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Leverage Your Dollars With Web-Based Classes

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Gregory Florez

Specialized and continuing education classes (CEC) for your fitness staff have been turned upside down by the Internet. Online continuing education is a cost-effective method of improving your staff's knowledge base.

These programs enable fitness professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills without taking them away from their duties. Internet education can be accomplished anywhere, at any time and, by providing this education through your club, it's a low-cost way to acknowledge outstanding performers and groom future leaders. This education can even help you differentiate from your competitors by providing specialized education around specific population segments you may be trying to reach such as older adults, dieters, prenatal and postnatal clients, and other emerging markets.

In the past, fitness professionals could earn accredited education by attending conferences and conventions or taking written home-study programs. However, Web-based delivery makes education more dynamic and easier to attain with quicker feedback. It also makes it easier for certifying and educating bodies to update and create new education, therefore more efficiently delivering that education to your professionals.

"We see an accelerating emergence of our online offerings because fitness professionals are as time-pressed as any other professionals," says Dr. Cedric X. Bryant, chief science officer for the American Council on Exercise (ACE), just one of a growing number of certifying agencies that offer online education. "They don't have to leave home or even adjust their teaching or client schedules to obtain this education. It truly is anywhere, anytime education."

CEC offerings may include a wide range of topics, including the business of personal training, nutrition and courses that deal with chronic diseases and special populations. ACE recently started an online course for those who want to break into the industry, Bryant says.

Peter Davis, CEO of IDEA, agrees that online education is a part of the future. "Nothing will ever replace real-time, hands-on, seminar-based education. It gives professionals a break from their normal routine, allows them to interact with each other and learn from the best in the industry. However, gaining CECs in between conferences using Web-based education is an excellent way to supplement this learning."

As with most technology, this is only the beginning. Expect to see Webcasts in specialized areas, online chats and the ability to ask questions of the program developers. Because fitness professionals are often disconnected to real-time information in the daily demands of their jobs, this will dramatically shorten the time between learning and implementation of programming, education and new class offerings. Nationally known fitness experts are the developers of some of these online modules.

Most fitness professionals need about 10 hours of CEC credits each year. Current online courses offer anywhere between one to 12 credits when successfully completed. Add to this the fact that, as club owners, you must ensure that your staff members stay as cutting edge and as credible as possible. Many of your members are often aware of new trends before those of us who work in the industry on a daily basis.

Internet-delivered programs represent one of the most forward-thinking trends to come along in decades. Some organizations that currently offer Web-based education and CECs include ACE (www.ace.org), Human Kinetics Publishing (www.humankinetics.com) and Desert Southwest Fitness (www.dswfitness.com). Don't miss this online opportunity.

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*. Florez can be contacted at gregory@fitadvisor.com.

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