



The Next Fitness Wave Involves Integration

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For the last decade there's been a lot of talk and a plethora of products that seek to merge the gap between fitness and health care. Many of these products and services have had some success; others have been ahead of their time or not lived up to their promise. With progressive technology and sophisticated technology companies becoming interested in this concept, we will now start to see things change quickly. More than 70 million Americans have medical health and lifestyle-related issues that can be solved by changing their exercise and eating habits. Additionally, statistics show that two of the biggest barriers to success are time and access. With a market this size, we are on the cusp of seeing mature technology companies, including PC, software and systems application entities, partner with fitness manufacturers and professionals to affect a large part of this segment. Our industry will benefit from these partnerships as a way to leverage their sophisticated and market-proven systems to launch a new wave that merges health care and fitness. With their understanding of the technology and user issues and solutions, we will see rapid integration of health care and fitness for many who have not been successful with more traditional equipment and club-based programs.

Expect to see in-home integration of health-screening tools combined with customized fitness programs that continue to gain efficacy. This will range from your home PC connecting with devices to track data regarding your vital health measures (e.g. blood pressure, glucose levels, oxygen saturation levels and resting metabolic rate) to more sharply defined customized programs for individuals with health issues. We will also see the emergence of applications that address business-to-business solutions that allow manufacturers to help clubs more effectively run their business using technology. Early attempts at some of these tools proved inefficient, sometimes inaccurate and generally not user friendly.

Essentially, these new programs and technology will help the industry "meet people where they live" — literally. Barriers such as time and access will fall away as our customers track and use health-screening information and apply that information to their personal health programs. Any of us with a computer and Internet access will be able to use and track vital information to create behavioral change.

Amy Acker, a senior vice president for the global telecommunications company Avaya, offered insights into this future. She said that a phone being tested in Korea included a glucose level measuring device integrated into the phone. The test measures glucose levels for diabetics and allows users to download and send the information to health care professionals who can monitor an individual's blood sugar levels.

In the future, Acker predicted that tech companies will partner with fitness equipment and fitness technology companies to integrate similar services into their electronic fitness equipment, allowing views in real time or post workout of key health-screening numbers. This technology will allow doctors, physical therapists and fitness professionals to modify or create individual lifestyle programs using current data and better communicate and triage their services.

Anne Matson, an executive from Intel, said a number of peripherals already exist to track health concerns and fitness goals. Many of these companies design their devices to connect to a PC, so users can download and analyze their health and wellness data and connect with online services. These device vendors work with companies such as Intel to bring to market health technologies that work across various devices and platforms, greatly expanding the way individuals can improve their health while addressing the barriers of access and time. Several online communities, services and professional sites (e.g. WebMD) already allow connection to personal health information and dialogue with others who have similar health issues.

Companies such as Intel and others will increasingly put resources into health and wellness technology solutions to help drive industry standards. Partnering with technology companies who have a depth of experience in understanding simple and intuitive user interfaces will be critical for new products and peripherals to truly have an impact on the health of our customers and patients. It is time for our industry to go beyond our product development teams and work with companies who understand technology to create usable next generation technology solutions.

More health devices will come to market to help individuals manage chronic health problems such as diabetes and asthma to address the leading health-related concerns of Americans. A patient will be able to capture data and send it quickly and directly to their respective fitness and health care professionals. With an increasing lack of hospital beds for our growing elderly population, these in-home devices for PCs will be useful, as well as cost and time efficient, for users.

Finally, as more proof that this is an emerging growth area, the technology executives that we talked to

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