



'Outside-the-box' workout at Omega Performance Training

FOR CLUBS AND CLIENTS!

Enhanced-performance training offers a way to up the ante



What if there was a way to consistently transform your clients' physical condition from "just okay" to "beyond outstanding"?

According to Eric Hughes, the owner and operator of Omega Performance Training, there is such a way.

In his opinion, the traditional, generally utilized exercise methods aren't wholly effectual and, in some cases, can contribute to membership attrition. Alternatively, he suggests, there is a better approach—a surer route to true fitness.

"Higher intensity exercise, lifting heavier loads, challenging yourself, and going beyond what you're normally accustomed to doing—those are the things that change the body in a positive, meaningful way," he contends.

In other words, according to Hughes, enhanced-performance training is where it's at today.

At his facility, a 4,200-square-foot niche club in Plano, Texas, part of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, enhanced-performance routines dominate the schedule. The club's lineup of classes includes boot camp, kettlebell training, sports-performance programs, strength and conditioning courses, TRX suspension training, Under Armour's Combine 360, and CrossFit. If it's a workout that stresses the body in such a way as to make it possible for someone to perform other activities—whether it's playing sports or simply dealing with everyday tasks—more efficiently and effectively, the patrons of Omega are likely doing it.

And they're not alone.

"These sorts of training facilities are becoming increasingly popular," reports Scott Lucett, the director of product development for the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), the Mesa, Arizona-based certification agency. "In addition, we're seeing more and more clubs making use of this type of training technique."

What's the reason for the growing interest?

"Simply put, it's the *results*," responds Lucett. "As might be expected, enhanced-performance courses can help you sprint faster or hit a baseball harder. They can also, however, help with everyday activities—allowing you to retrieve a plate off a top shelf with nary a strain or pain. They facilitate a number of positive outcomes. →

For Clubs and Clients!

"They can assist members who are already in good shape get in better shape than they'd ever imagined possible," he continues. "Furthermore, because enhanced-performance routines really ramp things up, clients can experience dramatic changes rather quickly—and people really crave fast results."

An alpha business model

Omega works with more than 120 clients each week, who pay upwards of \$99 per month to train with Hughes and his team. Many of them attest—in their appearance, performance, and words—to the validity of his philosophy and workouts. Angela Johnson, for instance, credits the intense classes with helping her to "get stronger and in better shape than ever." Another client, Vanessa Jones, who had trained for sports for 20 years prior to joining Omega, admits that its approach left her feeling "truly challenged for the first time."

"The training I encountered at Omega," she says, "made me a significantly better athlete."

"With these modalities, you get exactly what the name implies, in terms of outcomes for both the client and the business alike—the end product is definitely an 'enhanced-performance' product."

Surprisingly, it doesn't take much to produce such outcomes—at least, not in terms of equipment.

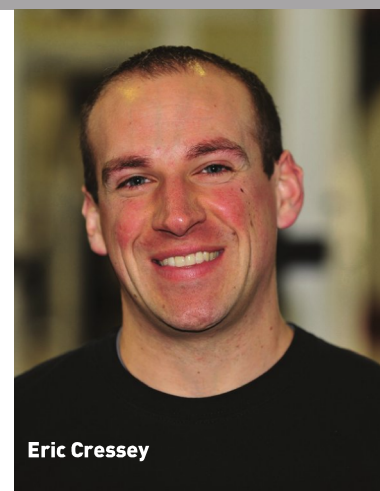
Upon first entering Hughes' studio, newcomers are often surprised and somewhat perplexed by its spare "bare-bones" environment. Omega, they quickly realize, doesn't have very much in the way of machinery. It's not the typical, expected setup, the owner acknowledges.

It isn't that Hughes is averse to machines. Rather, he's simply very selective about what he offers. What his clients will find are treadmills, rowing machines, StairMills, Jacob's Ladders, and cable-based strength-training equipment. The floor of the studio is littered with dumbbells, resistance bands, kettlebells, ropes, and other simple apparatuses and accessories. All told, Hughes invested just a bit more than \$20,000 to acquire the tools he felt would be most beneficial to his members.

What are conspicuously absent from the studio are any seated strength machines. Hughes is personally convinced that, when it comes to exercise, sitting down simply isn't the way to get ahead. "The body was designed to move, twist, turn, and bend when doing just about anything," he explains.



Scott Lucett



Eric Cressey

Oscar Baeza, an Omega trainer who goes by the nickname of "Coach Oscar," describes the studio's defining goal as "giving clients something they haven't been able to find anywhere else."

Patrons soon discover that the difference goes beyond the studio's design and equipment and the physical workouts. "Exercising can be a tedious affair, which is why it's so important that fun be an integral part of these classes," says Coach Oscar. "Yes, these routines are frequently more challenging than your standard ones, but participants derive far more pleasure from them." As far as Omega's concerned, sweating and smiling go hand-in-hand.

Coach Oscar notes that the classes also promote a lot of camaraderie, and Lucett concurs, observing that members feel "as though they're part of a special club." That, in turn, has been effective in driving commitment, utilization, and retention.

The fledgling IHRSA-member facility moved into profits after its first six months, generated more than \$200,000 in revenues in its first year, and now

enjoys a profit margin averaging 25%.

An upside opportunity

Lucett, though convinced both by belief and personal experience of the potential of enhanced-performance training—for club operators and clients alike—concedes that the industry has been somewhat lethargic in capitalizing on the genre. "There's still a lot of room to grow," he observes.

Eric Cressey, the president and cofounder of Cressey Performance, a 7,700-square-foot, high-performance training studio in Hudson, Massachusetts, agrees that, thus far, the industry "hasn't taken advantage of this approach the way it might have."

Cressey's facility, like Lucett's, has plenty of enhancement-centric offerings, as well as earnings that are sound and growing. "Despite a down economy," says Cressey, "we've seen a 34% increase in our business thus far this year." In fact, his business has racked up double-digit increases every year since 2007. On a really good day, Cressey Performance will conduct more than

100 training sessions, and, during its peak season, 500-600 per week.

Given the promise of enhanced-performance training, the results and enthusiasm displayed by many clients, and the business opportunity involved, the question becomes: Why aren't even more facilities exploiting these techniques?

"Concerns about safety may be one reason," suggests Lucett.

Hughes concedes that a few of the regimens cause some trepidation, and admits that, at one point, he himself had questions about CrossFit.

CrossFit, a popular centerpiece option at Omega, has, in the past, provoked some debate. An elite strength and conditioning program that combines several techniques, including power lifting and sprinting, to increase endurance, power, speed, agility, and balance, it's been criticized for being potentially unsafe.

Eventually, however, Hughes abandoned his reservations. What led to his change of mind?

He came to an important realization: "When you don't understand how the body should move," he explains, "when you aren't aware of proper form and technique, then *anything* can be too intense or dangerous."

"What you need to keep in mind," echoes Cressey, "is that, regardless of the program, *unqualified* instructors can hurt people."

Consider yoga, he says: On the surface, it seems a relatively gentle activity. "Yet, while some people thrive with the practice, others wind up with back pain. The differentiating factor is a skilled trainer," Cressey points out. "I've seen some bright, talented people teaching classes like CrossFit, and I thought they did a really great job. CrossFit is a good workout that *can* be performed safely.

"In general, I'd say that enhanced-performance techniques could work for nearly all populations. But you have to do your homework so you can properly accommodate individual needs."

Hughes agrees.

His team works with a varied demographic, with respect to age, fitness, and ability levels. A large number are 40-something stay-at-home-moms and middle-aged businesspeople, some of whom haven't exercised in years. They're hardly skilled athletes, says Hughes, but they succeed at Omega because of the staff's expertise. "We can always scale exercises to address particular limitations," he explains. "If, for example, you can't do a plyometric jump onto a box, we'll have you step up onto it instead. We start wherever you're at and go from there."

Hughes and Lucett both stress the importance of well-trained and appropriately accredited instructors. Hughes, himself, has added two certifications to an already lengthy list of credentials to bolster his enhanced-performance-training skills. He encourages his own team and other fitness professionals to never stop learning. "Continually improving your skill-set benefits your clients and can help grow your business," he attests.

He and Lucett also strongly suggest that trainers be taught how to motivate clients. "Learning how to inspire and support club members helps keep them engaged in the program," says Lucett.

At Omega, "constant encouragement" is an integral component of the business model. "Nothing is more powerful than the mind," says Hughes. "We're always working to build our clients' confidence. We know that, if they believe in themselves, and if they remain highly motivated, they're going to get better results. At the end of the day, everything is based on, and depends on, the results that our members get and by how satisfied they are with them.

"With these modalities," he insists, "you get exactly what the name implies, in terms of outcomes for both the client and the business alike—the end-product is definitely an *enhanced-performance* product." —

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Owner Eric Hughes, center, works with Omega clients



Hughes instructs a member on use of CoreTex equipment