

iFit.com

Solution Overview

Industry

Health and fitness

Architecture

Two-tier

Client: Microsoft® Internet Explorer and Microsoft Windows Media™ Player. (Options: Microsoft NetMeeting®, Macromedia Flash Player.)

Server: Web site hosted on an AS/400, running IBM HTTP Web Server and DB2. Content is stored on an INTERVU system running Windows NT® and Windows Media Server.

Software Used

Microsoft Windows NT
Microsoft Windows Media Player
Microsoft Windows Media Server
Microsoft NetMeeting
Macromedia Flash Player

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Colleen Logan
Director of Marketing
ICON Health & Fitness

Using Windows Media™ streaming technologies, iFit.com transforms a home workout into the future of fitness. With no waits for downloads, iFit.com rapidly streams a “virtual personal trainer” over the Internet in the form of a high-quality audio and video workout that actually controls the consumer’s fitness equipment. Consumers simply log on, begin streaming, and experience a more exciting, motivational, and truly interactive workout.

Picture this: you’re running along a trail in spectacular Waimea Canyon, with motivational, heart-paced music and the encouraging voice of a virtual personal trainer urging you onward. Only you’re really at home in the family room, working out on your treadmill. The video and audio accompaniments—together with digital signals controlling the speed and incline of your treadmill—are coming to you via your PC, courtesy of Windows Media and an innovative, patented, interactive technology and Web site called iFit.com. This technology is now included in several brands of exercise equipment offered by ICON Health & Fitness, the world’s largest manufacturer of fitness equipment.

ICON Health & Fitness, based in Logan, Utah, employs 5,000 people in the United States and Canada and makes fitness equipment under such well-known company-owned brand names as NordicTrack, ProForm, HealthRider, Weider, and Image. In mid-November 1999, ICON beta-launched the iFit.com Web site, together with iFit.com-compatible treadmills, combining two hot areas: Internet appliances and personalized e-services. The company is now adding the technology to its other exercise equipment, including ellipticals, stationary bikes, and home gyms. The opening price point for an iFit.com-compatible treadmill is a ProForm model at \$599.

“With iFit.com, we’ve got something really revolutionary—the world’s first Internet fitness appliance, and some great reasons to use it,” says Colleen Logan, ICON’s director of marketing. The streaming media, Website-controlled workouts are both more enjoyable and more motivational than traditional home exercise sessions, according to those who have tried the new technology. And more of them are trying it every week: the iFit.com Web site has been experiencing double-digit increases in the number of streams week over week, ever since the site went live late last year.

How It Works

To take advantage of iFit.com, home exercisers simply use a special cable to connect their compatible exercise equipment to their nearby PC. Then they log onto the Web site and select a workout. The Web site not only streams the selected audio and video workouts to their PC but also controls the equipment via digital cues—adjusting the

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ICON Health & Fitness

speed and incline of their treadmill, changing the weight on home gyms, and controlling the resistance level of bikes and ellipticals. All workout protocols are developed by certified personal trainers. In addition to streaming workouts (basic, audio-enhanced, or audio- and video-enhanced), users who add a Webcam (now available for as little as \$59) will be able, with the assistance of Microsoft® Netmeeting® conferencing software, to schedule live, one-on-one sessions with an ACE-certified personal trainer. The trainer can watch the user work out and provide tips to help the user get the most out of the workout.

Future plans for the Web site include:

- Personalized workouts, database-driven from each user's personal fitness profile history, designed to provide optimum results for each individual.
- Interactive real-time treadmill competitions, ranging from world-wide events to a group of friends competing against each other. Such events could have scenery, topography, and distance set up to match a real race, such as the New York Marathon.

Why Windows Media?

In selecting a streaming media technology, ICON had two key criteria:

- It had to provide the highest quality audio and video in order to motivate users. "A subpar audio experience or jerky video would not provide the kind of motivation we wanted to offer users, says Logan. "We're offering an experience similar to that of a health club, and we wanted to provide the same level of quality."
- The audio and video had to synchronize perfectly with the digital signals

the PC was sending to the exercise equipment. "If the trainer's voice told the user that the treadmill was about to speed up and nothing happened—or if the treadmill speed increased before the trainer could alert the user—it wouldn't work," said Logan. "All the signals had to arrive at exactly the same time."

ICON examined three technologies: Windows Media, Real, and Quicktime. "Of the three streaming media technologies we looked at, only Windows Media was able to provide the necessary synchronization," says Logan.

Another key differentiator between the products was cost: the Microsoft software comes with the Windows® 2000 operating system and is also available for free download (connect-time charges may apply). "With Windows Media Player and Server, as well as the NetMeeting software we use for our one-on-one personal training sessions, there are no licensing fees," says Tracy Cox, ICON's MIS Internet manager. "The other products would have required us to pay fees on a per-stream basis—and that would have been prohibitively expensive."

Solution Architecture

The iFit.com Web site is a two-tier solution. Client systems need only Microsoft Internet Explorer and Microsoft Windows Media Player. Users who want to have one-on-one sessions with a personal trainer also need Microsoft NetMeeting (which is a part of Windows 2000); and if they want to see image animation, they will need Macromedia Flash Player, a third-party plug-in.

The next release of iFit.com will include ActiveX® controls and COM objects that will control the fitness equipment in a different manner (currently it is controlled

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by sending it "chirps," or .WAV files). The new controls will also allow the equipment to send data back to the Web site.

The Web site content is stored on a system hosted by INTERVU, a leading service provider for Internet audio and video delivery solutions. The system runs the Windows NT® Server operating system and Windows Media Server.

The database functionally drives the system, building a list of workouts based on criteria entered by the user and then sending a call to the INTERVU network. Communication between the browser, Web display, and database takes place via Net.Data macros.

Development tools used to create the solution include Microsoft Windows Media Encoder, Microsoft On Demand Producer, the Microsoft Windows Media Indexer, the Windows Media SDK, and Sonic Foundry's Stream Anywhere. "The Microsoft tools were very straightforward and extremely intuitive to work with," says Tracy Cox, ICON's MIS Internet manager. "They've got wizards to walk you through all the steps. We were very impressed."

Multiple Revenue Opportunities

While ICON is still developing its business model, it has identified a wealth of revenue opportunities for the iFit.com technology. These include:

- Advertising revenues
- Monthly subscription fees, similar to those of a health club, giving users access to the entire database of streamable workouts
- Separate fees for one-on-one, live, Web-based videoconference sessions with a personal trainer

- Fees for consulting with a personal trainer through forums or e-mail
- Fees to have a custom workout created to meet a user's specific goals
- Fees to participate in online competitions
- Fees to participate in live Webcasts led by celebrities, such as iFit.com spokesperson Steve Young, the San Francisco 49ers All-Pro NFL quarterback. These Webcasts could be one-time "pay -per-view" events or monthly events to which users could subscribe.
- Revenues from selling hardware upgrades that allow two-way communication between the exercise equipment and the PC (as opposed to just PC-to-equipment communication)
- Fees for related services, such as consultations with a nutritionist to set up a personalized eating plan

The strength of the market has been demonstrated by ICON's sales results: just four months after launching iFit.com, ICON has sold 400,000 iFit.com-compatible treadmills. "We project that sales of all iFit.com-compatible equipment—including treadmills, bikes, ellipticals, and home gyms—will exceed 1 million units by the end of 2000," says Logan. That's about a tenth of ICON's total annual sales volume."

ICON expects sales iFit.com-compatible equipment to come not only from existing users of fitness equipment who want to be able to take advantage of the new technology, but also from those who have not previously purchased such equipment and are motivated by the new Internet capabilities to try home exercise for the first time.

"Thanks for one of the most motivational home workouts I've ever had."

Dave Stone
Treadmill User

"Giving consumers the ability to hear music, see video, and hear a human voice encouraging them onward while they exercise adds whole new dimensions to their experience—and with the help of Windows Media, we'll continue to explore new possibilities."

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For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Resource Centre at (800) 563-9048. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. For more information about iFit.com, call ICON Health & Fitness at 435-750-5230 or email clogan@iconfitness.com.

To access information over the World Wide Web, go to:

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

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

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Users Are Enthusiastic

What do users have to say about the iFit.com Windows Media-based solution? Here are some sample comments from the email that the iFit.com Web site has been receiving:

"Great idea...I've never enjoyed a treadmill until tonight." (Scott Mansfield)

"We tried out the audio workout this evening. It was really neat!...The music was very good quality and the treadmill adjusted quickly and accurately to all of the signals....." (Dick Norton)

"One of the best parts of the on-line experience I just had was to hear a 'human' voice encouraging me along...telling me when and how to breathe...and preparing me when the treadmill was going to change speeds and slope. I have told everyone where I work about it..." (Lisa Boren)

"iFit.com is probably the neatest thing I've done on my PC!" (Brian Roberts)

"Thanks for one of the most motivational home workouts I've ever had." (Dave Stone)

Technology Boosts ICON's Bottom Line

ICON expects to realize numerous benefits from iFit.com.

First, because the exercise equipment they manufacture is well-built and highly durable, it tends to have long purchase cycles. ICON was looking for complementary consumable products and services that could be sold more frequently. The iFit.com Web site, with its potential monthly subscription fees, personal training fees, Webcast fees, and so forth, fills that need.

Second, the company expects the iFit.com technology to drive sales of their fitness equipment. "The feature is so valuable to consumers that they will trade up to get it—and consumers who don't have any fitness equipment now will have a new, compelling reason to buy," says Logan.

Looking Ahead

For the future, ICON expects to continue to update and improve its Web site and to develop additional audio and video workouts. "We're still learning the power of Windows Media, and we will continue to use it as much as we can throughout the Web site," says Logan. "Giving consumers the ability to hear music, see video, and hear a human voice encouraging them onward while they exercise adds whole new dimensions to their experience—and with the help of Windows Media, we'll continue to explore new possibilities."