

# We're Still Standing: Employers Fight Sitting Disease

BY FRAN MELMED, CONTEXT COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTING

Nine hours. That's how many hours the average American spends working and commuting. For the majority of us, that's time spent sitting. Thanks to research stretching back as far as the '40s, we now know that time spent sitting is time doing us harm.

Google "sitting disease" and you're sure to get search results that declare your job is killing you. That's not metaphorical. Studies link sitting for more than four hours per day with an increased risk of earlier death. If that's not enough to stir you out of your seat, consider that sedentary behavior is linked to a two-times greater risk of diabetes, a 90 percent greater risk of cardiovascular disease, and an increased risk of obesity and a variety of cancers.

Unfortunately, for employer and employee alike, the focus on 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous daily activity doesn't cut the risk. The gym won't save us. With sedentary behavior, what's needed are routine activity breaks of short duration scattered throughout one's day.

Many employers are starting to tackle sedentary behavior within their wellness strategies. The growth in sales of treadmill desks and adjustable-height desks – tenfold in the case of one maker, TrekDesk – shows the appetite. Yet at several hundred to several thousand dollars a pop, investment in these desks demands consideration.

We've seen firsthand how employers are investing in the health and well-being of their employees, and the struggles they experience while seeking engagement and culture shift.

It was after participating in a client's 12-week team fitness challenge that we struck on the idea for Hotseat, a workplace wellness tool designed to defeat the chair, one person at a time. Hotseat uses a person's smartphone to deliver a rotating, individualized schedule of two-minute activity breaks, based on each user's activity preferences, calendar availability and desired times and hours of use. Every employee can select and initiate competitive challenges where they vie to be the last person standing, and family members and friends can play too, pulling in important and motivating health partners.

A two-month pilot with the American Heart Association showed excellent engagement and results. More than 250 employees and family members used Hotseat over a two-month trial period. At the end of the pilot, 78 percent remained engaged, 67 percent would recommend Hotseat to others, 67 percent took more activity breaks and 76 percent were more mindful of their time spent sitting.

Employing technology to beat the health hazards of technology? Strange, but true.

by 13 percent, and members already active in fitness saw the greatest improvement, reducing their factors by 22 percent.

- Incentive structures built around daily step counts motivated members to reach thresholds.

In 2013, activity trackers generated an estimated \$290 million in U.S. retail sales, according to the NPD Group, who says the market could double in 2014. Vitality was an early adopter of integrating devices as a means to track verified workouts, starting in 2004 as one of the first wellness programs to integrate heart rate monitors. The program now works with more than 100 unique devices.

As these technologies evolve, Vitality will continue to monitor and track (pun intended) the impact of these devices and tweak our program designs accordingly to drive the most impact on health. Additional details can be found in our new wearable devices technical brief.



## Technology in Wellness Can Open Doors and Change Lives

BY SUE LEWIS, CHIEF PRODUCT AND STRATEGY OFFICER, STAYWELL

Technology, when applied properly and wisely, can improve the way we live and work. It can help us make better use of staff time and resources. It can make people productive and processes more cost effective. It can also help us connect and communicate with people and is dramatically changing how we engage individuals in their personal health management and employer-sponsored wellness programs.

While technology is being used to boost participation in wellness programs, many payers and providers are also benefiting from some specific tools and applications, including:



1. **Social or peer-to-peer apps:** Whether it's mobile apps, a Web-based program on your participant portal or a workplace challenge, the power of social wellness leverages the support, motivation and accountability of peer relationships to achieve engagement. Harnessing the power of community and competition through social wellness platforms is yielding notable results on engagement and outcomes.
2. **Wearables:** Wearable fitness monitors and activity trackers, often linked to social wellness apps, allow users to monitor their progress in real time and compete with others for rewards. There is a bright