



Fitness Technology Should Follow The Three Pillars Mar 1, 2007 12:00 PM

Gregory Florez

Our industry is making significant progress in understanding what works and what does not when merging technology with fitness. However, when it comes to designing new fitness products and product platforms, the industry has overcomplicated the process. Nowhere is this more evident than in technology. Fitness is not that complicated.

To make money with technology — or any programming for that matter — we must attack behavioral change. When it comes to this type of change, we should look at three pillars: inspiration, motivation and adherence, and education and outcomes.

Individuals become inspired to join a club or start an exercise program for many reasons — upcoming events, medical concerns, life changes and other goals. Inspiration is the spark that lights the flame to get someone to want to make a change. However, inspiration does not make the change.

Motivation and adherence represent the two most critical pieces to success and longevity in sticking with an exercise program. Our job in this industry is to creatively motivate people to start and stay with an exercise program. The benefits are many: success for members, renewals, referrals and the creation of a great brand in your market.

Motivation and adherence make up the trickiest of the three pillars, and technology can be a lever in helping sustain behaviors if it is simple, seamless and easy. We are a society of consumers whose demands include instant, usable information. The more clicks, steps, forms and reading that individuals must perform to participate in exercise, the less likely they are to stay motivated. Unfortunately, no technology platform has completely figured this out.

Education and outcomes are natural consequences of the rewards of inspiration, combined with motivation and adherence. Education by itself doesn't change anyone without motivation and adherence.

As the medical space continues to merge with fitness, outcomes will become more important. Corporations and health care providers know that exercise is the key to lower costs, happier employees and increased productivity. With this knowledge, these entities will purchase fitness technology, but only if quantitative outcomes are measured. The right technology will do this.

Health clubs don't make people fit. Fitness equipment doesn't make people fit. Classes and trainers don't make people fit. And technology will not make people fit either. All of these things are accelerators or facilitators. They make a significant difference but only if they tie into inspiration, motivation, adherence and education.

If you are looking at developing or purchasing any technology that affects the fitness of your members, make sure that it supports the three pillars. If not, it is simply another capital cost, and you will not see any long-term return on investment.

Consumers are adept at using technology inside and outside of your club. They are also impatient, time starved and accustomed to technology that allows them to do everything quickly and easily. This means they do not want to enter information into a kiosk, exercise and then enter more information into the kiosk. Extra steps dramatically decrease motivation and adherence. Successful technologies seamlessly integrate with the technology members use outside of the club, such as PDAs, home computers and personal entertainment devices.

Clubs that are creating or integrating new technology products or elements will be more successful if they ensure that the products address these three pillars.

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