Online Training Log Sites

from run to watch to web

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Authored by: Andrew Opala

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Purpose of this Document

To find the most popular training log sites on the Internet and discover which one is the best for me.

I'm a wannabe runner, racer, athlete, etc. I want free tools to get me to a basic level of fitness. I started a blog called Running Man Wannabe publicly track my progress and it has helped find other people in different states of undress in terms of their training and running. In the same way I'm looking for an online logging tool or set of tools to get me to a decent level of tracking progress, analyzing changes, and planning improvements. The purpose of this document is to collect some of my findings to perhaps be a starting point for some discussion on the best site for each phase of athletic training.

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Selection Criteria

1. Online site (may have desktop or mobile components but needs to be stand alone through a web browser)
2. Free or basic access component without the need to purchase a subscription or hardware like a watch
3. Must be in English (I would hate to think how the Swedes translate fartlek)
4. Apparently many users (letting popularity filter things a bit)
5. Mostly or equal focus on Running for fitness and racing

Methodology

My first thought was to find all the different running watches on the market and see what sites they offered with the watch purchase so I made that initial list. Then I added all the social-type multi-sport sites from Google keyword

searches, etc. Finally I added any missing sites, based on my and other quick surveys of our respective blog readers. Then not to be outdone, I went to Alexa.com to find what other sites visitors were also visiting - just in case something was missed. Then I took this big list and tried to bring it down based on the 5 criteria. This gave me the list below.

The List

- Garmin Connect
- Adidas
- Running World
- Daily Mile
- Road Runner Sports
- Beginner Triathlete
- Timex Ironman
- Running Ahead
- Polar
- Log your Run
- Buckeye Outdoors
- Nike+

Category Comparisons

I reviewed each site in several areas. These were:

- Site information (demographics, popularity, traffic rank in the U.S., average time a user spends on the site, and the time I spent on the site trying to accomplish tasks)
- Data input (manual, linkage from a watch or hardware, uploading an excel sheet)
- Data output (tables, graphs, blog widgets, excel files)
- Types of sports covered (running, cycling, swimming, fitness, other)
- Analysis components (HR, time, distance, route, goals, splits, time, challenges, etc.)
- Social component (peer-training, forums, pictures, videos)
- Plans and Coaching (calculators, access to running plans, coaching access)

Specific Observations

Demographic

18-25 (some 25-34) year olds

The demographic results from Alexa.com confirm my difficulties with some sites. Those sites that Alexa says are more frequently visited by 18-34 year olds, I found to be very simple and limited in their abilities. With a kind of branched workflow presentation, where you would start down one path and have to finish before you could do anything. These sites were Adidas MiCoach, Nike+ Running. Both sites had wonderful graphics and very smooth fade in animations, but were annoying and difficult to use if you did not want to go through their 31 easy steps. These sites would be good for a novice that is not part of an existing running community, has no access to the Internet (!) and is unwilling to open a magazine about running. The other sites were organized in more of a dashboard orientation.

Popularity

By popularity (probably the largest running base to learn from, run with, and challenge) you would pick Garman, Adidas, Running World, and Daily Mile. You probably wouldn't pick Running Ahead, Polar, Log Your Run, Buckeye Outdoors, and Nike+.

Data Input

Manual Data Entry

Most sites allow for manual entry except the sites that are linked to hardware – these are Garman, Adidas, and Nike+.

Entry from Watch or From other Site

Most sites allowed for some Garmin, Nike+, or excel upload in addition to manual. Nike +, Adidas and Polar were particularly nasty for getting data into them.

Data Output

Almost all sites allowed for data to be displayed in tables, calendars and graphs on the web page. Where the sites differed was if you could export the data in an Excel file or to a blog widget/script. Only Adidas, Running World, Timex Ironman, Polar and Nike+ failed in this area. If these features were not necessary you might not care about this field. They are important in the long run – especially the excel export – because there is no guarantee that a site will remain up and you might lose years of input data. It's good to backup your data this way.

Sports Type

All the sites covered a variety of sports except for Polar (missing cycling and swimming) – but for that Polar had a very excellent fitness section for weight and machine training not found on the other sites.

Social Component

By far, the most social site is Daily Mile – it seems like a Twitter or Facebook that has sports in it as well - after that Beginner Triathlete. Most of the other sites had forums and some ability to comment but they were less powerful to harness messaging between site participants. I assigned no real points for this as I have a blog and feel this is not needed in a site.

Coaching and Training

Wouldn't it be great if you could answer a few questions about yourself and what you want to accomplish and voila, and training plan appears in your calendar and tells you when to work out? Well some sites have this in some respect. The best sites would be Beginner Triathlete, Polar, Running World (you have to pay), Timex Ironman, and Running Ahead.

In Buckeye Outdoors, and Beginner Triathlete you can actually request a coach. But of course this virtual person could be an inmate in a prison trying to make some extra cash. It's still a cool idea.

Overall Conclusions and Applications

	Popularity	Ease of Use	Input	Output	Training	_	Totals
Garmin Connect	3	3	0	3	1		10
Addidas	3	0	0	0	1		4
Running World	3	1	1	0	3		8
Daily Mile	2	3	3	2	0		10
Road Runner Sports	2	1	0	0	0		3
Beginner Triathlete	2	3	2	2	3		12
Timex Ironman	1	2	1	2	3		9
Running Ahead	1	3	3	3	2		12
Polar	1	3	1	0	2		7
Log your Run	0	3	3	3	2		11
Buckeye Outdoors	0	1	2	2	3		8
Nike+	0	0	0	0	1		1

1. Stay away from Adidas and Nike+ web sites
2. If you like Runner's World, use Timex Ironman instead. They are both operated by the same web company and Timex training plans are free.
3. Nutrition is an area that is covered in some of the more complex sites – you may want to explore this area for yourself
4. Mobile applications, especially on the iPod Touch and iPhone should definitely be an area of further research
5. The best scores came from Beginner Triathlete and Running Ahead.

Additionally For Me:

1. Buy a Garmin 305 – it gives a continuous stream of data for the developing athlete and is the best source of data for a serious runner
2. Keep my Daily Mile account for the attractive widget, but start entering everything into Garman Connect
3. Tell James (@ The Runner's Bug) that a fitness challenge could probably be tracked well at Polar if there is a wide variety of participants – beginner Triathlete has some features, but the steps to group participants in a challenge seem difficult.