Yes, I do own a crystal ball. However, I did not use it while writing this article. These are not only my predictions for the industry but current trends that are emerging today. Wellness continues to merge with fitness, and Americans over age 55 are the fastest growing group among health club members. By 2050, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that 80 million people will be 65 and older, representing 20.4 percent of the population. To grab our share of this market we must be creative in the way we introduce, sell, and price our programs.

**Outreach Programs**

We are seeing an increase in small, accessible facilities with outreach programs. Offering outreach programs that do not require membership is an opportunity to introduce prospects to your facility and programs. For example, a running club might meet at your facility for their monthly evaluation. This keeps them coming back and ties them to the facility. This also works well as a retention tool for new members. Coordinating a mountain bike program is a good example of an outreach program that works inside and outside the facility. Incorporating training for a 10K run and nutrition programs also fall into this category. An obstacle course in a local park is another example.

**Circuit Training**

Circuit training will become the major method of exercise for the current population that is not exercising today. Members of this population will begin, and stick to a circuit-training program. The circuits will consist of various exercise stations including outdoor courses. Circuit training is certainly not a new trend but is definitely gaining momentum. Just look at the latest series of boutique 30-minute exercise centers. These “circuit-training” centers are creating thousands of new customers for the industry. They do not promote their equipment or their facility; it is the program that is making these facilities so successful. This same programming can be accomplished in any size facility.

**Functional Exercise**

Functional exercise is continuing to grow. Baby Boomers are approaching retirement age and, in general, are more in-tune with fitness, living healthy and exercising more. Fitness professionals are focused on meeting their needs by putting together age-specific programs to keep them happy. This includes functional exercise. Functional exercise focuses on the basic movements that help people accomplish everyday tasks. Functional exercise classes teach people how to reach, bend, step, etc. Other popular programs go hand-in-hand with this such as flexibility, yoga and Pilates.

**Exercise Incentives**

Greater awareness of the relation of exercise to healthcare costs has started to motivate monetary incentives. Fitness is no longer just serving the 20-something population it did in By 2050, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that 80 million people will be 65 and older.
its infancy. The $14.1 billion fitness market is maturing, along with U.S. demographics, to provide a broader wellness service to its expanding customer base. Body sculpting has been replaced by the desire for solid healthy exercise practices. Overweight and obesity rates are on the rise and the healthcare costs for obesity now rival those attributable to smoking. The medical insurance industry, employers, and the insured population are getting involved in the process, with the desire to create a healthier, more “well” population of participants. Individuals are more responsible for their own health. Cost for inactivity is going to squeeze everyone’s pocketbooks. Neither government nor corporations can continue to support an “illness” model versus the new “wellness” model. Awareness is there, now we as an industry need to start supporting this by providing the appropriate types of programs.

**Medical Practitioners Opening Facilities and Fitness Facilities Adding Rehab**

There is an increase in medical practitioners opening exercise/wellness facilities. Rehab markets continue to expand along with the aging population. Many rehabilitation facilities are opening “phase two” fitness facilities within their walls in order to capture patients and customers as they graduate from rehab. Therapists are collaborating with fitness centers to reach more potential clients and patients as rehab and fitness merge. Physical therapists work with athletic trainers in many places, and athletic trainers are expanding their service offerings to more groups than just athletes. Fitness is a critical component of rehab as well as preventing additional injuries or health issues, and rehab clinicians emphasize that component of care.

**Entertainment**

We are currently seeing more emphasis on entertainment from the population already exercising. There are more sophisticated entertainment systems including televisions, sound systems, and video games integrated into cardio equipment. However, this may prove to be more of a fad than a trend. The majority of the population is interested in results from their workout, not being entertained by it. The successful technology will be the technology that makes the exercise experience more effective and efficient.

*Denton Smith is the President of SCIFIT Systems, Inc. He can be contacted at 800.278.3933, or by email at dsmith@scifit.com.*