

The Wonder of Wearables

Clubs use the results to motivate clients, design regimens, monitor progress, celebrate personal achievements, and, sometimes, as the basis for competitions or special events.

The data quantifies the current state of things and changes as they occur; but, at the moment, it's not predictive. Though the technology collects a vast amount of information, it doesn't crunch it to suggest how users could do better. That task, right now, remains the purview of the trainers and coaches.

However, given advances in personalization and artificial intelligence (AI), wearables will begin to offer advice on how to improve everything from athletic performance to one's sleep habits.

Today, in Tel Aviv, Israel, Shai Neiger, the CEO of CoachAI, has developed and introduced an automated, AI-driven software solution that's designed to improve member engagement with the use of a virtual companion. However, he cautions that, no matter how sophisticated the possibilities become, the information that clubs decide to track should depend on the member's level of knowledge and experience.

"Data needs to be simple and binary—what people can really understand—not complicated numbers," he says.

"People are already overwhelmed with their lives, and joining a gym and working with a trainer can be additionally overwhelming," observes Cortez. "We provide a safe space for our members and the right tools for success. Our HRMs are easy to use, and our members feel that they're worthwhile and introduce an element of fun."

Group exercise edge

For quite a while, fitness tech has played a key role in group exercise and small-group training (SGT) classes at many clubs, including those of Chuze and Orangetheory Fitness. Both make use of HR performance trackers for the basic, but essential, tasks of setting goals and monitoring clients' progress.

"They permit our members to see their heart rates in specific training zones," notes Matthew Taub, a coach at an Orangetheory facility in Toronto. "This allows them to work within their limits and train accordingly."

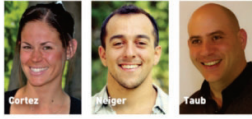
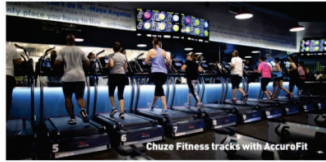
At Chuze, members wear the devices during the cardiovascular segment of their HIIT workout, which takes place on bikes, rowers, or incline trainers. Their heart rates are displayed on a screen in real time; and trainers work with them to keep them in their optimal training zone, maximizing benefits.

"The HR displays provide members with an easy, color-coded tool to gauge whether or not they're working at ideal intensity levels throughout the sessions," Cortez explains.

Trainers for trackers

Although individuals often utilize wearables on their own, there's a general consensus that they do better when assisted by an instructor or trainer.

"I believe the only way trackers can help clients achieve their goals is if they're combined with personalized human coaching," observes Dennis Mathias, the general manager of the Healthplex Sports Club, in Springfield, Pennsylvania.



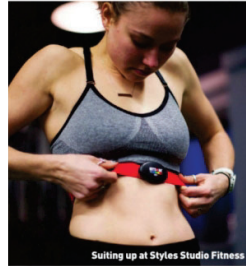
"Behavioral science shows that increased accountability encourages adherence. It's not about the weights and counting sets and reps. The primary goal is simply to get people to use the facility."

Mathias, who's been working with trackers for the past six years and tested most of those on the market, eventually developed a unique cardio coaching program that incorporates them. However, he attributes much of the program's success to human intervention. "My experience suggests that, if you educate the client, walk them through a progressive, strategically coached plan, and they come to understand what the data means, they don't quit, because they see positive outcomes," he says.

"HRMs are incredibly valuable in our training sessions, as well as for members working out elsewhere—on the gym floor, for example," adds Cortez. "But they don't have the experience or provide the service offered by our team of trainers and the rest of our staff."

"... The HRM display helps trainers by providing them with important feedback on how, specifically, to coach members."

"At Orangetheory, our coaches are trained to coach throughout the workout. They're part of the entire process," says Taub. "The OT Beat Performance Tracker is a tool they use to help members reach their goals."



Winning the game

Wearables' raison d'être is providing data for initial assessments and the monitoring of members' physical progress, but they also have a distinct impact on a club's fiscal condition.

In highly competitive markets, with endless exercise options, operators are always looking for ways to differentiate their offering and keep their clients and members engaged and coming back.

Used appropriately, and imaginatively, fitness tech is proving, among other things, to be an important—possibly essential—retention tool. →

