



Smaller Players Dominate Technology Innovations May 1, 2006 12:00 PM

Gregory Florez

Technology has moved to the forefront of focus for many institutional product manufacturers in their latest offerings. Some of this is because the public is ready for this new wave; some of it shows us that technology has focused more on user-friendly, credible products. The key is asking yourself if these products will help drive your club's success.

At the recent International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association's (IHRSA) trade show in Las Vegas, smaller niche manufacturers showed off their new products on the show floor. As opposed to previous years when large equipment vendors dominated the show, smaller, newer players introduced an abundance of new technology for the fitness industry. Here is the first part in a two-part series on new products showcased at IHRSA:

Power Plate, Inc. (www.powerplateusa.com) uses vibration technology to train muscles. It has taken a foothold in many pro and collegiate athletic facilities and is now gaining popularity in health clubs. The technology uses different modes of vibration to stimulate muscle strength, help rehab muscles and aid in post-workout recovery. Although Power Plate has been around for awhile, the new twist on the system is that it now comes with software that uses a key card. This key card allows clubs to track and monitor users, helping to increase sales of packages that include the system. The card also allow users and trainers to program a variety of workouts.

Exertron Inc. (www.exertron.com) displayed at the show a new, patented exercise technology that can be adapted to any piece of strength-training equipment in a gym. The system uses intelligent variable resistance that reacts to the user's levels of intensity throughout a repetition. The unit measures current and past performance and provides encouragement to continually improve their "score," e.g. strength from workout to workout. Exertron uses equipment-mounted sensors to automatically adjust resistance for strength depending upon the user's exertion level. One of the "wow" factors of this product is that exercisers do not have to manually change weights because the machines decrease resistance as the muscle fatigues.

Korebalance (www.ast-group.com/korebalance) uses technology to assist with popular core training programs. Previously used in physical therapy settings, the machine will soon be available to health clubs. The main product uses a version of a stability ball that a user stands on. A hydraulic system moves the ball to facilitate different muscle stimulus. The product features a LED screen that the exerciser uses to move the ball through virtual sport or daily activities. KoreBalance is navigated by moving your feet and body in different patterns as dictated by the program on the screen.

CSI club management software (www.csisoftwareusa.com) takes a large leap forward in providing a much more robust version of its earlier software products with the Spectrum NG system. The product leverages Microsoft.net and SQL server to increase the number of activities that a club can manage and glean information from by offering a Web version of the product. The suite of possibilities includes accounts receivable, client contract programs, facility management tools, class and league scheduler, POS reporting, and even gift card management.

True Fitness and MYE Entertainment (www.myemusicTV.com) have created a partnership that allows access to radio, TV and even a MP3 player by attaching a controller and optional docking station to True equipment. A club can create an audio and visual experience on its cardio equipment using a controller that is mounted to each piece of equipment to provide entertainment from LCD screens or wireless television systems. The system also offers an optional docking station for MYE's version of an MP3 player that plugs directly into the system.

Technogym Inc. (www.technogym.com) introduced The Wave, a cardiovascular machine that is a cross between an elliptical trainer and a stair climber but uses the lateral muscles in the legs, hips and buttocks. The machine moves up and down but while descending, makes the user push sideways. The product must be experienced to truly feel its motion, which uses muscles on the inside and outside of the legs that are typically not used on traditional equipment.

Look for more new technology products from the IHRSA show in next month's column.

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