

Skyfit app puts personal trainer in your pocket

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Two months ago, I was bombarded by Instagram ads for a subscription fitness app named Skyfit. The app promised, with the help of professional trainers who coach with just their voices, to do the impossible: eliminate the monotony from treadmill and other indoor gym workouts.

A cynic by profession, I was, to say the least, incredulous. But I was also desperate. This outdoor runner needed an indoor alternative when the summer heat became unbearable. And so I reluctantly downloaded the app, knowing I could easily abandon it after the free seven-day trial.

I didn't.

Instead, and I don't say this lightly, I became obsessed with Skyfit's voice-based approach to fitness, which is kind of like the digital fitness program Daily Burn, but minus the video and plus a ton more variety. With Skyfit, users who download the app and select a subscription option (\$10 a month or \$70 a year) can choose from hundreds of studio-style audio classes across categories such as treadmill, outdoor running, elliptical, indoor cycling, yoga and strength training.

Then, you just put your earbuds in and let your preferred coach handle everything else, including audio cues and music selection. So, for instance, Skyfit trainer Marq Brown (my personal favorite), a former professional football player, will talk through you an advance treadmill-

plus-bodyweight class, like "Fit Mix Mashup," telling you exactly when to increase your speed and when to jump off and do a circuit of squats. And he'll play songs that match the style of workout, while sharing some tough-love words - "make it burn" or "don't feel sorry for yourself" - to keep you moving.

But why just audio?

"I had confidence that audio would be a more powerful platform (than video)," said Ethan Agarwal, founder and CEO of New York-based Skyfit. "If I'm running outside, I don't want to be staring at a 4-inch screen."

Agarwal started the company while in search of a way to lose the extra weight he had gained during graduate studies at Wharton. Though he had enough funds to pay for a personal trainer, he had an epiphany: most people can't afford that luxury. That means a fitness neophyte's good intentions are often sidelined by the what-should-I-do-at-the-gym conundrum.

Maybe it seems odd to pay for what essentially amounts to a workout podcast - I certainly thought so at first - but Skyfit seems to have a hit a nerve with people looking for affordable, no-pressure fitness regimens.

First launched on iPhone about a year ago, Skyfit says its customers are now completing nearly 11,000 classes per day. The company's Android [app](#) debuted earlier this month. Though not a perfect comparison, the trendy spin brand SoulCycle disclosed last year that its studios average 72,000 rides per week (or 10,286 rides per day).

Backed by a modest \$1.5 million in funding, Skyfit now employs nine full-time staffers and works with 14 professional trainers. The company is adding 150 to 200 new classes each month, all of which are vetted by

head trainer Rochelle Baxter-Moncourtois.

So, for cheapskates like me, the only real downside is that Skyfit costs money.

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