

THE VENDOR TRAP

How to choose fitness tech without making expensive mistakes.

The questions to ask. The red flags to spot. The process that protects you.

THE PROBLEM

The average gym operator will spend six to seven figures on technology over the lifetime of their business. Most of those decisions are made on the strength of a demo, a sales relationship, and a contract that looks reasonable until you actually try to exit it. The fitness tech market is crowded, the pitches are almost identical, and the vendors with the best salespeople are not always the vendors with the best products.

WHY IT KEEPS GOING WRONG

Gym operators are experts in fitness. They are not, by default, experts in technology procurement. Vendors know this. The evaluation process is designed by the vendor, run on the vendor's timeline, and optimised for the vendor's outcome. You are making a long-term infrastructure decision using a 45-minute demo and a reference call with someone the vendor has pre-selected.

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS

This guide gives you the eight warning signs that separate vendors worth working with from those worth avoiding, the four myths that cloud most buying decisions, a practical question framework for every stage of your evaluation, and a workbook to run the process properly. The goal is not to make you sceptical of technology. It is to make you a better buyer of it.

Eight Signs You Are Being Sold To, Not Helped

Red flags that appear before you sign. Most operators only spot them after.

THE WARNING SIGNS

None of these signs, on their own, disqualifies a vendor. But the more you see, the more cautious you should be. A good vendor will welcome your scrutiny. A bad one will try to rush you past it.

THE DEMO IS FLAWLESS

Real products have rough edges. If every feature works perfectly and every question gets a smooth answer, you are watching a rehearsed performance, not a product preview. Ask to see something go wrong. Ask how they handle it.

REFERENCES FROM DIFFERENT OPERATIONS

They have references. From single-site boutiques when you run multi-site estates. From operators abroad when your market is local. Push for references from businesses that look like yours. If they can't provide them, ask why.

THE PRICE CHANGES AT CONTRACT

The number in the demo is not the number in the contract. Setup fees, per-location charges, premium support tiers, and data migration costs appear at signing. Ask for a fully loaded cost before you invest time in the evaluation.

DATA PORTABILITY IS NOT MENTIONED

If you cannot get a clear answer to "how do we extract our data if we leave?", you are not entering a business relationship. You are entering a hostage situation. Your member data is yours. Make sure the contract says so.

NO IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE BEFORE SIGNING

"We'll get you live quickly" is not a plan. If there is no written implementation timeline, with milestones and owner names, before you sign, there is no plan. There is just optimism. And optimism does not go live on time.

"WE INTEGRATE WITH EVERYTHING"

This phrase should trigger immediate scepticism. Ask them to show you the API documentation. Ask which integrations are native and which go through a third party. "We integrate with everything" often means a Zapier connector built last quarter.

STAFF TRAINING IS "INCLUDED"

Included means one session during go-live. What happens in month four when your manager leaves? Ask exactly what training is provided, when, in what format, and what ongoing support looks like after the handover.

SUPPORT IS A TICKET SYSTEM

In fitness, problems happen on Saturday mornings. A 48-hour SLA means a Friday evening outage gets fixed on Monday. That is your entire weekend gone. Ask specifically what weekend and out-of-hours cover looks like. If the answer is a ticket queue, that is your answer.



The Four Myths That Cloud Every Buying Decision

What operators believe going in. What is actually true.

THE MYTHS

MYTH: "The best demo wins."

Reality: Demos are not product reviews. They are sales performances. The vendor controls the environment, the data, the sequence of features, and the narrative. The best demo usually belongs to the vendor with the best sales team, not the best product. Evaluate the product in conditions that reflect your reality, not theirs. Ask to test it yourself, on your data, with your staff.

MYTH: "We will figure out implementation as we go."

Reality: Implementation is where most fitness tech projects fail. Not in the evaluation. Not in the negotiation. In the weeks after signing, when the project is handed from sales to a delivery team who has never spoken to you before. Before you sign, you should know the name of your implementation lead, the timeline to go live, and what happens if you miss it.

MYTH: "Our staff will pick it up quickly."

Reality: Maybe. But "quickly" is not a training plan. Staff turnover in fitness is high. Every new hire who joins after go-live needs to be onboarded onto the platform. If the vendor's answer to ongoing training is a YouTube channel of tutorial videos, that is the training plan. Ask what it costs to train a new manager in month twelve.

MYTH: "We can always switch if it does not work out."

Reality: This is the most expensive myth in fitness technology. Switching costs are real: data migration, retraining, workflow disruption, and the commercial leverage a vendor holds when they know you are trapped. The right time to negotiate your exit terms is before you sign, not after you realise you need to leave.

THE UNDERLYING PATTERN

Every myth above has the same root cause: operators treating a technology decision like a purchase rather than a partnership. A vendor relationship that goes wrong does not just cost you money. It costs you time, team morale, member experience, and the opportunity cost of the twelve months you spent trying to make it work before admitting it was not going to. The cost of doing it right the first time is always lower than the cost of doing it twice.



The Questions That Change the Conversation

What to ask at every stage. And what the answers tell you.

THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Most vendor evaluations are passive. The vendor runs the agenda and you react. These questions put you in control of the conversation at every stage.

BEFORE THE DEMO

- 1 What does your implementation process look like, and who leads it?
- 2 Can you give us references from operators similar to ours in size and model?
- 3 What is the fully loaded cost, including setup, training, and support tiers?
- 4 How do we extract our data if we decide to leave?

DURING THE DEMO

- 1 Can we see a feature that did not work recently, and how it was resolved?
- 2 Can you show us what the admin experience looks like for a new staff member?
- 3 Which integrations are native and which go through a third party?
- 4 If the system goes down Saturday morning, who responds and when? Is support a ticket queue with a Monday SLA, or is there genuine weekend cover?

BEFORE SIGNING

- 1 Who is our implementation lead and can we speak to them now?
- 2 What is the go-live date, and what happens contractually if you miss it?
- 3 What are the exit terms and how much notice is required?
- 4 What has changed in the product in the last twelve months?

DURING IMPLEMENTATION

- 1 What does success look like at 30 days, 60 days, and 90 days?
- 2 What ongoing training is available after go-live, and what does it cost?
- 3 What is the support SLA for a critical issue at the weekend? Is there a live escalation route, or does a Saturday outage wait until Monday?
- 4 What is on the product roadmap for the next six months?

Want someone independent in your corner?



Your Vendor Evaluation Workbook

Use this before you sign anything.

DUE DILIGENCE CHECKLIST: TICK BEFORE YOU SIGN

Every box below should be ticked before you commit to any fitness technology contract.

- Implementation plan: named lead, milestones, go-live date
- References: 2+ operators of similar size and model
- Fully loaded cost confirmed: setup, per-site, add-ons
- Integrations verified: native vs third-party, API docs
- Support SLA: response times, weekend and out-of-hours cover
- Training plan agreed: format, frequency, new starter cost
- Exit terms: notice period, data return, exit penalties
- Pilot or trial agreed before full contract commitment

VENDOR COMPARISON: SCORE EACH VENDOR OUT OF 5

Criteria	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
Implementation plan quality			
Reference quality (similar operators)			
Pricing transparency			
Integration depth			
Support model			
Staff training provision			
Data portability terms			
Overall confidence			

30-DAY EVALUATION CHECKLIST

- Send an RFI (request for information) to all shortlisted vendors before the demo.
- Run the demo on your terms: provide your own sample data and scenario.
- Complete at least two reference calls, both with operators similar to yours.
- Get a fully loaded cost breakdown in writing before any internal approval.
- Have your legal or commercial team review the contract, not just the sales summary.
- Confirm implementation lead name and meet them before signing.
- Test the support channel: call or email it and measure the response.
- Run a 30-day pilot if the vendor offers one. Use it seriously, not casually.

