

THE RISE OF THE HUMAN

Leon Rudge explores the need for personal trainers to adopt AI as an everyday tool and learn how to work with it as a copilot.

I've been working in global connected fitness for almost 15 years. In that time, we've seen substantial digital transformation with the introduction and growth of online coaching, apps and wearables. It's been both super exciting and challenging at the same time. It's had some impact, but AI is something very different as it's changing the status quo of world order and being rapidly embedded into everything we interact with by default. AI isn't coming, it's already here, and it's evolving at a rate we haven't experienced before. They're common stats but it took the telephone 75 years to reach 100 million users; Facebook 4.5 years; and ChatGPT just two months.

AI is set to continue impacting business and society as it continues its exponential growth. In its *Reskilling in the Age of AI* report, Harvard Business Review published, "The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development made a bold forecast. Within 15 to 20 years, it predicted, new automation technologies were likely to eliminate 14% of the world's jobs and radically transform another 32%."

Now more than ever it's essential for personal trainers to adopt AI as an everyday tool and to be skilled enough to work with it as a copilot.

What is AI?

Besides being the most-used buzzword in health and fitness, let's first get into what AI is. AI is a broad term of machines (computers) and software that can perform tasks that usually require human intelligence. That could be anything from recognising patterns in data to understanding natural language or even mimicking decision-making processes. While it might seem like it, it's not magic; it's a complex combination of maths, colossal amounts of data, and algorithms trained to do specific tasks. Let's dive a little deeper. There are two main types of AI.

The first type is Narrow AI (also referred to as Weak AI) which is the point we are at today.

It's excellent at doing one thing, such as analysing your clients' previous workouts and recommending a progressive programme or analysing a picture of the gym you are in and writing a periodised programme for you based on the equipment in the picture. It feels strange typing that and calling it Weak. However, it can't think outside that task; it can't think for itself.

The second type is General AI (also referred to as Strong AI or AGI) and GenAI is where we start to see the things of science fiction. It's where AI can think and reason comparable to or better than a human across ANY and multiple tasks. Right now, this feels a little scary but, luckily, we are some way off this being a reality.

Some of the main areas of AI relevant to personal trainers are:

- Machine Learning, which is where AI systems learn from data – for example, apps that track your clients' training and recommend adjustments.
- Natural Language Processing (NLP), which allows tools like ChatGPT or AI-based coaches to understand and generate human language and in any language. This is useful for writing personalised programmes or automating messages to clients.
- Computer Vision, which enables systems like Image and Video AI to 'see', which is useful for autonomously checking exercise form through an app or something like a smart mirror.

In a nutshell, AI is machines designed to think and learn like humans. It's like giving a computer a kind of 'brain' to help with tasks we usually need people for.

Should personal trainers care?

Absolutely! AI is here to stay and is being weaved into the fabric of everything we do and everything we touch. It's always been wise to stay ahead of technological advancements and how they can enhance your business and AI is one that you should absolutely get to grips with.

Why? Your clients will already be interacting with AI through wearables like Garmin, Whoop, Apple Watch and numerous health platforms such as Peloton, so they will start to expect a similar level of service and experience.

AI will also give you a competitive edge. It will help you deliver an enhanced service; it will amplify your service delivery. Whether it's in programming, research, scheduling, nutrition planning, data analysis or reporting, AI will set you apart from those still scribbling matchstick characters on programme cards. You'll lead the next wave of PT, easily and affordably.

How PTs can use AI to enhance and amplify their business

The list is endless: AI is only limited by our imagination and it takes a little while to start embracing it in everything you do but, trust me, platforms like ChatGPT are open on my laptop all day and the apps are on my home screen. You reach a point with AI where it becomes a companion, a copilot. It's like having the smartest person in the world sat next to you and you engage with it often.

Following are a few examples of where PTs can use AI:

- Client insights and personalisation – AI can analyse any data points you give it, so it has no problem taking in sleep data, stress, recovery and recommending training loads accordingly.
- Time efficiency – this is one of my favourites. AI handles repetitive tasks such as scheduling, programming, content creation and check-ins. It frees you up to focus on the areas that generate revenue and takes the time-consuming tasks off your hands.
- Content creation and building audiences is becoming an important part of a personal trainer's business and tools like ChatGPT can suggest content, write the content and schedule it for any length of time. It can also repurpose your content and is smart enough to edit the content depending on your



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target audience and social platform.

Member retention or retaining clients is one of the most underutilised areas where PTs can benefit from AI. By analysing data, effort and attendance, missed sessions can all be analysed and you can predict when clients are about to drop off.

This one is my number one benefit – it's a huge help in innovation. Every business needs to constantly evolve and stay ahead. Platforms like Perplexity, Claude and ChatGPT, if prompted well, can tell you how your business could evolve, identify global fitness trends, tell you why it's important and suggest how you could do it. The real magic happens when you test those business ideas fast in a low-code or no-code AI platform that creates the business for you quickly and at a nominal cost. Now, like never before, we are able to prototype services and even full businesses in a matter of hours.

Can AI outperform personal trainers?

AI is built to be comparable or better than a human at a specific task. Therefore, I'd suggest it does outperform personal trainers, but only at the task it's being prompted to complete. AI will complete that task much faster than a human and it'll be fairly accurate. However, it does get things wrong sometimes, so it's good to check over the result. This is the main reason I believe it's a great companion rather than a replacement – sometimes it just gets things very wrong, especially if you are working with large amounts of information. I've had several experiences where it gets a task horribly wrong and, even when I tell it where it's gone wrong, it continues to get the same thing wrong repeatedly.

And there are other areas where it just can't outperform a human. Sure, it can analyse data faster; it can track habits; it's got scale and it's consistent; but it doesn't offer human qualities like empathy, connection or deep intuition.

Together with AI, a personal trainer is without question an amplified version of themselves. Personal trainers should be thinking about AI as a copilot rather than a competitor and take advantage of the areas where it can outperform.

Should personal trainers be worried?

In June 2021, I wrote a LinkedIn article called *8 Technologies That COULD Replace Your Trainers and What to Do About It?*. It caused a little bit of a stir, but I evidenced each area and why it's relevant and realistic. In the article, I referenced history and how technology has always replaced human "jobs to be done" and, as a race, we simply embrace it and adapt.

I wrote, "We don't need to rub sticks together to start a fire and I no longer need to use candles to illuminate my house. Also, consider the evolution of construction equipment. In the past, we had to dig holes using shovels until the development of steam-powered machines and, later, hydraulics. But we didn't need to replace the humans whose job it was to dig the holes. We trained them to operate the new construction equipment. With continued advances in technology, we can now operate construction machinery remotely across countries and inhabitable areas like underwater."

"Technological evolution has replaced humans and their 'jobs to be done' for centuries."

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I would suggest that a personal trainer should only be worried if they choose to ignore AI.

What AI solutions are out there now?

There are countless AI platforms out there. In the health and fitness space, the obvious leaders are Whoop, Oura, Apple and Garmin. Fitness sector-focused apps like Vor (thisisvor.ai), Trainerize, Volt Athletics, e-Gym and studio concepts like Lumin Fitness's immersive experience with AI coaches are impressive.

Platforms like ChatGPT are already riddled with sector generative pre-trained transformers (GPTs). Just typing 'personal trainer' into its search box brings back scores of results.

I'd recommend ChatGPT, Claude.ai or Google Gemini for day-to-day tasks such as data analysis, business planning, programme design and content creation.

Sites like Perplexity.ai are great for research and business planning. AI-enable platforms like Canva's Magic Write are great for marketing content. Bolt.new is amazing at creating websites and apps in seconds if you have a little bit of technical experience. Automation platforms like Make.com are incredible at creating automation workflows and the new Canvas and Agent features on Zapier.com are a very clever piece of development.

I'd recommend researching a few platforms and considering how they could help you day to day in your business or, better still, ask ChatGPT. There is no better way to work with AI than asking AI how to better work with it!

Why the rise of the human?

I firmly believe that AI presents an opportunity for personal trainers like never before. I predict that the challenge humanity will have in this new age of advanced technologies such as AI is trust.

If I can't see it in front of me and be able to touch it, I won't trust it. Trust is going to play a huge part in the personal training service delivery. Technology can fake a voice, an image, a video and even a person at the other end of a video call, so I think trust will mean a lot to clients. Couple this with the wonderful human traits that can't be replaced by AI (at least not yet) such as emotional intelligence, empathy, authenticity, human connection and intuition, and it really is a great time for trainers to use AI for the repetitive tasks and double down on the human qualities to deliver an unrivalled human experience. **fp**



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