Fitness Apps That Find a Way to Stick Around

People are more likely to drop their gym than an app — here are five that appeal to different types of exercisers

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Fitness spending usually spikes in January, as the optimists among us kick off the new year by joining a gym. But few people stick with the program for long. By June, more than half of these new members will have dropped out.

Although attrition remains stubbornly high across the industry, one fitness category is showing promise: On-demand, app-based fitness programs are retaining new customers longer than their brick and mortar counterparts, according to a new study by Cardlytics, a firm that tracks digital-spending habits of more than 128 million bank accounts. (Names and personal details were kept anonymous.)

Looking at people who started new workout regimens in January 2019, Cardlytics found that after two months, about 50% of the on-demand app users were still going strong—or, still paying their fees, at least—compared with 34% of traditional-gym members and 41% of boutique studio customers.
The gap widened over time: After nine months, the traditional gyms lost all but 24% of their January newbies, studios were down to 23%, while on-demand fitness apps still retained nearly 50%.

The data tracks customer spending, not sweating, so there’s no guarantee that the app users are diligently exercising. But the same is true for gym and studio memberships.

Taking control of your workout schedule is an obvious benefit of the fitness apps. But mobile technology is capable of more sophisticated personalization, says Rema Padman, professor of health-care informatics at Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz College.

“Apps can build in features to engage consumers much better than gyms can,” she says. “The ability to track: What are my numbers today? How does that compare to last week? To last month? To my goals? To my peers? You can fine-tune to whatever objective you want. It’s the quantified self.”

Here’s a look at five popular apps in this increasingly crowded field that appeal to different types of exercisers:

### SWEAT: Kayla Itsines Fitness

**The Cost:** $20/Month; $55/quarter; $120/year

**The Gist:** Geared squarely toward women, known for comprehensive, high-intensity 28-minute workout sessions organized into discrete programs, such as the 12-week Bikini Body Guide or the SWEAT 2020 six-week challenge. Programs offer daily meal plans (options include vegetarian, pescatarian, etc.) with recipes, grocery lists, estimated prep times and photos. Built around Australian fitness personality Kayla Itsines and her training partners, the app encourages users to share photos of fitness milestones on Instagram, where Ms. Itsines has more than 12 million followers. Positive community reaction is virtually guaranteed.

**The Feedback:** “Some people are good at planning their workouts for the day, but I just know I won’t do it,” says Janette Artea, a 29-year-old consumer-brands manager in Dallas. She’s on a 752-day SWEAT streak, including weekly rest days, through Wednesday. “The app tells me, ‘This is the workout for the day. Here’s a video where you can see the examples,’ and it times you,” she said. “Someone else comes up with the exercises, I just show up and do it.”
**BetterMe**

**The Cost:** $30/half-year; $50/year

**The Gist:** Positioning itself as the app for fitness newbies, BetterMe tries to gamify weight loss by incorporating exercise into daily habits. For example: Every time you open the fridge, do 10 squats. The 30-day program starts small, with five-to-seven-minute workout routines. Users input a trove of personal information, from problem body-areas to favorite foods to water consumption, and BetterMe creates a customized diet plan and fitness “game quest.” “We try not to scare people off with a big challenge. We go one step at a time,” CEO Victoria Repa says.

**Peloton**

**The Cost:** Membership: $39/month plus Bike (about $2,000) or Tread (about $4,000); App-only access: $13/month

**The Gist:** Known for its high-end stationary bike with a touch screen that lets users take interactive virtual spin classes, connect with other riders in real time and race against a leaderboard. Has an engaged, enthusiastic social media following. Offers high-octane live streaming classes, up to 14 a day, and more than 1,000 classes on demand. Choices include musical-themed rides, hill climbs and rides with a live DJ. Peloton launched a connected treadmill in 2018. Beyond cycling, the app offers classes ranging from running to boot camp to yoga.
Fitbod

**The Cost:** $10/month; $60/year

**The Gist:** Designed as a strength-training app to be used at the gym or at home. The user keys in whatever gym equipment is available, such as barbells, bench press or medicine balls. Using machine-learning algorithms, the app then generates workouts based on your fitness goals. It has video demonstrations for more than 400 strength exercises. Members can set up several profiles cataloging the equipment at their home gym, work gym, etc.

Beachbody On Demand

**The Cost:** $38.87/quarter, $59/half-year; $99/year

**The Gist:** Most users start with the 21-Day Fix program, which comes with a three-month membership. Based on the personal data you provide, the app will prescribe the next three weeks of your life, from daily workouts to meals, snacks and protein shakes.

**The Feedback:** “I fell in love with this one trainer. She’s physically describing what to do and what not to do with each exercise,” says Maggie Beaudouin, a 29-year-old small-business publicist in Jersey City, N.J. “There are other cast members, one who always shows the modifications for each exercise, and they chat a little. Sometimes I laugh with them.”