



# Smarter Learning

Digital Innovation in Learning & Development



# Brad Tucker

Managing Director  
Premier Global NASM

It is an exciting time to be in the health and fitness sector.

Over the previous decade, the UK's fitness industry has grown considerably. Technology, in the form of smart devices, wearable tech, data analysis, digital platforms, and integration with smartphones to incentivise and gamify activity participation, has played an invaluable role in supporting our sector's commendable growth. This has attracted more committed gym-goers than ever before as people embrace new technologies to deliver high-quality experiences that see them return time and again.

Whether you are an employer, a fitness professional, or a training provider, the opportunities that have emerged with the onset of technology are both exciting and challenging at the same time. As the market expands and goes through rapid change, and consumer preferences continue to evolve, there lies our challenge – that we continue to innovate the user experiences that we provide to deliver greater value to our clients and customers, who expect nothing less in today's fast moving and competitive marketplace.

Further, this needs to be supported by a workforce equipped to succeed and service any customer who comes through our doors, whether a New Year's Resolution has just inspired them to take their first step toward fitness, or they're an elite athlete looking to refine their technique and secure a new PB.

At Premier Global NASM, we believe delivering the breadth and depth of skills required in a workforce fit for the future is something that can be greatly aided with technology. With digital platforms enabling the learning experience and catering to students of different learning types, we see opportunities in utilising technology throughout the learner journey to equip fitness professionals with the skills they need to help them start, sustain and succeed in their careers.

We are committed to embracing these technologies, investing in our digital delivery platform and seeking answers and inspiration from other sectors more advanced than our own.

Built upon our evidence based proprietary Optimum Performance Training™ (OPT™) model, the Premier Global NASM course is tutor-led and underpinned by content produced by a team of innovative instructional designers with rigorous oversight and guidance from Active IQ and the sector's Chartered Institute, CIMSPA. Live webinar learning and practical workshops afford direct interaction and engagement to our students with our world-class tutors, enhancing the learning experience, offering great flexibility and accessibility, all while maintaining quality standards.

We are excited to partner with ukactive to release this white paper and highlight the great work that's already being done in our sector, along with sharing perspectives on how technology can continue to play a positive role in the future growth of the sector and help get more people, more active, more often.

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# Summary

Technological innovation is transforming the physical activity sector. From data-driven platforms to wearable devices, today's technologies empower fitness operators, providers and members of the public to reach unprecedented levels of personalisation and engagement, whilst providing previously unimaginable levels of insight into consumer behaviour.

This same drive to adopt technology has also created opportunities in the field of learning and development, refining the tools and systems employed by the physical activity sector to support one of its most important assets: the physical activity workforce. This white paper explores how technology is impacting and disrupting the breadth of the activity sector, and, in particular, the opportunities that it presents for the learning and development landscape and examples of its adoption.

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# Introduction

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# Introduction:

## A workforce to champion



The physical activity sector's frontline workforce – a collection of 57,000 fitness instructors, personal trainers and group exercise instructors – are the first point of contact for many of the 12 million people who attend a fitness facility every year, and, often, are the reason why they are motivated to return time and time again.

Whether it is inspiring a brand new customer to love their first gym session, providing expert technical advice to elite performers, or supporting people to manage complex health conditions using the 'miracle cure' of movement, their ability to deliver the positive customer experience that many fitness businesses and brands are built on is vital to the continued wellbeing – and growth – of the fitness industry.

Likewise, employers will know that knowledgeable and confident physical activity professionals can be one of the most powerful drivers of customer acquisition and retention; and more broadly, a well-equipped, professional workforce is the vehicle through which the fitness sector has come to be regarded as a respected profession within the healthcare community, alongside doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists, generating significant growth as a result.

One of the most important developments in the physical activity landscape over recent years has been the movement to align the sector's training and development offer – now a booming industry in its own right – with this ambition to continue its professionalisation. The vast importance of a well-functioning workforce is recognised across the physical activity sector, and there are now a suite of learning and

development options available for individuals going through their initial fitness training, or refining their skills through continuous professional development as they progress through their career.

Ensuring the training industry is able to uniformly deliver the skills that employers require in their workforce, and that will equip them to thrive in a long fitness career, has been the subject of significant work by fitness employers and the sector's Chartered Institute, CIMSPA. They have now produced an agreed set of professional standards for every job role in the sector – which outlines the skills, knowledge and behaviours that all physical activity professionals should be able to demonstrate to succeed in the industry – which all accredited fitness training programmes are aligned against.

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**The physical activity sector is being propelled towards operating with a more adept, consistent and professional workforce. However simply adopting these professional standards is only the first step toward this ambition; truly building a workforce that is fit for the future will require a broader transformation in the way fitness professionals are supported to develop these skills, and keep them up to date. New digital technologies are constantly being developed, trialled and exploited to enhance the learning experience – but it is vital that that their deployment within the fitness sector also enhances the learning outcomes of physical activity professionals, and ensures they fully develop the skills they need to thrive.**

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# Introduction:

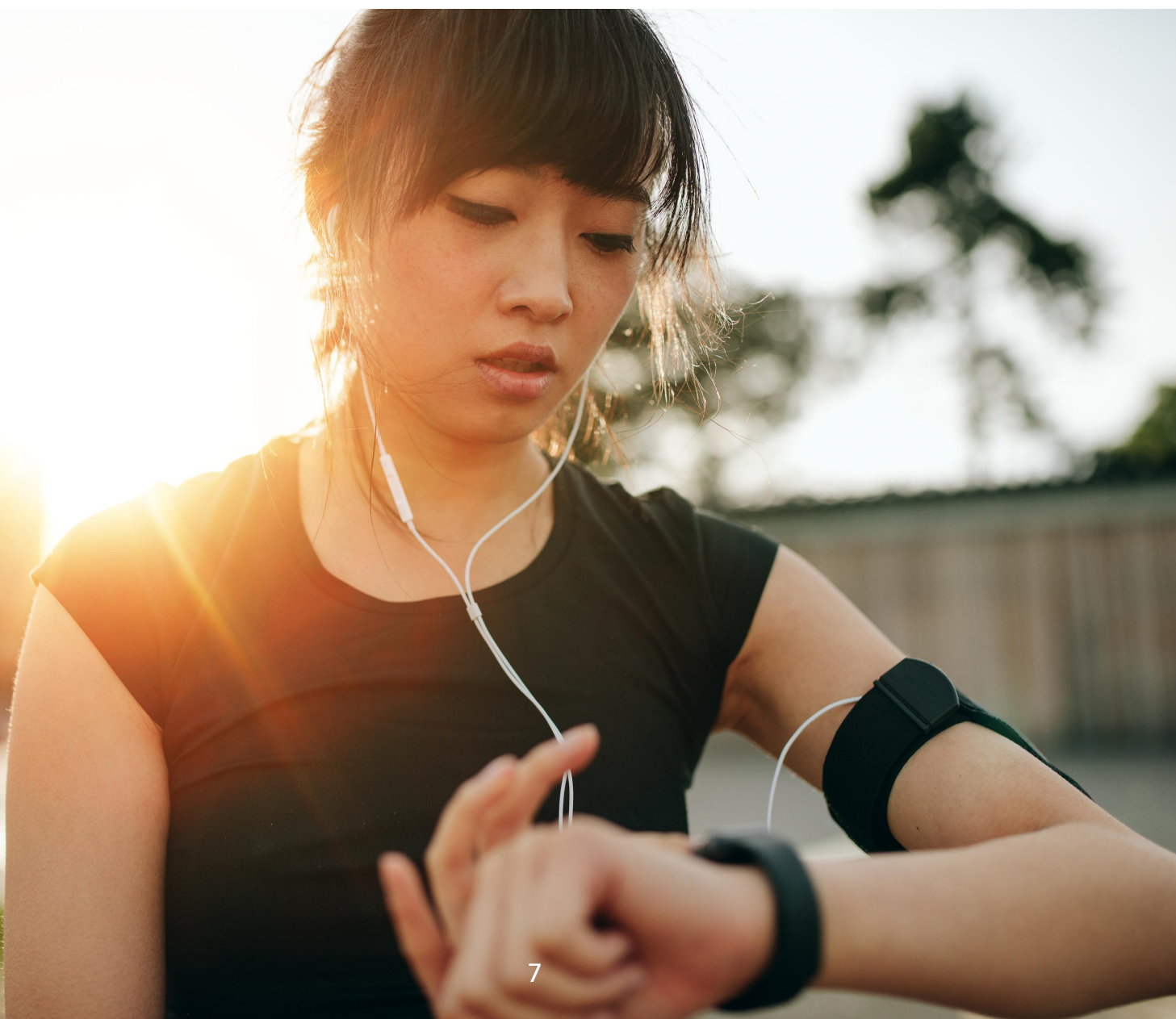
## Embracing digital: a transforming sector

Technology is ubiquitous in today's society. We're more connected than ever before, consuming an unparalleled amount of content, and for every new advancement that becomes commonplace, innovative providers to the market are pushing technology to even greater limits. Every aspect of the physical activity sector has been impacted, and is now being refined, through the continued development and application of digital technology.

From the analysis of big data, and better understanding the consumer experience on a massive scale – allowing organisations to align their service delivery perfectly to demand – to

building digital platforms that are accessible to all staff and foster a culture of continuous learning and development, the impact of technology on the physical activity sector cannot be overstated.

This white paper, produced by Premier Global NASM and supported by ukactive, explores how technological innovation is impacting the physical activity sector – and, in particular, how it is being applied to enhance the capabilities of the physical activity workforce and progress the sector's long-term ambition for its ongoing professionalisation.



# Introduction:

## The time is now

As will be explored throughout the following pages of this paper, technology has had an immense impact on how people choose to take part in physical activity, and how fitness organisations can encourage and support them to do so. From the services provided to customers on the gym floor, through to the availability to guide decision making in the board room, technology – where it is being appropriately embraced and deployed - is enriching the experience of everyone working in or being served by the physical activity sector. Similarly, systems of learning and development in physical activity have evolved significantly, with a number of digital platforms emerging that explore innovative ways to equip new, and support existing, exercise professionals to meet the needs of their clients and employers.

These developments are important, and timely, given the commitments from government and Sport England to support the physical activity

sector to get more people, more active, more often. Promoting physical activity in society was named a national priority for government in 2015, in its strategy Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation. Sport England, the arms-length body responsible for sport and physical activity in the UK, was tasked with its delivery, and has since taken a number of steps to progress it. As well as the creation of dedicated pots of funding for organisations that can engage the least active people, it has recognised the vital role that the physical activity workforce has to play to support a greater number of people to live active lifestyles – and, crucially, the importance of a sophisticated learning and development offer that harnesses the latest developments in digital innovation. The challenge of upskilling our existing workforce requires an answer of the scale that is only possible when aided by the power that technology can bring.



# Innovation and Disruption in Physical Activity



# Innovation and Disruption in Physical Activity

**Every day a new innovative provider comes to market and promises to disrupt the physical activity landscape. Technological innovation is being harnessed in new and varied ways to offer an improved activity experience – with more consumer choice, and deeper levels of personalisation than ever before – and supporting fitness providers to gain unparalleled insight into the behaviours and preferences of their users.** This section of the white paper explores a range of distinct technology-driven trends in physical activity, split into two parts: *removing barriers to fitness participation* and *enhancing the consumer experience*.

## Removing barriers to fitness participation

### Broadening consumer choice

A growing subset of gym-goers today are demanding ever greater flexibility in both their workout routines and their use of services – a trend that shows no signs of slowing down – and many independent digital booking platforms have emerged over recent years to meet this need. By presenting a single interface to the consumer, which is capable of digitally collating and purchasing a range of fitness services, organisations like MoveGB, PayAsUGym, Mindbody and ClassPass are allowing individuals to access physical activity opportunities without the traditional long-term commitment of membership it normally entails. Increasingly, they are being enabled by frictionless integration through interoperable technology systems, leading to a seamless customer journey.

For consumers, these platforms fulfil the key criteria of a tailored and seamless consumer experience, namely easy access, variety and flexibility, that transcends brand or location loyalty. While the success of this formula has been influenced by a great many things, it can also be credited to a new generation of “millennials,” who often pursue a great consumer experience to which personalisation is key.<sup>i</sup> Conversely, this development also presents challenges to traditional place-based businesses, including many gym and leisure operators, that

rely on becoming the sole fitness provider for an individual through building and maintaining a direct relationship with them. The experience of wider sectors is not viewed favourably, and a debate rages as to the long-term strategic attraction of collaborating with such aggregators or “market places.” The resulting battle for loyalty is fierce. With consumers now able to take advantage of platforms that offer increased flexibility, large brands have to consider how to offer a personalised, quality experience to attract every visit. This is also true in other sectors: within the retail sector, sportswear brands like Nike and Lululemon promote free in-store group training classes in the effort to stimulate brand engagement.<sup>ii</sup>

Some argue that this trend in consumer behaviour has the potential to significantly grow the number of people engaged as fitness service consumers, within the millennial cohort. According to a study from sports and nutrition company MyProtein, British millennials spend an average £155 a month on health and fitness and are two times more likely to pay for a gym membership than their parents.<sup>iii</sup> Millennials contributing to fitness industry growth, and their expectations have entrenched consumer choice as a core aspect of the physical activity sector.



### **Fitness tracking: wearable devices and integrated mobile applications**

Wearable technology in fitness is often described as the most prominent and noteworthy trend in the physical activity sector. The academic ACSM Health & Fitness Journal found that current health and fitness professionals rank it the number one trend – a position it also held in 2016 and 2017 – and the potential impact it can have on promoting participation in physical activity is immense. Consumers have repeatedly demonstrated an eagerness to track their daily activity performance, and in many cases have been happy to invest in dedicated devices which enable them to do so. Products such as Fitbit are often regarded as accessible lifestyle-related products, growing the range of consumers who are now comfortable tracking and considering the impacts of their daily activity levels.

This was met by the emergence of wearables and integrated smartphone applications which track daily step counts, running and cycling distances, as well as average calories burned. The future roadmap of developments in wearable technology holds a new frontier for innovation. From clothing that supplements body strength with electronic assistance, through

to personalised predictive healthcare, the next decade offers even greater potential innovation than the last, which is staggering when we consider that the iPhone only came to market in 2007.

Research is not clear whether wearable fitness technology alone generates sustained behaviour change over the long-term when used in isolation, although it clearly can have a positive impact when used in conjunction with other incentives and rewards.<sup>iv</sup> Nonetheless, it is clear that the wearable fitness market is booming: it is estimated that wearable activity trackers will generate \$53 billion in sales by 2019, and that they will be used by a staggering 75 million people by 2021.<sup>v</sup>

In the decade since this technology was originally pioneered, it has developed substantially. The original pedometer, to track a daily step count, has evolved into a myriad of accessible and specialised fitness products, with a market that spans active and inactive people alike (importantly, a market which is significantly broader than many other fitness products and traditional positioning of gym memberships provided by some operators).



For example, in North America, 17% of older people (aged sixty-five plus; one of the least active groups in society) use wearable technology to track their fitness – compared to only 20% of people below 65.<sup>vi</sup> The potential for these products to offer daily reminders and tips to move more among groups that are often the least active – including older people who may be homebound – are vast.

The improved sophistication of technology has allowed other measures to begin to be easily collected, allowing individuals to develop a more accurate and holistic view of their fitness levels. Significant spikes in heart rate levels are often now seen as valuable as daily step counts, and as a result, so too can it support individuals understand the benefits of resistance training and high intensity interval training over a walk to the shops. Myzone's technology constitutes a key example. Myzone is an innovative wearable heart rate based system that uses wireless and cloud technology to accurately and seamlessly monitor physical activity. Myzone monitors heart rate, calories and time exercising that convert into Myzone Effort Points (MEPs), with a focus on rewarding effort rather than fitness. The wearable strap connects to the Myzone app, which features built-in challenges, personal goals, rewards, gamification and a social platform to motivate other users. The app connects to digital health platforms, gym equipment, Bluetooth devices, biometric devices, as well as Bluetooth enabled GPS tracking apps.<sup>vii</sup> The immediate and interconnected nature of Myzone data is therefore conducive to quick feedback mechanisms which help people improve their daily habits.<sup>viii</sup>

Fitness operators are embedding similar wearable technology into their services to revolutionise consumer experience, and provide tailored fitness experiences, even in group settings. Technogym's TeamBeats uses heart rate monitors to gauge the performance of each participant, based on individual participant age, gender and condition. The statistics are displayed on large screens in real time to show instructors whether participants should work

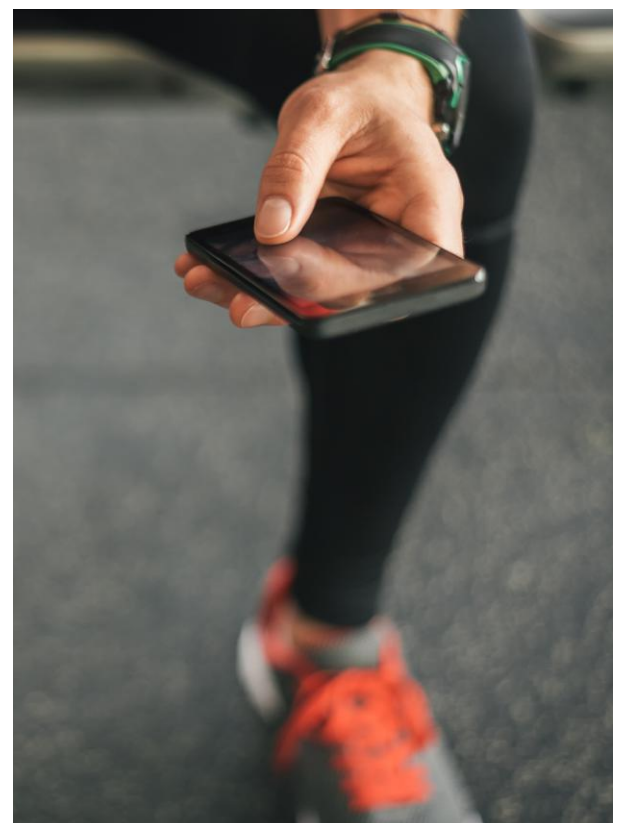
harder or slower, and provide motivation to each individual participant.

## Enhancing the consumer experience

### Gym everywhere: Apps and smartphones

The ubiquity of smartphones – particularly among younger people and many target markets of fitness operators – has been taken advantage of by fitness and leisure providers to offer services and insight round-the-clock, and extend their value from a place-based offer, contingent on individuals having the time to visit a facility, to a constant source of advice, insight and support.

Many fitness brands now offer their own branded smartphone Apps, which embrace the power of mobile technology to offer continuous value to their members, supporting them to maintain active lifestyles beyond the confines of their physical sites. The Anytime Fitness Workout app features a library of over 1,000 workouts, a workout planner, and a goal tracker. The app also syncs with wearable devices to provide a





complete overview of weekly and monthly activity levels, both inside and outside the gym. PureGym's recent partnership with Strava achieves a similar end goal, by enabling PureGym members to automatically sync their workouts to the running and cycling app. Netpulse, the leading provider of customisable mobile applications for fitness facilities, has also recently joined forces with equipment provider eGym to provide a seamless experience linking real-world exercise equipment with a digital mobile network. Both models significantly improve consumer experience by providing members with a concise oversight of their workout habits. The use of mobile apps is just as valuable for operators, which, if managed correctly, can support operators in providing tailored messaging and personalised experiences based on member needs, preferences and routines.

More importantly, mobile apps are driving the new narrative on the need for a more holistic and personalised understanding of health and fitness. Framed under this narrative, physical activity is one of the many facets of health. The Nike Running Club app constitutes a leading example. Nike's recent partnership with Headspace allows NikePlus users to access guided meditation runs to take their running to the next level. The company believes this move is "critical to serve the complete holistic needs of athletes."<sup>ix</sup> According to Headspace, mindfulness can "help strengthen motivation, increase focus, improve resilience, enhance form, optimize recovery and get people out of their head and into their bodies for an enjoyable and fulfilling training session".<sup>x</sup> Other mobile apps are also capitalising on our increasingly holistic understanding of health. Healing Clouds connects users to holistic health coaches and other healthcare professionals, to facilitate a balanced approach between physical activity, nutrition, work and social relationships.

## **Harnessing data to offer a stronger consumer experience**

Data-driven solutions have become invaluable assets for fitness providers and operators. Information about current and potential customers supports physical activity providers and operators in their ambition to enhance the consumer experience, and as a direct consequence, boost their member acquisition and retention. Increasingly, thanks to the provision of open APIs – the interfaces which enable connection between different technology platforms – these varying services are able to be connected to enhance customer experience and gather aggregated insight on behaviour.

The DataHub, the largest sports and physical activity database in the UK, which has recorded data on 500m customer visits to public leisure facilities, can be routinely analysed to identify key trends, preferences of key demographics, and inform future business decisions such as optimum pricing strategies, facility and equipment composition models, and the future success and member acquisition rates of new sites.<sup>xi</sup>

Nonetheless, it is a commonly held view that the applications of data-driven solutions within the physical activity sector remain in their infancy. Many actors in the fitness industry are just beginning to embrace the value of these technologies in transforming the health of communities and getting more people, more active, more often. For example, the journey towards open data is only just beginning, with Sport England continuing to champion this drive through collaboration with the Open Data Institute and a broad range of sector partners via the Open Active programme. The next fifteen to twenty years will be critical in unleashing the true potential of data-driven solutions to improve consumer experience, user retention figures, and consumer acquisition.



# New Approaches to Learning and Development



# New Approaches to Learning and Development

Compared to a decade ago, technology has fundamentally altered the way in which the physical activity sector delivers services to its users. This same technology is now also starting to be harnessed to support the individuals who deliver those services: the physical activity workforce. The challenge is two-fold. First, how do we ensure that our frontline teams are able to leverage the full potential of the technological tools at their disposal to continuously add value to the customer experience and business operation. Secondly, how can we unleash the potential of technological innovation to the benefit of learning and development strategies in place across the sector.

Debate remains ongoing among fitness employers regarding the extent of the role that technology can play in the learning, development and assessment of new professionals. Examples exist of organisations that remain committed to practical learning techniques, and yet, many are beginning to employ cutting-edge technologies to offer a more immersive digital learning experience. While some employers still believe they are yet to be convinced, substantial progress is being made by learning and development providers to demonstrate the merits of digital learning.

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**Technology is being harnessed to increase the availability and accessibility of training courses, enhance the learner experience, and build engagement with working professionals to ensure they are able to develop and maintain the skills they need to build a successful career in the sector. A failure to embrace technology risks providers being left behind, in an analogue age and becoming irrelevant to a generation of customers native to the digital era, many of whom are the employees joining the workforce today.**

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This section of the white paper considers three different examples of organisations in the fitness industry harnessing technology to support individuals through their learning and development.

## Harnessing digital platforms to kickstart a sector career: Premier Global NASM



In 2017, Premier Training International and the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), respectively the leading provider of fitness education in the UK and the USA, joined forces to form Premier Global NASM. Its goal is to support individuals looking to enter the industry with a world-class personal training course supported by the flexibility of digital learning, underpinned by NASM's proprietary Optimum Performance Training™ (OPT™) Model.

The Optimum Performance Training™ (OPT™) model is the industry's first comprehensive training system developed on scientific, evidence-based research supported by the NASM Research Institute at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. It equips trainers to individualise programmes and produce consistent results for clients based on their specific goals no matter their age or fitness level.

Premier Global NASM's learning offer is designed using adult learning theory, that uses behavioural and cognitive science to develop courses to help learners build upon existing knowledge and retain new information. This is achieved through the cultivation of authentic, relevant material and topics, that learners can begin applying right away.

### Creating a classroom at home and on the go

Learners enrolled on the Premier Global NASM Personal Training Diploma course are given access to a comprehensive online portal that provides them the ability to access their course at any time via their digital devices. Consequently it allows them to fit their studying into their daily routine and commitments (often including pre-existing jobs or careers), rather than vice versa.

The course is constructed around a number of regular touchpoints, built in to ensure consistent engagement so that learners can be guided through their journey. Central to this is the direct interaction with tutors on live, weekly online lectures, replicating the feel, focus, and structure of a classroom learning environment, with the technology being the enabling factor for flexibility. Within this live environment, learners are encouraged to engage directly with the tutors (they receive direct responses) and participate in interactive polls and discussions. All the digital lectures are also recorded and available on demand to learners who wish to re-watch and review them as needed, increasing knowledge retention.





Regular worksheets and interactive online tasks also help learners keep up with course progress and on track to achieve their qualification. Student Success Coaches are also available to learners six days a week, via phone or email, to provide support on any aspect of the course from content-based questions to logistical queries.

### **Delivering professionals with the skills to thrive**

Premier Global NASM delivers the Active IQ Level 3 Personal Training Qualification, with NASM's Optimum Performance Training™ (OPT™) Model. It requires students to be able to demonstrate rigorous technical and anatomical knowledge, as well as its application in a real-life environment. Furthermore, as well as supporting students to develop the knowledge required to work in the physical activity industry, it also takes steps to ensure they have the broader experience and communication skills to attract and retain a client base.

Premier Global NASM encourages the use of

technology to diligently assess and develop students into career ready professionals. For assessments, learners must submit a video showing them guiding a client through a pre-approved programme personalised for said client. This method of assessment allows the learner to work in their own time as opposed to scheduling in a specific assessment time at a specific facility.

With rigorous guidance from Active IQ and CIMSPA, students are assessed and given feedback on their practical skills using this video. The ability to rewind and pause the video to identify and isolate feedback relative to the student's performance while then offering very specific guidance ensures very thorough and rigorous evaluation, improving learner outcomes.

There is also the option for learners to do live assessments at a venue should they prefer. This process not only provides the detailed guidance necessary for a new student to a competent professional but also allows for an unprecedented level of flexibility in the assessment process for the learner.



**Julie Parkinson**

"I was very happy to be able to complete my Level 3 Personal Training Diploma with Premier Global completely via distant learning. Being a busy mum of 3 young children, and a swimming teacher, I was able to plan my study time around the logistics of family life. Even the exams could be taken at home and were invigilated remotely. The practical sessions were videoed and submitted online along with the other assignments. The course was very comprehensive and well supported with text, videos and interactive webinars. I would definitely recommend the course as it thoroughly prepares the student to be a knowledgeable, professional and successful Personal Trainer. I have since taken 2 specialist courses with Premier Global in Weight Loss and Senior Fitness. I am 50 years young and believe that regular exercise and healthy eating keeps us feeling and looking good".



**Jessicarr Moorehouse**

"I completed both the Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications via Premier Global NASM's online platform. This was perfect for me, as I'm an NHS Doctor working in A&E! The tutors are fantastic and always on hand to help. I've since gone on to start my own business 'Tribe.MCR', an Innovative Health and Wellness brand based in Manchester".

## Fostering learner engagement in a disparate workforce: My Learning Place, Places Leisure



# Places Leisure

### Part of Places for People

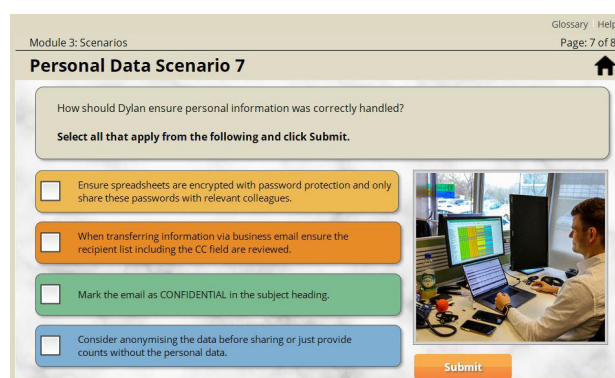
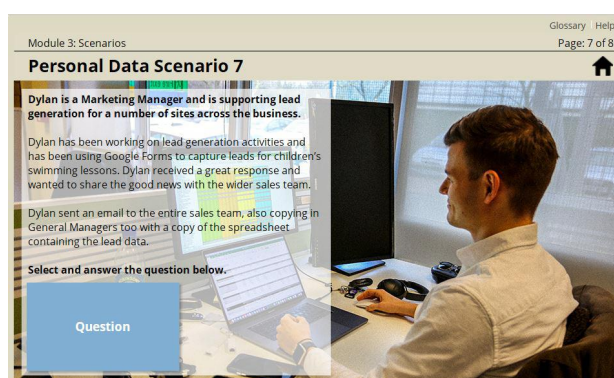
Places Leisure is one of the UK's leading public leisure facility providers, operating over 120 centres located across the UK.<sup>xii</sup> Their workforce spans over 9,000 individuals, including frontline exercise professionals, lifeguards, site support staff such as receptionists and cleaners, alongside managers and executive head office staff.

In June 2017, Place Leisure launched My Learning Place, a flexible online learning platform that all staff can access in and around their work schedule. The decision to move toward a digital offer was driven by practicality: classroom learning can be prohibitively expensive to deliver when the cost of the trainer, travel, accommodation and shift cover is taken into account – meaning that the number of people who could benefit from it was limited.

## Building an online platform to promote organisational consistency in learning

*My Learning Place* has allowed individuals geographically dispersed across the UK to take part in its learning, balancing a commitment to support staff development (the portal now includes 25 e-learning courses, covering topics such as Inductions, Health & Safety, Health & Wellbeing, Customer Service, Finance, Food & Beverage, and Sales) with minimal disruption to the business.

The success of Places Leisure rests on staff's continuous professional development, and ability to develop new knowledge and skills that can be applied at work. All the training in My Learning Place is developed alongside specialists from the business, to ensure it is tailored to meet the needs of staff and is directly relevant to their job roles. For example, when educating staff about recent changes to data privacy laws (GDPR), Places Leisure developed an e-learning course that places learners in typical day-to-day scenario at their centre where potential data privacy breaches could occur. Learning has also been targeted for specific job roles, such as a Legionella Awareness course that is assigned specifically to job roles that are responsible for water systems (such as Duty Managers and Technical staff). Soon, the platform will also be launching an 'All staff induction' e-learning course that takes place over twelve weeks to provide a more consistent onboarding process for all new staff.



## **Fostering engagement and buy-in**

The e-learning platform uses a variety of different media to make learning as engaging as possible. The movement away from classroom learning – which would regularly ensure tutors had a captured audience with nearly undivided attention – and promoting flexibility instead required Places Leisure to consider a range of steps they could take to ensure staff buy-in in the digital platform.

Firstly, the content itself is designed to be engaging and accessible. The courses include interactive exercises, questions, real life scenarios, videos and quizzes, and uses interactive media to 'bring the learning to life.' For example, the Dementia Awareness in Sport course was developed alongside the Alzheimer's Society, and used images to enable teams at the centres to step inside the experience of people living with dementia and see the various aspects of the leisure environment through their eyes. Learners also developed deeper empathy and were taught practical tips for enabling people living with dementia to continue enjoying exercise, including visual examples of how Places Leisure now designs and builds new centres to meet their needs.

Secondly, manager buy-in is crucial. Managers can access their own completion reports, to track staff engagement in the platform, and are

encouraged to appoint a My Learning Place Champion who is responsible for building engagement among staff and supporting them to schedule in time to complete their mandatory learning.

Finally, broader internal communication regularly highlights the centrality of the platform to the business. Monthly league tables are published, highlighting course completion rates, and individual stories of the impact learning has had for people in their job role.

## **Impact on the frontline**

Each e-learning course has a feedback survey which provides valuable information for areas of improvement, as well as a cross-business overview of engagement. Analysis has shown that three months after the launch of the 'Safeguarding Awareness' course, there were 55% more reports on queries and incidents which suggests that the training helped staff to identify situations which may put children and vulnerable adults at risk.

Similarly, in the Dementia Awareness e-learning course, 99% of learners felt the content explained the knowledge, skills and concepts it presented, 95% felt the course will help transfer skills and knowledge back on the job, and 97% felt their knowledge and understanding of dementia has improved.





## Embedding learning as part of the Everyday: Our People



# Our People®

*Our People* is a smart-phone driven communication and learning platform, built specifically for frontline workforces, to inform, manage and educate in an engaging and fun way.

As an organisation, they have sought to bridge the many digital learning platforms that exist into the most common devices used everyday, by many people: their smartphones. Traditional learning management has previously relied on the fact that a team member has easy access to a work PC during their time at their place of work, and that they have the time to sit and read through content that can take hours to fully digest.

The Our People tool instead was designed to make work-based learning as engaging and accessible as possible. By breaking content down into tiny chunks (called "micro learning"), accessible via their smartphone, many of the traditional barriers associated with online learning are overcome and staff find it easier to learn through small, achievable goals.

## Accessible and engaging learning

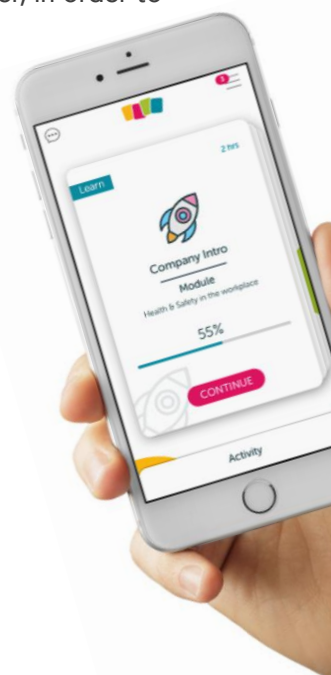
Our People is positioned as both a learning tool and a tool for ongoing communication. It can be used for operational tasks like Fitness Instructor Cover, Team Events, Compliance, and more general updates, which means that following its introduction into a fitness business it quickly becomes part of the "every day" use of the team member.

This platform is then able to deliver "ongoing" training, at the discretion of the employer, that can be accessed and refreshed at any time driving a more knowledgeable employee and consequently a better customer experience.


Our People delivers learning based on the use of "Cards". Cards are templates for content, and vary from static text, images, video, audio to more interactive Cards for quizzes, tap to reveal, or multiple choice questions. Team Members receive these Cards to their phone as a push notification and simply swipe through the content. At the end of the lesson, they receive an instant score and a pass or fail mark. If it's a pass, they are encouraged to move on to the next lesson.

## Harnessing technology to tailor content

Our People uses 'Tags' to build very specific profiles of each Team member, in order to develop bespoke training that caters for specific job roles. This allows managers to direct a variety of different types of content for different teams, tailored to be specific to the job role and tasks they are undertaking.



# Beyond the Horizon: World-class Learning and Development Driven by Technology

The background of the slide is a solid blue color. In the lower-left quadrant, there is an abstract graphic consisting of numerous white parallelograms of varying sizes and orientations, creating a sense of depth and movement. The text is positioned in the upper-right area, following the diagonal of the graphic.



# Beyond the Horizon: World-class Learning and Development Driven by Technology

Despite significant strides forward in recent years, the physical activity sector is still in its relative infancy when applying technological innovation to learning and development. However, across other industries, employers are learning to embrace sophisticated technology to greatly enhance and tailor the learning experience for individual workers. Over time, this will no doubt be true of the fitness sector, and already there are technologies that – if harnessed correctly – could radically transform the ways in which fitness staff train and develop.

## Accessibility & Scale

The provision of high-quality online courses and cohort management technologies has led to a revolution in the numbers of people able to be served by education establishments. One area where this has been greatly felt is in the provision of high-level business school education from leading universities around the world. As far back as 2014, the Financial Times estimated that over 450 Massive Open Online Courses “MOOCs” had been opened by over 100 universities which reached more than five million students. This dramatic increase in scale was accredited with transforming business models for those institutions as they sought to find new ways to monetise their expertise, and make use of armies of academics who were finding their skills and talents supplanted by provision which was moving online. Nonetheless, MOOCs have driven an accessibility of information, helping learners around the world access content which was once solely open to the privileged and wealthy.

MOOCs are yet to find their way into the fitness sector. However, with 57,000 existing exercise professionals, there is great scope for their potential. The work of CIMSPA is ensuring that future graduates from industry training programmes will be aligned to employer need and in line with recent developments. The accessible nature of the MOOCs courses drives its scalability and could meet the needs of the changing consumer profile and existing workforce within the sector.

Some training providers, such as Premier Global NASM, are already adapting to meet this changing need of learners in a digital age. Could more training providers make the leap by learning from the MOOCs and launch game changing innovations to deliver training needed by the sector at scale?

## Virtual reality

Immersive virtual reality technologies are amongst the most innovative learning aides on the market. They encompass any device which presents an artificial environment that replaces real-world surroundings convincingly enough so that users are able to suspend disbelief, and engage with the created environment. STRIVR is a pioneering proponent of immersive virtual reality services in learning and development through the use of virtual reality headsets.

STRIVR have partnered with Walmart to provide management training for employees through an interactive, 360-based video.<sup>xiii</sup> The technology rests on Edgar Dale’s Cone of Experience theory, which stipulates that talking, writing and direct experience constitute the most effective conduits for learning.<sup>xiv</sup> Employees were able to ‘trick’ their brain into experiencing different customer-facing situations, which gave them the opportunity to practice and apply their soft skills. Walmart, the leading US supermarket chain, has found this approach to customer management so successful that it is rolling out the VR headsets to its 5,000 stores. STRIVR and Walmart have found that this form of training has boosted the confidence and knowledge retention of its employees, and an improvement in test scores of approximately 10 – 15%.



Similarly, the 'HaptX gloves' are virtual reality gloves capable of using microfluidic technology to physically displace the skin the same way a real object would when touched, closely replicating its texture, shape, and movement. The gloves feature over 100 points of high displacement tactile feedback, up to five pounds of resistance per finger, and sub-millimetre precision motion.<sup>xv</sup>

Virtual reality – through both visual and tactile mediums – represents a huge potential opportunity for sectors that are consumer-facing and that rely on building a relationship with individual clients. One of the key challenges faced by the physical activity training industry currently is its ability to foster the development of the 'soft' communication skills that are core to member attraction and retention<sup>xvi</sup> – whereas virtual reality would easily allow new professionals to experience simulated situations where these skills can be developed. From practising securing the retention of a client, to responding to injuries, correcting form and posture and delivering group exercise classes, immersive virtual reality technologies have the potential to become valuable learning aids in the future.

### Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is another sophisticated technology that may well drastically improve the learning and development offer for exercise professionals. Defined as an area of computer science that emphasises the creation of intelligent machines that work and react like humans,<sup>xvii</sup> the technology can be developed to provide insight on individual learner behaviour so as to facilitate the creation of customised learning programmes.

This is the defining feature in numerous learning experience platforms like Rallyware, which make

use of artificial intelligence to aggregate data and curate personalized content. The platform is designed to support organisations empower their workforce through personalised engagement programmes that reflect their job role, learning style and professional requirements. In the example of a call centre – a working environment that often suffers from high levels of disengagement and turnover – Rallyware's Performance-based Training platform would harness business data and recommend curated content in response. For example, if an agent takes a long time to handle calls compared to other team members, a real-time analytics platform will track their progress and specific challenges they encounter and subsequently recommend relevant training. In this case, improved knowledge of commonly occurring problems, and general guidance to effectively manage customer calls.<sup>xviii</sup>

By predicting individual learner needs in this way, artificial intelligence makes learning and development programmes considerably more efficient.

Artificial intelligence will undoubtedly come to play a similar role in the physical activity sector. Though sometimes deemed threatening to the role of a personal trainer – through its ability to generate curated workout programmes for individuals without the need for a paid-for session – artificial intelligence may also be used to greatly enhance the professional development of trainers and allow them to offer a more comprehensive, effective customer experience. For example, an AI-based learning platform may be able to offer training to exercise professionals in response to their working patterns. This may include support with new business acquisition, marketing or client retention, or to develop their knowledge of specific customer demographics or long-term health conditions if they are already engaging with them on a regular basis.



## Remote Assessment

Effectively testing the ability to recall information, apply knowledge, and problem solve is an immense challenge faced by online education providers when students may well have access to the wealth of information available on the internet during an exam. The significant growth in the use of online learning – and the flexibility that it entails – has in turn necessitated the development of new, sophisticated techniques to remotely assess individuals and allow them to take rigorously invigilated exams from a remote location.

Solutions have been developed by a range of providers that harness a combination of video recording, artificial intelligence, and trained experts who monitor livestreamed exams to create an environment in which individuals can work under traditional 'exam conditions' in their own home. For example, Mettl, a remote invigilation service, uses an AI algorithm that continuously monitors the webcam feed of an individual and flag any suspicious or unusual behaviours, informing a 'Credibility Index' that predicts the probability that they may be cheating.<sup>xix</sup>

The system also continuously undertakes facial recognition, to prevent the impersonation of a candidate, and where relevant can be reviewed by a live expert to ensure it is working effectively.

Remote assessment in physical activity and fitness is growing in prevalence. In today's market, it often relies on users to submitting video assessments, which are subsequently reviewed by an expert.

However the live, often automated, remote monitoring of participants that is increasingly being deployed today for online exams may – in the future – also be applied to the practical assessments on the gym-floor, that are a staple of the fitness instructor and personal training qualifications in the industry today. A remote assessment AI algorithm or live, observing expert would enable live feedback to be given to the student, the flagging of any issues, follow-up queries to be made, and would add a further layer of robustness and dynamism to remote assessments.





## Gamification of the learning experience

Gamification is the use of game mechanics and game design techniques outside of traditional game contexts.<sup>xx</sup> This encompasses any platform that enables its users to improve scores, discover something new, or receive a prize, to facilitate the delivery of a specific task.<sup>xxi</sup> In the business world, gamification was initially adopted to solidify marketing and customer loyalty strategies. Nike's rewards-based activity tracker, Fuel Band, engendered a 10.5 million user growth in the company's membership base from 2007 to 2013.<sup>xxii</sup> The Starbucks reward card alone accounts for US\$ 3 billion in sales per year, attracting 80,000 new members on a weekly basis.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Companies have since incorporated gamification principles into their online learning and development programmes, hoping to witness similar increases in engagement levels. Within learning, game-like techniques such as scoreboards and personalised fast feedback have been proven to give users a greater sense of ownership, purpose and motivation when engaging with tasks and content.<sup>xxiv</sup> This constitutes the foundational element of

Gamelearn, a training company with more than 2,000 corporate clients including AXA, KPMG, and Procter & Gamble. Gamelearn is the most awarded game-based learning platform in the world and creates a variety of lessons pertaining to soft-skills such as negotiation and customer service.<sup>xxv</sup> The platform creates real situations in the virtual world, utilising video games, storylines and simulations, to develop skills in a secure environment. Gamelearn clients have since highlighted the platform's ability to engage and motivate employees over longer periods of time, as well as the benefits of practicing soft skills in zero-risk settings. Academic research supports these claims, and demonstrates that gamification in eLearning can provide better learning experiences and environments through instant feedback and behaviour-change mechanisms.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Given the versatile applicability of gamified learning, there is no doubt that it could engender similar benefits and successes in the physical activity sector. Gamification constitutes an immense opportunity for the industry to diversify its learning and development strategy and to keep personal trainers motivated over long periods of time.



Looking Forward



# Looking Forward

It is recognised across the breadth of the physical activity sector that digital transformation offers huge opportunity for future growth. From allowing organisations to build a more direct relationship with their customers, and support them beyond the confines of their facilities, to offering more sophisticated equipment and a better understanding of big data, when properly harnessed, technology is able to greatly enhance the experience of the customer and business alike.

Many organisations in the fitness sector are already exploiting this technology. Over the coming years, its ability to improve the ways in which exercise professionals learn and refine the skills they need to thrive will be similarly immense – and while the journey is well underway, there is much further to go to fully tap the opportunities that technology can offer.

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**Learning and development providers are looking to overcome the traditional barriers posed by classroom learning – its lack of convenience and accessibility – by employing digital platforms that can be accessed anywhere, and at any time.**

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However it is equally important that the movement toward using technology also enhances the quality of the learning, as well as its pure convenience. Innovative techniques that are designed to support the learner maintain engagement in their content, as they would in a classroom, are starting to become widespread, but there is further for them to go. Noteworthy technological developments that are occurring outside the physical activity sector – such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence – may offer guidance as to how this can be achieved.

Looking forward, the immediate priority for technology developers, employers and training providers in the physical activity sector should be to ensure that the work undertaken by each reinforces and supports the broader ambition to professionalise the workforce, as articulated by the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity.

Its Professional Standards Matrix – which outlines the skills needed to thrive in every job

role in physical activity – is currently the benchmark against which all accredited training programmes are audited against. This matrix should also be the benchmark for all employer-led, technology-based learning currently undertaken by working exercise professionals. The skills they develop throughout their career are equally – if not more – important than much of their initial training, and as such, should reflect the broader industry's ambition for a uniform, consistent, high-quality workforce. Transitioning from a market of innovative digital platforms and learning techniques towards a standardised learning and development offer, underpinned by sophisticated technology that is continually being refined, is the direction of travel required to truly deliver this aim. There can be no doubt that technology will need to be at the heart of our efforts to support our existing army of an active nation to have the skills that they need to thrive in the future.



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