dropping out and clients celebrating certain milestones like a 10-class anniversary.

“It solves that problem I ran into when I was running my studio: Who should I reach out to today?” Etuk says of FitGrid’s client-outreach tool.

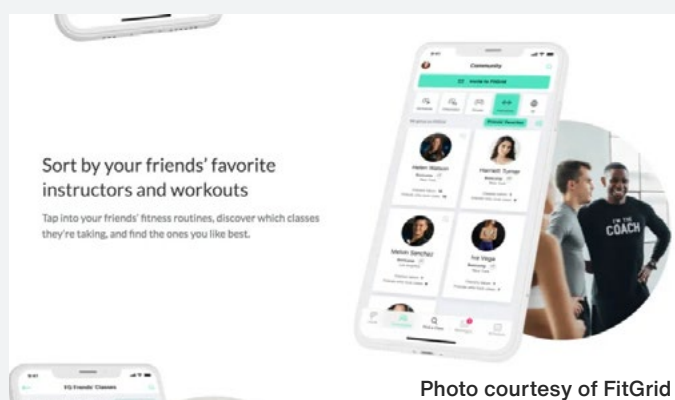


Photo courtesy of FitGrid

FitGrid AI Is Changing the Game

FitGrid is using AI to make its client-outreach tool even more effective and efficient for studios.

“In the first iteration, we gave you a bunch of information about these folks and you had to craft your own message based on a general template,” Etuk noted.

Now, FitGridAI creates custom email messages tailored towards specific customers a studio may be targeting.

“It takes all the information about that client and incorporates that into the messaging,” Etuk says. “What used to be a 15-minute exercise is now 6 seconds.”

In all, FitGrid says its AI tool can help studio owners reduce 300 minutes of work, a week, down to just 30.

Studio owners and their staff members can even set the tone of the AI-generated messages, choosing from options like friendly, urgent, emotional and motivational, to better connect with their clients.

Users can override AI-generated messages to add in their own modifications if they choose to.

“That’s just the beginning of what we’re doing with AI,” Etuk said, adding that FitGrid is planning to roll out other innovations soon.

Etuk said FitGrid views AI as an “accelerator and an enabler” on top of the company’s already impressive business model.

“If you think about a studio – the dynamic of that room is made up of the energy that flows between the three people in that space – the instructor, the client, and the staff member,” he explained. “With the way we have designed our product set, we are the only solution that has a piece of software in the hands of each one of them. That gives us deep insight into that energy and gives us a huge opportunity to enhance and guide the flow of that energy on behalf of the studio, with the goal of helping it drive more business.”

“At the end of the day, it’s a relationship business, and we’re the best relationship platform in the game.”

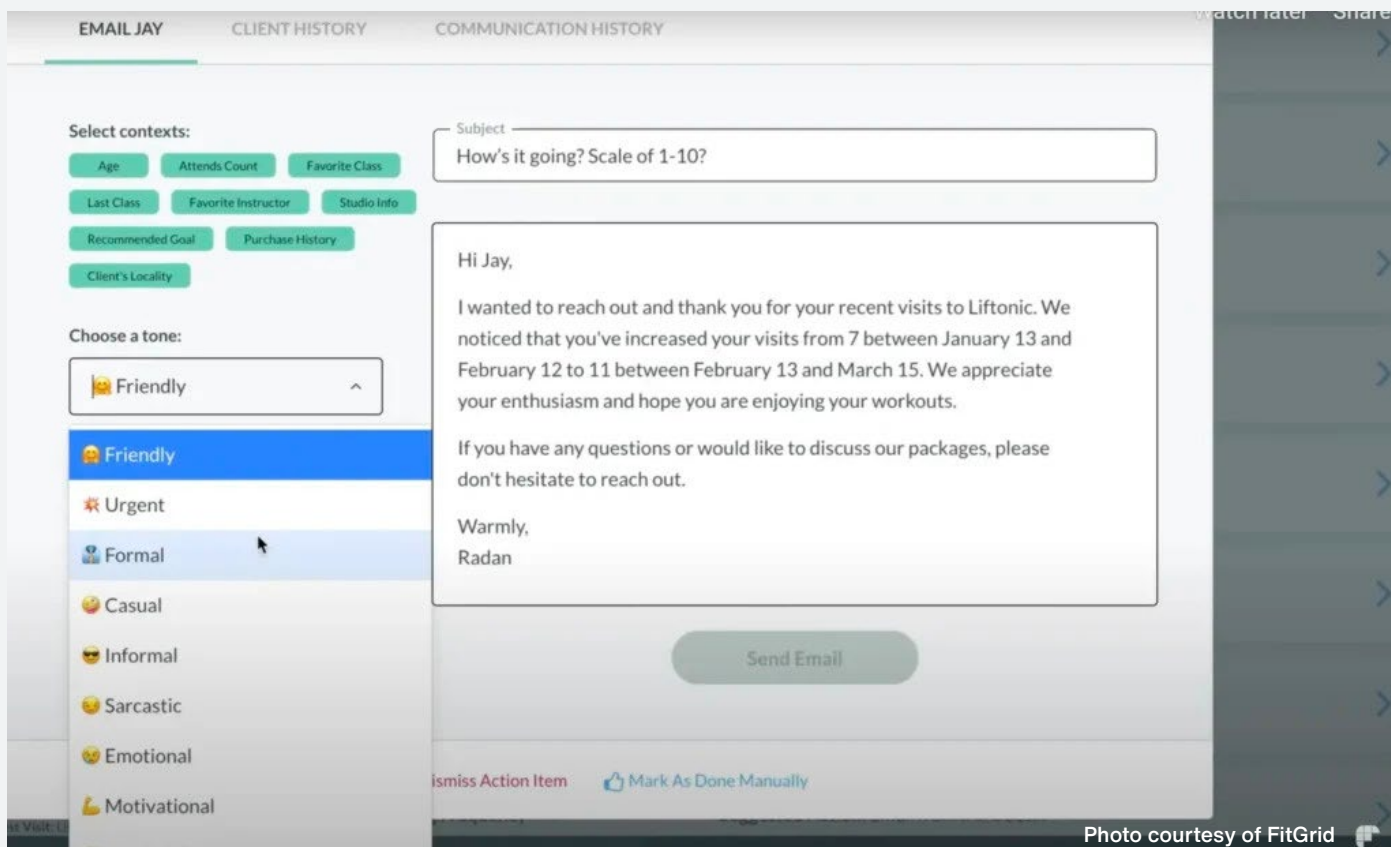


Photo courtesy of FitGrid



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The Gamification of Fitness: From Leaderboards to Enchanted Forests

By Courtney Rehfeldt



Photo courtesy of Zwift

While many fitness enthusiasts enjoy breaking a sweat, making a workout both competitive and fun while harnessing the latest in technology can attract those who don't, offering major benefits for fitness companies.

Major players are emerging in the fitness gamification space, luring in reluctant exercisers with competitive activities, dopamine spikes and socialization opportunities.

Athletech News spoke with some of the leading companies that are redefining what gamification means for the future of the fitness industry.

Orangetheory, the Masters of Gamification

Orangetheory Fitness, which added 200 new studios during the pandemic years, is gearing up for rapid growth, believing that demand is exceptionally high for its boutique fitness concept.

The fitness company, known for its high-intensity interval training, has mastered [gamification](#) with

its heart rate, performance tracking and in-studio monitors that directly connect to Orangetheory's wearable.

Orangetheory's gamification approach has led to fitness consumers interested in real-time data, which has become the bedrock of the brand. The boutique fitness company boasts a "Challenge Tracker" to track past and current performances for fitness milestones, such as a one-mile treadmill time or a member's best 2000-meter rowing distance. Members who are motivated by competition can see where they land on the leaderboard, working to increase speed or stretch over time.

"Gamification in the fitness space has always been — and I think will remain — an impactful way to motivate people to attain their goals," said Rachel Vaziralli, Orangetheory's director of fitness design. "Gamification has been shown time and time again to push people to find their max potential because competition, whether with yourself or others, drives people to work harder and can also help you adhere

to a workout program that you might otherwise quit.” Vaziralli notes that fitness gamification can come in various forms, using both digital and non-digital platforms.

“At Orangetheory, we like to do both, and we look at gamification in multiple ways, like workout events, thematic classes, and through our tech,” she added.

She points to Orangetheory members participating in a personal achievement journey where they can track progress over time or join a 30-day challenge where they commit to workouts, hydration and mental health, using a tracking card to help stay in the game.

Orangetheory also incorporates gamification in its events, offering a chance to hit new goals and test limits, such as a week-long event in October called Hell Week and another in May called Mayhem.

The boutique fitness company also integrates socialization and teamwork with gamified workouts such as Capture the Flag, where two Orangetheory members partner. The friendly and fun competition engages the entire class, measuring them against other Orangetheory classes worldwide and sharing results on social media.

As Orangetheory looks to the future, it sees an opportunity to continue to blend its gamification expertise with strength training, which is becoming highly popular among fitness consumers.

“As people continue to learn the importance of incorporating strength training into their workouts, the need to find ways to engage exercisers with gamification in that space will continue to rise,” said Vaziralli.

EGYM invests in Competition Tech

EGYM is all in on gamification and AI, believing that the fitness industry needs to lean into advancing tech.

The company, creating products for club operators and members, has experienced rapid growth. In 2022, EGYM reported year-over-year growth of over 200% in North America, with plans to more than double again this year.

“As a reflection of the importance and impact of gamification in everyday life, at EGYM we believe the application of gamification will continue to increase and accelerate in the fitness industry,” said [Dana Milkie](#), General Manager, EGYM North America. “Specifically, gamification will play a pivotal role in helping operators provide a more engaging, motivating and hyper-personalized experience for their members.”

According to Milkie, by personalizing exercise to individual consumers and leveraging technology to gamify workouts, clubs can differentiate the member

experience creating real brand loyalty.

“Since gamification is being delivered primarily via software technology, the ability to leverage AI to continuously evolve messaging, presentation and impact is significant,” he added.

He points to EGYM’s latest innovation, Gameday, as an example of how gamification can make a huge difference for health club operators and members.

“Designed to create competition within and between members, Gameday leverages a ‘total weight moved’ leaderboard to enhance members’ workouts



Since gamification is being delivered primarily via software technology, the ability to leverage AI to continuously evolve messaging, presentation and impact is significant.”

— Dana Milkie, General Manager, EGYM North America.

and allow for a unique experience for prospects,” said Milkie. “The results will instantly change your members’ workout routine and keep them engaged and motivated through gamification.”

Zwift Brings a New Dimension to Cycling

Valued at north of \$1 billion, Zwift, an immersive multiplayer online cycling and running platform, is aiming to become the premiere leader in the interactive cycling space. Co-founder and co-CEO Eric Min believes there are millions of future Zwift-ers who are just sitting on the sidelines at the moment.

The virtually connected fitness company is excited about the gamification space and hopes to add other activities to its platform.

“The nice thing about gaming fitness is the limitless potential,” said Zwift’s Chris Snook, director, PR & external communications. “When we launched Zwift in 2014, our mission was to make more people more active, more often. We believed that by gamifying our cycling experience, we would help make indoor training more fun.”

While indoor cycling has been around for years, Snook points out that the activity was often dreaded because the experience was not enticing enough to keep cyclists engaged and didn’t encourage them to return for more.

“Gamification allowed us to make indoor cycling more fun, more engaging and perhaps most importantly, social,” he said. “We began our journey looking to make serious training more fun.”

Zwift's approach, he said, was different from other platforms like Nintendo WiFit, but the experience especially resonated with Zwift's target audience of enthusiast cyclists and triathletes.

"Now though, we believe there is an opportunity to attract more leisure cyclists through things like gamification but also by branching out into other sports," said Snook. "We already have running but as fitness technology evolves, there is the potential to add further sports to the Zwift experience."

He added that Zwift and gamification, in general, represent a new opportunity to make people healthier while providing a more accessible way to exercise.

"Society in general is becoming more sedentary," Snook said. "We believe that a platform like Zwift has the potential to help combat this by using technology to make fitness and exercise more fun, more social, and more convenient. The convenience of exercising from home removes barriers and also unlocks opportunities by presenting equal opportunities."

Rewarding fitness enthusiasts is another angle that Zwift has mastered.

"We add many gamified elements in the Zwift that look to reward users for their efforts," said Snook. Since Zwift doesn't support in-app purchases, users can instead accrue Zwift's virtual currency, Drops, which can result in receiving tangible goodies for Zwift players.

"Like XP points, Drops are awarded the more you ride or run and we offer bonus multipliers by riding for extended durations with our pacer groups or when riding up hills," explained Snook. "These Drops can then be exchanged in the Drop Shop for new bikes, wheels and helmets."

Looking ahead, Snook confirmed Zwift is also looking at virtual reality, especially with the opportunities presented by Web 3.0.

Quell Puts the 'Game' in Gamification

Quell, a gamified fitness developer, recently completed a Series A funding round, bringing its total funding to \$15.6 million, which will fuel its launch game, Shardfall, and expand its video game library.

The gamified platform speaks to those who want an immersive experience that is unpredictable, slaying creatures and protecting an enchanted forest without realizing they are working up a sweat.

Cameron Brookhouse, co-founder and CEO of Quell, observes that gamification in some form or another has been a trend for roughly 30 years, with gaming features such as socialization and leaderboards constituting the components that make gaming appealing.

"To me, the future of gamification and fitness and wellness is transitioning from those kinds of light-touch integrations into full gamification where the game is the centerpiece," said Brookhouse.

But it's more than that, according to Brookhouse. It's also recognizing and building upon human behaviors. In its journey to positioning its brand with a gaming-first approach, Quell conducted significant research into people's fitness behaviors and perceptions. It also took an honest look at mainstream fitness activities.

"I think the core issue with fitness is what we call 'default exercise' – so things like running, cycling, the gym, which are really easy to access – are typically also really unpleasant for most people, either monotonous or boring or a bit painful," explained Brookhouse. He cited some statistics that he finds amusing, including a Strava survey that revealed half of runners either hate or barely tolerate running.

"I think it's amazing," he said with a laugh. "What product has 50% of people hating using it, but



they still use it? And then like 67% of U.S. gym memberships are completely dormant, right? So there's kind of this broken thing in the space."

That "broken thing" in the industry is what Quell believes can be easily fixed with the help of fitness gamification.

Brookhouse went on to say that when examining what makes exercise compelling, there's a substantial overlap with what makes gaming enticing, which he says isn't entirely surprising given that the most



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— Cameron Brookhouse, co-founder and CEO, Quell

enjoyable fitness activities are effectively games. "Team sports and things like that have really, really high enjoyment scores, but they're also really hard to access," he said. "But if you dig into these sorts of components of enjoyment, which I think is the future of gamification, it kind of sits along these pillars, like instantaneous and ideally variable rewards."

Scoring a goal or getting past an opponent provides a sense of celebration mixed with skill versus chance, much like the experience during a team sport.

"The reason that gaming (and especially gambling) are so successful is they play with this kind of sense of variable reward and then mixing that with an element of skill and chance," said Brookhouse, adding that collaboration and competition are strong drivers to keep players engaged.

While the fitness gaming space has elements such as leaderboards and rewards, Brookhouse believes competitors are missing one important aspect: immersion.

"We use that in a really specific way at Quell," he said. "When we say immersion, we mean that every exercise and action that you're doing is in the functional service of some obvious game goal. So nothing is abstracted, nothing is repetition, nothing is a plan — everything is responsive and everything makes sense functionally."

Brookhouse thinks companies in the gamification business are missing the bigger picture. "There's a bunch of VR players in this space and some console players as well that are making kind of a classic design mistake," he said. "They're thinking, 'OK,

we're making a fitness game, let's make a game about fitness, let's centralize fitness' and what that ultimately does is just recreate the gym, recreate those low enjoyment, default exercises in your home. In this immersive setting, you basically simulated a gym with a sort of wrapper around it and some polish."

In contrast, Quell makes the game the mission instead of the distraction, striving to recreate the fun of high-enjoyment exercises. "I think that's the future of this," said Brookhouse.

He shed light on Quell's launch game. "It's this beautiful sort of adventure RPG where you're running and jumping and fighting your way through this incredible fantasy world. But the game and the AI are the things that are your personal trainer and it's completely immersive," he said.

The game never demands that players do X number of jumps; instead, players are jumping because they are about to be attacked or running because the walls are closing in around them or they have to move quickly before getting hit with spikes. Brookhouse said that a system of unpredictability and intention makes Quell enjoyable.

Looking ahead, Quell is in the middle of its big launch year, debuting its wearable fitness gaming console and RPG game. "It's going to be kind of mind-blowing to see what the response to this is like," said Brookhouse. "I don't think anything like this exists out there yet. We've done a ton of new stuff on the hardware side, some really cutting-edge things with super lightweight motion tracking without any VR headsets or cameras or anything to impact the UX."

Quell will also use player biometrics to adjust game content, where the platform will know just how hard players are working so they can pitch personalized content to keep them in the exertion zone.

When it comes to gamification, Quell is confident it will deliver and is encouraged overall by what this new fitness genre can do to keep people engaged and excited to start a new fitness lifestyle.

"We're really excited to go live with this," said Brookhouse. "This is just the first step on the route to a massive portfolio of games and building this into a platform that is fully dedicated to fitness gaming."

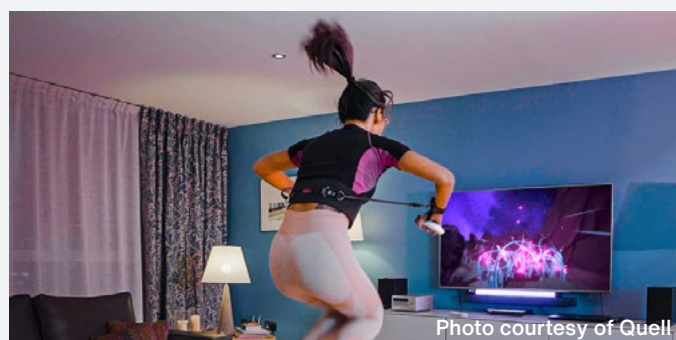


Photo courtesy of Quell

EGYM Takes Interactive Fitness to New Heights With Gameday

An impressive innovation around gamification and member motivation.

By Courtney Rehfeldt

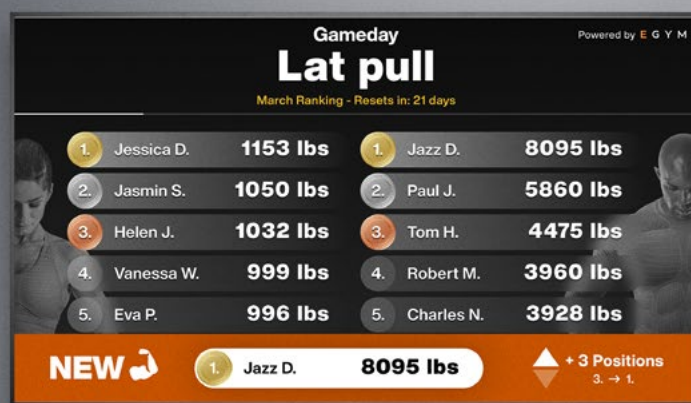


Photo courtesy of EGYM

EGYM, a leading global fitness technology company, develops forward-thinking fitness equipment for club operators and their members. As a strong advocate of embracing technology for the long-term success of club operators and the fitness industry, EGYM believes gamification is one of the keys to increase long-term operator success while improving member experience.

The Munich-based company, with North American Headquarters in Denver, Colorado, EGYM has experienced rapid growth, reporting year-over-year growth of over 200% in North America in 2022, with plans to more than double again this year.

The release of Gameday, an innovative and interactive workout that attracts new club members and motivates experienced fitness enthusiasts, is a performance-based experience that spices up a regular workout routine in the gym. A fun and free

Gameday competition allows clubs to highlight the myriad of benefits of EGYM's equipment and the club's offerings. The resulting experience is designed to drive an increase in membership upgrades, create additional revenue and improve overall operational impact and efficiency for clubs.

“

Since gamification is being delivered primarily via software technology, the ability to leverage AI to continuously evolve messaging, presentation and impact is significant.”

— Dana Milkie, North America General Manager, EGYM

Using a gamified approach, Gameday prompts members to try something new, breaking them out of the rut of a regular training routine while motivating and inspiring them through strength and fitness tests. No prior onboarding is needed, so interested users can just start Gameday and jump right into the interactive experience.

Members can compete against others or themselves and benefit from analysis and measurable results. The Gameday experience, using AI, offers deep insight for users, including detecting muscle imbalances, understanding ideal training weights and designing workout programs on EGYM's Smart Strength equipment.

After a member completes a Gameday workout, they will review their results on a leaderboard. They can also determine if they are satisfied with their performance or motivated to push further as they compete again. They will then be invited to onboard at the EGYM Fitness Hub, where the member can activate a complimentary trial to continue experiencing EGYM's equipment. At the end of the trial, members can upgrade their membership to continue using all that the club has to offer through the EGYM Ecosystem of products .

Dana Milkie, EGYM North America General Manager, says EGYM's latest innovation exemplifies the benefits gamification can bring to the fitness industry.

"Gameday is a great example of how gamification can make a huge difference for health club operators and members," Milkie said, adding that the experience will instantly change members' workout routine, keeping them engaged and motivated through gamification.

Milkie also highlights the importance of hyper-personalization and leveraging AI.

"By personalizing exercise to the individual, and leveraging technology to gamify the workout, clubs can differentiate the member experience creating real brand loyalty," he said. "Additionally, since gamification is being delivered primarily via software technology, the ability to leverage AI to continuously evolve messaging, presentation and impact is significant."

To get a demo of all of EGYM's industry-leading innovations and better understand what is required to launch Gameday, contact EGYM today.



Photo courtesy of EGYM

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These Fit Tech Brands Help With Acquisition, Engagement & Retention

By Josh Liberatore

With more competition than ever in the world of fitness, gyms and studios would do well to leverage the power of technology to better acquire, engage and retain members.

That's easier said than done, so Athletech News spoke with executives from some of the top fit tech brands in the industry to get their thoughts on how fitness operators can and should use software, data and AI to get members in the door and keep them around for the long-term.

Tech companies servicing the fitness industry see a few main ways they can help gyms and studios with acquisition, engagement and retention. Strategies include embracing virtual content, using data and AI to better understand customers and making a mobile app that stands out from the crowd.

Use Apps to Reach Your Members 24/7

The fitness consumer is increasingly spoiled for choice when it comes to working out. The

proliferation of at-home fitness offerings and online content makes it tougher and tougher for brick-and-mortar gyms and studios to attract new members and keep their current ones from jumping ship for lower-cost options. At least that's the traditional view.

ABC Fitness sees things differently. The fit tech giant, whose technology powers the apps used by some of the biggest clubs in the industry, is on a mission to help gyms keep their place as the go-to fitness brand for their members.

Sharad Mohan, president of ABC's Trainerize and GymSales platforms, believes clubs are uniquely positioned to become the center of their members' health and wellness lives. Mohan says that while consumers have tons of choices for fitness content, they're looking for one centralized place where they can manage all those choices. Enter the traditional gym.

"It's getting confusing for our members," Mohan says

of all the fitness content options consumers have today. “So the question is, who is best positioned to make sense of all those moving parts? The club. Because the consumer still looks to the club as their relationship partner for fitness.”

Mohan says clubs should leverage tech providers like ABC, who can create apps that go beyond traditional features like managing bookings and scheduling appointments.

“I think what makes our mobile app different is that it not only does a lot of the in-club stuff that you need, which I sincerely believe is table stakes today, but it really compliments in-club stuff with the general lifestyle expectations a person today has when it comes to digital fitness,” Mohan explains.

Gyms should be leveraging technology to create “personalized programming” for their members, Mohan says. That includes not just fitness programming, but nutrition, mental health and lifestyle options. Ideally, members should be using their club’s app all the time, not just on workout days. “The person might not even be motivated to workout more than once every week or once every two weeks,” Mohan says. “That should not mean that the gym has nothing to do with their fitness and lifestyle seven days a week.”

Cristine Kao, ABC’s chief marketing officer, says offering diverse in-app programming can help clubs stay top-of-mind for their members.

“There’s a lot of data points that show that programming, especially around nutrition and habit, really makes the member engagement ‘sticky,’” Kao said. “That means you’re getting your clients’ mindshare. Imagine waking up first thing in the morning and all you see, on your watch or on your phone, is, ‘Hey, don’t forget to drink water.’”



It’s getting confusing for our members. So the question is, who is best positioned to make sense of all those moving parts? The club. Because the consumer still looks to the club as their relationship partner for fitness.”

— Sharad Mohan, platform president, ABC Trainerize and ABC GymSales

Content is King

One way gyms can use their app to engage members is by providing best-in-class content.

Wexer, a fit tech company focused on helping gyms

improve their digital fitness offerings, believes in the power of virtual content for brick-and-mortar clubs. The company describes its mission as helping gyms “bridge the gap” between the digital and physical worlds.

“We strongly believe that virtual fitness will be the new treadmill,” said Robert Louw, chief growth officer at Wexer. “It took around 22 years for the treadmill to become accepted. When the treadmill came, everybody said, ‘Why do you need a treadmill to run indoors? I can just go outside and run.’ Nowadays it’s weird to walk into a gym without a treadmill. We think the same about consuming content in-club. But we also understand that it’s going to be needed outside the four walls of the gym.”

Wexer allows its clients to choose from its own aggregated fitness content library, but the company believes clubs should also be creating some of their own content. Wexer partners with clubs along that journey, Louw says, providing gyms with the data and expertise they need to create top-quality content. “A great example is, we’ve seen huge growth not just in wellness content, but breathing content and sleeping content,” Louw said. “The uptake is enormous.”

Louw says gym owners and executives often think they intuitively understand what types of content their clients want, but the data sometimes tells a different story.

“A lot of times me and my team talk with CEOs, and they’re like, ‘We’re a hardcore gym, we swing kettlebells.’ And then we look at the stats, and it shows that yoga and Pilates are actually their most popular content.”

“Data doesn’t lie,” Louw says.

Leverage Tech and AI

Technology, including AI, can be a powerful acquisition tool in a fitness operator’s marketing toolbox.

Walla, a platform that provides management software for studios, is set to release a marketing suite that allows its clients to personalize their outreach to customers. Walla’s marketing suite includes an email template its clients can use to create member-specific emails using custom GIFs, videos and photos.

“It’s backed by AI,” says Natalie Efstathiou, director of product at Walla. “So you can search for a specific image, a dolphin laying on the beach drinking a margarita, for example, and it will show up.”

Walla also has a feature that lets studios determine the different “personality types” of their members. Members are prompted to take a test, which returns one of four different personality types. Efstathiou says knowing a customer’s personality type allows

studios to more effectively market to their individual members, since different people respond better to different forms of communication.

“One of the personality types is the Thinker, and a Thinker doesn’t really care much about the cheerleader, ongoing types of messages, they just care about the facts,” Efstathiou said. “They don’t need constant reinforcement.”

Automate Acquisitions

Humans are poor multi-taskers and most of us have unreliable memories, so automation technology can play a key role in helping clubs ensure they’re reaching out to each and every customer. Enter Xplor Technologies and its Marketing Automation platform, found within Xplor’s Mariana Tek boutique fitness product.

Emily Montgomery, the head of professional services at Xplor, says the platform’s tools help studio owners automate marketing tasks like sending emails and texts to members and potential members. Montgomery says that for studios, the most important part of the acquisition process happens before a potential client even creates an account.

But most studio owners don’t nurture leads soon enough. “Before you have created an account, when somebody is shopping and looking to see what studio they might want to take a class at, that’s where we want to start that engagement process,” Montgomery said. “And the most effective way to do that is in an automated fashion.”

Xplor helps its clients start the customer acquisition process as soon as a potential client browses a studio’s website and looks for class information. “Right away, we set up an email and SMS drip campaign to then bring that individual into the brand,” Montgomery said.

For the fitness industry as whole, the act of acquiring is becoming more and more digital.

“

When the treadmill came, everybody said, ‘Why do you need a treadmill to run indoors? I can just go outside and run.’ Nowadays it’s weird to walk into a gym without a treadmill. We think the same about consuming content in-club.”

— Robert Louw, Chief Growth Officer, Wexer

Kao of ABC Fitness says the fit tech company has noticed an interesting trend when it comes to how gyms and clubs are acquiring new members. “We’re seeing now that around 40% of new members coming in are actually choosing to join online immediately” rather than visit in-person, she said. People between the ages of 18-34, Gen Z and Millennial groups, are most likely to obtain a gym membership online, Kao says, likely due to their digital upbringing.

“You almost don’t even apply, from a historical perspective, an acquisition anymore,” Kao says. “It’s not really about communication, it’s about removing friction.”

Automation can also play a key role in engagement and retention.

Montgomery of Xplor says studios too often fail to engage their new members immediately after they first sign-up, which is when they’re in the “honeymoon stage” and are most likely to be receptive to marketing reach-outs.

“I go to many different studios, and most often, 30 days later, after I came in and had a single class, I maybe received one phone call, I didn’t get anything else,” she said. “After the 30 day mark, I get a, ‘We miss you’ and another offer to come back. But there was no connection that happened in between.”



Photo courtesy of Xplor Technologies

Fitscope's Plan To Bring On-Demand Fitness Classes to the Masses

By Josh Liberatore



Photo courtesy of Fitscope

If Fitscope has its way, people will be streaming the brand's content on cardio machines everywhere, from their local big-box gym to their basement.

Founded by former television executive Ed Stansfield, [Fitscope](#) produces, licenses and distributes on-demand fitness classes designed primarily for cardio equipment, which it films at its studio in Los Angeles. The brand delivers its classes directly to consumers and also to gyms through its app. Fitscope also creates some white-labeled content for equipment manufacturers, including brands like Bowflex and BodyCraft.

Stansfield got the idea to get into the fitness content business while he was living in Hong Kong and wanted to do Peloton workouts. Since the

connected fitness company's bikes weren't available for purchase in the East Asian country at the time, Stansfield was forced to use a generic spin bike and follow along as best he could using the Peloton app.

"That's when I realized the value proposition that was interesting about Peloton wasn't so much the equipment, it was the app," he said.

Stansfield's makeshift connected fitness routine worked pretty well, but it wasn't perfect.

"The classes were good, but they weren't tailored for someone who didn't have a Peloton, because they called out metrics specific to the bike, like the resistance levels," he noted.

After moving back to the U.S., Stansfield leveraged his TV background to create Fitscope, leasing a studio in downtown LA to create on-demand fitness classes.

Stansfield wanted Fitscope's content to stretch beyond the spin bike and include classes for all types of cardio machines.

"I liked taking indoor cycling classes, but I thought it'd be great if I could find an elliptical class, a treadmill class or a rowing class," he says. "At that point, when you went on YouTube, there just wasn't much quality content for those machines."

“

There are a lot of companies out there doing spin classes or rowing classes, but that's just the tip of the iceberg for us. We have categories built across all types of very niche-focused machines.”

— Ed Stansfield, founder, Fitscope

Today, Fitscope's [online content library](#) features over 1,000 on-demand classes, which are led by expert trainers and feature sessions of various lengths and difficulty levels. On the Fitscope app, you can find a class for pretty much any type of cardio machine, from the treadmill to more specialized devices like vertical climbers and functional trainers. Stansfield believes a big part of what sets Fitscope apart from the litany of other fitness content

providers is the “scope and depth” of its cardio machine library.

“There are a lot of companies out there doing spin classes or rowing classes, but that's just the tip of the iceberg for us,” he says. “We have categories built across all types of very niche-focused machines.”

The company also produces content for non-machine categories like yoga, stretching, strength training and core work, although its bread and butter is cardio equipment.

Using Data To Personalize the Experience

Another key aspect of Fitscope's value proposition lies in the company's mobile app, which does one thing in particular that makes it stand out from the competition.

The Fitscope app syncs to cardio equipment and heart-rate monitors using Bluetooth FTMS, an industry standard for connected fitness equipment. Users exercising on FTMS-equipped machines can see real-time data from their cardio equipment displayed on their phones or tablets while taking a class on the Fitscope app.

“If you're doing a cycling class, you can see all the metrics from your console on the screen, like RPMs and watts,” Stansfield explains. “This would be the same for any machine that you connect the app to. For rowing, you can see your strokes per minute, your 500-meter split. For a treadmill, you can see your miles per hour.”



Photo courtesy of Fitscope

Fitscope instructors incorporate those metrics into their sessions, giving classes an extra bit of excitement and personalization. For those without access to Bluetooth-enabled equipment, the Fitscope app displays metrics from the instructor's machine on-screen.

"We're serving both audiences," Stansfield notes. "We're serving someone who's got a newer connected bike, but the app is also useful if you don't have equipment like that."

Since manufacturers often send their machines to Fitscope's studio for content production purposes, the company is uniquely positioned to be able to ensure its app pairs with as many types of cardio equipment as possible.

"We actually test on equipment from a wide range of brands and then we make tweaks to the FTMS setting to make sure that our app pairs with as many pieces of equipment as it can," Stansfield says. "Because of that, our app ends up working with a lot more pieces and types of equipment than other apps that are using FTMS."

Try Before You Buy

As a way to get its content – and innovative app – out in front of more eyeballs, Fitscope recently

introduced a free subscription tier.

With the free tier, users get access to seven classes per category, or 70 classes in total, for no charge. The free classes are updated every month and feature a mix of different program lengths, types and instructors, so users get a complete picture of what Fitscope has to offer.

"Our biggest issue is getting people to try Fitscope," Stansfield says of the decision to introduce a free tier. "Once they try it, usually they subscribe and stay subscribed for over a year. All of our retention and conversion metrics are really strong. But marketing is expensive, so we just want to get Fitscope out there and make Fitscope ubiquitous across as many devices as possible."

Fitscope's paid subscription tier, which gives users full access to the brand's entire library of over 1,000 on-demand classes, can be had for \$14.99 per month, \$29.99 per quarter or \$99.99 annually.

Stansfield is confident that once more people are able to try Fitscope, they'll be sold on the quality of its content and will want to pay.

"Right now, almost half of our subscribers are annual," Stansfield notes. "We think that speaks really well to the quality of our content."



Photo courtesy of Fitscope



Photo courtesy of Les Mills

Hybrid Fitness Is Here To Stay (and More Tech-Enabled Than Ever)

With what seems like a continuous stream of new tech solutions available to them, gyms and studios have their pick of the digital options that appear to be table stakes in the new normal of hybrid workouts.

By Judith Russell

Back in the halcyon days of 2019, most fitness enthusiasts worked out at a gym or studio. When many gyms were forced to close in early 2020, people rushed to install home gyms, sending sales of workout equipment through the roof. People were also leaving the cities to get more space, allowing the home gyms to hold more gear. Peloton, Hydrow, Tonal and others enjoyed meteoric growth.

Many industry watchers thought there would be a crush of gym members returning to IRL workouts once gyms and studios reopened, reasoning that people would miss the camaraderie and intensity of working out in the same room with an instructor and other people. The general feeling was that once people returned to the office, they'd go back to their

old fitness ways, and that spin bike in the home office would become little more than an overpriced clothes rack.

Then an interesting thing happened. People decided that, just as they weren't willing to go back to the office five days a week, they didn't want to go back to the gym full-time either. McKinsey & Co. reports that the number of people doing hybrid fitness routines grew by 41% between 2020 and 2022, with many claiming that hybrid training returns better results than just doing in-home or in-gym workouts. And, according to research conducted by on-demand fitness leader Les Mills, almost 60% of fitness enthusiasts now prefer a 60/40 split between gym and home workouts.

“

This year, Barry's X users have 4 times more in-studio check-ins compared to our in-person-only client base. This proof point further amplifies our belief that an omnichannel client is the most valuable to our business.”

— Jenna Hauca, Senior Vice President, Digital & Marketing, Barry's

Although most people admit that working out in the gym helps keep them motivated and results in longer workouts, working out at home is a great convenience tradeoff, and allows one to exercise more frequently, efficiently and cost-effectively. There is growing evidence that hybrid workouts remove a lot of the friction around exercising by eliminating the time to drive to the gym, find a parking spot and wait for a piece of equipment to be free. They offer flexibility and a more varied menu of workout modalities, a huge draw for the Millennial and GenZ fitness enthusiasts that comprise the majority of gym members today. Hybrid workout routines also keep that exercise bike purchased during COVID from completely going to waste!

More Gyms Offering a Branded Omnichannel Experience

Gyms and clubs, which for years have been using tech solutions for the back end of the business to enable easier class registration and membership management, are now using more consumer-facing technologies to capitalize on the growing demand for digital fitness offerings as a complement to traditional brick-and-mortar gym membership.

Gym and studio operators are engaging their members through multiple physical and digital touchpoints to offer digital experiences that can be used alone or in combination with their physical

gym memberships. Much like the retailers who offer both brick-and-mortar and online shopping to their customers, gyms are now allowing, even encouraging, their members to workout wherever, whenever, and however they choose.

Boutique fitness brand Barry's offers Barry's X, a subscription-based community-driven digital fitness experience that the company calls the “first and only one of its kind.” Featuring both live and on-demand classes across web and mobile apps, Barry's X brings the brand's signature Red Room intimacy, atmosphere and camaraderie to its members' screens wherever they are.

“Barry's clients who utilize our digital product, Barry's X, are significantly more engaged with the brand overall, said Jenna Hauca, Senior Vice President of Digital & Marketing at Barry's. “This year, Barry's X users have 4 times more in-studio check-ins compared to our in-person-only client base. This proof point further amplifies our belief that an omnichannel client is the most valuable to our business.”

The Barry's X LIVE classes enable users to sign up, keep themselves accountable and join a live fitness experience with up to 200 other Barry's members. The LIVE class experience offers users the ability to have their camera on to share their video with the instructor for real-time training. Users can also share their feed with just their friends in the class, or to the entire community – a true simulation of the IRL Red Room experience. The on-demand library offers users the opportunity to take their favorite instructor whenever, wherever they like, with different class lengths available.

The larger gym brands, many of which cater to a young, cost-conscious crowd, are also gearing up with digital. 24 Hour Fitness offers the 24hrGo app, which allows members to check into the gym with a QR code, make class reservations, track progress by connecting a wearable and stream thousands of workouts to do in gym or at home.

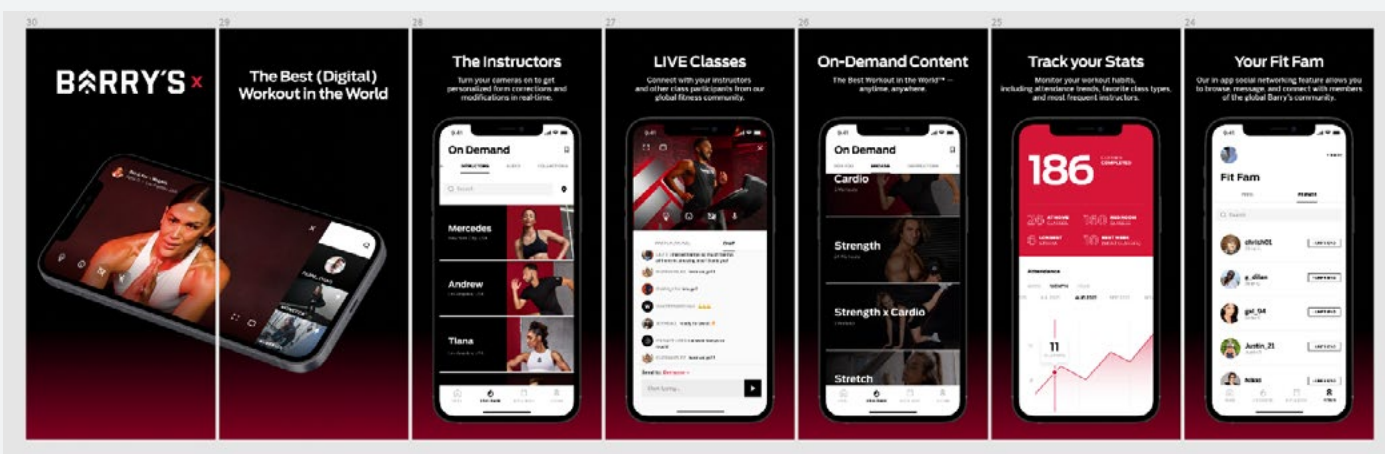


Photo courtesy of Barry's

According to Crunch CEO Jim Rowley, research has shown that fitness consumers will continue to take a mixed approach to their fitness routines. “In response to this trend, we have launched Crunch+ to deliver quality on-demand and live-stream workouts to give members more options.”

Self Esteem Brands CEO Chuck Runyon said consumers today expect personalization. “The smart phone is the single, most important piece of equipment in the wellness space. They might only visit your studio or gym a couple of times a week, and so our brands need a way to offer content that is compelling to the consumers we serve and keeps them engaged in our brand. Anytime Fitness can be with anyone, anytime, anywhere, and we can provide that coach in your pocket when you’re not inside the gym or club, sending you those nudges for better behaviors, and showing you your biometrics and outcomes. We’re using technology for good, not to replace people.”

Not surprisingly, wearables are playing a role in hybrid fitness. Planet Fitness launched its fitness app long before the pandemic hit but has significantly grown its digital offerings since then. The Planet Fitness watch app allows members to “have a gym on your wrist.” Their app also offers an in-person crowd tracker, which is particularly helpful if you don’t want to wait in line for the cable towers. Life Time Fitness offers its most popular classes in video format so that members can work out at Life Time anytime and anywhere, and offers access to Apple Fitness+, which is often accessed on the Apple Watch.



Anytime Fitness can be with anyone, anytime, anywhere, and we can provide that coach in your pocket when you’re not inside the gym or club, sending you those nudges for better behaviors and showing you your biometrics and outcomes. We’re using technology for good, not to replace people.”

— Chuck Runyon, CEO, Self Esteem Brands

Creating an on-brand virtual experience requires investment by gym owners, who must ensure that the virtual experience is on par with the in-person workout. Zoom will no longer get the job done. As members move across the physical and digital spectrum of the gym’s offerings, they want to have a consistent, on-brand experience from start to finish. And the smart gym owner will capitalize on the opportunity to track and learn from the members’ activities.

Some gym operators are collaborating with

established online fitness brands to provide virtual workouts to their members. Fitness International, owner of the LA Fitness, Esporta Fitness and City Sports Club brands, offers its clubs’ members Les Mills+, a new streaming platform that can be added to a gym membership for on-demand workouts. Fitness tech leader ABC Fitness Solutions also recently announced a new partnership with Les Mills that makes the group fitness giant’s on-demand video classes available to ABC customers. Club operators can offer Les Mills classes such as Bodypump, Bodycombat and Les Mills Grit, among others, to their members both virtually and in-club.

Tech Solutions Providers

A growing number of tech companies and content providers have entered the digital fitness space, offering a myriad of software solutions that add powerful digital capabilities to a gym’s list of services. Fitness tech leader Mindbody’s Virtual Wellness platform enables its gym and studio customers to deliver live-streamed and recorded workout classes to their members.

Netherlands-based Funxtion helps gym operators keep their members engaged with customized digital fitness content. The company has created over 2500 exercise videos for 500 virtual classes in more than 1000 of its gym customers, including Anytime Fitness, Sportcity, Puregym, Goodlife Fitness and Kubofit.

UK-based fitness tech brand Wexer, whose parent company Core Health and Fitness, also owns the Schwinn, Nautilus and Stairmaster brands, acquired Intelivideo earlier this year. Wexer’s Virtual Connect platform allows its gym customers to make its content available to its gym partners, most of which are in Europe. The Intelivideo deal will expand its content-creation capabilities and presence in the U.S. market.

Eight-year-old FORTË is a subscription-based streaming platform that provides access to avant-garde boutique studio classes instructed by leading fitness experts worldwide. FORTË installs hardware and software into boutique studios, which enable the classes to be streamed live to FORTË’s platform.

The Gamification Angle

Some solutions are based on gamification to drive community and engagement. New York-based Swerve is a global fitness and competition platform that aims to turn underutilized group exercise rooms at gyms, hotels, residential buildings and schools into packed digitally-enhanced competitive fitness experiences for their communities. From its New York City studio, Swerve streams classes conducted by world-class instructors to big-screen TVs throughout the world. The company has teamed up with Marion Roaman, one of Peloton’s co-founders, to develop its Cycling product, the first sport in its collection, and expects to roll out additional fitness modalities beginning in 2024.

Swerve draws on the power of community via its team-based methodology, a gamified experience whereby each location is its own team, competing (globally) against other locations in real-time, which provides a fun, inclusive, highly immersive, and inherently community-building experience. Swerve CEO and co-founder Eric Posner said his company “does not replace existing instructors at gyms.”

“We are a supplement to the schedule of existing classes, enabling gyms to go hybrid, offering classes on the hour, every hour, packing schedules with offerings and solving key profitability challenges for gyms due to labor shortages and the difficulties scaling top talent,” Posner said. “We work with some of the largest gym chains in the U.S., streaming into Crunch, XSport, YouFit, YMCA and Mountainside Fitness. In addition, we are in active negotiations and/or pilots with more than 15 additional brands and expect to be streaming to over 100 locations by the end of 2023.”

Posner reports that so far this year Swerve has proven to drive up to six times more bookings and deliver four times more classes per day at its partners--at about 15% of the cost. Swerve, whose three co-founders worked in investment banking before starting the company, was just selected to receive an investment from the Techstars Los Angeles business accelerator.

With so much investment pouring into fitness technology, and new solutions propelling the industry into a new physical/virtual hybrid normal, a few things seem certain. First, the innovation will continue, with the companies behind each innovation strongly believing that their concept will prevail. Second, there will be a few winners but many more who don't make it. Only time will tell how and when this shakeout will happen. And third, with all the options now available, it's a great time to be a fitness and wellness consumer, and an exciting time to be in this industry.

The image shows a woman in a blue athletic outfit riding a stationary bike on a Swerve virtual cycling screen. The screen displays various performance metrics and leaderboards. On the left, there are three circular widgets: a resistance level of 'MEDIUM', a speed of '63', and a timer showing '0:13'. On the right, there is a leaderboard with seven rows, each representing a different location. Each row shows 'AVG POWER', 'AVG BEATS', and 'TOTAL SCORE'. At the bottom, there is a 'SHOUT OUTS' section and a '2ND QTR DYNAMIC' badge.

Location	Avg Power	Avg Beats	Total Score
BURBANK CA	223	127	349
UNSQ NYC	145	105	251
34TH ST NYC	105	92	197
WALNUT CREEK CA	93	56	149
DALY CITY CA	89	51	140
HUNTINGTON NY	101	30	132
38TH ST NYC	68	48	116

SHOUT OUTS: WAY TO SHOW UP MIKE C. @ UNSQ NYC CONGRATS ON YOUR 1ST GAME TORI M. @ BURBAN

2ND QTR DYNAMIC

Photo courtesy of Swerve

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Photo courtesy of shutterstock.com

How Gyms Can Increase Per-Member Revenue, With Club OS

By Josh Liberatore [Photo courtesy of Shutterstock](#)

Some of the world's biggest gym chains are leaving revenue on the table, according to Club OS, a sales engagement and marketing automation software provider whose clients include top brands like Anytime Fitness, Gold's Gym and Retro Fitness.

Club OS helps gyms with standard member acquisition, engagement and retention tasks like automated text message and email follow-ups for members and potential members. But the company's software can go deeper than that, helping clubs increase the amount of revenue they generate per member by using tools like upselling and strategic giveaways.

Nick Hahn, Vice President of Product and Development at Club OS, spoke with Athletech News

about how gyms can do more to leverage their tech stack into more revenue.

Use Software To Offer More Value

First and foremost, Hahn says gyms should be taking advantage of tried-and-true methods of increasing per-member revenue, like upselling on personal training classes.

Club OS' software allows gyms to track which members used to book personal training sessions at a high clip but have fallen off in recent months or weeks. Gyms can send automated or manual texts, emails or phone calls to encourage those members to resume one-on-one coaching.

“The incremental revenue for personal training is great, so it’s a high-priority way to re-engage with the member,” Hahn says.

But there are more under-the-radar ways gyms should be using the software Club OS provides to monetize their members, like upselling on nutrition products, Hahn says.

“Many of our customers are really diving into nutritional supplements as another source of income because it’s quite easy,” Hahn says.

Gyms that sell things like protein shakes, smoothies and supplements can use Club OS to track when a member’s monthly supply may be running out, for example.

“If you sell protein powder, and you know the customer has a 30-day supply, 25 days after they purchase it, you should be sending that person an email saying ‘Hey, you’re about to run out soon. Why don’t you come back in and buy that?’ If a week goes by and they still haven’t bought it, give them \$1 off or some kind of incentive to come in and purchase it instead of having them go buy it off Amazon,” Hahn explains.

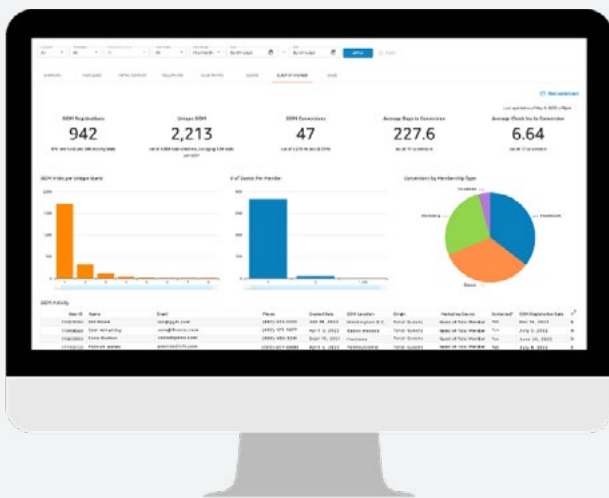


Photo courtesy of Club OS

Gyms that sell shakes and smoothies can also offer members free drinks after taking classes that are already included in their membership.

“Offer that to all your members and try to get them hooked into the association of, ‘I take a class I buy a shake,’” Hahn counsels. “An \$8 smoothie may only cost 50 cents to make, so you’re really increasing the ROI of that class.”

Go After ‘Sleeping Members’

Gyms shouldn’t be afraid of reaching out to their “sleeping members,” or those customers who still maintain an active membership and pay monthly dues but rarely if ever step foot in the gym.

“Generally speaking, a lot of gyms are scared to communicate with the sleeping member because they’re relying on that passive income,” Hahn says. “But I think there’s a real opportunity to turn that passive income into active income, at a higher ROI, by increasing the value for those members.”

Most people who really wanted to get rid of their gym membership likely already did so during the pandemic, Hahn notes.

“If they didn’t cancel during COVID, an email now is not going to do it,” he says. “Gyms who are brave enough to try it are not seeing mass cancellations.”

Gyms can use tools like personal training sessions,



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— Nick Hahn, VP/Product & Development, Club OS

free classes and discounts on nutrition items, among other tactics, to engage sleeping members.

“The best member is the engaged member,” Hahn says. “Applying technology to engage with an inactive membership base is a big opportunity.”

Talk With Your Tech People

Despite the prevalence of software in the fitness industry, many gyms, even large chains, likely aren’t fully leveraging the different technologies they pay for.

“There aren’t many clubs out there that are truly taking advantage of all the functionality that their technology offers,” Hahn believes. “And that’s not just Club OS, it’s really their entire tech stack. What I find very often in talking with clubs is that they have these ideas of how to do something and they’re out there looking for a solution, and one of their existing vendors already solves it, but they’re not having the right conversations with them.”

Gym operators are understandably focused on day-to-day operations, but they would do well to carve out some time for regular, strategic conversations with their technology providers, who can serve as valuable business partners.

“Too many view spending an hour a month with each technology vendor as a waste of their time because they need to be in the club operating,” Hahn says. “But gyms should be keeping in touch with their vendors, asking them questions like, ‘What are my competitors doing better in your system that I’m not doing? What features of yours am I not implementing? What can my staff be doing better?’”

Even gyms that have been on the cutting edge of the digital revolution risk becoming outdated if they don’t make it a priority to maximize their tech and stay current on new features, enhancements and best practices.

“Technology advances very rapidly and you have to be willing to invest the time in to keeping pace with it, or else you’re going to fall behind your competitors,” Hahn says.

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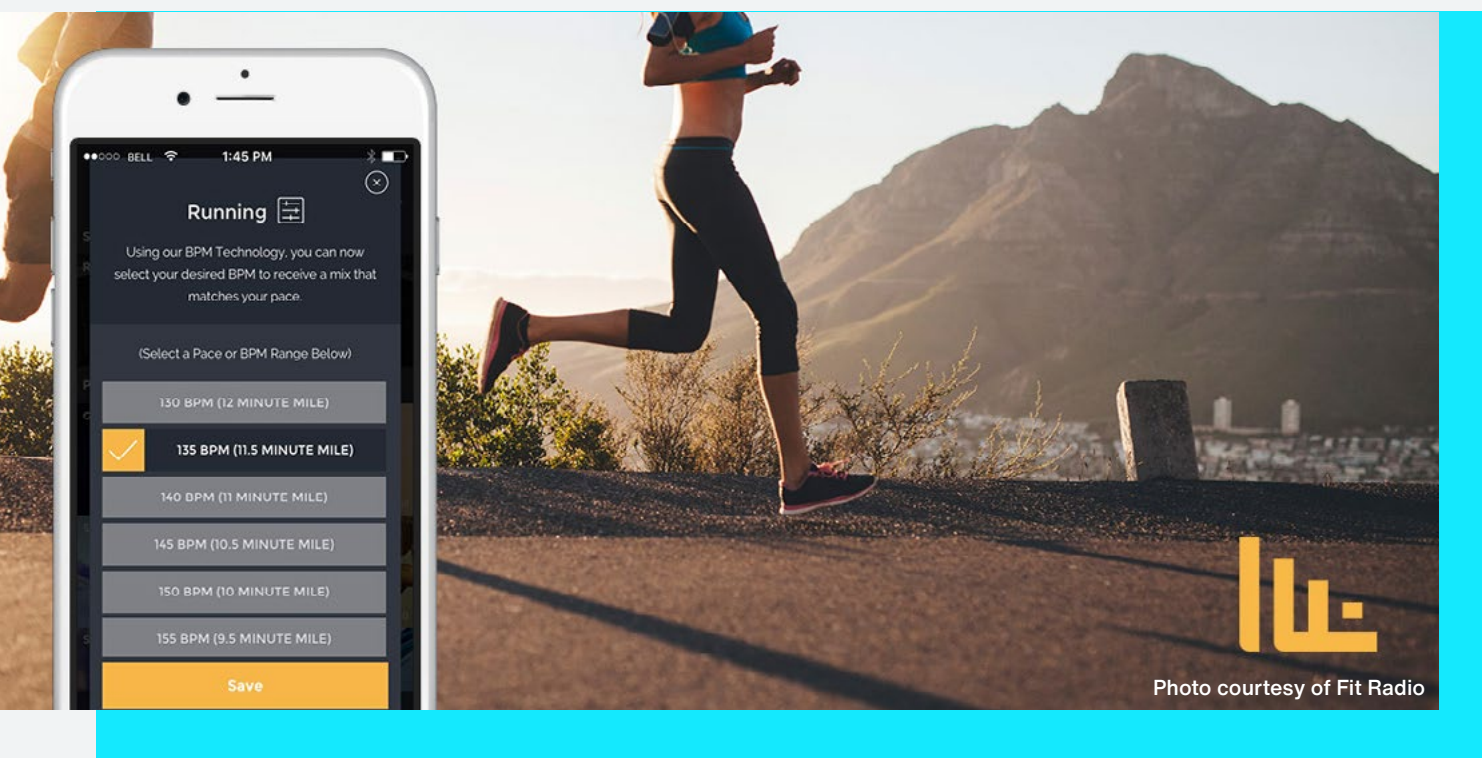
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— Nick Hahn, Club OS



Music Platforms & Technology: Using Sound To Drive Customer Engagement

By Courtney Rehfeldt



A fitness business can have killer fitness equipment, motivating fitness instructors, the best content and all the bells and whistles, but if the music is drab, it won't be a hit with fitness consumers.

Music is essential for a successful fitness business, and research proves its importance on a scientific level. According to a 2021 [study](#), listening to music has been shown to have ergogenic benefits and can modulate certain physiological responses, such as heart rate and muscle activation, resulting in improved performance during a workout or training session.

Athletech News spoke with some licensing industry leaders including Feed.fm, Tuned Global and Fit Radio on how fitness operators can use music to drive customer engagement and what lies ahead in an ever-changing world of technology.

Feed.fm on Customization

End-to-end music solution provider Feed.fm suggests club owners explore music customization options and

integrate fitness equipment directly with digital apps. It recently launched [in-game music](#) for WIN Reality, a virtual reality baseball and softball training platform, so athletes and fitness devotees can listen to hit music while at bat in a virtual ballpark.

The game, designed for all ages but popular with teenagers, allows players to select their preferred genre, which is supported by Feed.fm's streaming channel.

"Feed.fm has seen from our digital partners, time and time again, that music makes people more engaged in their workouts," said Lauren Pufpaf, COO and co-founder of Feed.fm. "They exercise longer and harder when they're listening to music they know and love, that fits what they're doing."

It's the connection between fitness consumers and their digital apps that Feed.fm says represents an opportunity for club owners.

"We think the hybrid experience of digital personalization for music and workout routine

alongside physical gyms has a lot of potential in the future,” predicts Pufpaf. “We could see gyms integrating their equipment more directly with apps to guide the experience in the gym, while still letting customers personalize the music and routine to their exact preference within the app. This could lead to a feedback loop back to the gym that helps them select music for all customers that is more connected to their specific preferences.”

As it looks to the future, Feed.fm says it wants to make it easier for the next generation of digital platforms to incorporate popular music.

“The low-code or no-code software trend has empowered many industries to do more with fewer technical resources, and digital music integration is now going through that transition as well,” said Pufpaf.

She added that Feed.fm has several launches coming this year that will allow companies to have sophisticated music customization within their product with minimal developer resources, which Pufpaf says will be a big win for everyone.

While Feed.fm currently utilizes music curators who identify music trends, the licensing company confirms that it is also interested in better understanding how people discover and consume music.

“We think we’re in the middle of another epochal shift, similar to the switch from physical to digital music,” said Pufpaf. “This time, though, it’s a switch from more passive streaming platforms to interactive digital experiences. Younger people aren’t just finding new music on Spotify or Apple Music, they’re finding it through viral dances on TikTok, music in video games, or tracks they work out to on whatever digital platform they use.”

Feed.fm is devoting time to enriching its data platform to better track songs and artists as they are on the rise across Feed. fm’s customer base. “In the future this will help us give a clearer picture on the mechanics of virality for music and also a more real-time understanding of what new tracks are poised to break through,” said Pufpaf.



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— Lauren Pufpaf, COO and co-founder, Feed.fm.

Tuned Global Embraces AI

Tuned Global, a B2B music streaming service, offers turnkey and branded music streaming app solutions so businesses can focus on growth while allowing their technology to handle the details.

As Tuned Global embraces AI, the music streaming solution provider hopes to integrate music and AI technologies with wearables and fitness trackers.

Earlier this year, the company expanded its business in Europe, the Middle East and Africa and appointed its first head of AI. [Tuned Global](#) also acquired Pacemaker, a music tech company, to expand its B2B music and streaming technology offerings.

According to Tuned Global, as fitness businesses compete for the top spot, providing a positive music experience can help them stand out.

“In today’s digital era, offering a digital training experience is essential for gyms to attract and retain new customers,” said Con Raso, CEO and managing director of Tuned Global. “With the competitive landscape in the fitness and wellness digital space, music can be a key differentiator. The same workout with great music creates a memorable and positive experience, leading customers to return for more.”

Raso points to fitness companies such as Peloton, which has leveraged music programming and artist partnerships to establish a strong following of devoted fitness consumers.

“Instructors have become like DJs, carefully curating playlists that resonate with their audience’s demographics and workout intensity,” said Raso. “People are drawn to these sessions because of the music selection that resonates with them, often discovering and following instructors on social media for their unique music choices.”

As Tuned Global looks ahead to the future, the B2B music streaming service says it’s embracing AI capabilities, which will help fitness businesses create the best music experience for members.

“We are working on a text-to-music playlist generator, enabling music curators and trainers to search for songs based on their preferences using their own language,” said Jonas Norberg, head of AI. “We can generate curated playlists tailored to these specific requirements using the available catalog only.”

Tuned Global has also introduced an AI DJ feature that automates the creation of beat-matched transitions between tracks during workouts, ensuring a smooth and uninterrupted music flow.

“Advanced users even have the option to customize these transitions, offering a level of control over the music experience,” added Norberg.

The music streaming service platform is also

exploring the integration of music and AI technologies with wearables, fitness trackers and virtual assistants, which would allow real-time adjustments to the music experience based on user data.

“For example, the tempo of songs can be dynamically adjusted to match the pace of a workout or biometric data such as heart rate or galvanic skin response can be utilized to detect the user’s emotional state during workouts,” said Norberg. “These adaptations aim to provide a personalized and immersive music experience, enhancing motivation and engagement during workouts.”

Fit Radio’s Plan for Hyper-Curation

“Instructors have become like DJs, carefully curating playlists that resonate with their audience’s demographics and workout intensity. People are drawn to these sessions because of the music selection that resonates with them, often discovering and following instructors on social media for their unique music choices.”

— Con Raso, CEO and Managing Director, Tuned Global



Photo courtesy of Tuned Global

Curated digital music fitness app Fit Radio plans an exciting rollout this year to keep fitness members engaged. The music provider serves several fitness leaders, including F45, and powers 15,000 gyms

around the U.S. and Canada.

Fit Radio founder and CEO Russell Greene offers a unique perspective on music curation services, with a background in exercise physiology. Greene planned to go to school for physical therapy but received an opportunity to run one of the biggest nightclubs in the southeast, changing the course of his journey.

While catering to the nightclub crowd with great beats, Greene saw a chance to pivot, entertaining fitness enthusiasts with advanced music solutions. Much like music keeps clubgoers entertained, Greene says keeping fitness members engaged comes down to experience and building community.

Fitness operators can foster growth and committed members by providing a one-stop shop for wellness where consumers can start a new journey in all areas instead of just attending workout sessions.

“The real importance is community,” said Greene. “Some of the most successful brands that we work with, it’s more of a lifestyle change.”

He points to Burn Boot Camp, which he explains is involved in every aspect of health and wellness, with its holistic approach that resonates with clients.

“They’re in the community, they’re creating events for their members. They’ve got phenomenal fitness content,” said Greene. “They’ve got a family experience, nutrition, counseling, all kinds of things. I think that the lifestyle aspect and community is really important for fitness.”

Gym operators who are open to evolving trends in fitness will find success in keeping their members happy and engaged. “You’ve got a couple of things happening in fitness,” said Greene. “Obviously boutique fitness is huge and there’s obviously a rise towards that, but what we’re also seeing is some of our bigger big box gym partners are creating and focusing more on the group fitness experience.”

He points to Club Studio, an LA Fitness sister brand, which is tackling both trends at once.

“It’s a brand new studio that they launched,” said Greene. “It’s like five boutique fitness concepts under one roof.” He sees other big box fitness gyms embracing boutique fitness where possible in their facilities.

The Fit Radio founder also touched on the popularity of strength training in the fitness community.

“A lot of science, a lot of research has come out in the past year or so that strength training is way more important [than other fitness methods],” said Greene. “There’s been some research that in terms of overall body mass, body composition and results, strength training is just more effective.”

Greene, whose background in exercise science

means he's deeply interested in the shift in fitness, sees how club operators are now incorporating more strength training into their workouts. He also observes the pairing of low-impact resistance training paired with low-intensity cardio for a more extended period of time.

He says this newer low-impact/low-intensity fitness approach can be especially ideal for consumers new to fitness, perhaps reluctant to jump into the deep end with an intense boot camp or HIIT approach.

"It's just easier to get started that way too," said Greene. "So I think we're seeing some brands trying to alter programming to incorporate strength training and also lower intensity cardio."

As a streaming media content provider, Fit Ratio is using technology in its advancements, working with machine learning and AI to pair fitness instructors with specific types of workouts.

"We're working on a lot of suggestion-based programming," shared Greene. "We can pair and match formatting around workout styles because we have 20,000+ mixes on the platform across 45 different fitness modalities."

But the most significant endeavor that [Fit Radio](#) will release this year involves hyper-curation, working

with its partners to better understand the music preference of members, even on a local level.

"Let's say you're in New York, and you live in a certain suburb and you're about to show up for a five o'clock workout class. Well, we would know your music preference as well as everybody else in that class and then we would make suggestions in real-time based on class attendees," Greene explained.

"That has been the holy grail that we've always been chasing," he said of the upcoming rollout, planned for Q4.

This level of curation takes the pressure off of instructors and fitness operators and lets Fit Radio handle diverse music tastes.

Ultimately, music curation is essentially about engagement, not only recognizing the needs of members, but implementing a system where they feel their input has been implemented.

"Members want to know that their opinions count," said Greene. "Some of the initial stuff that we've done, it's been very well received by members where they know they are part of the music experience and it's not just some random instructor that brought a playlist."



Photo courtesy of feed.fm

The 5 Biggest Trends to Come out of the Connected Health and Fitness Summit

By Elizabeth Ostertag



Photo courtesy of CHFS

The Connected Health & Fitness Summit, organized by Kisaco Research, brought together industry experts, entrepreneurs and investors to explore the latest innovations and trends shaping the health and fitness landscape.

The event showcased a range of startups that are revolutionizing the industry with their groundbreaking solutions, but also included executives from major health and fitness companies like Planet Fitness, Google, Xponential Fitness and Nike. With around 300 attendees, the event was different from a typical trade show in that it drove value by curating a room of industry experts looking to grow and innovate.

Here are the five biggest trends that emerged from the conference, providing a glimpse into the future of wellness.

1. Community is King

One of the key themes that emerged from the

conference was the recognition of the power of community in enhancing user engagement, retention and cross-selling opportunities. Startups showcased innovative strategies to build and nurture communities within the health and fitness space.

Safe Sweat highlighted the significance of the value of providing a private and safe environment for fitness enthusiasts. The company's flagship location is 2,700 square feet and features eight private FITsuites ranging in size from 150 to 250 square feet. By removing outside distractions and the stressors of working out in a public gym, Safe Sweats aims to foster a sense of community among its members.

Othership offered a unique alternative to traditional social spaces like bars, creating a safe space for emotional well-being through a community-focused sauna experience.

The conference also focused on building a community for attendees. Its fitness forums, like the

Women in Connected Fitness Forum and the CEO and Founders Forum focused on the formation of key relationships and partnerships to tackle the uncertain landscape of connected fitness and drive one's business forward.



2. Analytics and Artificial Intelligence to Drive Value

The integration of digital technology with physical fitness was another prominent trend at the conference, particularly in terms of personalization. Companies drive value by utilizing data analytics and artificial intelligence to provide personalized fitness experiences. User data like biometrics, workout history and preferences can allow platforms to tailor exercise routines, offer targeted recommendations, and track progress accurately.

Personalization is particularly relevant when it comes to finding the right balance between at-home and in-person fitness. Product managers from companies like Oura addressed wearables' value in bridging the gap between different activities throughout one's day, whether at home or in a studio. The Oura Ring has increasingly focused on fertility, as evidenced by Oura's partnership with Natural Cycles. Wearables are no longer solely focused on activity and sleep, but can drive value in more facets of life.

3. Digital and Physical Integration

Integrating data from digital platforms with physical experiences emerged as another significant trend. Brands like Rumble (Xponential) are looking to incorporate metrics into their studios, like punch count sensors in-bag. The conference also drew attention to creative ways that brands are bringing the in-studio magic online. At the conference, Julie Cartwright, the president of Pvolve, attested to the brand's ability to increase digital consumer conversion by 15% when it introduced a virtual onboarding session with a trainer to discuss client goals. Such personal touches to a digital realm can enhance the consumer experience at scale.

4. Franchising for Market Expansion and Revenue Growth

Franchising models were highlighted as a strategy for market expansion and increased revenue. Safe Sweat and Pause Studio both unveiled their plans to launch franchise models, allowing them to partner with big-box establishments and broaden their reach. By leveraging the success of their flagship studios, these start-ups aim to capitalize on the growing demand for health and fitness services. Franchising not only offers a scalable business model but also enables established brands to penetrate new markets and attract a larger customer base.

5. Personalization and Gamification of Fitness Experiences

The conference showcased the growing importance of personalization and gamification in fitness experiences. Start-ups like Flexia demonstrated their innovative approaches to bring personalized and gamified fitness experiences to users. Flexia introduced a digital platform that provides real-time intelligence-based scores and key performance indicators tied to Pilates workouts.

Swerve, which live streams a fitness experience to gyms around the world, was also represented at the conference. For consumers who want a personal, in-studio experience combined with the digital-powered cycling experience, Swerve bridges that gap. These start-ups aim to enhance user engagement and satisfaction by tailoring fitness experiences to individual preferences and promoting a sense of belonging.

Overall, The Connected Health and Fitness Summit 2023 showcased the importance of utilizing technology and in-person connections to drive value for consumers. The 2024 Connected Health & Fitness Summit will take place on February 7-8, 2024, at the Loews Hollywood Hotel in Los Angeles. As the industry continues to evolve, these trends will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of health and fitness, offering exciting opportunities for businesses and consumers alike.

