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## Fitness Equipment R&D Has Not Been Affected By the Recession, Manufacturers Say

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Many of the products presented at the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association trade show last month in San Francisco were upgrades of existing products, but some new products were introduced. That may have surprised some people, considering the state of the economy during the past few years and speculation that manufacturers had cut back on research and development. However, it didn't surprise manufacturers, many of whom deny that they decreased R&D spending.

"The rumor mill is that all these other companies are cutting back on R&D," says Tim Porth, executive vice president of product development and marketing at Octane Fitness, Brooklyn Park, MN. "We didn't want to cut back. We wanted to be more efficient. We kept every project going that was on the list, even through the economic downturn. We knew it was one thing that could help us come out of the recession with a bang."

Some manufacturers—Octane, Technogym and Precor—even say that they increased spending on R&D during the recession.

Flavio Venturi, group product manager for Technogym, Gambettola, Italy, says the company's R&D grew although the rate of that growth did slow a bit—although not enough to stop the company from introducing several products in the past two years, including the Crossover, Group Cycle and Visio entertainment.

Bob Baumgartner, product manager at SportsArt Fitness, Woodinville, WA, says: "SportsArt isn't the biggest company in the business, but we decided focus [on new products] was more important and that we shouldn't cut back. We want to continue to have innovation and have something different from what everyone else offers. That's how we were able to come up with the Green System."

The Green System, which SportsArt introduced last month, is a group of eight fitness products attached to an inverter that harnesses human-generated power from exercisers and feeds it back into the power grid as usable energy.



Several equipment manufacturers, including Precor, increased R&D spending during the recession, helping them to introduce some new technology in 2011. That includes the P80 touch screen on Precor's Experience series cardio line. *Photo courtesy of Precor.*

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