

Gaming and smart fitness technology is ready to transform our health - but we must think about its design

Whether it's our laptops, smartphones or smart home devices - the same devices that connect our everyday lives are helping drive an epidemic of loneliness and sedentary behaviour. But technology also offers a lifeline for tackling these issues. Smart fitness products can help transform how individuals exercise - turning workouts into gamified experiences which encourage physical activity through fun and community engagement.

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These products are only set to become more advanced, with new developments in AI and machine learning technologies increasing their potential for data capture on health and wellbeing. The AI in Healthcare market is projected to grow to \$20.9B in 2024 and is estimated to reach \$148.4B by 2029. This is opening up massive potential for growth in the market for seamless and intuitive gamified experiences.

These market projections are already translating into real-world innovations. Companies such as Boxx and Quell, are developing a much more immersive fitness-gaming experience with controllers that track movement and HR, allowing the player to physically control the avatar as they run, jump and battle their way through fantasy games such as Shardfall.

These experiences motivate users by gamifying fitness and making them

compete to achieve goals. This helps them feel inspired to exercise, powered by a sense of achievement. They're also more accessible - providing alternatives for those who are unable to access gyms, or feel uncomfortable exercising in public. And they add a huge variety to workouts, allowing users to move in entirely different ways than using traditional gym equipment.

As people turn to technology for improving fitness, we can expect to see more gaming companies creating immersive experiences integrating health and wellbeing. And how these gaming products look, feel and impact the planet, will be key to transforming health.

But to fully convince users on the benefits of gaming focused exercise, then these products must be created in the right way.

Putting the humanity in gaming design

For gaming technology to help people achieve their health goals, the design must be human-centric. This means designing products that meet the needs, preferences, and limitations of users through understanding the end-user's experience - including understanding the target audience through research, then using those insights to create solutions that are intuitive and serve the user.

Think of it like a pair of running shoes - if the design doesn't consider the runner who will wear them day-in day-out, then the end product will be uncomfortable and will discourage regular exercise. This human-centric approach could even go one step further to include improvements in AI voice assistants such as ChatGPT, which can open up a whole new opportunity for interaction without the onus on button pads and joysticks to enable companies to tap into an older demographic.

Human-centric design can also help address accessibility and cater to

people on all parts of the body spectrum. As gaming becomes an experience that extends outside of screens - and the potential for wearables and goggles increases - it's critical to ensure that all users are considered during the design process, and that the end product caters to them.

We're already seeing examples of this considered in the design of major gaming devices, such as Microsoft's Xbox Adaptive Controller which is tailored for gamers with limited mobility, featuring large programmable buttons and compatibility with a range of assistive devices. Or the Nintendo Switch, which offers flexible play styles - handheld, tabletop, and docked modes which cater to different user preferences. But this needs to go further - and human-centric design should be a constant consideration for gaming companies when developing new products.

By placing the user at the core of the design process, companies can create gaming technology which serve the people who will actually use the device.

Reusable not replaceable

For these innovations to transform health, devices must be designed to escape the cycle of planned obsolescence. Users don't want to feel like they've invested in technology which will be replaced by the newest iteration in a year's time. Instead, they want devices which are built-to last - and can become the tool they rely on to improve their wellness long into the future.

This means creating devices which are durable and sustainable alongside reducing resource use and utilising recycled materials. Whether through durability, repairability, modularity or designing in considerations for use by a second or third user - design for longevity must be at the heart of future hardware design.

Designing the future

Creating the technology needed to revolutionise health through gaming means working with the right partners to integrate human-centred research and sustainable design considerations into every project.

This means working with a design partner who aims to break down assumptions through research - answering the question 'what is the reason for this product to exist?' before finding the market opportunity that brings both genuine value for the user and long-term business potential. The right design partner will also consider materials and sustainability at the beginning of the design process - using sustainability reports that look holistically at the full product life-cycle, identifying the key areas for intervention.

As gaming and immersive fitness becomes a viable option to improve health and wellness, design must lead this change - and create the products that can transform fitness for everyone.

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