



Entertainment Responds To Personal Devices

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Gregory Florez

Fitness manufacturers have tried for decades to unlock the key to providing entertainment and motivation to exercisers, but no new products have truly captured the zeitgeist of the majority of club members. Perhaps too many smart people have been developing products they think will truly be revolutionary when in reality, technology is only revolutionary if it gives exercisers what they want.

Troy Severson, a director with Intel's new Digital Health Group, puts it best (albeit tongue in cheek) by saying, "We can now make a USB key that allows your computer to power a George Foreman grill, but who cares?"

Some experts believe that more than 40 percent of people already use iPods or the new competitor from Microsoft, Zune, while exercising. I bet that this number will easily exceed 60 percent within the next year, especially as competition heats up and prices decrease. Individuals use these devices for entertainment and motivation. They are demanding more interactive and on-demand services that tie into the devices. Club owners must embrace this trend or be left behind.

Some manufacturers are enhancing their product offerings to respond to this explosion. The immediate online access that manufacturers of these personal entertainment devices provide eliminates the most significant barriers for Internet content providers: driving traffic to their site, processing member enrollments and payments, downloading software, and returning people to sites for new program downloads. Because the field is still in its infancy, some clubs are reluctant to jump into this space, but this trend is not going away.

Tony Garcia, president of MYE Entertainment, captures the technology quandary that many club owners face.

"One of the major issues for fitness facility operators is the overwhelming advance of digital technology," he says. "They want to be confident their entertainment systems will attract members to their facility, result in a substantial return on investment and can expand as their needs change."

Many club operators are worried about getting left behind if they purchase technology that may be outdated within six to 12 months, Garcia says.

With more than 10 million iPods sold, another company also has tapped into the already hugely popular platform. Podfitness, a fully customized audio workout system, will soon launch the next version of its product line of content and programming for health clubs and consumers.

Companies like these two can provide real coaches and integrate behavior modification techniques into their systems. With MYE Entertainment, users can even use touch screen technology to read e-mails, watch TV and play games while exercising.

Clubs that embrace these systems will set up docking stations where users can download exercise programs, celebrity trainer workouts and even club events, schedules and other marketing information.

Manufacturers will provide streaming video, expanded TV programming capabilities, and the ability for clubs to bundle and sell programming services along with other premium offerings, offering a compelling financial reason to buy into these systems. You must be able to use the technology to build your business, which is why the entertainment companies are providing services that motivate, program and help with retention, and are providing the ability to sell these services or bundle them with other for-fee offerings.

Consumers are voting by the millions in favor of making their workout media portable. Don't get left behind.

Gregory Florez is CEO of FitAdvisor Health Coaching Services and First Fitness Inc., which was rated as the No. 1 health coaching online training service by *The Wall Street Journal*. Gregory can be contacted at gregory@fitadvisor.com.



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