

## **Boosting Staff Skills and Club Productivity Through Technology** *The train is leaving the station. Board now!*

A rapid movement is afoot toward using web, online meeting and other technology-based tools to help clubs, and their professional staff increase performance, prepare for certifications, obtain specialized certificates and fulfill a variety of other business needs. This trend has been building more slowly in fitness than other industries, and has seen its share of challenges. Current economic realities combined with the need for knowledge transfer make using these tools a necessity. This need has also accelerated growth and lowered cost by providers of these services

Using technology training solutions dramatically cuts costs, allows technical and knowledge skills necessary and also addresses the issue of getting staff - be it sales or fitness professionals - up to speed more quickly rather than sending them to a live conference or seminar. This also lowers the budgetary risk of spending valuable training dollars on your human resources and hoping that trained staff will stay with you to reap the benefits-or provide a return on your invested dollars. Technology-based learning quite simply diminishes your risk during a time of razor thin margin for business errors.

A few of the formats found to be successful for the health club industry include:

- Online course preparation for certification
- Training in customer service, and business processes
- Certificate training
- Advanced, specialized training in areas from consultative selling, to sports performance, even training for special medical and demographic populations
- Live web casts and online chats using content experts
- Blogging
- Using time efficient tools and networks, e.g. YouTube, Facebook, etc.

I spoke with leaders from 2 organizations that are developing, refining, and delivering technology based learning modules to our industry. Cedric Bryant, Chief Science Officer for The American Council on Exercise offered the following “health and fitness professionals now entering the market are highly attuned to, and accustomed to using online resources for education and advanced knowledge transfer. It is an expectation for them. A given.”

Interestingly enough they are using the social networking sites to dialogue and connect with others without the traditional conference formats we’re used to. We have to acclimate to this dramatic shift in the changing work force. At ACE we are responding aggressively to this shift.”

Another certifying organization, The American College of Sports Medicine is also offering a variety of technology learning platforms, which include web-based education to connect experts all over the world and provide forums for presentation and interaction.

“Web-based learning took off for us last year, and it will become turbo-charged in 2009,” said Richard Cotton, ACSM’s national director of certification. “You stand to gain in both participant productivity and overall cost-effectiveness with these platforms. Technology does, in this case, make life easier.”

Both ACE and ACSM are not for profit organizations and have significant credibility and very solid content along with being very familiar names in the industry. Dozens of other entities are jumping into this space. It is essential to research providers to determine if their learning content fits your needs. When doing so here are a few things to look for:

- Is their content (or modules) recognized by accredited certifying bodies where necessary? Provide CEC’s?
- Do they offer a sample of the curriculum, tests, and outcomes for you to test drive before you buy?
- Is there a continuum of learning resources, i.e., if they have a basic “consultative selling” module, is there follow up including advanced modules? Live online support?
- Can they provide client references in order that you can contact colleagues and determine the efficacy of their programs?

In my research a few other technology-based learning solutions include:

- [www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org)
- [www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org)
- [www.ptonthenet.com](http://www.ptonthenet.com)
- [www.ideadfit.com](http://www.ideadfit.com)
- [www.smartclubmarketing.com](http://www.smartclubmarketing.com)
- [www.dswfitness.com](http://www.dswfitness.com)

Also read this publication regularly, looking for advertisements from companies that provide technology based training and education.

Conferences and face-to-face learning is very powerful, and the experience is valuable. You simply cannot replicate the richness of an onsite, interactive experience. All of us must also be fiscally responsible and open to the increasing depth and efficacy of technology training and learning.