



## The Democratization Of Technology And Product Is Here

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Gregory Florez

**I recall sitting in** one of our industry conferences several years ago when the keynote speaker talked about the future of fitness. Along with the standard cookie-cutter prognostications, he said: "Within the next 20 years your members will be able to look at their workout programs and other critical information from you using a handheld, computerized organizer anytime, anywhere. You will be able to track and access members and stay in touch with them wherever they go and wherever you happen to be."

At this point many of my fellow conference attendees put pens in pockets and began reviewing the rest of their schedule for the day. I was intrigued but not particularly persuaded — it sounded like another optimistic Jetsons-style future to me, and it didn't apply to building my business today. The future described by that speaker is here, and it does apply to our businesses today. The revolution blending fitness products and technology has begun.

In this monthly column, I will explore a variety of issues that will impact you and your members in the product and technology segments of your clubs. I'll share real time, actionable information, interview your members (and prospective members), as well as talk to manufacturers and scientists. I will also share relevant examples from thought leaders in different industries — those who have understood the zeitgeist of their respective universes and customers, and nailed the simplest and most timely combination of technology and user interface to delight their customers.

There is much we can learn from, say, Steve Jobs who probably doesn't know the three leading treadmill manufacturers but surely knows how to innovate, build perfect products and generate recurring revenue streams from service offerings.

The Apple iPod was originally thought of as a niche, quirky toy by most, geared toward teens and the uber-hip. In fact, upon release, industry insiders derided the iPod and predicted that Apple got it wrong, again. It is now ubiquitous and has become a paragon of nearly flawless form and function. Sales have consistently quadrupled quarterly, while Apple has made the unit smaller, more user friendly and less costly. The full force didn't hit Jobs until a recent trip to New York that he described: "I walked out of a building on Madison, looked around and realized that every third person had our familiar white earbuds in their ears."

So what does this have to do with you and the success of your facility? Most of you have been pitched the next latest and greatest product. Many of you have purchased "bleeding edge" products only to have them languish in a little-used area of your facility, underused by your staff and members.

My goal is to not only illuminate what is possible, but also provide actionable steps about how to use technology and understand trends. Following are some assumptions and facts I'm starting with to make sure you get value from reading this column:

Most of your members and end-users are time starved and over programmed in most aspects of their lives.

Most industry statistics state that more than 60 percent of fitness facility members own, or will own, home exercise equipment. This will not replace their use of your facilities but rather be an adjunct when they are pressed for time. This is an opportunity for ongoing revenue for leading-edge management.

More than 90 percent of your members have Internet access at home, and 70 percent of those use e-mail at least two times per week. Additionally, 85 percent of all Americans have a cell phone. I'll discuss how you can leverage this to sell more, increase renewals, and improve adherence to your programs.

Markets such as physiological testing, nutrition services and home exercise equipment have surpassed \$3 billion in revenue.

If I can't validate a particular trend or product — one that I know is making a difference in your universe — I won't waste your time. Next month, look for the first wave of product and trend reviews that can drastically change your business.

**Gregory Florez** is CEO of FitAdvisor Health Coaching Services and First Fitness Inc., which was recently rated as the No. 1 health coaching online training services by *The Wall Street Journal*. He and his team have

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