

Pounding the treadmill can get a bit, dare we say it, boring for some members. Kath Hudson looks at some of the latest products to put the spring back into their step

# THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

**I**n a survey conducted in December 2009 by Precor – in conjunction with Leisure-net Solutions – 66 per cent of respondents said they get bored during their CV workout, with 10 per cent saying they feel bored every time. Many of them complained about the in-house music and found “pop videos featuring near naked women gyrating irritating”.

Only 14 per cent said they never use any kind of entertainment while exercising, while 51 per cent said they would spend more time on the CV equipment if it provided entertainment and motivated them.

“It’s vital that the fitness industry provides equipment that meets with

member expectations and enhances their enjoyment,” says Miles Rimell, Precor’s head of marketing. “We are continually updating our offering and aim to provide operators with a variety of entertainment options which they can make available to their members.”

Precor has a number of established entertainment products. ChannelCast TV offers a range of channels, while the Personal Entertainment Player (PEP) allows members to upload content from an iPod to the Personal Viewing Screens (PVS) on the equipment, as well as to upload workouts to the Nike+ website.

The latest innovation, launched in August, is a dual tuner for the Personal Viewing Screens, which allows clubs to

utilise their in-house analogue system as well as introducing freeview channels.

## media access

Currently only available in the US, but set for a UK launch in 2011, Netpulse has an exciting new platform – the Netpulse Media Network – which allows members to bring up their own playlist, plug in their iPod or iPhone, connect to social media and choose from a massive library of TV programmes and videos, as well as save their workout results for further analysis.

The company predicts that this workout data will be useful as proof of participation to show employers, or healthcare providers in order to get a



**Technogym (left and above) and Precor (right) are both attempting to find solutions to keep members interested**

discount on insurance. Meanwhile the social media function allows members to have a virtual run with someone in another part of the country.

“Everyone takes their mobile everywhere now, so they have access to content wherever they are – except in the gym, which is the one time you want access to media,” says Bryan Arp, CEO of Netpulse, who expects the product to have a significant impact on motivation levels.

And it’s not just members who will benefit from this technology; it can also help inform clubs with their buying decisions by tracking what equipment is being used and looking at the workout data. It can also show how much individual members are exercising, helping clubs to identify those who are in danger of lapsing.

The platform is currently being rolled out across some of the larger health club chains in the US, but Netpulse has also struck deals with a number of major equipment manufacturers – details as yet undisclosed – to have the technology embedded into the latest versions of their equipment in time for the European launch early next year.

“We’re putting together the roll-out plans for the UK now. There’s a great deal of interest,” says Arp. “We believe our platform creates unique opportunities which will change the criteria

consumers look for when choosing a fitness centre.”

### web-enabled

Last year, Technogym launched Visio, an upgrade to its digital platform – Wellness TV – which provides entertainment, allows members to monitor results and guides them through their workout. The latest version, VisioWeb, includes web access and is available this month. It can be retrofitted to Excite+ equipment.

As well as giving users access to live TV, radio, iPod, USB multimedia devices and games, the touchscreen display also shows the lapsed time, calories, distance, heart rate, speed and goals for the workout. There are a variety of exercise programmes on offer and different interfaces for different

categories of user, from beginners to the more advanced.

“With increasing focus on technology within fitness, the inspiration for Visio’s development was to deliver the ultimate digital platform to increase motivation, show results and provide entertainment in a simple and intuitive way while users work out,” says Visio product manager Craig Swyers.

### virtual reality

And then there’s the whole category of interactive offerings, with exercisers taken into a virtual training environment via their personal screens.

Trixter launched an updated version of its Xdream bike at LIW, the Xdream mark 3, with a ghost racing mode that allows users to race against themselves. Meanwhile Matrix Fitness Systems

launched a video programme, Virtual

Active, in the summer, which allows users to work out to cinema-quality videos of iconic destinations, including the Las Vegas strip and the Hollywood Walk of Fame, while the cardio equipment automatically adjusts to the elevation changes seen on screen.

MD for Matrix Fitness UK, Jon Johnston, says this is a great way to give members a new experience and keep them engaged and motivated.

It’s compatible with Matrix 7xe series cardio equipment and is sold with five ▶



**Star Trac has launched its new coach programme in order to focus on PT**

## The fitness industry is notoriously hesitant to accept new changes in technology

▶ videos, although many more are also available to buy.

And InStyle has carried out the first European installation of its virtual plane simulator last month, at Cox Green Leisure Centre in Maidenhead, Berkshire. The Dogfight virtual plane simulator is connected to a recumbent exercise bike that's designed to bridge the gap between exercise and entertainment. Users propel the plane by pedalling and control the simulator via spring-loaded handles. Graphics and sounds "instantly transport the user to the breathtaking world of virtual flight".

There's a choice of futuristic aircraft in which users can undertake their mission, with environments including a hostile winter landscape, a tropical archipelago, a cityscape and a desert. Once the player has mastered the art of flight, battle commences: users compete against other players in the gym for an adrenaline-pumped game of aerial combat.

Duncan Lawson, director of Instyle Fitness, says: "The fitness industry is notoriously hesitant to accept new changes in technology, but doing so is vital if leisure centres are to maintain interest from new generations. Today's young gym-goers demand to be entertained and kept mentally motivated during a workout, and the Dogfight is the perfect solution."

### guided training

But is there a danger that too much entertainment might put people off their workout? Star Trac seems to think so and has responded with a personalised workout led by a personal trainer. Offering more than one million different workout options, the Star Trac Coach programme has been embedded into the E-TRxe treadmill and goes hand-in-hand with the increased industry focus on the benefits of personal training.

"Treadmill users tend to choose their workout programme, then listen to their iPod or watch the TV, so never

engage 100 per cent in their workout. They zone out, concentrating more on what they're listening to or watching rather than pushing themselves further, increasing speed, intensity or inclination," says Star Trac Europe managing director Matt Pengelly. "Star Trac Coach engages with them from the beginning of their workout to the end. This is the first programme to offer real-life training to each individual user, providing them with a better workout experience and helping them achieve greater results."

Pengelly says the launch has been inspired by the success of the eSpinner – a Spin bike for the gym floor offering workouts members can follow on the personal screen – which demonstrated that members benefit from embedded programmes to enhance training.

Also focused on providing motivational training advice, Audiofuel has released two CDs which take



**A Precor survey found that 66 per cent of members get bored during their CV routines**

members through two well-constructed running programmes. The Pyramid Interval Training Programmes use high tempo music specially composed to match the running stride, combined with voice coaching.

### staying relevant

People are now used to carrying around their own stock of music, checking Facebook and Twitter accounts whenever they want to and watching their favourite TV programmes when it suits them. In order to keep the 'i-generation' motivated, it seems inevitable that clubs are going to have to embrace this shift in behaviour.

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