



Ann Johansson for The New York Times

Kimberly Fowler, left, owner of a California yoga center, offers a workout video that can be viewed online or downloaded.

## Personal Trainers Available by the Download

**W**HY hire a personal fitness trainer to bark at you for \$50 an hour when you can download one online for a fraction of the price — and spare yourself the embarrassment of having someone watch as you never quite get in shape?

That is the question an increasing number of would-be fitness buffs are asking, as more trainers package their services in audio or video files that can be downloaded into an iPod or P.D.A. for a quick trip to the gym.

The idea dovetails with the suddenly voracious appetite for downloadable media among online consumers and the long success the fitness industry has enjoyed in selling home video products like workout tapes. And while this trend is too nascent to be judged a success (there are no Tae Bo sessions for the iPod yet), it does hold great potential for the personal training business, which has historically been marginalized by high prices.

"Downloaded workouts are absolutely here to stay," said John Spencer Ellis, president of the National Exercise and Sports Trainers Association, an industry group serving fitness professionals. "For trainers, it's becoming a new way to acquire customers or generate money 24/7, or both."

Mr. Ellis said that since the start of the year, he had seen a sharp rise in the number of trainers who had posted audio clips online or recorded workouts with clients or studio productions replicating those workouts. On clips sold on the trainers' own Web sites, or on sites like Podfitness.com, iTrain.com, and iAmplify.com, trainers coax listeners through a multitude of workouts.

When not reminding runners to breathe deeply and relax their arms, for instance, trainers also guide listeners through weight-training routines or Pilates exercises. For cardiovascular exercises like running or aerobics, trainers say, video is of little use. But for weight-training, yoga and other routines, visual cues can be much more helpful.

Four months ago, Kimberly Fowler, who

owns the YAS Yoga and Spinning Studio in Venice, Calif., uploaded a 53-minute workout video to iAmplify.com, the first of what she said would be a video series that could be viewed online or on devices like iPods.

"It's hard to just listen to a yoga class or a fitness class," Ms. Fowler said. "Sometimes you need to see it, and some people are just very visual anyway."

"And yes, my voice is one thing," Ms. Fowler added. "But with video they get to see you and they get more involved with you, so it's a more personal connection."

Better connection with remote clients, Ms. Fowler said, leads to better workout results and more repeat sales. "I get, quote, 'a lot of money' for private sessions, but there are only so many hours in a day to do them," she said. "I'm trying to make money while I sleep."

Ms. Fowler sells downloads of her video for \$20, compared with \$25 for the DVD, and although she would not give specific sales figures, she said the downloadable format was going well, particularly in cultivating foreign audiences.

"Shipping a DVD to Japan costs more than the DVD itself," Ms. Fowler said. "This can be a huge avenue for me."

Perhaps it will eventually. But industry executives and analysts noted that while there are hundreds of millions of digital audio players in the hands of consumers, video iPods and other potentially workout-friendly devices have only recently begun to penetrate the mass market.

"Video is much newer, but it's a transition that will definitely happen," said Murray Hidary, chief executive of iAmplify, which is based in New York.

Mr. Hidary's business arose from the idea that personal trainers would need an easy way to offer and sell workout clips online, but the site has since expanded to include self-help advice, walking tours narrated by celebrities and poker tutorials, among other topics. The company currently recruits

specialists from various categories to star in the clips, but Mr. Hidary said he might expand the service in the future to allow anyone to upload videos or audio files and start charging subscriptions or fees for individual downloads. (iAmplify keeps at least half the revenue from each sale on the site.)

As Web sites catering to the online fitness category wait for a significant market to materialize, some are taking small steps to help insure profitability in the short term. iTrain, for one, is relying on a so-called micropayments company to help it sell downloads for around \$1, without having credit card processing companies eat too much of the revenue from each sale.

The company, Peppercorn, processes iTrain's payments in batches, according to Sebastien Reant, iTrain's chief executive. "So I end up keeping 50 percent of what I would give up through the other process," Mr. Reant said. "With small payments, that's a huge savings."

Web sites like iTrain and others may need to watch their pennies in the future, because health clubs could start competing heavily with independent fitness trainers. According to Pamela Kufahl, editor of Club Industry's Fitness Business Pro, a trade publication, in-house personal trainers generate more income for clubs than any other add-on service.

Clubs could distribute multimedia workout clips as a way to keep members from straying to the online workout sites, Ms. Kufahl said, or they could see online workout clips as an opportunity to get more people interested in their services. Just 14 percent of the United States population belongs to a club, she said.

"A lot of people could be turning to these iPod workouts because clubs seem intimidating," Ms. Kufahl said. "But once people purchased a video and became familiar with the personal trainer, maybe they'd come in. It's probably still too new for a lot of clubs to be doing, but it's something they're going to have to look at in the near future."