

TRAINER SUCCESS

Business insights,
strategies &
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World to Fitness®

9 Survey Data

2009 IDEA Personal
Training Programs &
Equipment Trends

14 Training for Growth

Seasonal Change:
Autumn Color

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN LEARN THIS MONTH:

Use 2009 IDEA Personal Training Programs & Equipment Trends data to focus your marketing and to plan your budget; explore what autumn—the season of change, reflection and beauty—means to you, your clients and your business.

SURVEY OVERVIEW by Jan Schroeder, PhD

Personal Trainers Meet the Needs of Savvy, Cost-Conscious Consumers

The 2009 IDEA Personal Training Programs & Equipment Trends report shows that training styles, equipment and choices have broadened to serve an ever-expanding, discriminating market.



Personal training is still king of the hill in the fitness industry. Whether in an entrepreneurial or a facility setting, trainers are steadily filling sessions as a growing variety of clients are inspired to fitness and wellness through personal training leadership.

Not all personal trainers offer all categories; trainers have tailored their services to match or attract a specific market

share rather than stretch themselves over the vast range of specialty categories. This targeted approach may reflect the rigors of a tough economy, but niche specialization is nothing new among smart trainers.

There is strong growth potential along the continuum, which gives most trainers the luxury of choosing the clientele with whom they are passionate

IDEA Trainer Success

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IDEA's Mission Statement

IDEA and its members are passionately committed to improving the health and fitness of all people. We are focused on delivering compelling member value by imparting knowledge, credibility, inspiration, marketability, and personal and professional growth opportunities.

IDEA's Purpose

To Inspire the World to Fitness®

Core Values

- We believe that ethics come first; fairness and integrity guide all of our decisions and relationships.
- We have a passion for providing fitness information and education.
- Our decisions are guided by the professional needs of our members.

about working. Survey respondents customize their offerings to suit the wide array of clients' ages, abilities and goals—from the apparently healthy and the highly athletic to those who need specialized training like postrehab and back pain prevention programs.

Generally speaking, the survey reveals that training methods focus on function by using a range of techniques, such as strength, balance and flexibility training. Overall, respondents report that they continue to use various types of equipment, both small and large, in order to meet their clients' needs. However, most skilled professionals help clients meet goals with the use of small, portable equipment. These training tools (resistance tubing, stability balls, dumbbells, medicine balls, etc.) remain solidly in the top 10 pieces of equipment most frequently used.

Group personal training activities—such as boot camps, circuit training and social activity groups—are offered by approximately one-third of respondents and appear to be poised for growth.

Client retention is robust across the board. IDEA trainers report that 77% of their clients stay with the business 1 year or longer. A magnified look reveals even more impressive client loyalty: most clients stay with their trainer for more than 5 years (32%), while the remaining customers stay 1–2 years (21%), 2–3 years (15%), 3–4 years (12%) or 4–5 years (8%). Just 12% of clients stay with their trainer for less than 1 year.

Do these numbers reflect your experience? If not, diving into these trends may help you determine what's missing in your mix. What are IDEA personal trainers doing to achieve this longevity among their customers?

Taking the Long View

According to the personal trainer members who completed the 2009 survey, training adults one-on-one remains the bread and butter of their business. The focus within sessions includes strength training, stretching, balance and functional resistance training.

These are the session options offered by over 50% of survey respondents:

- 98% personal training, adult, one-on-one
- 97 strength training
- 96 stretching and/or flexibility
- 96 balance training
- 96 functional resistance training
- 89 flexibility/range of motion assessment
- 86 height and weight assessment
- 85 training for weight management
- 85 personal training, 2 clients share
- 84 balance assessment
- 81 cardiorespiratory interval training
- 79 body weight—only training
- 77 circumference measurements assessment
- 77 body composition assessment
- 77 resting heart rate assessment
- 76 cardiorespiratory circuit training
- 75 cardiorespiratory endurance training
- 73 muscular endurance assessment
- 72 back pain prevention
- 72 cardiorespiratory cross-training
- 72 plyometrics
- 71 senior-specific training
- 70 postrehab following injury
- 70 activity heart rate assessment
- 66 cardiorespiratory endurance assessment
- 65 speed, agility, quickness conditioning
- 65 personal training, youth, aged 18 or younger, one-on-one
- 61 exercise for chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, coronary heart disease)
- 60 nutrition coaching
- 60 personal training, outdoor sessions
- 59 blood pressure assessment
- 58 personal training, 3–5 clients share
- 57 nutrition assessment
- 54 online client reminders and information
- 54 sport-specific training
- 52 walking

How Is Personal Training Offered?

- * One-on-one personal training has once again found itself topping the list of programs, with 98% of respondents reporting that they offer it to their clientele. A little over half (53%) believe one-on-one personal training is stable, while 33% believe there is still potential for growth in the industry.
- * Personal training in which 2 clients share a session is still very popular among IDEA trainers. This year, 85% offer it, a percentage that has held steady from 2008. When we look more closely at who is offering partner training, those trainers who work within their own homes (91%), in personal training studios (90%) and within clients' homes (90%) are slightly more inclined to offer the service.
- * Personal training with 3–5 clients is offered by over half of the respondents (58%); this is up 9 percentage points from last year's results. In addition, 46% of respondents believe this category will continue to grow. The increase is likely due to a combination of factors: (1) the increased popularity of boot camps and circuit

training for small groups; (2) the economies of scale for both personal trainers and consumers; and (3) the social aspect of training in a group, which makes exercise more fun for many.

Michelle Reiter, MS, a fitness professional in Los Angeles, says, "These are exciting times. I believe we are experiencing a shift within our collective culture in taking responsibility for improving our health and wellness; therefore, the potential of our industry is growing evermore!"

"Our clients are looking to us to provide direction and guidance in designing customized programs. I believe what makes a training program successful is not only the trainer's knowledge and expertise, but also serving our clients to the best of our ability, being flexible and adding safety and *fun* to the workouts. I like to use Dr. Wayne Dyer's quote, 'How may I serve?' as my motto for running my personal training business."

According to the survey, only 5% of respondents' clients are younger than 18 years; however, 65% of trainers offer one-on-one personal training for this age group, and 39% offer small-group activities for youth. Even with the con-

stantly increasing numbers of overweight and obese youth, the growth potential in this population is seen as rather small (less than 30%).

Sabrena Merrill, owner of Fitness Logic in Lawrence, Kansas, observes that the majority of clients are middle-aged with adult-aged children. "There really is no 'referral' base to work with, because the kids are already out of the house," she says. When examining this category in more depth, we see that 43% of personal trainers offer programming for teens (13–17 years of age), while only 23% offer programming for kids (12 years and younger). Merrill also feels that some parents do not view structured exercise programs as "safe" for children under 12 years. "I think some of them still operate under the assumption that preadolescents will stunt their growth if they participate in resistance training," she says. "In addition, a significant percentage of parents are overweight or obese and do not place a high time commitment or financial priority on formal exercise. But by the time the kids reach the teen years, their opportunities have really opened up through school programs/sports and the whole family becomes more aware of the

TRAINING BY FACILITY TYPE

How Is Personal Training Offered?

	All Respondents	Health Clubs	Personal Training Gyms	Personal Training in Trainers' Homes	Personal Training in Clients' Homes
n (number)	528	218	105	131	239
personal training, adult, one-on-one	98%	100%	100%	99%	100%
personal training, 2 clients share	85	89	90	91	90
personal training, 3–5 clients share	58	59	61	60	60
personal training, outdoor sessions	60	65	58	73	72
personal training, youth, aged 18 or younger, one-on-one	65	74	75	64	67
personal training, youth, aged 18 years or younger, small-group	39	46	47	40	37

% of respondents offering the activity.

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METHODS USED IN TRAINING SESSIONS

Focus Is on Function

	All Respondents	Health Clubs	Personal Training Gyms	Personal Training in Trainers' Homes	Personal Training in Clients' Homes
n	528	218	105	131	239
Resistance Training					
strength training	97%	99%	100%	99%	99%
functional resistance training	96	98	100	96	98
body weight-only training	79	87	83	84	82
plyometrics	72	79	83	75	77
very slow strength training	38	43	43	43	36
Olympic-style lifting	17	20	21	19	16
Cardiorespiratory Training					
cardiorespiratory interval training	81%	89%	85%	88%	87%
cardiorespiratory circuit training	76	84	81	82	82
cardiorespiratory endurance training	75	83	79	79	78
cardiorespiratory cross-training	72	78	81	78	76
Flexibility Training					
stretching and/or flexibility	96%	97%	98%	99%	98%
Other Training					
balance training	96%	97%	97%	99%	98%
speed, agility and quickness conditioning	65	73	76	70	68

% of respondents offering the activity.

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importance of physical fitness. It is at this time that they may begin to seek the help of a fitness professional.”

Focus Is on Function

Survey respondents report that their training sessions break out as follows: 53% of the time is spent on resistance training, while the remainder is spent on cardiorespiratory (23%) and flexibility training (18%), as well as other training methods (19%). Strength training (97%), functional resistance training (96%), balance training (96%) and stretching/flexibility (96%) are the most commonly used training methods.

Chuck Wolf, MS, director of Human Motion Associates in Orlando, Florida, has a good idea of why trainers are using such techniques so frequently. He says

that to train functionally, a movement pattern must incorporate eccentric loading of the muscle prior to concentric unloading; be triplanar in nature; overcome gravity and ground reaction forces; and incorporate balance and flexibility. “Functional training benefits the client by integrating movements rather than isolating movements; helps promote mobility and stability; can enhance quality of life and daily movement patterns; and can improve overall health and well-being,” Wolf says. “From the trainer’s perspective, this approach creates myriad ways to design programs, provides time efficiency and significantly reduces burn out. It makes training—and our business—fun.”

The majority of the training session is devoted to resistance and flexibility

training; the portion spent on cardiovascular training is just 23%. With heart disease being the number-one cause of death in the U.S. for both men and women, 23% is simply not enough, feels Jason Karp, PhD, exercise physiologist and director/coach of REVO₂LT Running Team™ in San Diego. “Research has shown that low cardiovascular fitness is a strong predictor of death from cardiovascular disease and even of all-cause mortality, with the risk being comparable to the risk associated with other primary cardiovascular-disease risk factors, including diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and cigarette smoking,” Karp says. “Cardiovascular endurance is arguably the most important component of health-related fitness because the functioning of the heart,

lungs and circulatory system are so essential to overall health.”

Among cardiorespiratory training techniques, interval training (81%) is used slightly more than other methods, like cardiorespiratory endurance (75%), circuit (76%) or cross-training (72%).

The most common types of equipment used for cardiorespiratory training are treadmills (78%), followed by elliptical trainers (71%), upright cycles (63%), recumbent cycles (62%) and stair climbers (50%). Equipment that uses more upper-body musculature—such as indoor rowing machines (42%) and arm ergometers (20%)—are used by fewer than half of the respondents.

Benefits of Group Training

Despite all we hear about the economies and profitability of group training, fewer than half of respondents report that they train clients in such activities as small-group circuit training (48%); indoor small-group boot camps (38%); social activity groups (walking or running clubs, group trips, organized group activities) (31%); outdoor group activities (29%); and outdoor boot camps (26%). Although these activities do not rank very high, the majority of the IDEA trainers surveyed believe there is growth on the horizon.

Ayla Preszler, MS, personal trainer and group fitness director at Frog’s Fitness in Long Beach, California, finds

that training in a group setting has many benefits for the personal trainer and for the participants involved: “I see four main benefits to group training: efficiency, cost-effectiveness, motivation/accountability and retention,” she says. “If the trainer takes the time upfront to assess each participant’s fitness level and goals, a well-designed workout should cater to most of the group’s needs. The trainer can then take time during the workout to work with each individual one-on-one to demonstrate modifications and progressions as necessary. The trainer is now designing one workout (with modifications and progressions) that can apply to many individuals.” >>



WORKING WITH GROUPS: IS IT TIME TO GROW?

Benefits of Group Training

	All Respondents	Health Clubs	Personal Training Gyms	Personal Training in Trainers’ Homes	Personal Training in Clients’ Homes
n	528	218	105	131	239
boot camp classes, outdoor	26	31	25	33	29
group activities, outdoor	29	32	26	37	32
small-group boot camps, indoor	38	41	42	47	40
small-group circuit training, indoor	48	54	57	52	50
social activity groups (walking or running clubs, group trips, organized group activities)	31	32	29	37	30

% of respondents offering the activity.

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Ayla further pointed out that for the trainer, group training is a way to increase income while decreasing the hourly cost of a training session for participants. “Instead of training one client per hour, you are training 4, 5 or even 6 clients in an hour and can charge each person a ‘discounted price’ per hour, which will still hold a higher hourly rate overall for the trainer.”

Finally, Ayla has found that group training provides even greater motivation and accountability for participants than one-on-one training. “If someone does not feel like working out, they are no longer just canceling on the trainer; they are canceling on their workout buddies,” she points out. “I also encourage my clients to spur each other on during our workouts. Due to the cost-effectiveness and motivation/accountability that group training provides, I find that participants are eager to come back for more. Affordability does not tend to be a problem, and they have guaranteed workout buddies to share the challenge with. This leads to great retention both for the trainer and for the fitness center in which the trainer is working.”

Programs for Clients With Medical Concerns

Faced with the realities of an aging population, personal trainers work more and more often with clientele who—for a variety of medical reasons—need spe-

cialized instruction. The vast majority of survey respondents have clients with special medical needs (83%), chronic injury (85%) or physical disabilities (54%). In order to assist these clients, trainers offer specialized programs, such as back pain prevention (72%), postrehab following injury (70%) and exercise for chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, coronary heart disease) (61%). In addition, approximately half of the trainers surveyed believe that these types of special programs will continue to grow.

As Anthony Carey, MA, owner of Function First in San Diego, points out, “Nearly every trainer in the field is working with someone who is, was or will be classified as a special population. The prevalence in society of issues such as lower-back pain and cardiovascular disease makes it nearly impossible not to work with a client with medical concerns. And as the current medical model becomes more restrictive, greater numbers of people will be seeking help and guidance from the fitness community. Fitness professionals need to remain within our professional boundaries and within our level of education and experience. Working with special populations requires special preparation.”

Small, Portable Equipment Remains on Top

Survey respondents reported using all types of equipment, with an emphasis

on the smaller portable pieces. These are the 10 pieces of equipment most frequently available:

- 97% resistance tubing or bands
- 97 stability balls
- 95 barbells and/or dumbbells
- 93 balance equipment (BOSU® Balance Trainers, disks, wobble boards, balance boards)
- 90 medicine balls
- 85 foam rollers and small balls
- 81 steps and platforms
- 78 treadmills
- 75 weighted bars
- 71 elliptical trainers

Once again eight of the top 10 most frequently used pieces of equipment are small and transportable. “The growing trend of [using] small, portable pieces of training equipment offers both clients and trainers many benefits in addition to allowing us to train more functionally,” observes Fabio Comana, exercise physiologist with the American



TRAINING SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Programs for Clients With Medical Concerns

	All Respondents	Health Clubs	Personal Training Gyms	Personal Training in Trainers' Homes	Personal Training in Clients' Homes
n	528	218	105	131	239
back pain prevention	72%	72%	72%	75%	73%
exercise for chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, coronary heart disease)	61	65	62	59	61
postrehab following injury	70	69	77	67	70

% of respondents offering the activity.

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Council on Exercise. "However, we must always remember that functional training is not driven by the equipment we use, but by the results we seek. Consequently, while small, portable equipment can be very functional, it depends on how it is utilized. The added benefit of this portable equipment [is that it] allows trainers and clients to select appropriate training environments while not suffering the constraints of the past, [when] we were limited in what we could use outside of the gym. Much of the growth of in-home training can be attributed to the development of effective, small, portable pieces of equipment."

Even though only two pieces of large equipment (treadmills and elliptical trainers) made the list, the majority of those surveyed use stationary items such as pulley equipment (67%), plate-

loaded machines (63%), upright cycles (63%), recumbent cycles (62%), selectorized (pin-selected) machines (62%) and stair climbers (50%).

About the Survey

The **percentage (%)** shows the number of survey respondents who answered yes to a given survey question. All percentages have been rounded up at 0.5 and down at 0.4. Percentages do not necessarily total 100, because of multiple or missing responses.

About the Respondents

IDEA personal trainer members who gave us permission to use their e-mail addresses were sent three e-mail invitations to link to a Web-based survey in February 2009. The 557 trainers who responded represent 77% personal trainers, 12% owners, 4% fitness direc-

tors, 1% personal training directors, 1% general managers and 3% other titles. There was an 8% response rate, with a 95% confidence level and a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error.

About the Demographics

On average, the respondents work at two separate facilities. Forty-three percent offer personal training in clients' homes, whereas 24% offer personal training in their own homes; otherwise, 20% work in fitness-only health clubs, 12% in multipurpose health clubs, 19% in personal training gyms, 9% in Pilates or yoga studios, 10% in parks or recreation programs, 7% in a YMCA/YWCA/JCC, 6% in corporate fitness centers, 6% in group exercise studios and under 6% in other venues. Most of the respondents are self-employed (56%), while 31% are independent contractors and

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PERSONAL TRAINING

26% are employees. A number of trainers (26%) earn additional revenue by selling products to their clientele. As for location, 24% work in suburbs, 33% in large cities, 36% in small cities or towns and 7% in rural areas. Most respondents live in the United States—35% in the West, 26% in the Northeast, 20% in the North Central region and 19% in the South; 4% live in Canada.

About the Clientele

Our trainers serve a predominantly female clientele (72%), with the most common age ranges being 35–44 years (24%), 45–54 years (32%) and 55–64 years (23%). Most clients are at an intermediate fitness level (48%) or beginner fitness level (40%), while only 19% are advanced. While 97% of trainers have clients that are apparently healthy, they also train individuals with special med-

ical needs (83%), chronic injury (85%) or physical disabilities (54%). Amateur athletes (64%) are also a common clientele for trainers, while professional athletes (14%) are clients less frequently. Almost half of all trainers work with children and teens (aged 18 years or younger) (49%), whereas 25% of trainers work with women only.

The average cost of a training session is \$56 (median \$55). Most clients pay for their training sessions either as a package (63%) or as individual sessions (51%); just 14% pay for sessions with a monthly membership fee, and 5% pay with an annual membership fee.

About Median and Mean

The mean (average) is found by adding together all the numbers and dividing by the number of responses. Very large numbers and very small numbers can

create a wide range, which may make an average less representative of most of the people.

The median is the midpoint, meaning 50% of respondents answered above that number and 50% answered below it. A median is useful because it helps eliminate the distortion that an average can cause.

About Health Clubs

The “health clubs” category in the charts includes multipurpose and fitness-only health clubs and YMCA/YWCA/JCC facilities. ■

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