



How Will In-Club Technology Affect Fitness Pros?

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Gregory Florez

From portable metabolic carts to computerized exercise training and tracking, in-club capabilities are expanding at a rapid pace. Fitness professionals are caught in the cross hairs of this wave between club owners and users. Does technology help or detract from a fitness professional's career?

I recently interviewed Scott Goudeseune, president, and Cedric Bryant, chief exercise scientist, of the American Council on Exercise (ACE). The organization has trained or certified more than 250,000 professionals worldwide during the past 20 years. Following is part one of my conversation with them.

Gregory Florez: *Do emerging technologies provide a hindrance or an opportunity to the professional fitness associate in a club setting?*

Scott Goudeseune: Overall, an opportunity. As technology becomes more prevalent, more individuals become involved in fitness, helping professionals grow their client base. Americans are enamored with technology, and they will continue to embrace technology in all areas of their lives. This will create more opportunities for clients to connect with clubs and their fitness professionals.

Cedric Bryant: Technology creates a significant opportunity for both clubs and professionals when approached in the correct manner. Portable metabolic assessment tools are among the more interesting technologies that are already being used by fitness professionals. These tools can help gain precise information like energy output, and when they're in the right hands, they can be powerful.

One downside is when health clubs lean on technology too much at the expense of personal touch. Health club owners need to realize that technology will never take the place of the in-person contact with a certified fitness professional. It's called personal training for a reason. As such, technology should serve as a tool that helps facilitate a more in-depth relationship without losing the personalization.

Florez: *What significant technologies do you see affecting club fitness professionals currently?*

Goudeseune: Tools that allow instructors to train more people more efficiently, manage class sizes and stay in touch with their clients away from the gym. As Cedric said, it is critical that this does not take the place of individual face-to-face contact. This is particularly important in the initial consultation and early sessions with a fitness professional.

Online services that allow trainers to tailor their client's workouts over the Internet are beginning to take hold, although we don't yet know how this affects progression or adherence. Remember that in many cases, a club professional's earning potential is limited by the number of physical sessions or classes they can conduct.

Technology is helping them to better leverage their time. Summarizing workouts, planning sessions and other time-consuming tasks are being condensed considerably. In some cases, this is also allowing trainers to actually grow their training base. They can do this by training someone on a scheduled basis both in person and remotely. Technology can also help reduce the cost of personal training packages for a client.

Also, clubs are always looking for a competitive edge, and technology tools can help professionals work with a much larger base of members overall. This will allow clubs to gain new revenue streams aside from their traditional programs.

Bryant: The better online services provide valuable tools for personal trainers. These include articles, exercise demonstration libraries, exercise reminders and even recipes for clients. Depending upon a trainer's experience and credentials, this type of information can increase the value of their services while making sure that they stay within their scope of practice. Mypyramid.gov and Eatright.com are examples of credible tools available to trainers online.

Various tools like postural assessment, etc., are also becoming popular in the fitness industry. One caution however: all of these new technologies need to be taught by a trained professional who is also certified. These training modules should provide hands-on education and follow-up to ensure that they are used correctly and safely.

In next month's column, the remainder of our interview will focus on the future of technology for fitness professionals and club owners.

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