

Crossing the Health & Fitness Tech Chasm

By Denise Lee Yohn

If CEA's Industry Forum is any indication, the CE industry is quite bullish on health and fitness technology—and for good reason.

Interest in personal monitoring technology has exploded thanks to a confluence of trends including an aging population, increased scientific knowledge in health and physiology, and new ways for consumers to use digital technology to connect with others and the things they care about.

Many new products and services have been launched recently, including an integrated system that tells someone how efficiently they slept the night before, a glucose monitoring device that remembers protocols diabetics are likely to forget, and a mobile application that turns phones into remote health monitoring devices. But while adoption of new products and services within the broader digital health movement is being fueled by wholesale changes in the healthcare industry, the health and fitness segment has yet to break through and grow beyond its current niche of athletes and fitness enthusiasts.

Health and fitness tech needs to “cross the chasm,” the technology adoption theory introduced by Geoffrey Moore in 1991. He argues that the greatest peril for tech companies is the transition from an early market dominated by a few visionary customers to a mainstream market of predominantly pragmatic people.

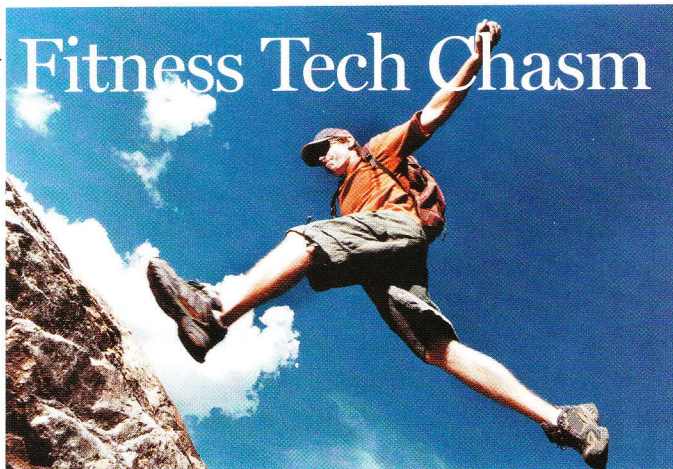
The two markets display unique psychographic profiles which make their responses to technology and tech marketing very different. The gap is so significant that Moore called it a chasm.

The challenge for health and fitness tech companies is to cross the chasm into broader relevance and appeal to the mainstream market. To do this, they must expand the definition of health and fitness from sports and exercise to a healthy lifestyle, which simply involves moving more, eating better and making life more enjoyable.

This definition of health and fitness calls for creating different priorities when designing new technologies and communicating them to consumers. Now many companies in this space focus on features and functionality that only athletes and fitness enthusiasts care about like heart rates, cadence and body composition. Instead, new technologies should speak to the needs of a healthy lifestyle. The business leaders at CEA's Industry Forum highlighted several of these needs:

- **Ease-of-use** ▶ The mainstream market isn't interested in figuring out technology, so no-brainer user interfaces and integration with existing products and systems are musts. The mainstream also isn't interested in committing to an exercise program, so there's an opportunity to design technology that makes health and fitness “easy to use.” Anthony Delli Colli, vice chair of the Market Adoption Working Group of the Continua Alliance suggested making health and fitness activities accessible 10 minutes at a time. He drew the comparison to social networking, pointing to how people like to check in on social sites in bite-sized chunks of time.

- **Everyday relevance** ▶ New health and fitness technologies should fit into people's existing lifestyles, and not require them to adopt new



ones. IDEO CTO Doug Solomon shared his firm's human-centered, design-based approach to creating new health products. IDEO's team of technologists, designers and social scientists look at the big picture of how people are living, not simply the isolated goal of addressing a health problem. Technology should weave health and fitness into people's daily activities like walking, eating, and listening to music.

- **Engaging experiences** ▶ Striiv, a new digital pedometer, is designed to facilitate fun experiences by linking getting fit to competing in friendly contests, donating to charities, and spending time with family and friends. The company's CEO Dave Wang says “engagement is everything.” Similarly expert analysts including Tom Rodgers of AT&T Capital Investors discussed developing video games as a way to make health and fitness engaging for kids.

- **Extra channels** ▶ One barrier to tech adoption is distribution. Specialty retailers are a great channel for those in the early market who keep up with the latest news. But mainstream consumers might not know these technologies exist, much less where to buy them. Michael Clay of Verizon's Wireless Device Marketing & Business Development group advocated for more emphasis on mobile as a channel for generating broader awareness and access—both in brick-and-mortar locations and online app stores—given the penetration of mobile devices and high usage incidence in the mainstream market.

- **An expense that's worth it** ▶ As with all technology, the right price is critical to mainstream adoption of health and fitness products. Increasing the perceived value should be the primary focus. While exercising may seem like a luxury, feeling and looking great are universal, priceless drivers that should be leveraged.

Ultimately crossing the chasm requires health and fitness tech companies to think differently about what business they're in. Are they in the hardware and software business, or are they in the business of giving people access to helpful information? Are they trying to improve athletic performance, or are they trying to improve quality of life?

To tap into a bigger market, the industry needs to move away from a technology-centric approach and adopt a more consumer-centric one. By driving innovation based on what consumers want when it comes to improving their lives, companies can fulfill technology's full potential and cross the chasm. ○