



2026 State of the Personal Training Industry Report

Insights on Growth, Retention, and the Modern Personal Training Business



INTRO

Last year tested the fitness industry in ways few expected. Economic uncertainty reshaped consumer spending, yet demand for fitness and coaching remained resilient.

In-person training regained its value, not as the default, but as a premium experience anchored in accountability, community, and trust. Digital coaching did not recede. Instead, hybrid models matured, blending flexibility with human connection in ways that better reflect how people live and train today.

Several forces accelerated this shift. AI and automation moved from experimentation to everyday use, reshaping how personal trainers program, communicate, and scale. Wearables and health data raised expectations for personalization and progress tracking.

The rise of GLP-1 medications introduced a new type of client, reframing weight loss and placing renewed emphasis on strength, muscle preservation, and long-term health.

Personal trainers sit at the center of this industry-wide transformation. The opportunity in 2026 is not about choosing between technology and connection, online or in-person. It is about combining them intentionally.

This report draws exclusively on survey data from ABC Trainerize users to examine the trends shaping personal training today. They reflect the real-world experiences and perspectives of personal trainers building sustainable businesses in the year ahead.



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HUMAN-LED, SYSTEM-POWERED PERSONAL TRAINING

Personal training in 2026 is defined by a clear tension. Technology has become unavoidable, yet the value of coaching remains deeply human.

Trainers are navigating AI tools, automation, wearables, and on-demand programming while facing clients who expect more personalization, flexibility, and long-term support. The result is a redefinition of what a personal trainer delivers.

Survey data shows that successful coaches are not choosing between technology and connection. They are using systems to protect it. Hybrid delivery models, digital touchpoints, and automation are increasingly handling the repeatable parts of coaching, creating space for deeper relationships, better accountability, and more contextual decision-making.

This balance matters. As competition increases and client expectations rise, effort alone is no longer enough. Coaches who build systems around their expertise are better positioned to scale sustainably, retain clients, and deliver consistent outcomes. Moving forward, the strongest businesses are not the most automated or the most personal, but those that intentionally combine both.

TECHNOLOGY, TRUST, AND GROWTH: THE 2026 PERSONAL TRAINING REPORT

SCALING SUSTAINABLY IN A MATURING MARKET

#1

One of the biggest misconceptions in 2026 is that "more effort" equals "more clients." The market has shifted, and the post-pandemic digital rush has cooled into a stable phase.

The good news is that demand is remarkably healthy. Across the industry, there is virtually no widespread decrease in client volume, signaling that coaching has moved from a "luxury" to a "staple" for consumers.

Surveyed trainers reported no **widespread decrease in the number of clients they onboard each month**. Despite economic pressure and rising competition, the personal training market continues to show steady demand for coaching services.

Did the number of new clients you onboard monthly decrease in the past year?

60%
NO

40%
YES

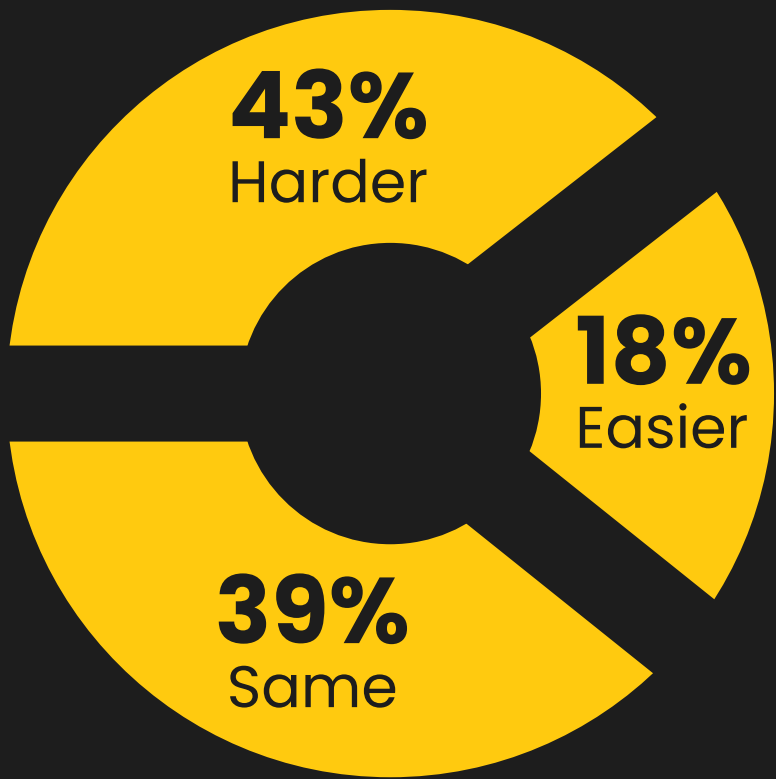
THE “ACQUISITION WALL” IS REAL

However, while the floor is solid, the ceiling is getting lower. Finding new clients has become a significant hurdle!

4 in 5 trainers report that client acquisition is now either harder or has plateaued compared to previous years, while only about 1 in 5 are seeing an improvement in the ease of acquisition.

This reflects a clear market shift. The post-pandemic digital surge has cooled, organic social reach is less predictable, and competition has intensified. Growth no longer comes “for free” simply by showing up online.

How would you compare your success in finding new clients in 2025 compared to previous years?



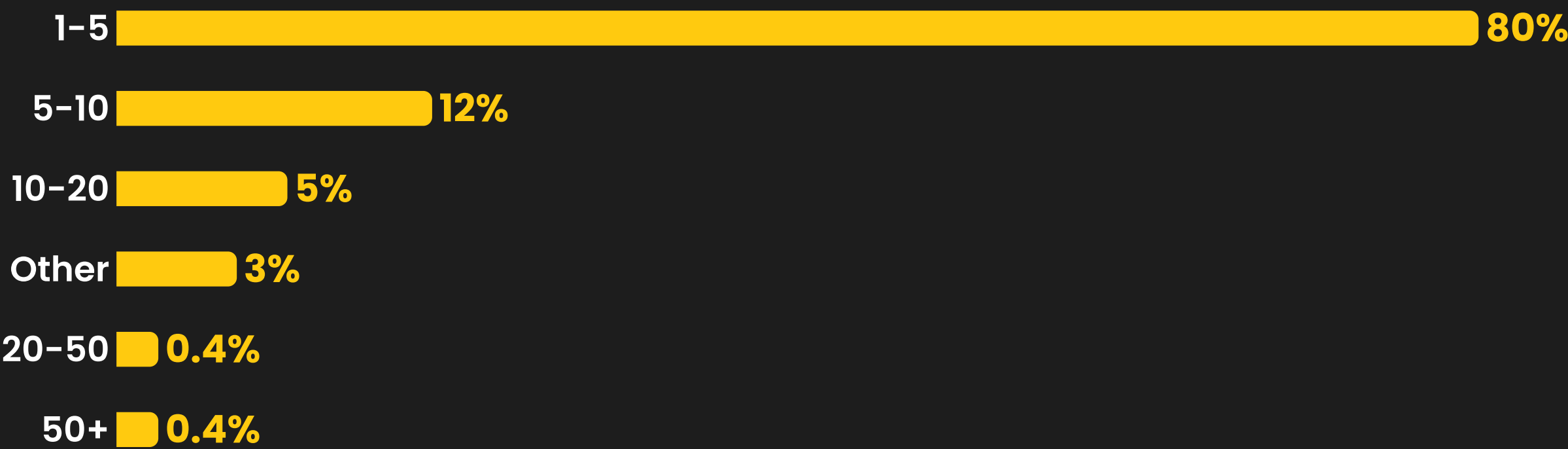
82% say it's harder or plateaued

THE SCALING CEILING: DIFFERENT STAGES, SAME BOTTLENECK

At the same time, trainers report similar onboarding limits.

The majority of trainers report onboarding 1–5 new clients per month, pointing to a shared operational ceiling. While some trainers manage larger total client bases, onboarding velocity remains constrained.

On average, how many new clients do you onboard monthly?



This convergence reveals the real challenge of a maturing market: **time, systems, and delivery models — not demand — are now the primary constraints on growth.**

- Trainers with fewer clients are hitting calendar limits.
- Trainers with more clients are hitting system and delivery limits.

Both groups face the same underlying issue: **growth without structural change leads to burnout, not scale.**

WHY IT MATTERS IN 2026

For personal trainers who built their businesses during the digital boom, this contraction can feel alarming.

The challenge is no longer just “getting certified and showing up.” The slower onboarding pace indicates a classic barrier in entrepreneurship — the “Time-for-Money” trap. An entrepreneur maxes out their calendar but doesn’t max out their income. Without changing their delivery model, they have hit a hard revenue ceiling.

The trainers who are growing aren't doing it by finding 100 new clients a month; they are doing it by fundamentally changing how they serve the clients they have.

If Acquisition is harder, Retention and Revenue per Client become your primary growth engines. You cannot scale a 1:1 model indefinitely. To break that ceiling, you must decouple your income from your clock.



PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Pivot to Group Training

Stop selling only 1:1 hours. Transition to small groups (2-4 clients). You can increase your hourly revenue while lowering the per-session cost for the client, a win-win in a high-inflation economy.

Use AI as Your "Backend" Assistant

If you are part of the majority capped on time, you must automate. Use AI tools to handle program adjustments, check-in texts, and marketing emails. This buys you back the hours needed to build relationships.

Monetize the "Other 165 Hours"

Use on-demand content (mobility libraries, nutrition guides, etc.) to offer a "Hybrid" recurring membership. This keeps clients paying for your expertise 24/7, not just your presence for one hour.

Want to go deeper on implementation? Explore practical courses inside the [ABC Trainerize Academy](#) today!

FITNESS IS NO LONGER THE FULL PRODUCT

#2

Roughly 4 in 10 trainers reported a noticeable change in what clients expect from coaching compared to the prior year.

A near 40% movement in a single year signals an industry change in motion. **Nearly half the market has fundamentally changed what it wants from a coach in just twelve months.**

This is not a marginal preference shift. It reflects a redefinition of value.

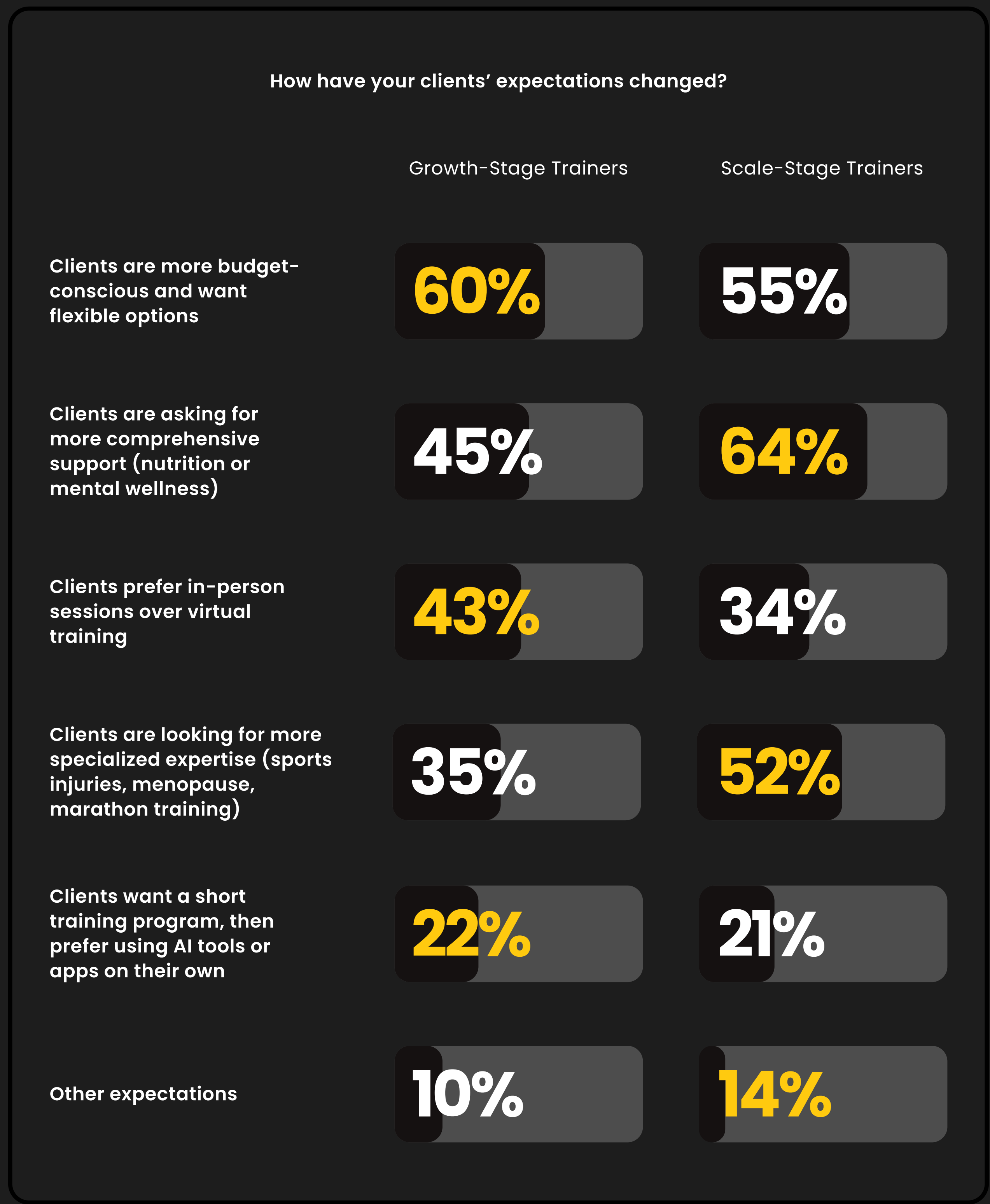
Have you seen any shifts in client expectations in the past year?

60%
NO

40%
YES

For trainers who are working to scale their businesses (**Scale-Stage**), the most common shift was increased demand for support beyond workouts.

For trainers who are earlier on in business, (**Growth-Stage**), expectations skew slightly differently but reinforce the same broader shift.



THE TREND SIGNAL: LONGEVITY OVER AESTHETICS

This shift is also visible when trainers were asked which trends will most impact the industry. “Focus on longevity and healthspan, not just aesthetics” ranked as a top-three industry trend. Specialized niche coaching and mental health or holistic wellness integration also ranked among the most impactful trends.

What trend do you think will impact the personal training industry the most over the next year?



WHY IT MATTERS IN 2026

Coaching is evolving into a relationship-driven service. Those who can't deliver personalization at scale risk churn — even if their workouts are strong.

This full-spectrum demand is being driven by three distinct forces that static workout templates cannot address.

1. The “Human Premium” in an AI World

- Clients won’t pay premium rates for a workout generated by AI or LLMs; they pay for the accountability, empathy, and context that only a human coach provides.
- **The Reality:** When life intervenes—poor sleep, stress, illness—clients value a coach who can adjust expectations with nuance and permission, not just logic.

2. Gen Z & The Rise of Fitness as the “Third Place”

- For younger clients (Gen Z and younger Millennials), fitness is their new social hub. They aren’t just buying fitness; they are buying identity and community.
- **The Reality:** Gen Z and younger Millennials are less motivated by credentials alone and more drawn to belonging, energy, and shared experience. They want run clubs, social squads, and Hyrox teams. If you train them in isolation, you’ll lose them.

3. The “Silver Tsunami” & Anti-frailty

- While the industry obsesses over 20-somethings, the 55+ demographic holds the loyalty and disposable income.
- **The Reality:** A 2026 trend to watch? Power training for seniors. Research shows muscle power declines faster than strength and is the #1 factor in preventing falls. These clients need high-level programming to remain “anti-frail,” not just active.

Check Out: [The Coach Report 2025](#) for a snapshot of real coaching behavior, workouts, and habits from 2025.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Shift the Value Proposition

Stop positioning yourself as a workout provider. Position yourself as a guide for consistency, progress, and long-term outcomes. Make that explicit in your messaging and onboarding.

Systemize Accountability

Use scheduled check-ins, progress tracking, and simple habit targets to replace ad-hoc motivation. Consistency beats intensity for retention.

Extend Support Beyond Sessions

Use on-demand resources (mobility routines, recovery guidance, lifestyle prompts) to stay present in your client’s week without adding more live hours.

HYBRID DELIVERY IS NOW THE DOMINANT COACHING MODEL

#3

The industry has moved past the debate of online versus in-person coaching. Survey results show that **hybrid delivery is now the dominant model for coaches, compared to purely online or in-person coaching.**

48%

Nearly half of trainers report hybrid as their primary delivery model

This consistency matters. It indicates that hybrid delivery is no longer an experimental model or a competitive differentiator. It is the baseline operating model for trainers at different stages of business maturity.

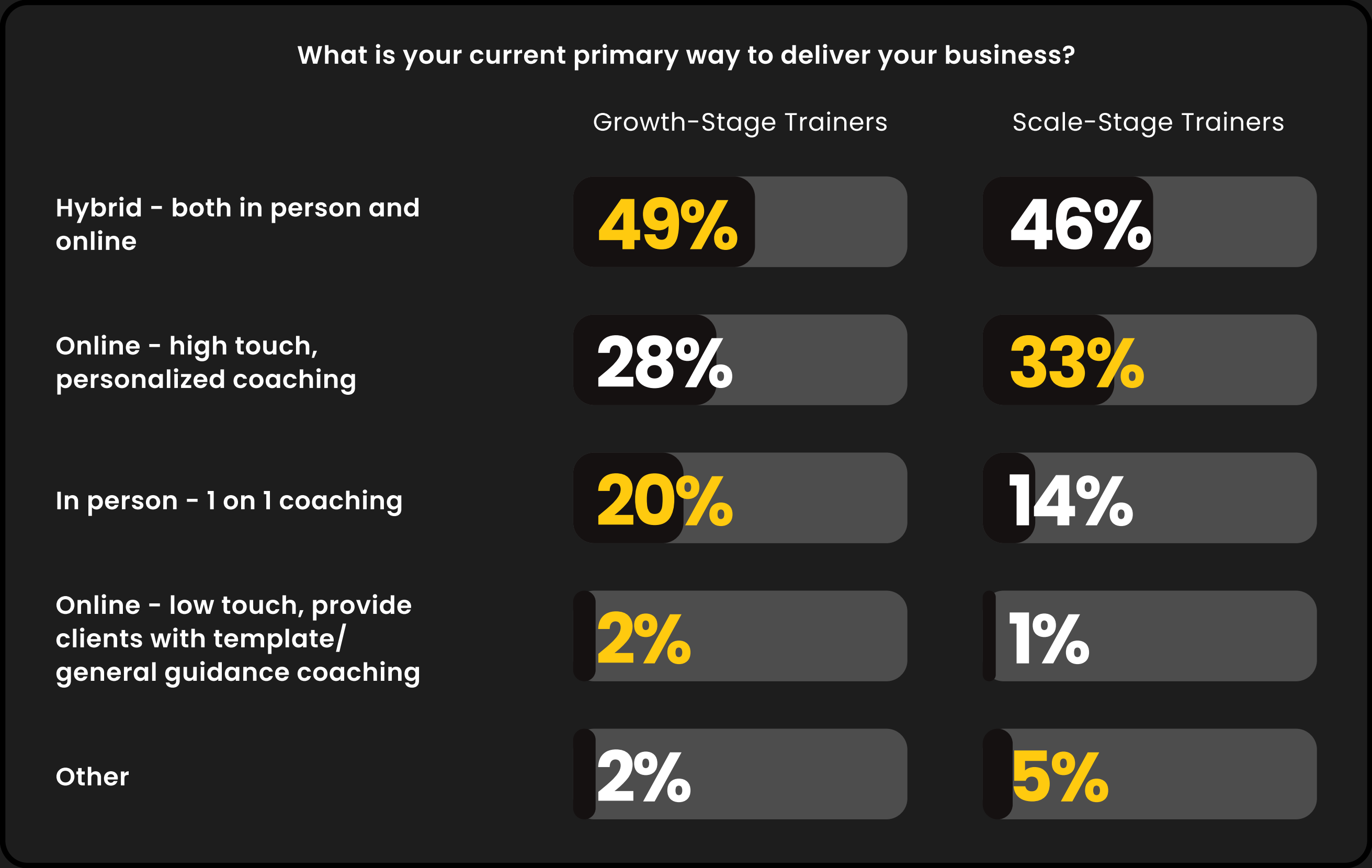
Where the cohorts begin to diverge is **how delivery evolves as client volume increases**.

Surveyed data shows that:

- Scale-Stage Trainers are more likely to rely on online high-touch coaching as a **primary model (33%) compared to Growth-Stage Trainers (28%)**
- Growth-Stage Trainers maintain a higher reliance on **in-person 1:1 coaching (20%) than Scale-Stage Trainers (14%)**

This contrast reveals a clear progression. As trainers move from Growth to Scale, delivery shifts away from time-bound, in-person sessions toward hybrid models.

Moving from "time-bound" (in-person) to "outcome-bound" (online) is the specific lever that allows trainers to graduate from the "Growth" to "Scale" category.



WHY IT MATTERS
IN 2026

Flexibility has become a core driver of retention and perceived value. Hybrid delivery builds flexibility directly into the service model. When value depends entirely on physical attendance, you can become vulnerable to client schedules, travel, and budget constraints.

Survey insights align with a broader behavioral shift often described as **JOMO (Joy of Missing Out)**. Clients are increasingly rejecting the guilt associated with missed sessions and rigid schedules. Hybrid models support a more “doable” approach to fitness, allowing clients to stay consistent through programmed at-home workouts when in-person attendance isn’t possible.

At the same time, purely digital coaching models face growing challenges with engagement and content fatigue.

In contrast, hybrid models that anchor digital delivery to an ongoing human coaching relationship consistently demonstrate stronger retention. The coach remains the anchor; technology extends the relationship.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Transition to a recurring monthly "Hybrid Membership"

(e.g., "\$400/month for 4 in-person sessions + Full App Programming"). Stop selling 10-packs. This stabilizes your cash flow and frames digital support as a core value, not a free add-on.

Monetize the "Other 165 Hours"

Clients spend a few hours per week with you and the rest on their own. Use your app to deliver mobility work, travel workouts, weekend nutrition guidance, and recovery protocols, so progress continues without extra sessions.

Automate the "Base," Coach the "Peak"

Build master programs for your core training cycles. Spend your limited time adjusting around injuries, constraints, or goals. This is how trainers handle 50+ clients without increasing hours.

Use in-person strategically:

As client volume grows, in-person sessions become a premium tool for assessment, accountability, and relationship building, not the default delivery mechanism.

On-Demand Content Is the Third Pillar of Hybrid Coaching

On-demand content is how you monetize the "other 165 hours" of the week. It allows a client to pivot from a heavy gym lift to a 20-minute home mobility flow on a stressful Tuesday without breaking their streak.

Our data reveals a specific demand for utility over volume as just a way to get clients to consume more and more content.

Here's what coaches are hot on for 2026:

Format Matters:

- Multiple difficulty levels in one workout **71%**
- Equipment-specific **54%**
- Equipment-free / bodyweight **52%**
- Demo-style, plug-and-play videos **50%**
- Follow-along workouts **38%**

Top Themes:

- Mobility & flexibility **68%**
- Warm-ups & cool-downs **67%**
- Muscle building **62%**
- Mental wellness & recovery **60%**
- Fat loss **61%**

Duration:

- 30–45 minutes **58%**
- 10–20 minutes **53%**
- Modular workouts **53%**

Where Hybrid Coaching Breaks Down in Practice

Even though hybrid coaching is now the most common model, many trainers are still struggling to keep clients engaged. And it's not for complicated reasons. The same problems keep showing up.

The biggest issues trainers report are:

- #1** Content Customization and Delivery
- #2** Workout Variety and Boredom
- #3** Motivation and Accountability
- #4** Check-ins and Progress Tracking
- #5** Challenges with Tech

This confirms that retention does not fail because of training quality, but because clients lose structure, feedback, and momentum between sessions.

These gaps map directly to the need for structured on-demand content, wearable-informed adjustments, and consistent check-ins inside hybrid models.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Stop Filming “Workouts,”
Start Filming “Solutions”

Offer specific libraries based on the formats and themes above.

Structure is King

Organize your content library into series or challenges to gamify the experience and gives clients a roadmap to follow on their own.

The “Travel Protocol”

Build a specific toolkit for travelers. When a client goes on vacation, don't pause their program; assign them there to keep the billing and the habit active.

Check out: [TZ Collective Recap | The Business of Belonging: How Coaches Grow Through Community](#)

AI AS BOTH A COMPETITOR AND A TEAMMATE

#4

In 2026, AI is a double-edged sword.

It is simultaneously the

top trend

expected to impact the industry (67%) and the greatest perceived threat, with 62% of trainers concerned about competition from low-cost or AI-based consumer apps.

UNIVERSAL ADOPTION:
THE TOP 3 USE CASES

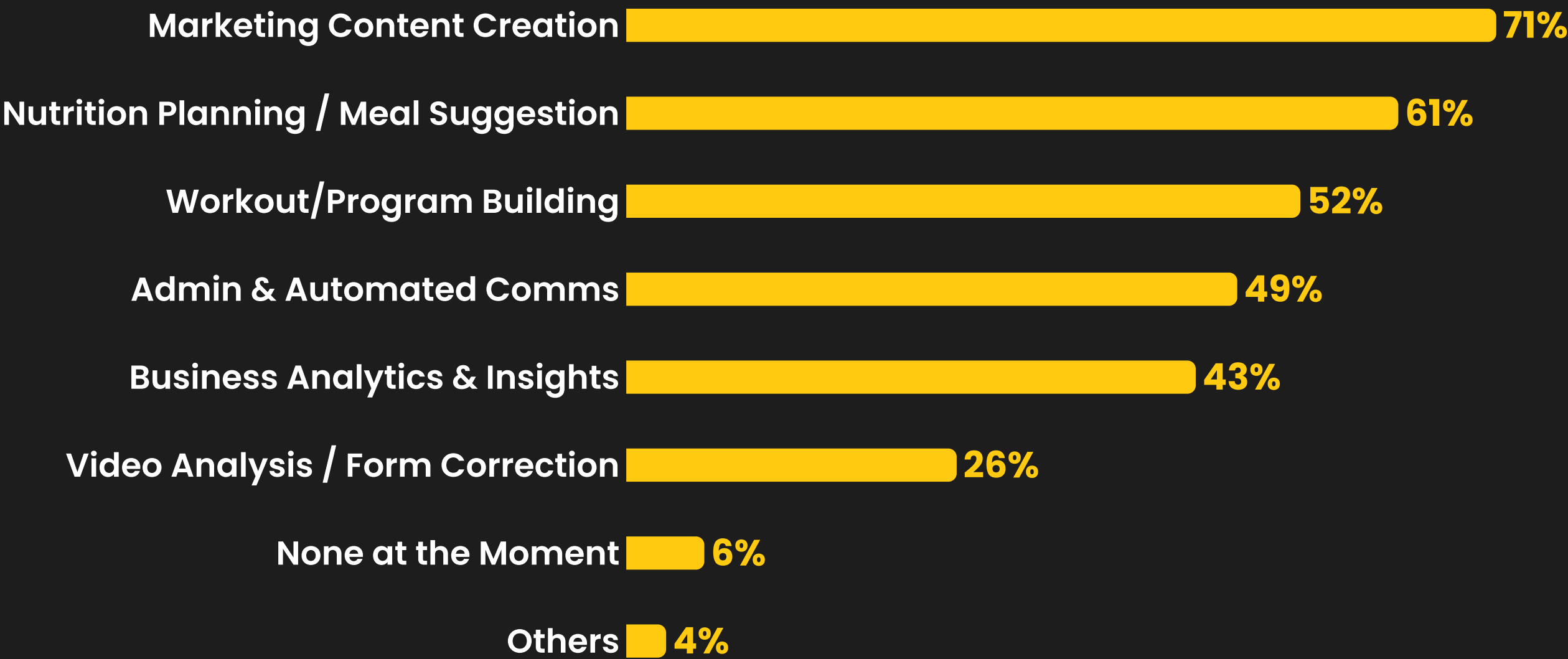
Despite the fear of AI apps, trainers are not sitting on the sidelines. 64% of respondents are already using AI regularly and finding it helpful.

The data shows that trainers are using AI for simple, "backend" tasks to stay competitive:

1. Marketing

2. Program Design

3. Admin & Communication



SHARED RISKS:
THE TOP 3 CONCERNS

Just as the usage is aligned, the concerns are mirrored across the industry. Trainers are adopting AI as an assistant, but they are drawing a firm boundary on where it stops. The top three dealbreakers are:

- 1. **Loss of Personal Connection:** The fear that automation will erode the human relationship that justifies premium pricing.
- 2. **Accuracy and Safety:** The risk of AI-generated errors in programming or technical guidance.
- 3. **Client Perception:** The worry that clients will feel they are being coached by a "bot" rather than a professional.

WHY IT MATTERS IN 2026

Only around 8% of surveyed trainers are hesitant to use AI. And they're feeling the friction. Those riding the wave have realized that while AI can handle the "logic" of fitness (reps, sets, and schedules), it cannot provide the **"Human Premium"** (empathy, context, and accountability).

By using AI to handle the administrative friction, you can buy back the time needed to be more human with your clients.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Use AI to "Buy Back" Time

Time is the #1 challenge when creating programs. Apply AI to repeatable backend tasks like programming logic, initial check-in texts, and marketing emails. This is non-billable work that AI handles instantly.

The "Coach-in-the-Loop" Rule

Never let AI have the final say. Maintain full coach oversight for decisions that affect safety, motivation, and injury management. You're the boss.

Be Transparent

Position AI as a support tool that enhances your service, not a shortcut that replaces your care. Tell clients: "My AI analyzes your data so I can focus on you."

THE RISE OF THE MEDICATED CLIENT: "PRESCRIBING MUSCLE"

#5

The widespread adoption of GLP-1 medication (like Ozempic, Wegovy, and Zepbound) has created the fastest-growing demographic in the fitness industry. This is no longer a niche; it is a mass-market shift that is medicalizing the role of the personal trainer.

Key Industry Signals:

The Demographic Explosion

Approximately 1 in 8 adults (12%) have now used GLP-1 medications, a figure that has more than doubled in the last 18 months.

The Muscle Crisis

Clinical data indicates that without resistance training, up to 15-60% of the weight lost on these drugs can be lean muscle mass. This phenomenon, often called "medication-induced sarcopenia," creates a lowered metabolic rate and potential long-term frailty.

The Shift in Demand

Major gym chains and franchises are pivoting rapidly, launching dedicated "GLP-1 Support Programs" that prioritize strength over cardio.

WHY IT MATTERS IN 2026

For decades, clients hired trainers to help them lose weight. In 2026, the medication handles the weight loss; they are hiring trainers to help them keep their muscle mass.

The traditional “weight loss client” who might be motivated by vanity is being replaced by the “medical necessity client.”

Doctors are effectively prescribing muscle. These clients are not looking for a bootcamp to burn calories (the drug creates the deficit); they are looking for a safety net to prevent their body from consuming its own muscle tissue.

This is one of the strongest **recession-proof revenue streams** available to personal trainers. Health spending is often the last thing cut from a household budget, especially when it is tied to a medical prescription.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Launch a “Muscle Preservation Protocol”

Rebrand your weight loss packages for this demographic. Explicitly market “GLP-1 Support” that focuses on hypertrophy and high-protein intake, rather than high-intensity cardio, which may exacerbate fatigue.

Build a “Referral Pack” for Doctors

Local obesity clinics are desperate for safe places to send patients. Create a one-page PDF outlining your “Muscle-Sparing Program” and drop it off at local endocrinology and weight management clinics.

Adjust for “The Crash”

Be ready to modify programming on the fly. GLP-1 users often experience nausea and fatigue. Switch from long, grueling sessions to shorter, more frequent strength bouts (e.g., 30 mins) to ensure adherence without burnout.

WEARABLES, HEALTH DATA, AND PERSONALIZED COACHING

#6

Wearable technology is no longer emerging. It is assumed. What has changed is how clients expect that data to be used.

For trainers, wearables, health data, and performance tracking **consistently rank among the most impactful industry trends over the next year.** This places data literacy alongside longevity-focused training and specialized coaching as core pillars of modern personal training.

The data signals a clear shift in expectations. Clients are no longer impressed by tracking alone. Step counts, calories, and raw metrics are table stakes. What they now want is **interpretation.**

They are increasingly turning to two sources for meaning: AI tools and human coaches. AI can provide logic and pattern recognition at scale, but it cannot contextualize stress, motivation, injury history, or emotional state. **That gap is where coaching value now lives.**

32%

of trainers consider Wearables, Health Data and Performance Tracking some of the most impactful industry trends in 2026



PERSONAL TRAINERS AS A DATA TRANSLATOR

We have moved from the “Information Age” to the “Interpretation Age.” A client can see their Sleep Score is 45% on their wrist, but they don't know what to do about it. Do they skip the gym? Do they push through?

If you ignore the data your client is wearing 24/7, you are coaching blind. The value isn't in the workout file; it's in the adjustment you make before the workout starts based on their biological reality. And this is where you can show your expertise and value beyond *just* assigning workouts.

WHY IT MATTERS IN 2026

Data-driven coaching is the ultimate retention tool because it proves you are watching. It creates a feedback loop that an AI app cannot yet replicate with the same level of empathy and nuance.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

The “Red/Yellow/Green” System

Don't get bogged down in complex graphs. Ask clients to share their “Readiness Score” at the start of a session.

- **Green:** Push for a PR.
- **Yellow:** Stick to the plan.
- **Red:** Pivot to mobility or active recovery.

Translate, Don't Transmit

Never just send a screenshot of data to a client. Always attach an insight. Instead of “Your HRV is low,” say “I see your HRV is down; let's extend the warm-up today to help your nervous system recover.”

Anchor Data to Behavior

Use data to prove your value. Show them the correlation: “See how your resting heart rate dropped this month? That's the strength training working.” This visual proof builds massive trust and long-term retention.

WHERE PERSONAL TRAINING IS HEADED NEXT

The trends shaping personal training are not isolated. They compound.

Harder acquisition, higher expectations, hybrid delivery, AI, medicalized weight loss, and data-driven coaching all point to the same conclusion: the traditional 1:1 session model is no longer sufficient on its own.

As a result, the middle of the coaching market is thinning. Trainers offering moderate customization at moderate prices without systems are facing the highest strain.

In contrast, growth is increasingly **concentrated in two models**. On one end, high-volume, low-touch coaching uses automation and templates to serve large client bases efficiently. On the other hand, low-volume, high-ticket coaching delivers specialized outcomes through semi-private, medical, or outcomes-based programs.

At the same time, demand is shifting toward demographics with higher lifetime value and loyalty. Active aging clients are becoming a critical growth segment, and community-based formats, such as small groups, shared goals, and recurring experiences, are adding both retention and efficiency.

WHAT PERSONAL TRAINERS ARE BUILDING NOW

Coaches adapting to this environment are expanding how value is delivered, not just how often.

Semi-private and group training are increasing revenue per hour while strengthening accountability and community.

Hybrid memberships bundle live training with recovery, education, and ongoing support.

On-demand and digital add-ons extend coaching beyond sessions without adding hours.

In the years ahead, successful coaching businesses will not be defined by how many sessions they sell, but by how intelligently their services are structured. The future of coaching is not about doing more work. It is about designing models that scale trust, outcomes, and impact.

FINAL WORDS

The personal training industry is not being disrupted; it is being refined. In 2026, success favors coaches who combine human judgment with well-designed systems, adapt to changing client needs, and build businesses that can evolve with the market. The future of coaching belongs to those who design for sustainability, not just growth.

Start building a more resilient personal training business. Explore a free trial of [ABC Trainerize](#) and see how human-led, system-powered coaching works in practice.

Try it for free for 30 days!