



# Lead Members To Embrace Technology In 2005

Jan 1, 2005 12:00 PM

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**In business headlines** around the country, the media quoted that several of the handheld computing companies, including Palm, were introducing meal-planning and personal-training software. The value proposition is that more of us are mobile and a large percentage of that population is headed toward a health crisis. In one of these articles it stated that a partnership between a handheld software company and Weight Watchers has created one of the best-selling software downloads of the season.

There are very clear signs that your customers are embracing technology to improve their own health. Last month, Fitness Business Pro's Associate Editor Jennipher Shaver wrote about the trend toward clubs using BMR (basal metabolic rate) and RMR (resting metabolic rate). Neither of these methods is new but both have had a sound following among athletes and other performance aficionados. The news here is that clubs, both boutique and larger chains, are using these methodologies to target baseline measures to show progress. Clubs report success with this in terms of participation and profit. So, what does this mean, and what can we expect for 2005 and beyond? How about:

Technologically simple ways to make strength machines easier to navigate with less user time and motion. Good examples include the latest versions of cable-driven strength training machines.

Using heart rate, VO2 and the aforementioned BMR and RMR as baselines, clubs and trainers will create increasingly personalized programs. Again, these will not be sold as "one offs" but rather as an integral part of a complete program.

Online training will become a much more common extension of in-club personal training. Although much has been written about this subject, and many of the early players have gone, e-mail and the use of online tools will become an important service for many club-based trainers. Some clubs will create and use their Web sites to drive this service while others will partner with proven entities. These services will link with steadily growing "life coaching" businesses that are maturing in the fitness market. The Web will allow coaches a more robust and simpler way to provide lifestyle assessments and help clients with time and stress management tools while away from the club.

Increasingly sophisticated nutritional software programs will not only aid club registered dieticians in assessment and programming, but will also provide the ability to highly customize their recommendations. This will take the form of everything from providing food recommendations based on client preference to helping dieticians make appropriate supplement recommendations.

You'll see simpler and more customized exercise software solutions that your members can use in the club and while traveling. The key here is that these solutions have extremely simple user interfaces and are able to be integrated into existing lifestyles, e.g. Microsoft Outlook, etc. Some will take the form of portable software, and others will integrate with your member's current technology choices. The general rule is that if it takes more than one or two clicks to make an exercise appointment or food entry, your members won't use it.

Cardiovascular machines will get smarter and simpler. Anyone can make an elliptical trainer or treadmill with programs and a display, but the winners will make larger backlit displays that cater to aging eyes and require no learning curve.

Thought-leading clubs will test and use devices that were once strictly used in the domain of mind/body and Chinese medical practitioners to integrate everything from massage to relaxation techniques and herbs to members.

Meridian Stress Assessment System. These systems measure electrical impulses that link to different organs in the body. Manufacturers claim that their products give the user the ability to also determine deficiencies both nutritionally and stress related.

One final thought on the dark side of technology. Many club members rush from their office, soccer practice and other appointments to make it to your club. Their day includes dealing with traffic while talking on the cell phone, checking their Blackberries or listening to news radio. At its essence, taking care of our bodies goes hand in hand with taking care of our mental state. Consider that what many of your members need is to simply come to the gym and be "present" in their workouts. For many, this may mean unplugging from technology and being mindful when they are exercising. It may be the only part of their day where they have the opportunity to focus on just being with themselves without the distractions of more information or having

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