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Fitness Apps: For the fit and the unfit

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4



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Fitness Apps

So you're not a gym bunny and haven't spent the morning running around the block before heading to work. Your main engagement with sport is watching it on the TV and chatting about it with your friends on social media or over a glass of something. But, like most people, you've got a smartphone and can't have failed to notice that in the world of technology one of the most important areas of growth and focus is in the monitoring and improvement of the fitness of our bodies. Corporations are interested in a fit workforce. Technology businesses see rising opportunities not just for sales of new devices, but for the expansion of their reach into the smartphone environments of a range of different demographic groups. Crucially, health services are increasingly keen on prevention rather than cure. In this white paper, we examine the 'activity trackers' which have started appearing on our smartphones, not requiring any external device (or additional expenditure) but using the technology within the phone (including accelerometers, GPS location and internet connectivity) and the engagement of people keen - or persuadable - to use it.

Recent research has highlighted the dangers and cost of global health and fitness issues. "Within the next ten years China, India, and the United Kingdom are projecting losses in national income of US\$828 billion due to reduced economic productivity associated with chronic disease" (Sweeney and Quimby 2012). These health problems include high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol - often caused by smoking - weight gain, inactivity and poor diet. At the local level, the North-West of England and cities such as Salford in particular have their own challenges with 27% of adults in 2012 recorded as obese. This long term effect of this situation is a much lower life expectancy (Public Health England, 2012). The picture is similar across Europe, where we face tough health challenges, such as heart disease, which is cited as the number one killer, causing almost twice as many fatalities as cancer across the continent (Townsend and Nichols, 2015). These premature deaths in

"Cities such as Salford have 27% of adults who are recorded as obese."

Europe are closely linked to social inequality, particularly related to lower income brackets and less privileged communities (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 2007).

As a way of countering this health crisis we look at the range of fitness apps now available and the type of people using them. From this comparison we then discuss a case study regarding the development and deployment of a fitness app aimed at the unfit - and people whose interest in the 'beautiful game' can be brought to bear upon their own fitness through the 'gamification' of digital fitness. We conclude this white paper with some simple recommendations for encouraging engagement in fitness activity in those least interested in it.

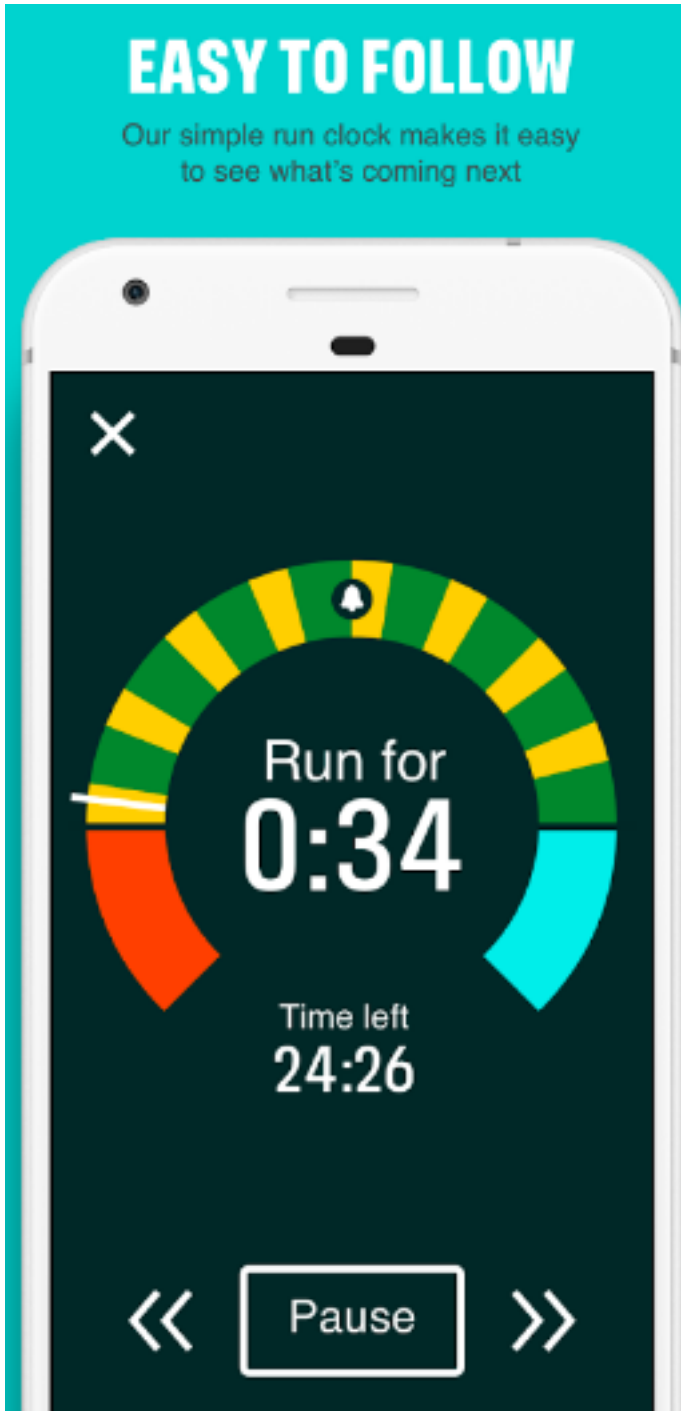


A Quick Guide to Fitness Apps

Apple's engagement with the sector began with their Health App which was introduced with iOS8 in 2015. The app aimed to pool the data being generated by the range of other apps and devices connected to the smartphone - including the Apple Watch - was a major marker for this trend. Health services and applications were being heralded in 2014/15 as the 'next big thing' for smartphones and tablets. This technological development was driven by the availability of more complex processors and advances in sensor hardware. Together with the growth in wearable technology means the technology giants are rushing to develop and promote health related products. *Facebook*, *Google* and other major players are all engaged with initiatives and investment in this area. The market for smartphone apps alone is predicted to have grown 10-fold from \$US2.4 billion in 2013 to \$US26 billion by 2017 (Frank, 2014).

From a consumer's point of view there are many advantages in using a personal fitness app. People can explore their options and choose the app that aligns with their personal motivations and goals without introducing too much expense or risk.

For small to medium enterprises (SMEs), engaging with this multi-billion and multinational market may seem daunting at first but increasingly client organisations of all kinds are looking to involve themselves in this trend and are demanding new and innovative ways of interacting with their customer base through digital channels. The range of apps is vast, but these do cluster around a small number of categories. First off, there's the 'getting started' range. This is the range we will focus on later in the case study.



The “Getting Started” Category of Apps

Couch to 5k

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/apps>

This is one of the go to apps for anyone feeling out of shape and looking to improve their overall fitness. The app focuses on helping users reach achievable goals in an achievable time frame (nine weeks). The use of well-known celebrity coaches keeps users motivated as they start to build a regular fitness routine.



Fitnet

<http://fit.net/>

Fitnet is the app for people who can't make it to the gym. Five to seven minute workouts are delivered by professional instructors to help users get build their fitness. The innovative use of the phone's camera to help ensure that instructions are followed correctly.



Freeletics

<https://www.freeletics.com/en>

Freeletics focuses on offering a broad choice of workout categories to fit into the time available. The workouts cover strength or cardio training, and last between 15 and 45 mins. The real selling point of this app is the flexibility. The tailored workouts allow users to build solid foundations and can guide users all the way up to being an expert.



FitBit

<https://www.fitbit.com>

Fitbit takes a different approach. Users engage with the service by purchasing a reasonably priced wristband that allows tracking of everyday movements (primarily steps). This measurement allows users to track their daily movements and get an idea of how active they are, while those who are more sporting can track their favourite activities. Fitbit have also invested in building community tools that encourage friendly competition and in turn motivate users to push themselves further. Purchasing a device is not absolutely required - many of the features of FitBit are available through the app.



The “Keen But Otherwise Busy” Category of Apps

This category of apps are for the more dedicated, fitness has become important for them and is a regular part of their routine, but they still have lives outside of fitness. These apps often include a ‘gamification’, incorporating competition in a fun context. This category also includes music apps that offer entertainment during exercise.

Zombies, Run!

<https://zombiesrungame.com/>

Once you have established a solid exercise routine keeping interested can be tricky. The *Zombies, Run* uses gamification to overcome boredom. “Only a few have survived the zombie epidemic. You are a Runner en-route to one of humanity’s last remaining outposts.” The game works by introducing challenges on a normal run. Zombies appear, supplies appear and these diversions add a few more metres to your run. It is no surprise that this game is one of the best selling health and fitness apps.

Charity Miles

<http://www.charitymiles.org/>

Getting fit has its own benefits but you can’t beat the feeling of donating to charity. Every mile you run, walk or cycle helps to raise money for your favourite charity. The app is currently focused towards US charities which will discourage some users, and although the app uses a clean design it doesn’t really have any features that benefit the end user.

Motion Traxx

<http://www.motiontraxx.com/>

Keeping up motivation in the gym can be tricky. After 20 mins on a treadmill things can get a bit dull. That’s where Motion Traxx positions itself by providing you an expert trainer. You are given a clear workout plan that plays up-tempo music and provides guidance on keeping focused and motivated while you get yourself fit. Motion Traxx wants to be your health companion and aims to provide the support you need to get fitter.



The “Fitness Fanatic” Category of Apps

The “Fitness Fanatic” apps are for those who are serious about their fitness regime to the extent that it occupies all their free time. This range includes tools for professional sportspeople whose record performance statistics for their continuous improvement.



Nike+ Training club

Nike are at the forefront of using technology to help support users’ health and fitness routines. Workouts are broad and varied and allow users to tailor their workouts based around specific needs. The app is simple to use and does a great job of switching between browsing and workout modes. When exploring content the app is refined and elegant but as you switch to an activity the UI becomes big and bold, making it easy to tap buttons and read the screen while in motion. Interaction is further improved and simplified when the app is paired with the Nike Watch.



Strava

Strava is a market leading app for serious athletes for good reason. Not only is there a great set of personal fitness tracking tools for individuals, the app is built around bringing users, and their social groups (fitness clubs and teams) together. The app also provides the opportunity for users to share data including preferred routes. Most importantly Strava recognises that athletes at this level are looking for friendly competition and that is the app’s real hook.

MyIthlete

<http://www.myithlete.com>

MyIthlete has an innovative focus on personal fitness. Using a sensor the user takes a 1 min reading of their heart rate. The algorithm then evaluates their heart rate variability and advises on how best to train. The simple interface guides users through the process of collecting data and provides clear advice on whether to train hard, normally, or to take it easy. This app puts the user in control of their own training and recovery.

ithlete
Train.Recover.Perform

What do Fitness Apps do?

From these examples it can be seen that fitness apps come in all shapes and sizes and are tailored for a range of different uses and users.

The most successful apps all use a simple and consistent combination of criteria.

The keys to fitness app success,

- Understanding the user's situational needs and goals (successful)
- The technology must not be an optional extra, but become part of the user's overall health approach
- Long-term and intermediate goals are important for the user

- Relapse is likely and the best apps help users through the tough times
- Users need to quickly identify with the meaningfulness of the app or programme
- Nudges need to come in many shapes and sizes including push alerts. But when the nudges stop, you need to ensure the user has taken ownership of their goals

Often health and fitness apps have most success when they consider and apply the principles commonly seen in computer games,

- Guide the user through the setup process to help them develop an understanding of the game.



Answer the questions, What am I doing? Why am I doing it? Why should I persevere?

- Start with easy levels that allow the user to demonstrate their existing achievements and let them feel a sense of reward
- Build a system that increases the difficulty level just enough at each stage without the deterring the user from the continuing
- If the challenges are too easy users are likely to get bored and stop playing
- If the challenges are frequently too difficult users are likely to become frustrated and give up



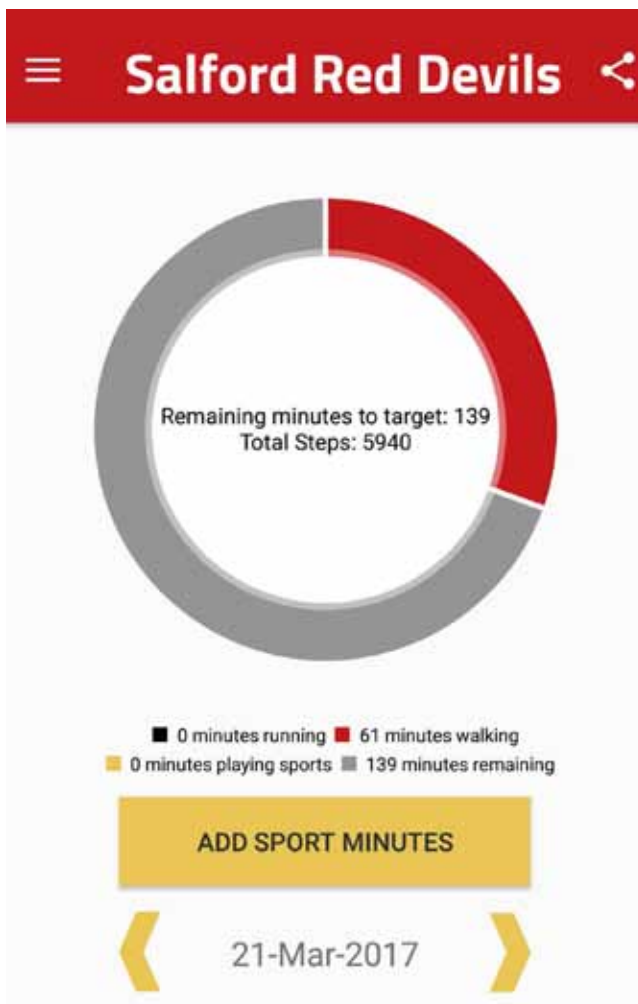
“Most crucially - a key criteria of success for health apps is understanding how to encourage and motivate your users,

- How does the app behave when a user first starts using a fitness app?

Many users tend to rely on notifications to encourage them to perform an action.

- How does the app help a user to improve their perception of themselves?

“I am fitter” / “My football team helped me get fitter”



**Footy
Fit**

VIDEO

TWEETS

NEWS

FIT

LIVE



Fit League



Twitter Feed



Videos



News



Fixtures/Results



Team



Settings



About

Case Study - Fan Fit

What is Fan Fit?

Fan Fit is a smartphone app that helps organisations like sports clubs to communicate with their fans and get them thinking more about having active, healthy lifestyles. The app is designed to increase fitness awareness and empower fans and players through a smartphone. The app can track various activities including walking and running and integrates with social media and other key information channels. It can be rebranded to an organisations colours, brand and information. It has been developed through research at the University of Salford. All aspects of digital business, football fans and communications are key areas of research for the University of Salford's Centres for Sports Business and Digital Business. Both centres work in conjunction with staff, students and external partners to understand these specialist but significant areas of business activity.

How well does it do it?

The first phase of the **Fan Fit** project created a basic iPhone and Android version of the app and it was trialled with several focus groups of students, football fans, coaches and staff. It was also demonstrated to a number of sports clubs at different levels. The original version of the app was designed for Football clubs and as a result was called Footy Fit. The app was then rebranded as **Fan Fit** and a version was created for the Salford Red Devils Rugby club. This change reflected the wider multi-sport and multi-organisational potential of the app.

The concept was well received but there were many areas identified for improvement and new functionalities suggested through our research. We took a user-centred design approach to the project. This means we conducted a number of User Experience (UX) tests including focus groups and interviews. As a result we found that there were several usability problems with the

visual design and functionality. The plan for the next phase is to take on board this feedback and produce a new version to be used in universities or other large organisations.

Fan Fit is about combining people's interest in sport with interaction between fans and players online, and becoming more aware of their own fitness and wellbeing through friendly competition. Sports clubs at all levels are adopting apps, social media and the spirit of Web2.0 (McCarthy et al., 2014). Larger clubs have communications departments and both large and smaller clubs are using free tools and software to connect with their fans through platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *YouTube*. Fans of organisations and clubs at all levels are using smartphones and cameras to produce video and photography to feed into these social media platforms to talk to fans (Araújo et al., 2014). Many organisations have a basic website and social media presence, but clubs and fans at all levels are interested in the effective use of digital media and apps to further engage and connect with each other (Kuzma et al., 2014). Digital media use in football clubs has risen dramatically with digital media marketing driving a demand for content (Lin and Yazdanifard, 2014).

Organisations and their brands increasingly have a responsibility to their supporters and communities to encourage wellbeing, healthy living and exercise. This community support extends to schools, colleges, wellbeing drives and initiatives at national and international level. This dual purpose of engagement and conversation through digital platforms and the growth in popularity of fitness apps provides an excellent rationale for the **Fan Fit** app.

FanFit

WELCOME TO

Digital fitness app

GET IN

SPORT AND FITNESS A

Are you a sports fan or manager who is interested in clubs

[Home](#)

[Blog](#) ▾

[About Fan Fit](#)

[Contact Us](#)



TO FAN FIT

App for sports fans

TOUCH



AT YOUR FINGER TIPS

updates, live scores and keeping fit? Then check out Fan Fit

Summary

Fan Fit is a real world research project aiming to develop considerable impact and understanding in this area. It combines social media and fitness data together to make an engaging experience for sports fans.

The infographic above demonstrates the preferences of the general public for an app such as **Fan Fit**. 69% of those surveyed enjoyed watching football and 25% enjoyed playing. 94% owned a smartphone but only 19% a wearable fitness device. 49% of people would be very likely or likely to use an app such as **Fan Fit** and 32% said they would use it, possibly. From these results, the project concluded that the target audience and appetite for a project such as **Fan Fit** could well be significant.

The project so far has been used by sports clubs, staff and students at the University and several student projects. The project is white labelled  meaning that it can be easily fitted with the sentiment  different brands. We are also actively seeking other organisations from sport, education and elsewhere who are interested in participating with this project. In addition to staff and student projects, we are also working with several external digital companies including UX experts Sigma.

The UX of the app, is of critical importance. User experience design (UX, UXD or UED) is the process of enhancing people's experience, satisfaction and brand loyalty by improving the usability, ease of use, and pleasure provided in the interaction between them and the product. With each iteration and version of the app, the UX testing focus groups and interviews help us to identify problems in the ease of use of the app and also to identify new features to develop. Where there are patterns in user feedback, we can respond to this using our multi-faceted team.

We have identified that there is a huge and expanding market for health and fitness smartphone apps. The fitness market is primarily for fitness fans and would tend to be associated with wearables such as wristbands. Our approach is to create a fitness app for non-fitness fans aligned with organisations / popular brands. Sports clubs are examples of high impact brands, which contain many friends and family relationships. These are high in social capital and trust and as such, fitness can be used as a motivator for gamification and fun with a smartphone app branded towards a favourite brand as a hook. The addition of content geared towards this brand and aligned with the social capital of players and other club celebrities provides further motivation to encourage non-fitness fans to engage with the app and think more about their physical movements.

We are keen to speak to any digital industry firms, research organisations or sports clubs that would like to further discuss any aspect of this whitepaper.



Recommendations for using fitness apps

References

- Be clear and honest what category your current fitness levels places you into

Getting a 'starter' app won't help you shave seconds off your 10k personal best, and a 'fitness fanatic' app will do nothing more than demotivate you if you're just starting out.

- Choose an app where the UX is immediately friendly

As soon as you adopt an app you start filling it with your data and it's not easy. If you decide later that you want to change, to extract that data and transfer it to another app.

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