



Leveraging Your Facility's Technology

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Fitness facilities are becoming increasingly technology-driven as a way to differentiate themselves from the competition, drive revenues and leverage staff resources. You can now provide lactate threshold assessment, analyze oxygen output and provide metabolic testing, all in addition to the services that have long been the staple of most clubs. At one time devices such as metabolic carts were available only in clinical settings, and they cost about \$60,000. The same technology is now available for less than \$8,000. Moreover, these new devices are highly portable.

Traditional strength-training and cardiovascular equipment have also become more versatile, responding to the trend towards functional activities for clients across a variety of activities and sports. In short, we are now realizing the full benefit of what once were mere possibilities in the frontier of fitness married with technology. This creates many new possibilities for both health and fitness professionals and facilities. Trainers, dieticians and others can now provide testing, monitor progress and create comprehensive programming with ever increasing accuracy.

In-house capabilities that were once only on owners' wish lists can now be fully integrated into your setting. The end game, of course, is much more comprehensive bundles of services that have the potential to create revenue and more value for your members over a longer period of time.

However, many of these exciting devices and machines — from ground-based, functional strength-training machines to metabolic testing devices — are being improperly used and, in some cases, are collecting dust in the corners of facilities. Generally, this occurs because of inadequate training and education for the practitioners who were slated to use the devices with their clients and inadequate marketing of the technology's capabilities.

Just because appropriate technology has finally come of age for use in your facility and is cost effective, more accurate and more intuitive to use, it doesn't mean it's working. Working in this context means stepping back and doing two things: first, determining how you want to create testing and programs that are offered together as complete packages for different segments of your club members, and secondly, making sure your staff is trained in their use and function on an ongoing basis.

The following is an example of how you might view a "product-as-service" extension in your facility. You purchase a metabolic testing device and provide body fat testing, dietary counseling and meal planning along with functional strength-training devices and personal training in your facility. You then sit down with your management and sales team as well as your health and fitness practitioners and map out programmatic strategies for different populations within your club that include some or all of the elements of the new technology and programming. You also discuss how you might charge for creating comprehensive programs around each population and how to best market them. Involving two to three frequent user members to provide feedback in this process can help you zero in on how to structure the financial equation so it is equitable for both parties. Always keep in mind that you are not selling sessions, tests or blocks of time. You are providing services that help clients reach their goals. If you look at them as separate entities rather than a program, so will your clients.

Most manufacturers and their products fall short of expectations when it comes to providing followup support. Most have a sales representative who sells a product and system to you, then provides an operations manual and a short on-site training clinic. Hands-on training and education may take time and resources, but it has also proven to be the only way that new technologies become integrated into the fabric of a fitness center's programs long-term. When you are reviewing the new technologies available, you should always ask manufacturers about a training program.

Technology for technology's sake never made anyone's life better. It's in the skilled use and execution of technology by professionals and the accompanying human touch that make them successful. If you are considering purchasing or already own new technologically advanced equipment, remember that two things must occur for success: bundling and marketing their capabilities and making sure that your staff is trained on a long-term basis.

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Back to Top

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