



Hot Products

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By Gregory Florez, contributing writer

Editor's note: Gregory Florez is CEO of FitAdvisor, which provides fitness training and coaching to companies and individuals as well as product and technology reviews for consumers and the fitness industry. He is also our Focus On Technology columnist.

Innovation can be painful and often times unsuccessful. Fitness industry warehouses and health club storerooms are littered with the carcasses of innovative products that never lived up to their promises. Early versions of technologically sophisticated products were created in labs but didn't capture the zeitgeist of the real world. In essence the romance of technology overshadowed function.

The paradox of innovation is that companies cannot produce great new products without taking the risk of innovating. And many innovative products go through several versions before a company "gets it right."

Some products, however, rise above the rest. Every year we look at some of the hottest products in the fitness industry. This year's hot products are all about innovation. The products range from traditional hardline pieces to portable training aids. Some of them have been proven but now include added innovations that make them more valuable to exercisers. Others are unproven products that bring something fresh to an industry in dire need of innovation.

Here, then, are some of the best recent innovations that we expect to make a difference for your members in 2006.

Ab Crunch Bench (by Life Fitness)

An innovative core training offering, the Life Fitness Ab Crunch Bench delivers a unique workout. The product uses a patent-pending AbCam™ System that enables users to maintain a smooth and natural crunch motion for effective, efficient workouts.

The biomechanics of the AbCam™ System offer a natural exercise that is ergonomically designed to maximize ab contraction and minimize hip flexion. The integrated weight horn allows users to add resistance for a more challenging workout without time-consuming changes. The ergonomically angled pads and foot pegs provide comfort and stabilization for a variety of users. E3 Integrated LCD™ System with Touch Screen Technology, an integrated touch screen LCD console (powered by an Intel microprocessor), is standard on all Life Fitness "E" models. This all-in-one system combines advanced exercise program control with premium personal entertainment and education.

My Take: The industry abounds with abdominal machines that don't work. This one does. The combination of thoughtful and proper biomechanics and technology make this easy-to-use product a winner.
www.lifefitness.com

Advanced Vibration Technology (by Power Plate)

Advanced Vibration Technology© exploits the body's innate reflexive response to disruptions in stability to stimulate enhanced muscle strength and performance. The Power Plate produces a vibration through which energy is transferred to the body. This mechanical stimulus produces a stretch reflex, which — depending on the frequency — results in rapid and intense muscle contractions 30 to 50 times per second. Vibration training on the Power Plate can improve muscle strength, flexibility, range of motion and bone density and can stimulate blood circulation, according to the company.

The principle goes like this: Just as the leg kicks forward involuntarily when the doctor strikes the lower knee to test reflexes, the body's muscles engage in an involuntary reflexive contraction in response to vibration's disruption in stability. The body's reaction to this mechanical stimulus is all natural and occurs involuntarily at the neural level.

The Power Plate claims to be a resistance machine providing an outcome similar to, and even more beneficial than, working out with free weights or weight-bearing equipment. The company claims that its product can achieve these results through super compensation of the muscular system.

My Take: Many in our industry are still skeptical about this technology, and it is indeed quite new. We've had several personal trainers and exercisers use it repeatedly and almost all have agreed that they benefited from the programs. They said it was quite different than traditional

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