Are Dedicated Sports and Fitness Monitors Still in the Running?

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Consumers want to improve the functionality offered by sports and fitness apps through the use of sensors. A recent study conducted by IMS Research [1], a company recently acquired by IHS Inc. [2] (NYSE:IHS), found that 62.3 percent of respondents with a smartphone interested in sports and fitness applications and who exercised at least once week, were prepared to purchase sensors to monitor performance and enhance the sports and fitness application on their smartphone.

Performance monitoring was once provided only by dedicated sports and fitness devices, designed solely for this purpose. The emergence of the smartphone meant many of these functions could be provided via an application (for example the pedometer), making use of the processing power and technologies (such as GPS or accelerometers) found within the devices.

With Bluetooth Smart Ready beginning to find its way into smartphones, and ANT+ already included in some, the potential use of the smartphone as a sports and fitness device only increases. Utilizing the new low-power element of Bluetooth Smart Ready means smartphones can make use of performance monitoring sensors (such as heart rate) for longer periods of time with a less detrimental effect on battery life. This will undoubtedly reflect an improvement in the user experience, which is good news for consumers, with 36 percent of respondents owning only a sports and fitness app indicating battery life was an issue.

There are issues associated with generating revenue from mobile apps, “almost 80 percent of respondents indicated they would only be prepared to pay less than £2.00/$3.20 for their sports and fitness application, highlighting these monetization difficulties,” noted Lisa Arrowsmith, senior analyst with IMS Research. “Fortunately

for the sports and fitness industry there is the opportunity to provide accessories (such as pedometers or heart rate sensors) to enhance the functionality of the sports and fitness app, and provide further revenue generation to counter any potential reduction through declining interest in standalone monitors."

The indication that consumers are prepared to pay for sensors to complement the application on their smartphone is good news for the industry, opening up a new potential market of customers that may not have purchased a dedicated sports and fitness device in the past. In the study, approximately 82 percent of these respondents suggested they would pay up to £90/$140 for a complementary sensor. Combining this with the increasing inclusion of Bluetooth 4.0 (Smart Ready) in smartphones means an application with a complementary sensor becomes a viable alternative to a dedicated device, reflecting the direction sports and fitness monitoring is heading.

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