

# Working Out as a Social Experience

The Universal Fitness app offers new options

**Suzanne Adams-Ockrassa**

Three Northern Arizona University grads are hoping to join a growing field: bringing the exercise world into the social media world.



Anthony West, Anthony Lawson and Matthew Drapkin are currently testing their new app, Universal Fitness, in San Diego and Flagstaff. They hope to release the beta version to the public before the end of the year.

The app is a kind of mashup of Facebook, Yelp and your favorite exercise tracking app. It allows users to share their workouts, tips and dietary advice with others and ask questions, as well as track their workouts, find and rate gyms and other facilities, and test their fitness. The number of places listed on the app is expected to grow as the number of users increases.

West and Lawson acknowledged that Universal Fitness has many of the same features as millions of exercise apps currently on the market. However, most of those apps don't allow users to track more than one exercise type, provide a map for local gyms and workout facilities, or try to create and encourage a community of fitness, Lawson said.

"We wanted to bring in all types of activity," West said. "We wanted to bring different communities together who share a similar experience in trying to stay fit. It doesn't really matter what you do as long as you do it."

They want to create a voice and a place for individual's young and old who want to improve their health but need motivation from others to do so, Lawson said.

For example, there are some people who just lift weights and other people who just do cardio workouts like running or the elliptical, he said. But there is also a large and growing group of people who like mixing things up and doing both. Other apps in the Google Play and Apple iTunes stores focus on one type of activity: running, yoga, etc. Universal Fitness is designed to provide one location to track all of a user's exercise, weightlifting, running, swimming, hiking, etc.

West and Lawson got the idea for a health app after they saw the effect that a lack of exercise and good diet had on their family members.

“We both have a lot of family members with ill health,” Lawson said.

“We wanted to bring health and wellness to others,” West added. “We want to create a community of support for fitness here and across the nation.”

The original idea behind the app was to make it easy to find locations to work out no matter where you are in the U.S., and eradicate the old excuse of not being able to work out while on a trip or vacation because you don’t know where the closest gym is, Lawson said.

Users can add their favorite gyms and workout areas -- such as hiking trails -- to the app, which allows visitors with the app to scope out locations to workout, hike or run while visiting for work or on vacation, he said. This also allows you to connect with local fitness groups or enthusiasts who you might be able to partner with on a run or workout.

The app morphed into something much bigger when Drapkin joined the team, West said. Drapkin has a background in nutrition sciences. It was his idea to try to create a nutrition blog to provide information on diet and exercise app users and an exercise tracker to the app to count steps or reps. They’re also toying with the idea of a rewards system for the app, much like the badge system that other exercise apps like FitBit and Strava use.

The app includes a blog with nutrition tips, recipes and a social media-type tab for photo and video shout-outs to friends or to ask questions. A shortcut button for feedback to the developers is also included.

While the finished app will be free to download, the trio is considering a monthly subscription service that would help users test their fitness and create custom workouts. Most of the financial support for the app will come from ads, Lawson said. He said the group is in negotiations with several advertisers now.

Right now, the trio has a Kickstarter page set up to help with startup costs and plans to release the beta version of the app by the end of the year.

Source: Adams-Ockrassa, S. (August 6, 2017). Universal Fitness: Putting the social in working out. Arizona Daily Sun. Retrieved from: [http://azdailysun.com/business/local/universal-fitness-putting-the-social-in-working-out/article\\_e9a61284-b0a5-52e2-bd58-a80feb0675a6.html](http://azdailysun.com/business/local/universal-fitness-putting-the-social-in-working-out/article_e9a61284-b0a5-52e2-bd58-a80feb0675a6.html)