

# Motivating Members with Interactive Products

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*Keeping members motivated to exercise can be difficult. But, by bringing the stimulation of outdoor and computerized activities indoors, manufacturers are making exercise fun and members are coming back for more.*

ALTHOUGH WORKING OUT inside a fitness center has its advantages, I find outdoor exercise to be more enjoyable. First of all, you've got better visual stimulation — particularly when you're exercising in pleasant surroundings, such as in a park or in the countryside. You also get the benefit of fresh air and sunshine, which always make me feel more cheerful and energetic than working out indoors.

A few scientific studies have looked at the pros and cons of exercising outdoors versus inside. One compared performances of the 1,800-meter run outside on a wooded track with runs performed indoors on treadmills. Results showed that participants ran faster on the outdoor course. Another study found that athletes' heart rates were higher during an outdoor run than when they ran the same distance on a treadmill. A 1995 Australian study found that trained runners felt less anxious, depressed, angry and hostile, and more invigorated, after an outdoor run than they did when they ran the same distance on a treadmill.

Some time ago, I came across an interesting article about exercise motivation by a group of researchers led by John P. Porcari, Ph.D., a professor in the department of exercise and sports science at the University of Wisconsin in La Crosse. His team had been testing virtual reality (VR) exercise machines as a means of keeping people motivated. These machines were equipped with interactive CD-ROM systems to create a computer-generated virtual environment. For example, while exercising on a VR step machine, users could "pilot" a WWI biplane equipped with water cannons, and try to shoot down hot air balloons and destroy enemy sites to earn points. The faster the users stepped, the faster their "planes" flew, and the more points they earned. The VR recumbent cycle gave users a number of options, including cycling through the Alps or crossing a Caribbean island to the sounds of island music and exotic birdsongs. Not surprisingly, the volunteers who took part in testing the VR exercise equipment preferred the interactive VR equipment to non-VR devices.

Many companies have created products like these that help stimulate the exerciser, which can offer a more positive and motivating exercise experience. Following are reviews of what's currently available.

## Arcade 6EX Platforms by Cobalt Flux

Cobalt Flux, South Salt Lake, Utah, manufactures high-performance gaming peripherals. Its primary products are platforms and systems for dancing. The Arcade 6EX system is its top-flight set-up for dance, exercise and entertainment. These low-impact platforms are water-resistant and come with platforms and practice pads (color coordinated for dance steps and aerobic activities). The pads can be interfaced with a monitor and PlayStation 2 (PS2), which are not provided. This product may be appropriate for schools, private studios and commercial fitness facilities looking for a fun, interactive, motivational fitness tool.



**Advantages.** The product can be used to teach dance or provide interactive, motivational activity for young (or all!) exercisers. It provides the opportunity to challenge the vestibular system, enhance coordination through various foot movements and stimulate motor skills required by daily activities, as well as sport-specific movements.

**Disadvantages.** One disadvantage is that fitness centers must pony up for the additional purchase of the

PS2 system and monitors. Interface software is provided but, without the other components, it creates an additional burden for the owner/operator, as multi-purchases, warranties and installs may be necessary.

**Cobalt Flux:** distributed by [Motion Fitness](#)

### DDR super NOVA by Konami

Konami Digital Entertainment Inc., Tokyo, Japan, makes an interactive, 3D dance video game. The latest release in North America uses a hardware engine that delivers vibrant 3D backgrounds. Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) displays video and popular music, incorporating more than 300 songs and 2,000 dance steps. The system also features animated on-screen dancers. The basic premise of the Konami system is for users to simulate the dance movements displayed on the video screen while moving onto lit panels on the floor plate.



**Advantages.** Given the video screen and the changing colored floor plates, the interactive nature of this game is obvious. Originally intended for video arcades, it's now having relative success in the fitness market.

**Disadvantages.** Konami is the expert in creating the video games, the platforms they use are for home use only, so get the Commercial Grade platforms by Cobalt Flux.

**Konami:**

### Exer-Station by Powergrid Fitness

Powergrid's, Laurel, Md., Exer- Station uses ISOCOR technology, which is incorporated into a steel platform attached to a controller in the base to measure pressure (pull/push) on the controller (basically, isometric exercise). Theoretically, the harder users push or pull, the more total-body musculature is recruited to meet the demand. Microprocessors translate the force into movement on the video screen. The software creates a video game from the movements. Pressure in one direction creates the actual movement on the screen. The Exer-Station claims to be both strong and sensitive, with the ability to sense light pressure to loads in excess of 400 pounds and torque in excess of 1,200 foot-pounds.



The Exer-Station interfaces with all major game consoles. Therefore, it is possible to interface with XBox, GameCube and other PC-compatible gaming technology. Video addicts will surely love this product, and they may improve their fitness level along the way. The display shows total workout time, pounds lifted and current effort level.

**Advantages.** The Exer-Station is an interesting concept, and an additional attempt to use video gaming to engage the inactive. The product potentially has merit in fitness facility and school environments as an introductory or show-case device. If members are captivated and entertained, there is the potential to increase their caloric expenditure and exercise compliance.

**Disadvantages.** The exercise is isometric, which is not appropriate for individuals with cardiovascular conditions or severe deconditioning. Prospective, clinical research shows evidence that isometric exercise will raise blood pressure and increase intra-thoracic pressure. Additionally, there has always been question as to the functional relevance of isometric exercise — to see a modest increase in metabolism, caloric consumption and energy expenditure, the activity should include movement of the sustained variety. Good for the kids that are gamers to keep them getting some exercise.

**Powergrid Fitness:** distributed by [Motion Fitness](#)

## GameBike by Cateye

Cateye's GameBike is an exercise cycle and plug-and-play video game controller that controls body movement on the screen. The cycle is connected to any PS2, XBox or GameCube. As many as four cycles can be interfaced at any one time, allowing for multi-user interface, competition and motivation.



Two versions of the cycle are available: the GameBike (for residential and light commercial use) and the GameBike Pro (the commercial model). The GameBike Pro is designed exclusively for fitness facilities, schools and instructional settings. It features a fitness computer that provides exercise results, allowing participants to track their activity and workout data. The computer allows for automatic heart rate control, and provides additional safety and exercise prescription capability.

There are various workload levels, which makes the product appropriate for youth, deconditioned individuals, older adults and competitive athletes. Two sizes are offered to accommodate various heights.

**Advantages.** This product offers some unique features while accommodating a small footprint. If space is an issue, or you are looking to integrate virtual fitness into your facility, this product may fit your needs nicely.

**Disadvantages.** Fitness centers must purchase the gaming products separately, and only upright models are currently available. Quality has been less than desirable since they use a home bike. So large settings will have problems.

**Cateye:** distributed by [Motion Fitness](#)

## Makoto by Motion Fitness

Motion Fitness', Palatine, Ill., Makoto combines exercise with the science of sensory integration. It is designed to improve neurological and physical performance. This device is appropriate for a variety of uses, from entertainment to sports-specific training to rehabilitation. It is even appropriate for people with disabilities, as a wheelchair will fit comfortably within the "arena." It is appropriate for all ages, with minimal balance and coordination deficits. It is engaging, stimulating and interactive for both the physical and mental realms. The device claims to improve strength, agility, endurance, reaction speed, hand-eye coordination, visual and auditory acuity, and concentration. It can be used by individuals, teams and leagues.



All activity takes place within a small arena (there are two available sizes) surrounded by three "strike plate poles" (requiring an 11-by-11-foot area). The object is to kick or hand-strike the appropriate light (programmed into the circuit board) or use a "padded bopper," engaging the upper extremities into the simulated movement patterns displayed on the lighted towers. Both light and sound guide the user to the appropriate response. As one strike is completed, the pre-programmed system draws users to the next target with different lighting and tones. The pace and sequence can be controlled to dictate the intensity, duration and frequency, thus providing an ability-appropriate progression. Typically, there are about 1,500 movements completed within a 15-minute period. On average, this raises the heart rate to 70 to 80 percent of its max. There are 11 skill level settings, and arenas can be linked to play in tandem mode, or multiple players can participate in one arena.

**Advantages.** This product is reasonably priced. Great for larger groups.

**Disadvantages.** Some members may object to its simulation of violent activity. So don't use the hard staffs use the soft boppers.

**Makoto:** 877 668-4664; [www.motionfitness.com](http://www.motionfitness.com)

## Spark/S2 cycle by Espresso Fitness

The Spark cycle by Espresso Fitness, Sunnyvale, Calif., was developed through a cooperative effort between mechanical engineers and game programmers. The cycle offers a durable exercise bike interfaced with game software. The Spark cycle has a high-definition LCD screen, and the concept is to apply cycling technology to interactive video gaming through virtual reality technology.



The S2 version is new, and gives the user an outdoor riding experience. The rider steers, shifts and rides according to the interactive video display, which is connected to the Internet. Fitness data is an overlay on the video screen, delivering real-time data to the rider and fitness professional. The "ghost rider" option allows users to ride against their previous results on the same course. Cycles can be linked for side-by-side competition or to chase a pre-programmed pacer. Once the ride is over, the rider and/or coach can view the results, track progress and log the data through the Internet connection.

**Advantages.** Espresso products provide additional revenue from members through subscription, special events, contests and custom programs.

**Disadvantages.** The Spark cycle requires a high-speed Internet connection.

**Espresso Fitness:** distributed by [Motion Fitness](http://Motion Fitness)

## Sportwall by Sportwall International

There are various products in the Sportwall line (Sportwall International Inc., Carpinteria, Calif.), all designed to provide interactive stimulation to the user, culminating in improved fitness, coordination and balance. The interactive products are appropriate for group fitness for all ages, performance systems for athletic enhancement, and junior interactive fitness and physical education/adaptive physical education.



The Sportwall is a padded wall connected to lights and sounds that users "hit" in order to score points. It is fun and social, which makes it appropriate for the deconditioned or beginning exerciser. The product delivers quick results due to a short learning curve, regardless of ability or previous levels of activity. It provides score tracking and real-time feedback.

**Advantages.** There are at least six different configurations of the Sportwall, so virtually any facility can implement this system with minor facility changes.

**Disadvantages.** A potentially limiting factor of the Sportwall is its size requirements.

**Sportwall International Inc.:** distributed by [Motion Fitness](http://Motion Fitness)

## 3 Kick and climbing walls by Fit Interactive

Fit Interactive, Paradise, Utah, offers two products to the commercial fitness market: 3 Kick and climbing walls. 3 Kick provides a full-body workout for youth and adults alike. Designed for the martial arts industry, it has application to the general fitness industry, as well. The user strikes, kicks or punches one of three pads appropriate to the flashing light within the pad. Once contact has been made, the light goes out and another is randomly lit with a corresponding sound. The score is based on speed. The faster the user moves, the more



points are accumulated. The computerized score keeper randomly assigns the strike pads, and the speed is advanced according to the participant's response time. The game can accommodate one to three participants, from beginners to advanced.

Also available from Fit Interactive are a variety of climbing walls. Its Ascent Wall line features a recent release called FunRock. The FunRock is a single-climber simulator, which can be coin- or freely operated through a kiosk system to control the rate of ascent and difficulty. This particular wall has a smaller footprint for facilities with limited space.

**Advantages.** The 3 Kick and climbing walls are available in several configurations, depending on anticipated use and space.

**Disadvantages.** Members may object to the violent nature of the 3 Kick. For climbing walls, measures should be taken to reduce liability, such as hiring an experienced climber and providing appropriate training for your staff.

**Fit Interactive:** distributed by [Motion Fitness](#)

## Climbing Walls:

### Trazer by Cybex

Cybex International, Medway, Mass., manufactures Trazer, an interactive, computer- based system. During Trazer play, clients interactively control life-sized 3D games with their body movement. While playing Trazer, users control their on-screen characters' location. To operate Trazer, clients wear a transmitter, called the Beacon, around their waist. The Beacon emits an invisible infrared signal similar to that of a television remote control, enabling Trazer to calculate the moment-to-moment position of the body as it moves in front of Trazer's video display. In addition, heart rate information can be received from a Polar-compatible heart rate monitor. Real-time measures of speed, power, balance and heart rate, among others, are quantified and stored.



**Advantages.** Trazer is appropriate for all ages and abilities.

**Disadvantages.** Fitness centers much purchase a video display separately for Trazer to function.

**Cybex International:** distributed by [Motion Fitness](#)

## Exercise motivation

Whether for children or adults, the deconditioned or athletes, interactive exercise products can create fun during exercise, and keep your members motivated. These types of products can also be a profit center for your facility, as turns on the equipment can be sold individually, or as part of a package.

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