



Eye on the

Future

David Norman introduces the new language and technology of 'exergaming'

For years fitness club members have become used to the standard features of equipment in clubs and gyms (weights and cardio). Innovations in fitness equipment have generally been through evolutions in product design (such as built in LCD screens or cooling fans) rather than complete new product developments – such as the Technogym Wave, Strive's adjustable cam weight machines or the Cybex Arc trainer.

However, today we see the advent of an entire new category development, which sees products from smaller commercial manufacturers with a point of difference products. These aim to attract users; engage them for longer; provide the motivation for continuing or returning to the product; and, importantly, provide a more effective physical and mental result, often in less time.

Some key examples of such equipment can be seen in products such as Absolo, Xavix, Trixter's Xdream and Strive's 3kick, Jump Q and Heavy Ball stations, and Xergames Sportwall and Xerdance products.

The training benefit of these machines is that these units are training the whole body and include skill development of balance, co-ordination, reactions, strength and cardiovascular fitness. Significantly, they include the added component of fun, through the concept of 'exergaming'.

Sometimes referred to as interactive fitness products or even mind/body development (as they call upon greater mental focus to co-ordinate with the physical - making it a more holistic and beneficial range of training products), exergaming is a new



breed of technology based products that provide exercise in an interactive nature for exercisers young, old and in between.

An additional benefit is the feedback exergames generates. As in any fusion of technology and gaming, scoring is a fundamental element in exergaming and, like video gaming, personal feedback both inspires and motivates progress. This makes exergaming more effective than traditional machines, which provide little more than time/distance statistics. In addition, feedback from participation in competitive sport can often be in a negative context if mistakes are made or skill and conditioning is not matched to that of others in a group.

In schools where exergaming has been introduced, there has been a rise in confidence of all participants leading to improved behaviour and additional elected participation in sports.

Exergaming products like Xavix and Interactive Training System's Hopsports actually have the users using real bats, balls and equipment to mimic, simulate or control the activity, unlike some other commercial gaming products that play sport games.

I also see exergaming as being complimentary in most cases to 'traditional' weights and cardio training where the gains from dedicated training on these units is recognised. Adding exergaming to such traditional equipment adds training variety which is so important to stress the body in different ways, while also increasing mental stimulation.

Similarly, with the need to appeal to the wider population who aren't attending our gyms and clubs, or those not consistently working out the traditional way, exergaming provides real



solutions whatever the age, level or ability.

In a society that is growing in size and reducing its activity levels, exergame developers aim to connect users at the appropriate level with the technology that can be embraced for exercise – an approach that manufacturers call ‘tricking’ users into action. Such tricks do work and are not gimmicks, and for business owners provide a greater return on investment over traditional equipment outlay. For those who want to offer their members more, owners and managers need to invest in quality to ensure longevity in the products. Remember, it is about return on investment and exergaming delivers not only products but also programs to support its use.

Despite using the word gaming, these products are not just for children but for all generations, with the added bonus, that interactive exercise using mind and body is a great leveller between all users, young and old, fit and overweight, conditioned or not.

Facilities choosing to use exergaming products should see themselves as having a distinct advantage over their competitors. In marketing terms, the USP (unique selling point) of exergaming needs to be marketed correctly to target groups that can benefit. While exergaming suits all users, deciding on the programming, type of use, format, environment and facility will determine its effectiveness.

In 2009, Virgin Active at French's Forest have shown their hand by including multiple exergaming products in their Club V childrens' facility, while other independent clubs have included the products in group fitness studios to maximise usage when traditional classes are not being taught. Another great suggestion is to create functional spaces where such ‘play’ can be set up and still combined with other new functional systems like TRX suspension system or kettlebells. To complement this there are a range of programming solutions such as those from Crossfit.

Ultimately, I believe circuits for youth and circuits for adults are the most time effective, layout efficient and simplest to program. Incorporating exergaming with traditional weights and cardio machines at an existing facility is usually an easy fit and will cater to the diverse market on which all operators need to focus.

In the future, I believe clubs and facilities need to explore the many solutions now available on the market outside the current norm, and look to incorporate them into their planning over the next five years.

To make a comparison with how the music industry has transitioned from vinyl, to tape, to CD, to iPods so the fitness industry will soon experience exercise and fitness by different means.

David Norman is Manager of EYE Fitness. EYE fitness imports, sells and trains users, and consults to businesses and schools on the benefits of innovative exercise equipment, education and exergaming products to enhance adherence, participation, enjoyment and connection to the benefits of exercise.



Eye's Vision

Formally 123Strive Australasia, the recently launched EYE Fitness are aiming to become Australia and New Zealand's most innovative fitness supplier of exercise equipment, education and exergaming products, programs and consultancy services.

Eye's vision is for schools, community groups, sports teams and facilities and all areas of the fitness industry (commercial clubs, recreation centres, PT studios and personal trainers) to use engaging products and turn-key programs to increase exercise adherence by users which will in turn make a difference to all users and the people they connect with.

With the name change has come additions to the management team which now boasts years of industry experience embracing the corporate, education and fitness sectors.

As 123Strive Australasia the business was able to establish key accounts with Goodlife Health Clubs and Virgin Active; top sporting teams like Manly Sea Eagles and the Geelong Cats; while also acting as distributors of the Strive Smart strength range.

As EYE Fitness, the business continues to distribute Strive Smart strength while having innovative brands including the UK-based Trixter and products from Xergames, MotusUSA, Xavix, Absolo, and Hopspots (all from the USA).

According to EYE Fitness Manager David Norman "it is important for clubs to consider how they are differentiating themselves from competitors; how they are maximising facility space and usage and how they are appealing to the broader community to attract new members, clients and users and then ensure they regularly attend, get results and ultimately be retained year on year.

"At EYE Fitness we have reviewed the leading trends in clubs and product evolution overseas to bring products that benefit the users, and the businesses bottom line and ultimately address these issues."

EYE Fitness aims to focus on exercise equipment, education products and exergaming to provide innovative and interactive products to benefit all users. EYE is more than an import and sales business, it is a dedicated training and consultancy business ensuring every consideration is made for maximal impact of product use relevant to health outcomes, the facility and profitability.

For more information EYE Fitness on 1800 771 079, Email: dnorman@eyefitness.org, www.eyefitness.org