



# Rising Above Today's Challenges for Fitness Businesses

Guidance from Conor O'Loughlin  
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# Keeping You at the Forefront of Fitness

## Guidance from Conor O'Loughlin, ABC Glofox Platform President

The fitness industry is undergoing profound changes, driven by evolving consumer preferences and accelerated by the disruptive forces of technology. As fitness operators, it's critical that we stay attuned to these shifts and adapt our offerings to meet the dynamic needs of today's members. By leveraging data, embracing innovation, and doubling down on what matters most—our people and our communities—we can navigate this exciting era and bring immense value to those we serve.



Data from the 2024 Innovation Report from ABC Fitness shows that our industry has made a remarkable post-pandemic comeback. These numbers paint a compelling picture of the industry's resilience and growth:

- **74% of consumers prioritize their health and fitness**, marking an 8% increase from 2021.
- Among active consumers, **60% have a gym membership or frequent a health club or studio**—an 11% uptick.
- **Training studios and group exercise studios have seen 4% and 5% increases**, respectively.
- **Check-ins have surged by 9%**, surpassing pre-pandemic levels.

Furthermore, consumer spending reflects this heightened commitment to fitness. Households are allocating more of their budgets to membership dues, with a 3% year-over-year increase. Those working out 9 to 12 times per month have skyrocketed from 22% to 55% in just one year.

We're also seeing some interesting changes in the way consumers think about fitness.

## The convergence of fitness and wellness

One of the most pronounced trends we're witnessing is the convergence of fitness and wellness. Gyms and studios are increasingly adopting ancillary services to cater to members' holistic needs. This shift extends beyond physical fitness to encompass nutrition, recovery, mindfulness, and overall longevity.

The Innovation Report categorized fitness consumers by their habits, demographics, and preferences. It showed:

- **A 4% year-over-year increase in "Wellness Lovers"**, who seek to balance fitness, nutrition, and mental wellbeing.
- **A 6% year-over-year increase in "Fitness Explorers"**, members and students who continuously seek out new fitness programs, products, and services.

Both of these categories index high with Gen Z and millennial consumers. That said, 89% of individuals aged 55 and older also consider it extremely important to remain active as they age.

This data underscores the immense potential for fitness brands to cater to the growing demand for comprehensive wellness solutions. Savvy operators are tapping into this demand by providing a one-stop-shop experience, incorporating offerings like plunge pools, saunas, recovery rooms, and even IV drips.

**"Wearables is one way that personalization is happening whether a club is digitally connected or not."**



## Personalization is paramount

A trend across all aspects of modern life is the expectation of personalization, and the fitness industry is no exception. With the advent of AI and advanced technologies, we now have unprecedented opportunities to tailor experiences to individual preferences and goals. This may involve offering personalized workout plans, nutrition advice, and goal tracking through mobile apps or digital platforms.

Wearable technology has emerged as a personalization tool, with 56% of Gen Z, 48% of Millennials, 58% of Gen X, and 43% of Baby Boomers using wearables to monitor their workouts. While this presents a significant opportunity for fitness operators to leverage data from these devices to better understand member behavior (both in and out of the gym or studio), wearables can also show limited tracking, provide counterintuitive guidance, and confuse members. There is no question that owners and operators must understand the opportunity around wearables, but there also isn't a rush to drastically change a foundational business model.

Data also gives us an opportunity to personalize by demographics. For example, we know that Gen Z craves novelty and innovation. Studios and boutiques can cater to this group by offering unique fitness programs such as special themes, unique partnerships, and community-driven experiences.

However, the first step in creating personalized experiences is not technology—it's listening. We need to engage with our members, ask for their feedback, and understand what they truly want. While we can't be all things to all people, we can hone in on where we can deliver the most value based on our expertise and our members' needs.

From there, we can leverage data and technology as powerful complements to enhance the member experience. Whether it's through wearables that provide insights into workout patterns or AI-powered recommendations and reminders, these tools can help us engage with members at every stage of their journey and keep them accountable for their goals.

## Community is critical

Amidst all the technological advancements, one thing remains paramount: the power of community. Our ability to foster genuine connections among our members is what sets us apart in an increasingly competitive landscape.

The data reinforces the importance of community-building in our industry. Modalities that foster social interaction and support are on the rise:

- **Recreational and sports activities** have increased by 8%.
- **Working out with a personal trainer or special instructor** is up by 7%.
- **Small group training sessions** have grown by 5%.
- **Group exercise classes** have seen a 3% uptick.

We've also seen that participation in group exercise classes varies by generation, with 27% of Gen Z, 36% of Millennials, 40% of active Gen X, and 38-41% of active Baby Boomers engaging in these activities. This highlights the importance of tailoring community-building efforts to different age groups.

The level of community is dependent on the business model you run. In a large franchise with a couple of thousand members distributed across locations, it's about allowing them to create mini-communities through challenges where they get to know each other. In a localized gym or studio with a couple of hundred members, it's easier to bring everyone together.

**"Developing communities is the most popular theme that we see in successful businesses"**



The common theme is that if people identify your gym or studio as a social place to go, there is a stronger drive to pay membership fees, higher retention, and increased referrals. It's critical for every business to adopt some form of community, but this will look different depending on the business. Ultimately, it's about understanding that people come to us to improve their physical fitness and be part of something greater than themselves.

## Embracing our role in society

As health and wellness hubs, fitness brands have an opportunity—and arguably a responsibility—to drive positive change in our communities. We're seeing a growing trend of gyms and studios embracing activism and aligning themselves with causes that resonate with their members, particularly mental health, diversity, and sustainability.

Gen Z, in particular, places a high value on social responsibility, with nearly 70% feeling it's extremely important for their health club, gym, or studio to support social issues. Mental health tops the list of causes they believe clubs should rally around, followed by racial equity, sexual harassment awareness, and gender equality.

Taking a stand on social issues may seem like a risk, but in today's climate, many consumers (especially younger generations) expect and appreciate when brands demonstrate their values. The key is to be authentic and advocate for causes aligning with your brand identity and members' priorities. Having a somewhat opinionated voice is the right way to approach it, leaning into building a brand with digital touchpoints that expand beyond the four walls of your gym or studio.

Embracing social responsibility enhances loyalty and engagement and broadens our impact outside of fitness. When we show up in meaningful ways for our communities, we build bonds that extend far beyond the gym floor.

## Summing it all up

Data from the Innovation Report shows a host of emerging opportunities and strategies that can help your business stay ahead of the curve and bring more value to your members:

- **Address the disjunction between members' expectations and actual utilization** by offering programs and services that meet their top priorities, such as nutrition guidance, workout accountability systems, mental health/mindfulness programs, better sleep programs, and immune health strengthening.
- **Offer personalized member experiences by tailoring classes and programs to meet members' needs and goals**, providing flexible mobile experiences, and understanding member behaviors and preferences to enhance their lifestyles.
- **Gain a 360-degree view of your business to make data-driven decisions**, strengthen your community, reach revenue targets faster, and optimize end-to-end revenue management.
- **Harness the power of data to make informed**, data driven decisions that help grow your business faster.
- **Streamline and enhance your studios operations and engage with members** with unmatched control, security, and flexibility.

Lastly, as health has become a top priority worldwide, international markets present expansion opportunities. Global growth—either online or through physical presence—can help you tap into diverse markets and demographics.

Right now, we have a profound opportunity to shape the future of our industry and the lives of those we serve. We can navigate the exciting road ahead by staying attuned to our members' evolving needs, leveraging technology and data wisely, and cultivating the communities that breathe life into our businesses.





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