

The Evolution of Personal Training: **Industry Data Every Gym Leader Needs for 2026**

Coach-level shifts in personal training, translated for gym operators and fitness leaders



INTRO

Last year tested the fitness industry in ways many operators were already watching closely. Economic uncertainty influenced consumer spending, yet demand for fitness and coaching remained resilient.

What personal trainers are reporting points to a market in motion. In-person training has regained its value as a premium experience built on accountability, community, and trust. Hybrid models have matured alongside it.

AI and automation have moved from experimentation to everyday use. Wearables and health data are changing what members expect from a coaching relationship. GLP-1 medications are reshaping who is walking through the door and why.

Personal trainers work directly with members and adapt quickly. That makes their experience a useful early signal for how the broader coaching market is evolving, and what gym operators and personal training studio owners can expect to see more of.

Insights in this report are based on survey data collected from ABC Trainerize users across different stages of their coaching businesses, including trainers working fully online, hybrid, and in-person.

HUMAN-LED, SYSTEM-POWERED PERSONAL TRAINING INSIDE MODERN GYMS AND STUDIOS

Exploring how personalization, technology, and hybrid delivery are reshaping coaching while reinforcing the importance of human connection.

TECHNOLOGY, TRUST, AND GROWTH: THE 2026 PERSONAL TRAINING REPORT

#1 SCALING SUSTAINABLY IN A MATURING MARKET

Why demand remains strong, acquisition is harder, and growth now depends on systems, delivery models, and retention rather than effort alone.

#2 FITNESS IS NO LONGER THE FULL PRODUCT

How client expectations have shifted toward longevity, specialization, mental wellness, and full-spectrum support beyond workouts.

#3 HYBRID DELIVERY IS NOW THE DOMINANT COACHING MODEL

Why the hybrid model moved from experiment to default, and how delivery evolves as operators move from growth to scale.

On-Demand Content As Retention Infrastructure

How structured, utility-driven on-demand content supports consistency, flexibility, and engagement between visits.

How SETS Hybrid Training Scaled a Community-Driven Franchise with ABC Glofox

Every part of the business—sales funnels, communication, class management, reporting, and payments—is in one intuitive platform. The result is a true focus on growth, connection, and coaching excellence.

#4 AI AS BOTH A COMPETITOR AND A TEAMMATE

How operators are adopting AI to reduce workload while drawing clear boundaries around trust, safety, and oversight.

#5 THE RISE OF THE MEDICATED CLIENT: PRESCRIBING MUSCLE

How GLP-1 medications are reshaping the weight-loss market and positioning strength training as a medical necessity.

#6 WEARABLES, HEALTH DATA AND PERSONALIZED COACHING

Why clients now expect their data to inform training decisions.

THE FUTURE OF TRAINING

How these trends compound, why the middle of the market is thinning, and which business models are gaining momentum.

HUMAN-LED, SYSTEM-POWERED PERSONAL TRAINING INSIDE MODERN GYMS AND STUDIOS

Personal training in 2026 is defined by a clear tension. Technology has become unavoidable, yet the value of coaching remains deeply human.

Across the industry, personal trainers are navigating AI tools, automation, wearables, and on-demand programming while working with members who expect more personalization, flexibility, and long-term support. The result is a redefinition of what personal training looks like inside modern fitness businesses.

Survey data shows that successful personal trainers are not choosing between technology and human connection. They are using systems to protect it. **Hybrid delivery models, digital touchpoints, and automation are increasingly handling the repeatable parts of personal training, creating space for deeper relationships, stronger accountability, and more contextual decision-making.**

This shift is not simply a matter of preference. Many coaches are adopting hybrid and digital models because they make their businesses more efficient to run and easier to scale.

Remote programming, app-based communication, and AI-supported workflows reduce time constraints, expand how many members a trainer can support, and lower the operational friction that comes with delivering every service in person.

As coaches build businesses that extend beyond the gym floor, operators increasingly need to support system-powered personal training, combining in-person sessions with digital tools, hybrid delivery, and data-driven client management.

Gyms and studios that enable this model make it easier for trainers to scale, retain members longer, and deliver more consistent results across their client base.

#1 SCALING SUSTAINABLY IN A MATURING MARKET

Demand for personal training is remarkably healthy. Across the industry, there is virtually no widespread decrease in client volume, signaling that coaching has moved from a "luxury" to a "staple" for consumers.

Surveyed trainers reported no widespread decrease in the number of clients they onboard each month.

Did the number of new clients you onboard monthly decrease in the past year?

60%
NO

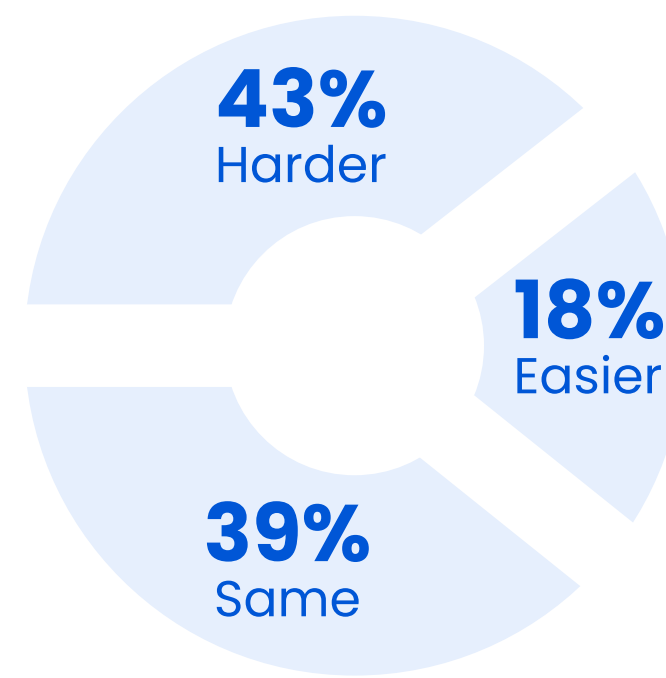
40%
YES

THE ACQUISITION WALL IS REAL

However, while the floor is solid, the ceiling is getting lower. Finding new clients has become a significant hurdle.

4 in 5 trainers report that client acquisition is now either harder or has plateaued compared to previous years, while only about 1 in 5 are seeing an improvement in the ease of acquisition.

How would you compare your success in finding new clients in 2025 compared to previous years?



82% say it's harder or plateaued

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR GYMS AND STUDIOS IN 2026

The acquisition squeeze trainers are reporting is a broader market signal. Consumer attention is fragmented, paid acquisition is expensive, and organic reach has eroded across every channel.

Gyms are fishing in the same shrinking pond. If your growth strategy still depends primarily on new member sign-ups, you are building on an increasingly unstable foundation.

Top-performing operators are the ones extracting more value from the members they already have, through PT uptake, secondary spend, and retention programs that make cancellation harder to justify.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR GYM OPERATORS

Move from session packs to recurring memberships: Bundles that combine in-person sessions with digital access create more predictable revenue.

Build digital touchpoints between sessions: Members who only interact with you during scheduled sessions are the most likely to cancel. Check-ins, app-based programming, and between-session communication close that gap.

Measure PT retention separately. Most gym operators track overall member retention but not PT-specific retention. Knowing how long PT clients stay and where they drop off is the first step to improving it.

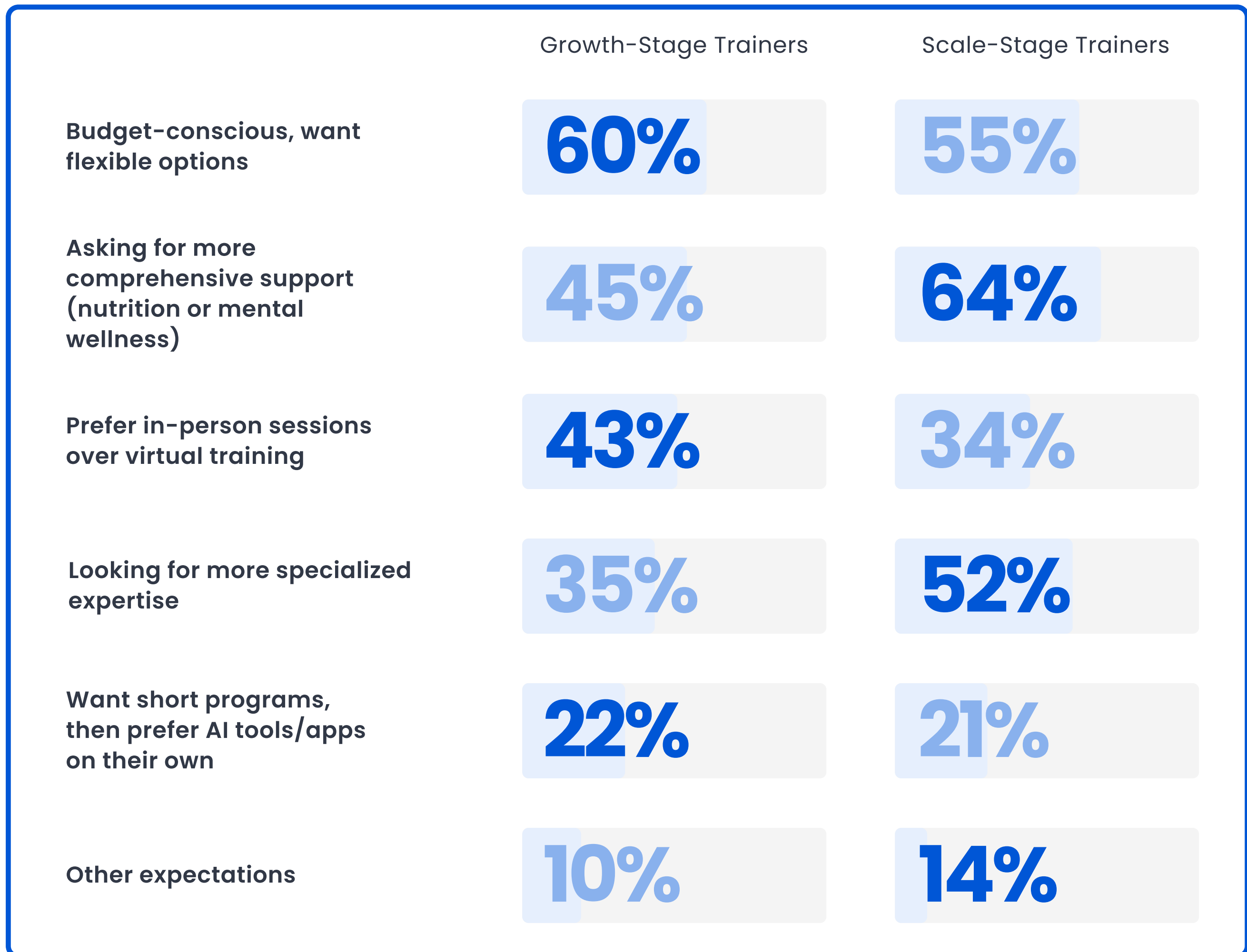
Package PT as a product: Clear tiers, defined outcomes, consistent delivery, not left to each trainer to sell differently.

#2 FITNESS IS NO LONGER THE FULL PRODUCT

Roughly 4 in 10 trainers reported a noticeable change in what clients expect from coaching compared to the prior year. This is not a marginal preference shift. It reflects a market-wide **redefinition of what coaching is supposed to deliver.**

For trainers who are working to scale their businesses (Scale-Stage), the most common shift was increased demand for support beyond workouts.

THE MOST COMMON SHIFTS TRAINERS REPORT



Longevity and healthspan ranked as a top-three industry trend! Aesthetics-led programming is no longer the primary driver for a growing segment of the market.

THREE FORCES DRIVING FULL-SPECTRUM DEMAND

1. The “Human Premium” in an AI World

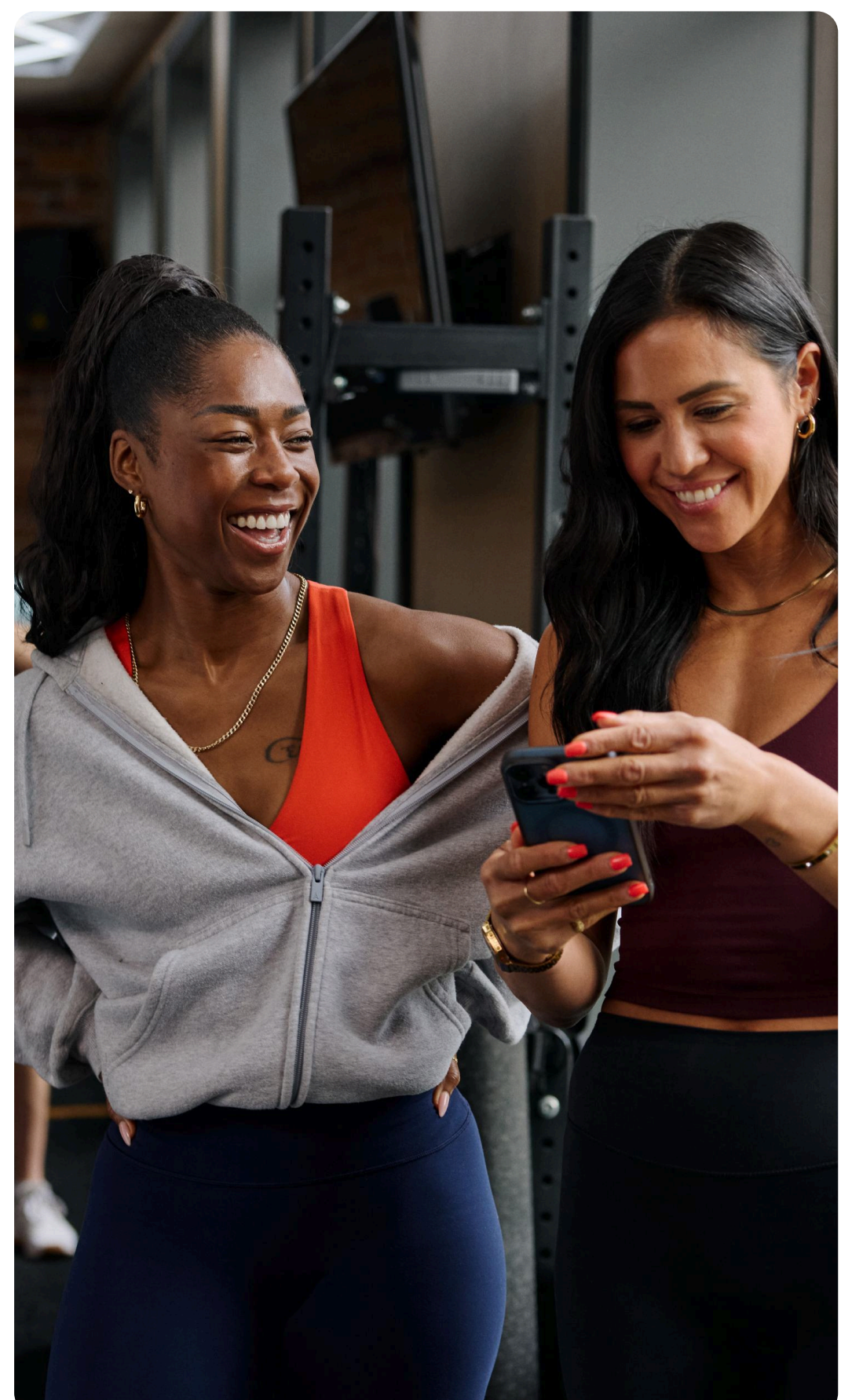
When life intervenes, poor sleep, stress, illness, members value a fitness operator who can adjust expectations with nuance and permission, not just logic.

2. Gen Z and the Rise of Fitness as the “Third Place”

For younger members (Gen Z and younger Millennials), fitness is their new social hub. They aren’t just buying fitness; they are buying identity and community. Gen Z and Millennials want run clubs, social squads, and Hyrox teams. If you train them in isolation, you’ll lose them.

3. The “Silver Tsunami” and Anti-Frailty

While the industry obsesses over 20-somethings, the 55+ demographic holds the loyalty and disposable income. These members need high-level programming to remain “anti-frail,” not just active.



Free Resource: [2025 Year in Review Wellness Watch Report](#)

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR GYM OPERATORS

Build service tiers that go beyond the session: Bundle PT with nutrition coaching, recovery programming, and longevity-focused amenities.

Invest in longevity: Recovery spaces, health scans, performance assessments. Tiered offerings increase spend per member and give you a premium product worth staying for.

Hire specialists and position them as premium: Coaches with expertise in active aging, post-rehab, menopause, or performance attract higher-retention members and justify higher price points.

Catch churn before it happens: Most operators find out a member has disengaged after they have already left. Your member management platform should surface early warning signals, attendance drops, booking gaps, and engagement changes, so your team can act while there is still a relationship to save.

#3 HYBRID DELIVERY IS NOW THE DOMINANT MODEL

The industry has moved past the debate of online versus in-person fitness services. Survey results show that hybrid delivery is now the dominant model for coaches, compared to purely online or in-person coaching.

48%

of trainers report hybrid as their primary delivery model

And there was a clear progression too: Moving from "time-bound" (in-person) to "outcome-bound" (online) is the specific lever that allows trainers to graduate from the "Growth" to "Scale" category.

DELIVERY MODEL BY BUSINESS STAGE

	Growth-Stage Trainers	Scale-Stage Trainers
Hybrid — both in-person and online	49%	46%
Online — high touch, personalized coaching	28%	33%
In-person — 1:1 coaching	20%	14%
Online — low touch, template/general guidance	2%	1%
Other	2%	5%

WHY IT MATTERS

Flexibility has become a core driver of retention and perceived value. Hybrid delivery builds flexibility directly into the service model. When value depends entirely on physical attendance, you become vulnerable to client schedules, travel, and budget constraints.

Members have been trained by streaming platforms, on-demand apps, and remote coaching to expect flexibility as a non-negotiable. They will not downgrade that expectation when they walk through your doors.

At the same time, purely digital coaching models face growing challenges with engagement and content fatigue.

In contrast, **hybrid models that anchor digital delivery to an ongoing relationship consistently demonstrate stronger retention.**

Gyms and studios that cannot support hybrid-enabled coaching are not just behind the curve; they are actively making it harder for their trainers to compete and their members to stay.

On-Demand Content Keeps Members Engaged

On-demand content is how you monetize the “other 165 hours” of the week. It allows a client to pivot from their gym visit to a 20-minute home mobility flow on a stressful Tuesday without breaking their streak.

Survey data reveals a specific demand for utility over volume.

Here’s what coaches are prioritizing for 2026:

Format Matters:

- Multiple difficulty levels in one workout **71%**
- Equipment-specific **54%**
- Equipment-free / bodyweight **52%**
- Demo-style, plug-and-play videos **50%**
- Follow-along workouts **38%**

Top Themes:

- Mobility & flexibility **68%**
- Warm-ups & cool-downs **67%**
- Muscle building **62%**
- Mental wellness & recovery **60%**
- Fat loss **61%**

Duration:

- 30–45 minutes **58%**
- 10–20 minutes **53%**
- Modular workouts **53%**

Where the Hybrid Model Breaks Down in Practice

Even though hybrid coaching is now the most common model, many trainers are still struggling to keep clients engaged. And it’s not for complicated reasons. The same problems keep showing up.

The biggest issues trainers report are:

- #1** Content Customization and Delivery
- #2** Workout Variety and Boredom
- #3** Motivation and Accountability
- #4** Check-ins and Progress Tracking
- #5** Challenges with Tech

This confirms that retention does not fail because of training quality, but because members lose structure, feedback, and momentum between sessions. These gaps map directly to the need for structured on-demand content, wearable-informed adjustments, and consistent check-ins inside hybrid models.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR GYM OPERATORS

PT programs that only exist on the gym floor are structurally exposed; **building digital continuity** between sessions is a retention move, not a technology experiment.

Recurring hybrid memberships outperform session packs on both revenue predictability and member retention.

On-demand content, especially mobility, recovery, and nutrition guidance, keeps members billing and engaged during the gaps.

Evaluate whether their current tech stack supports hybrid delivery or creates friction for trainers trying to maintain client contact between sessions.

#4 AI AS BOTH A COMPETITOR AND A TEAMMATE

In 2026, AI is a double-edged sword.

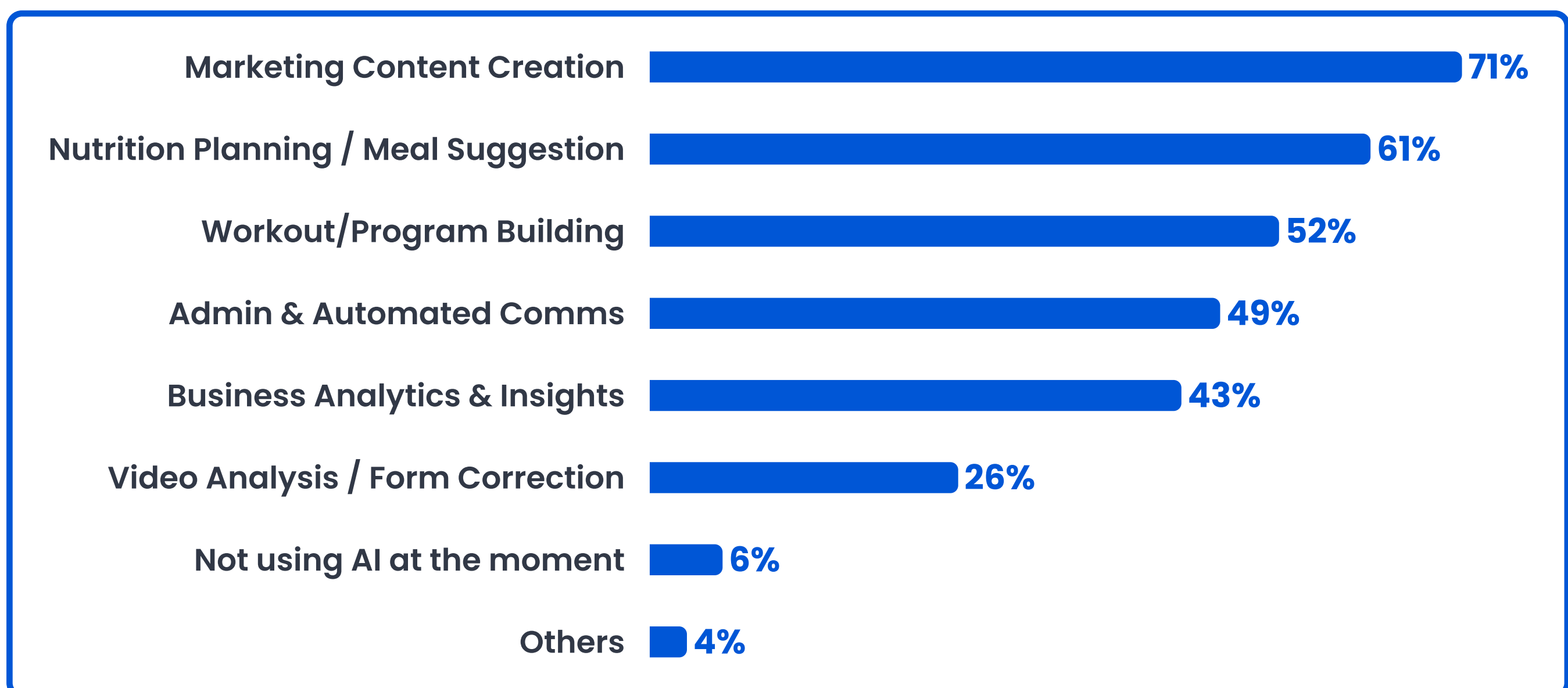
It is simultaneously the

top trend

expected to impact the industry (67%) and the greatest perceived threat, with 62% of trainers concerned about competition from low-cost or AI-based consumer apps.

UNIVERSAL ADOPTION: THE TOP 3 USE CASES

Despite the fear of AI apps, 64% of respondents are already using AI regularly and finding it helpful. The data shows that trainers are using AI for simple, backend tasks to stay competitive:



Shared Risks: The Top 3 Concerns

Trainers are adopting AI as an assistant, but they are drawing a firm boundary on where it stops. The top three concerns are:

1. Loss of personal connection

2. Accuracy and safety

3. Client perception

WHY IT MATTERS

Only around 8% of surveyed trainers are hesitant to use AI. Those riding the wave have realized that while AI can handle the logic of fitness (reps, sets, and schedules), it cannot provide the “Human Premium” (empathy, context, and accountability). By using AI to handle the administrative friction, you can buy back the time needed to be more human with your clients.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR GYM OPERATORS

Embed AI into your operations, not alongside them:

When AI lives inside your core platform for programming, check-ins, and client communication, your team uses it consistently, and you maintain visibility. Separate tools create gaps.

Use AI to free up coaching time:

Program templates, automated check-ins, and AI-assisted marketing reduce the admin burden on trainers, giving them more time to retain members.

Keep the coach in the loop:

AI should support delivery, not replace oversight. Errors in programming or client communication damage trust fast. The coach owns the relationship; the tool assists it.

Watch Our Latest Webinar: [The Intelligent Fitness Operator: Thriving in the Age of AI](#)

#5 THE RISE OF THE MEDICATED CLIENT: PRESCRIBING MUSCLE

The widespread adoption of GLP-1 medications (like Ozempic, Wegovy, and Zepbound) has created the fastest-growing demographic in the fitness industry. This is no longer a niche; it is a mass-market shift that is medicalizing the role of the personal trainer.

Key Industry Signals:

The Demographic Explosion

Approximately 1 in 8 adults (12%) have now used GLP-1 medications, a figure that has more than doubled in the last 18 months.

The Muscle Crisis

Clinical data indicate that without resistance training, up to 15–60% of the weight lost on these drugs can be lean muscle mass. This phenomenon, often called “medication-induced sarcopenia,” creates a lowered metabolic rate and potential long-term frailty.

The Shift in Demand

Major fitness chains and franchises are pivoting rapidly, launching dedicated “GLP-1 Support Programs” that prioritize strength over cardio.

The traditional “weight loss client” who might be motivated by vanity is being replaced by the “medical necessity client.” This is one of the strongest recession-proof revenue streams available to fitness operators that necessitates expert coaching.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GYM OPERATORS

Build a dedicated GLP-1 program now: This segment arrives already motivated and medically directed. Operators who move first have a clear advantage before it becomes standard.

Market it explicitly: Members on GLP-1 medications are actively searching for facilities that understand their needs. If your program is not visible, you are invisible to them.

Shift the programming: Fewer high-intensity cardio formats, more progressive strength work, shorter sessions. This is not a minor adjustment, it is a different product.

Build referral pipelines with local clinics: Obesity clinics and endocrinologists need somewhere to send patients. Most gyms and studios have not touched this channel yet.

#6 WEARABLES, HEALTH DATA, AND PERSONALIZED COACHING

Wearable technology is no longer emerging. It is assumed. What has changed is how clients expect that data to be used.

32% of trainers rank wearables, health data, and performance tracking among the most impactful industry trends in 2026

The data signals a clear shift in expectations. Clients are no longer impressed by tracking alone. Step counts, calories, and raw metrics are table stakes. What they now want is **interpretation**.

They are increasingly turning to two sources for meaning: AI tools and human coaches. AI can provide logic and pattern recognition at scale, but it cannot contextualize stress, motivation, injury history, or emotional state. **That gap is where coaching value now lives.**

Coaches as a Data Translator

Data-driven coaching is the ultimate retention tool because it proves you are watching. It creates a feedback loop that an AI app cannot yet replicate with the same level of empathy and nuance.

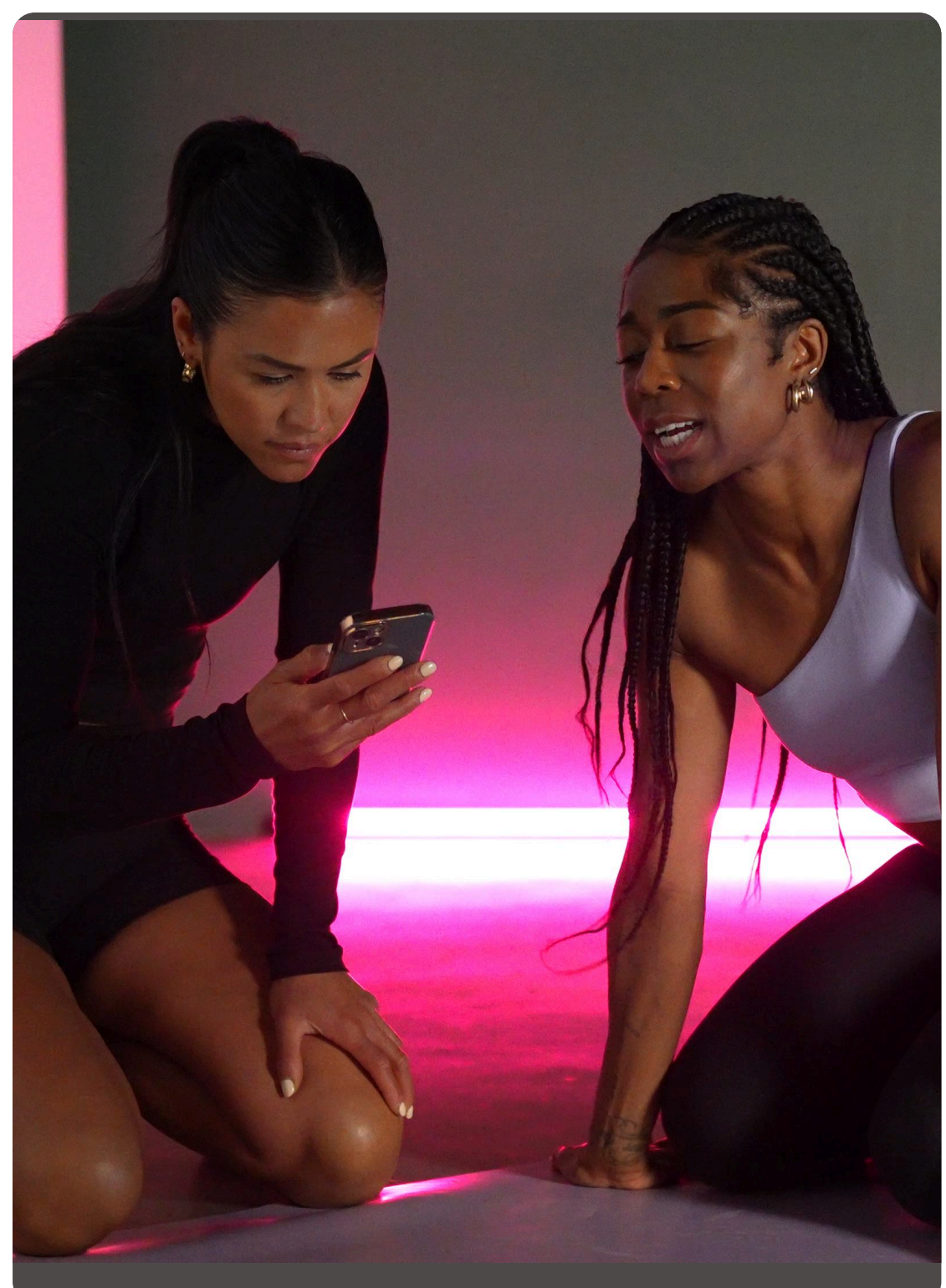
WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GYM OPERATORS

Act on the data your members are already wearing: Sleep scores, HRV, readiness metrics, PT programs that engage with that data deliver measurably more value than those that don't.

Train staff to have data conversations: Knowing what low HRV means for today's session costs nothing but time. Most gyms have not prioritized it.

Audit your tech stack for wearable integration: If your platform does not support it, that is a gap worth closing.

Use data to make cancellation harder: Members who can see their own progress in their biometrics have fewer reasons to leave.



THE FUTURE OF TRAINING

The trends shaping personal training are not isolated. They compound. Harder acquisition, higher expectations, hybrid delivery, AI, medicalized weight loss, and data-driven coaching all point to the same conclusion: the traditional 1:1 session model or the basic gym memberships are no longer sufficient on their own.

As a result, the middle of the fitness market is thinning. Operators offering moderate customization at moderate prices without systems are facing the highest strain.

The demographic shift matters too. Active aging clients, GLP-1 users, and community-driven younger members are becoming the dominant growth segments. These are not passing trends. They represent a structural change in who is walking through gym doors and what they expect when they get there.

For operators, the opportunity is clear. Personal training is one of the highest-margin, highest-retention services a gym or PT studio can offer, but only when it is built on the right infrastructure.

The gyms that will lead in 2026 and beyond are not the ones with the most trainers or the most sessions on the schedule. They are the ones that have built scalable systems around human coaching, combining in-person expertise with digital delivery, AI efficiency, and data-informed programming.

Human-led, system-powered coaching is not a vision for the future. It is what the fitness market is already moving toward. The question for operators is whether their facility is equipped to keep up with it.



FINAL WORDS

The personal training industry is not being disrupted; it is being refined. In 2026, success belongs to the operators who build systems around human coaching, designed to scale, retain, and deliver consistent outcomes across every location.

Attract new members, keep your community engaged, and **boost revenue with a single platform** built to help fitness businesses thrive.

[**Get a demo now!**](#)