

The Pros And Cons Of Promoting Wellness Technology



By Michael Rucker

As a health club operator, you are probably aware that health and wellness technology is quickly evolving, bringing a host of new and promising products. However, using and promoting technology for technology's sake is not always the right answer. It's often about how intelligently you apply technology that is the winning recipe. Technology should work for you and your members, not the other way around.

Science and technology have been a part of health and fitness for many years now.

Numerous athletic records have been broken over the past quarter century. Chances are most people have not evolved to be naturally better athletes during this relatively short time period. More likely, it is that technology, process, and rigor have afforded today's athletes the ability to beat their predecessors.

Some examples of modern day fitness technology used to improve performance are motion capture, wind tunnels and CT scans. These technological advances paired with advances in tracking techno, reveal to users what specific workout regimens are helping them improve and which ones are wasting his/her time. The modern day coach in competitive sport is almost as much a data analyst now as he or she is a mentor and it's not uncommon for professional teams to have data sets rivaling Fortune 500 companies.

It's not only professional athletes who collect and analyze data to help them progress. It's now becoming more common for the layman to use activity and biometric tracking devices to improve his/her own fitness and well-being. I'm sure that some of these people are most likely members of your health club.

What Is An "Activity Or Biometric Tracking Device"?

According to a recent Pew Report, an estimated 69% of Americans track their health in some way using some form of health measure. Out of those reporting that they track health, about one in five people report using some form of technology to do so, including the use of activity and biometric tracking devices. Activity and biometric trackers now come in many varieties. There are mobile phone apps which turn your phone into an activity log; there are the tried-and-true pedometers and accelerometers; there are advanced GPS devices; there are heart rate monitors and wireless scales; there are even devices that roll some of these features into one device. There are devices that can monitor sleep patterns and, through the use of companion software, help users maintain a healthy diet.

Is It Valuable For My Member's To Track?

There is no doubt that activity and biometric tracking has influenced some people to have healthier lifestyles. Having reasonable, recognizable goals is a well-documented approach to improve the likelihood of achieving desirable results. Activity and biometric tracking devices are great tools to help measure progress. They are valuable products for coaches and trainers. Professionals can use these tools to keep clients accountable, as routine and regimen planning aids, and as a predictive tool determining when and how to increase

the workload. When used effectively, this type of technology offers valuable tools for all involved.

Should You Recommend Activity Tracking to Your Members?

Whether or not a club member should be using a tracking device depends entirely on his/her personal goals. A recent study conducted by Ryan McFadden and me at Club One, suggests there is no guarantee that one device will be right for everyone. The benefit a member will get from any device depends entirely on the individual and what he/she is trying to achieve.

For example, a member looking to develop strength may find tracking aerobic activity a burden, or perceive measuring their Body Mass Index a counter-productive success metric. An enthusiast of running may need the sophistication of a GPS tracking device to plan running routes, measure exact distance traveled and log precise race times. For members just looking to improve their cardiovascular fitness, the use of a GPS device might be overkill, as the robust feature set that comes with most GPS devices can be cumbersome to navigate.

The populations who are good candidates for tracking programs are those who are typically sedentary and engage these types of devices in a coordinated program such as an organized group, generally either self-selected (ex., Weight Watchers) or through their employer (ex., a company "competition"). These candidates likely spend all day at their desk, driving to and from work, and have hobbies and/or interests that do not involve any rigorous activity. When an activity monitor is given to individuals fitting this description in conjunction with group support, significant self-improvement often follows. Many people think they are generally active until seeing just how sedentary their lifestyle is through the insight tracking provides. This wakeup call is often enough to elicit behavior change.

There are people who get to the gym, but just not enough. Because they are busy, they cannot plan a daily fitness routine because of demands on their time. These people are ideal candidates for tracking. Using a pedometer as the example, these people can take extra steps during their work day—extra trips to water cooler for instance—to create healthy patterns that enable them to reach their goals. Whether that's taking the stairs rather than an elevator, or walking the long way to the office, activity tracking is useful for increasing the desire for healthy behavior.

Pros And Cons Of Recommending Technology To Health Club Members

Pros: These devices allow your members to set targets; to see the results of their efforts, and to plan and adjust their training regimens according to measurable metrics. They add a lot of value when paired with the appropriate member. A good example is an avid runner who would likely benefit from a GPS enabled device to ensure he/she is getting the mileage needed to succeed and/or helping him/her to improve through a predetermined online speed training program.

Most of these devices will make your members more mindful of their progress. Members will now have a historic record of how they measured a month ago, or six months

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assessments, program design, small group personal training and presentations, while gaining experience under the direction of NASM with guidance and critique by your staff. It's a winning opportunity to access the cream of the crop of personal trainers with the option to hire if you choose. If your facility is interested in hosting a personal trainer externship experience, contact NASM at NASMjobtraining@nasm.org for details.

Engagement and Inspiration

A personal trainer has to be able to positively connect with a client in order to truly inspire the individual to change any habits and reach goals. A trainer's attitude, behavior, and communication skills affect whether a member will re-sign for additional training sessions, and perhaps whether to retain membership at your facility. According to LeBoeuf (2000), 68% of customers who quit doing business with a company do so because of the attitude or indifference of an employee toward a customer. Pay attention to the candidates' body language plus their ability to make eye contact, smile and remember names. Also consider their listening skills and if they are friendly and compassionate. These are all key communication qualities for a personal trainer. Enlist the help of other staff, asking them to rate the candidates interactions prior to and after the interview (hosting an externship is also an opportunity to see a personal trainer's engagement skills in action). A candidate that has positive interactions with staff and members is definitely worth further consideration.

Training New Hires

Once you've made the hiring choice, work with the new hire and your staff to properly train new employees in the ways of your facility and performance expectations. Based on the job description, train the essential skills they need to initially perform the job but then expand the training to address short-term and long-term needs. Schedule an assessment of their training early on to discuss their performance and identify areas for development. Enlist your employees to assist with the training. This will help make everyone an integral part of the personal training team.

As you can see, choosing the right personal trainer for your team does take some thoughtful preparation and consideration. With the huge growth projected for personal trainers through the next decade, identifying the right person for the job requires that you know what qualities and qualification you need for your facility and its members. Use these suggestions to help guide you in the process of growing a successful personal training team and facility.

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ago, and how they have improved over time. This brings a sense of accomplishment to your members and it allows members to set realistic goals for future progress. This data is now easily collected and analyzed, whereas in the past it would have been time consuming to collect and apply. Some devices come with the ability to socially share progress through online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. This can spur adherence in some individuals that have the competitive spirit. They have the added benefit of providing exposure to one of your fitness campaigns through that member's social network. There is evidence to suggest that a focus on calories (a feature of most activity trackers) helps people stay more mindful of their diets. Knowing an estimate of how many calories one burns in a day can make members more careful about what they eat. In summary, these devices have the potential to encourage your members to adopt healthy habits.

These devices offer utility to your staff as well. Coaches and trainers get additional visibility into the activity of their clients. It allows them to tailor and monitor their clients' workouts outside of the club in a way that may not have been possible before.

Cons: You may think that if your members can see clear progress, it's likely that they will have positive feelings towards your health club. This may be true, but what if the user has a terrible experience? A negative experience with a device you marketed to them may make them associate that experience with your club. It could potentially hurt your brand equity and/or it could damage the effective rapport your coaches and trainers need to succeed with their clients. This makes it absolutely crucial that the right devices are recommended to the right individuals.

An operator must consider the danger that the member may find that an activity tracking device is a viable alternative to a health club membership. It may inspire a preference for outdoor activities or the member may simply think, "I'm already doing enough". Lastly, you need to fully understand each device you promote. If you are offering a particular device at your club and the hardware is shoddy and/or the software is poor, it should be expected that members using the device will come to you first for support.

In summary, there is no easy answer as to whether or not you should recommend activity and biometric tracking devices to your members. There are many benefits, and these devices are perfect for some people, but not all. You should be mindful that if you match the wrong device to particular members, they may associate their poor user experience with your club's brand. However, if your health club masters the ability to pair member goals with the right device, it might just be the winning recipe for increasing your retention rates.

For a in-depth look at this topic, download Club One's Activity and Biometric Tracking Study available at www.cluboneinc.com/tracking-device-study.pdf

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