

Secrets for Survival:



KEEPING YOUR FITNESS BUSINESS RUNNING IN 2021

 BURNALONG



Last Year Everything Changed.
What's next in a post-COVID world?

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INTRODUCTION


For many fitness businesses the sudden turn to a virtual world during the COVID-19 pandemic was difficult. An industry that has long been anchored by in-person activities and community engagement (like group classes) suddenly had to shift. Millions of people started working out in their own homes to avoid crowds. Like a switch, that change came suddenly in Spring 2020. But it wasn't entirely new. The shift toward online fitness was already underway, and it was simply accelerated in the wake of a global disease that limited or completely eliminated traditional gym activities.

THE GROWTH OF ON-DEMAND FITNESS AND DIGITAL TOOLS

Data and payment firm Cardlytics¹ published information about the growing trend of home-based on-demand workouts several years prior to the COVID shift, showing on-demand fitness purchases growing 160% in just two years.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has tracked fitness trends for 14 years, and “wearable technology” has occupied the top spot on their trends list since 2016.² This is indicative of a broader trend of people feeling more comfortable using digital tools as an integrated part of their overall fitness.

At-home workouts are nothing new—anyone who was around in the 1980s and 90s³ remembers workout videos with supermodels like Cindy Crawford, the iconic leg warmers⁴ of Jane Fonda, up-tempo dance workouts with Paula Abdul, and of course, sweating to Tae Bo with Billy Blanks in your living room.



But today's at-home workouts are more than just a VHS you repeat each day. App-based fitness is now one of the fastest growing industries in the world, with Reports and Data predicting⁵ that it will reach \$14.64 billion by 2027. Home-based activities are up across the board, and research firm McKinsey reported that even in areas with fewer restrictions and after the pandemic is over, many people expect to continue doing more at home. Topping the list of at-home activities were cooking, home improvement, watching movies, and exercising.⁶

So how can you survive the shifting landscape in exercise, wellness, and fitness? It's important to know where things are trending and be prepared to meet the needs of Americans trying to do more for their wellness.

Here are 10 important trends to keep an eye on in the coming months and years. These trends were happening before the global pandemic, and have only accelerated over the past year. The secret to keeping your fitness business alive well past a 'return to normal' is to master these trends and position your business for long term success.



TREND 1: THE FUTURE IS HYBRID

Crunch Fitness, a gym with more than 300 U.S. locations, conducted its own survey and found that almost half of respondents (47%) want better options for at-home workouts. Another 83% thought they would return to the gym when it was safe to do so. At the same time, more than half of people in a July 2020 survey⁷ said they don't plan to renew their fitness memberships after COVID is over, citing "more affordable" ways to get fit that they discovered when they couldn't go to their local fitness facility.

The most likely scenario between people flocking back to the gym or foregoing it entirely is going to be somewhere in the middle, where people participate in "heterogeneous" fitness programs with both in-person and virtual options, according to ClassPass CEO Fritz Lanman.⁸ Like many fitness businesses right now, ClassPass is looking for ways to merge these experiences. Rick Stollmeyer, CEO and founder of MINDBODY, agrees, noting their own efforts to include both on-demand content and in-studio options. It's an opportunity to bring in people who might feel more comfortable trying out a class at home before entering a studio, sparking interest and increasing the potential that they become long-term clients.



The key is embracing a level of flexibility to create a business model of "and" instead of "either/or" as you look toward the future.

TREND 2: CONSIDER TECHNOLOGY WITH ON-DEMAND AND STREAMING FITNESS

Virtual fitness is on the rise and it's not stopping anytime soon. While there are existing social media platforms to distribute content—like YouTube or Instagram—none of those channels are specifically designed to cultivate connections between instructors and clients. Those platforms are all one-way distribution channels. You create content and send it out. The most common interaction is a 'like' or a comment, but most of the time your participants won't feel like they are part of a group fitness session.

Live streaming fitness sessions, on the other hand, provide the feelings of community and shared experience of taking classes together, which can engage people and keep them coming back. The proliferation of at-home streaming options⁹ and the almost-cult-level following¹⁰ of some streaming fitness trainers is a testament to people's desire to not do the workout thing all alone. In a time when feelings of depression and isolation¹¹ are reaching alarming levels, a streaming class is an online connection.

Even when we can get back to more normal routines, there are still large swaths of the population who can't make it to a studio or a fitness facility for that group class. Postpartum moms, parents with young children at home, people living in rural areas, and anyone with a job that lacks flexibility can benefit from the ability to work out from home on their own time, or jump into a live-stream class.

For boutique fitness studios, or those in business for themselves as a personal trainer, the idea of creating your own app for on-demand fitness might not seem feasible, or even be something you're interested in doing. Platforms like BurnAlong allow trainers to quickly create live and on-demand content for their current clients, while also promoting their business to new clients with targeted exposure.

TREND 3: USE THE TOOLS THAT ARE ALREADY AVAILABLE

In order to thrive in a world of hybrid in-person and on-demand fitness offerings, you need to use fitness technology in strategic ways. That doesn't mean inventing the next FitBit or trying to code your own fitness app. It does mean capitalizing on existing technology to benefit your business and your clients. For example, you can offer recorded classes that clients can quickly find online and stream them from any device (smart TV, smartphone, tablet, or computer). Make sure your platform offers your clients those choices.

Online communities are also essential in a virtual fitness environment. Social interactions help boost people's motivation and desire to workout, so offering on-demand classes that allow people to participate with a close friend—or 1,000 of them—can improve retention rates. Working out with others improves consistency, duration, and motivation¹² to workout. **In fact, one study showed that people working out with others exercise twice as long¹³ on average than those who do it alone.** Another study¹⁴ found that 95% of people who started a weight loss program with a friend finished, compared to just 76% of people who did it alone. Positive peer pressure can help people stay motivated in their fitness goals over time.

Other benefits like gamification and individual or group challenges,¹⁵ and the ability to communicate with others on the platform, can take your fitness tech to the next level.

TREND 4: EMBRACE MULTIPLE AREAS OF WELLNESS

Physical fitness is important, and for many fitness businesses that might be all you currently offer. But in the past year it is clear that overall wellness goes far beyond cardio and body fat percentages. Today's members want community and connection. They want holistic classes that address multiple areas of health and wellness.

Fitness businesses that transition into wellness programs create for themselves tremendous opportunities for growth. An Aetna Health Ambitions Study¹⁶ released in 2018 found that people are actively seeking resources that support health and overall well-being. Six in 10 respondents said if they had an extra hour in their day, they would spend it on mental and physical well-being activities (notably 67% of women responded this way). It also found that more people are turning to digital tools for mental health. Offering wellness services alongside your fitness classes provides added value to your clients.



Classes on breathing exercises, stress management, healthy eating, and mindfulness are highly sought after, and create opportunities for your clients to connect with you on a level beyond sweat.

TREND 5: ENGAGING THE UNENGAGED

Fitness is not a one-size-fits-all activity. Only 5% of the adult population does 30 minutes of physical activity each day, and only 1 in 3 gets the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity each week, according to the President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition.¹⁷ A quarter of adults report spending absolutely none¹⁸ of their free time on physical activity. Children are also increasingly sedentary, spending an average of seven hours a day in front of a screen playing video games, watching TV, or using a smartphone or tablet.

These statistics certainly point to the need for more physical fitness opportunities that people will participate in, but they also highlight an important reality: fitness offerings must be inclusive. If your programming targets only the most hardcore workout enthusiasts, you're leaving 95% of the population behind. For many people, the goal of a fitness program is not just weight loss, it's improving health, feeling better, and having opportunities to socialize with others.

Six things you can do to improve inclusivity:

- Offer classes for varying fitness levels and clearly indicate the class level (beginner, intermediate, expert) before someone starts.
- Demonstrate 'scaled' movements for those who can't perform the prescribed exercise.
- Talk through movements clearly and demonstrate them for someone who is new to the class.
- Offer alternative movements for individuals with physical disabilities or mobility limitations.
- Incorporate family classes where kids and parents can workout together (see Trend #7 for more on this).
- Don't assume everyone wants to lose weight—discover your members' goals and help them feel validated in their achievements.

TREND 6: ADAPT TO SURVIVE

Raise your hand if every plan you ever created has gone exactly as you imagined. Anyone? Probably not. The reality for any business owner—from personal trainers to multi-location gym franchises—is that things don't always go as planned. But when they inevitably get off track, successful fitness businesses know how to adapt and make the best of the circumstances.

At no time has this been quite as apparent as the past year, when gym owners and fitness trainers were forced to scramble and figure out how to provide classes and instruction to people stuck at home. The most successful ones worked with tools that were readily available—streaming classes online, providing personalized sessions instead of group sessions, adapting workouts so they could easily be done at home without any equipment at all, spreading out equipment in their gym so it's at least six feet apart, or moving classes outside.

The reality is that even when COVID is over, there will still be curve balls for your business. The ability to adapt and innovate quickly based on your clients' needs and what's happening in the world will help you build a stronger and more resilient business in the future. Start by adapting your business for an online experience, and use that learning experience to manage future challenges.



Adapt your business to provide an online experience. 47% of people want better options for at-home workouts.

TREND 7: IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

Almost half of adults¹⁹ in the U.S. report feeling stressed and not having enough time to do the things they need to do each day. For working parents or those taking care of aging parents as a member of the “sandwich generation” this time crunch can feel even worse. Carving out time to workout instead of spending it with your children or family members often leads to more stress and feelings of guilt. It’s also one of the reasons people (especially moms)²⁰ don’t exercise as often as they might like to.

Fitness offerings that engage both parents and children, or have scaled versions for a grandparent to do, can boost participation and tackle the stress of feeling like you have to give up one thing you love (time with the family) for another thing (your physical health). Plus they can help older adults get exercise that is vital to reduce the risk of diseases like diabetes and osteoporosis, and set a valuable example for future generations.



Fitness offerings that engage families can boost participation.

TREND 8: TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR BUSINESS AS A TRAINER

Fitness content creators grew in dramatic fashion in 2020, driven by the pivot from in-person training and group classes to online offerings. People who were shut out of their favorite gyms were suddenly searching for online trainers to fill the gaps. Like other social media influencers,²¹ fitness influencers are quickly building powerful brands and loyal followings online.

Given that their prior employment arrangements weren't always beneficial²²—most personal trainers split revenues with the gym where they work, and in some cases that's as lopsided as a 70/30 split in favor of the facility—the ability to create content online for a passionate group of followers might be more economically viable. For example, a personal trainer might only get \$20 from an hour-long session, but the customer paid \$65 and the rest went to the facility. The same trainer can offer a virtual training for \$50 and keep it all. It's a win-win because both sides get a better deal, and that doesn't even take into account the potential for additional income²³ from things like affiliate marketing, brand promotion, and advertising. Consumers are also more likely to see the value in going directly to you in the future.

Even if you're not social-media-savvy, you can still join platforms that will allow you to monetize your fitness videos and create a following without worrying about constantly tweeting and keeping up with Instagram stories.

TREND 9: COLLECT TWO PAYCHECKS WITH MULTI-CLUB MEMBERSHIPS

As people seek out more holistic services for their overall well-being, they might be forced to purchase multiple club memberships to meet their needs. That presents a significant opportunity for current fitness businesses to address things that are missing in your facility--for example, offering yoga in addition to your boot camp classes, or adding a healthy cooking webinar for members to watch. Many people would prefer the convenience of getting it all in one place, and are likely to pay a little more for a monthly membership to add on specific services or offerings.

Monte Sanders, a Baltimore-based fitness instructor expanded his core business (and went so far as to rename it) and began focusing on Mind, Body, and Spirit (not just physical fitness). This provided new realms of wellness to increase interest, retention, and revenue as clients came for more than just physical fitness.

TREND 10: DURING AND POST-COVID, CONSUMERS DEMAND FLEXIBILITY

The digital world is changing consumer behavior and raising expectations in every industry, and fitness is no exception. People want access to more information, more data, and more variety than ever before. As a result, they demand flexibility and choice in their fitness routines. Meet your clients where they are by providing them with the ability to access everything from strength workouts and spin classes to personal training sessions and guided meditations on their smartphone, smart TV, or laptop.

Many folks shifted to on-demand fitness content on their favorite devices, but will that continue in a post-COVID world? There are behavioral shifts caused by the pandemic that will persist beyond masks and quarantines. Consider the rise of grocery delivery, which has tripled since 2019.²⁴ Quarantines forced people to adopt new habits, and 90% of current e-grocery customers say they will continue to shop online. What is critical to note here is that this pointedly indicates a loyalty to brick-and-mortar locations. Rather, customers are looking for new ways to access the products and services of their favorite providers.

Circling back to Trend #1, The Future is Hybrid. There are specific advantages for fitness routines to be accessible at home. Many fitness influencers and businesses are prepared to adapt, to change, to create the flexibility that consumers want and need to maintain their own wellness—to meet people exactly where they are and build a foundation for fitness there. That will be the key to success in the coming years.

LAST YEAR EVERYTHING CHANGED. SO WHAT IS NEXT FOR YOUR FITNESS BUSINESS, NOW AND IN A POST-COVID WORLD?

Now we've reached the hard part: implementing some of these practices! If these trends are something you want to work on, it can be hard to know what's the right path forward. There are a lot of options to pursue, but allow us to recommend BurnAlong, whose fitness partners are helping more people, earning passive income, and growing brand awareness.



To see a demo of how BurnAlong can benefit your fitness business, [click here](#). For a one on one conversation with BurnAlong, [click here](#).

See why leading fitness instructors are [joining BurnAlong](#) and how you can be part of it. The premier at-home fitness and wellness app allows you to expand your business to reach more clients with streaming and on-demand classes, boost recruitment for in-person classes, and keep your business thriving even when the whole world turns upside-down.

We've been part of the virtual fitness revolution for half a decade, and have seen each of these trends accelerate during the global pandemic. We help fitness businesses like yours to increase client engagement, retention, and revenue by bringing your business online in hours, not weeks.



SEE A DEMO