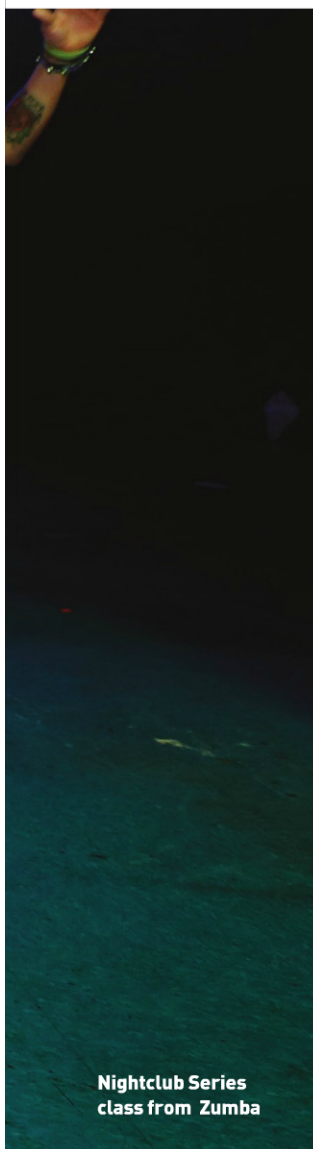
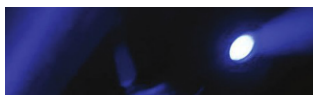


The 'Fun' Factor



Valuable tips on how to make **exercise entertaining** and addictive

By Liane Cassavoy

There's a nasty little secret in our industry, and it has nothing to do with pricing, or contracts, or trainer certifications, or the cleanliness of your club. The secret: Most people don't enjoy exercising. In fact, many of them actually *dislike* working out. That's the naked, unvarnished truth.

Fortunately, there is a solution: making exercise fun and entertaining.

Turning club-based physical activity into something that's engaging and enjoyable will keep members coming through your doors over and over again.

That's good for them—and it's good for you.

We know that's true, in theory, but how can you make exercise and entertainment synonymous in reality? For suggestions, *CBI* interviewed six industry thought leaders to get their take on how to achieve that golden goal—with and without the use of technology. Here's what they had to say.

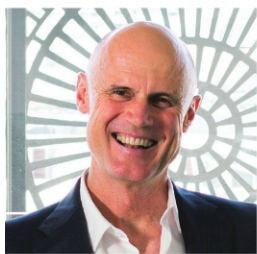
Phillip Mills, president, Les Mills International

Phillip Mills agrees that the entertainment factor is incredibly important.

"Most people are attracted to exercise because they're after results, but they need more to take their engagement to the next level," says Mills. "We want them to fall in love with fitness, so they'll *want* to work out. Exercise that's social, entertaining, and fun will accomplish that—it's addictive. People forget about the effort involved, enjoy themselves, are inspired to achieve more—and keep coming back."

Mills suggests that clubs have a wide variety of options to choose from. "We're talking about motivating people, so top music, rock-star instructors, great programming and choreography, crowd energy—those are all effective. But if you're looking for *one* thing to do, I'd say build bigger studios, 4,000 to 10,000 square feet. This will enable you to hire the best teachers and run huge classes, with 100 to 300 participants every day. →

The 'Fun' Factor



"While the large-studio model is still uncommon, wherever we see it around the world, it works incredibly well. You should also focus on *cool* programming, such as HIIT classes; today, the dominant group exercise (GX) market is the Gen Y/Millennial one."

What about technology?

"For weight rooms and cardio centers, I love big-screen mosaics, featuring music videos with the audio played throughout the gym, and some exciting sports; we recommended a music-to-sports ratio of three-to-one. Save the news and soaps for the personal cardio screens."

"For GX studios, our IMMERSIVE FITNESS video programming is the future," he contends. "By combining technology with exercise, we've blurred the lines between entertainment and workouts. For inspiration, we studied the immersive tents used at music festivals and the innovative video employed, for instance, at Beyoncé or Kanye West concerts. The movement and music of our exercise classes are now synchronized with a video-content screen in a purpose-built studio. We've successfully integrated technology, exercise education, and creative design."

Harley Pasternak, fitness guru, celebrity trainer, and best-selling author

The key to making exercise more entertaining? The *Netflix effect*, says Harley Pasternak.

"Exercise—especially cardio—can be boring because it's often repetitive and uneventful. Time moves slowly, and we think about all of the things we'd rather be doing. Entertainment makes workouts go by faster," he explains. "If you're watching a captivating television show, you're distracted, and the time flies by."

That's how technology can be useful, he continues. "If you get hooked on a series, and only watch it when you're exercising, you'll look forward to your time on the treadmill instead of dreading it."

And the technology doesn't have to be a screen on the wall or a console on the equipment. Wearable devices can prove entertaining, too. "Using a Fitbit activity monitor adds another dimension to exercise, diverting our attention by showing us how much we've moved."

Clubs and trainers who don't want to rely on technology to enliven a workout should consider a change of scenery, he says. "I think any new atmosphere can be great. Just changing what you're looking at can make all the difference. For me, I love being outside. Whether you're enjoying the scenery in a park or people-watching in a city, it gives your brain something to distract itself with. And, of course, music can really perk up a workout, increasing energy and intensity."

Finally, don't overlook the power of a friendly competition. "My favorite kind of cardio is playing basketball with my buddies. We have a half-court at our gym, and I get caught up in the competition and fun, and forget how hard I'm working."



Alberto Perez, CEO, Zumba Fitness, LLC

Zumba, of course, is known for making exercise fun.

"There's a reason the Zumba program caught on with 15 million people—it's *exercise in disguise*," explains Alberto Perez. "If you're enjoying what you're doing, and you experience the emotional and physical effects, then there's no feeling of dread; it's actually something you *want* to do—not something you *have* to do. This will get the average person off the couch, and help them to become active and healthy."

However, Zumba's success didn't arise out of the program's fun choreography alone, he adds. It's the group approach that keeps people coming back. "The class setting creates a sense of comfort and community, allowing people to open up more, and enjoy the support of their fellow students. It's also a place where they can meet new friends."

Perez firmly believes that you don't have to rely on technology to make exercise fun. "At Zumba, we've learned that *less* is better. You don't need distractions to enjoy your workout in one of our classes."

However, the right music and lighting are essential, he cautions. "Music is the key to an amazing workout—that's clearly obvious in a Zumba class. Our new media campaign, 'Let It Move You,' addresses this factor directly. The music takes over your body and mind, and allows you to break free and live in the moment—that's the effect that music and dance can have."

And if it feels like a party, all the better. "We like to create a party-like atmosphere, from the sound system to the lights," says Perez. "In my studio, I have a light-up stage that adds a nightclub element to the experience—because, at the end of the day, a workout should be an experience that sticks with you long after the class has ended."



Bryan O'Rourke, chief executive, Integerus, LLC; president, Fitness Industry Technology Council

As the president of the Fitness Industry Technology Council (FITC), Bryan O'Rourke spends much of his time thinking about the future of fitness. More often than not, that involves technology. But no matter how much technology you have in your club, you have to remember this: "People want what is fun and social. This is driven by groups, music, motivation, and ambiance," he says. "You need great music and great, motivating instructors to keep things entertaining."

The desire to connect with instructors on a more personal level, as well as to work out with like-minded people, is one of the factors driving growth in the boutique studio market, O'Rourke points out. These smaller facilities offer an atmosphere that many members enjoy more than those of bigger facilities, though larger, multipurpose clubs remain popular, too. And, great instructors and great music are central to making exercise fun, no matter where you work out.

When it comes to technology that can make exercise more entertaining, options abound, and many more are on the way, reports O'Rourke. "There are so many possibilities, some of them making use of artificial intelligence and interactive equipment. The morphing of the digital and physical space is key to the engagement and entertainment trend."

Also coming soon, thanks to falling prices for screens and virtual reality: fully immersive experiences, such as Les Mills' IMMERSIVE FITNESS programming.

Brent Darden, principal, Brent Darden Consulting; former chairperson, IHRSA's board of directors

Making exercise fun isn't just an intriguing idea, observes Brent Darden. It could also be the key to the industry's future.

"People often view physical activity as fun when they're participating in sports or recreational activities. They're getting exercise, but they don't pursue those activities specifically for exercise," he explains. "But, too often, when people say, 'I need to exercise,' they don't associate that with having fun. Finding more ways to make it entertaining and enjoyable will benefit those individuals, our industry, and society as a whole."

One of the best ways to make exercise fun is to create a community around it, says Darden. "It's been well documented that, if we can get people engaged in a community around exercise, they're more likely to stick with it longer. If someone joins with a partner, it makes a big difference; and small or large groups are even better. Exercising alone is boring. Other people make it more entertaining."

However, Darden says, the instructor makes a class. "An instructor who's creative and knowledgeable and chooses great music will provide an overall experience that's fun. The instructor also must make it interactive, get to know all of the participants, and be helpful and facilitating during the class. That helps members build a support system that comes from working out regularly with the same people."

When it comes to technology, Darden advises customizing things whenever possible. "What one person may find entertaining, the next person may have no use for. Someone wants to watch ESPN, while someone else wants to download music and movies. The key is letting people access what entertains them personally."

Donna Cyrus, senior vice president of programming, Crunch Fitness

Sure, there are some people who'd be content to exercise all day, every day. But, for the rest of the world, one of the keys to making exercise fun is making the time go by—fast. In a group class, there are several ways you can help make that happen, suggests Donna Cyrus, starting with the instructor. "If the instructor is engaging, the time will fly by," she promises.

You also should consider the look and feel of the room, she says. "The environment in the room, especially the lighting, can play a huge role in creating the feel of the class. Low and soft color lighting is great for classes such as yoga or mind/body. And don't be afraid to use theatrical lighting; dance comes to life with, for example, brightly colored lighting or even disco balls. Choose the lighting based on the activity."

And while technology shouldn't be the be-all/end-all when it comes to making fitness fun, it can prove useful in keeping members motivated and engaged. "TV screens and virtual reality systems all play a part in adding to the environment. Technology systems for indoor cycling programs increase engagement of the participant, especially those that allow them to track their improvement, and compete with other members of the class. These kinds of systems," she concludes, "can keep them coming back more regularly." —

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See "Product Showcase" on pg. 58.

