

Hermes Awards 2022
The Hoffman Agency
Client: Nautilus, Inc. (Bowflex)
Category: 90c. (Publicity Campaign)

Leaning into Connected Fitness

When you hear “Bowflex,” you likely have a flashback to the cheesy infomercials of ripped athletes performing their workouts with a home gym. While Bowflex has come a long way since the infomercials of the ‘80s, many consumers still think of Bowflex as an old home gym brand for boomers. Our team was out to change that perception.

In the last few years, the connected fitness industry has boomed with consumers flocking to boutique studios, live stream workouts, and onto the Peloton bandwagon. Bowflex kept banging at the door — trying to be part of the digital fitness conversation. While we had succeeded in making some noise with the launch of the Bowflex C6 stationary bike, it wasn’t considered part of the smart bike craze. Ultimately, Bowflex wanted to be the consumer’s choice for smart, indoor cycling — not just another indoor cycling bike with a built-in screen and on-demand classes.

Nautilus had a new product in the hopper that was sure to change the indoor cycling game, so we knew this would be our opportunity to insert them into the connected fitness conversation. The Bowflex VeloCore bike, as an (un)stationary bike, broke all the rules of traditional indoor cycling.



The Bowflex VeloCore indoor bike is the industry’s first dual-mode bike that features both a stationary setting and a leaning mode. In leaning mode, riders can push and pull the bike from side-to-side, replicating the movement of outdoor cycling. A proprietary, patent-

pending lock-out feature keeps the bike in stationary mode, so you can opt for a traditional cycling workout if desired. The VeloCore is also Bowflex's first connected bike, and with the JRNY digital fitness platform, exercisers are treated to an immersive experience with engaging digital content on a 22" HD touch screen, customized coaching and a library of trainer-led content.

While launching a revolutionary bike when the level of demand for home fitness products was off the charts due to the pandemic sounds promising, we faced a handful of obstacles. The supply chain was beyond our control — products were taking months to be delivered to consumers. Additionally, the bike's leaning feature could be perceived as "gimmicky." How would we prove that the side-to-side feature mimicked that of an outdoor cycling experience and provided a better workout than a regular stationary bike, which justified the price tag? How would we make consumers understand that this was not your average smart indoor bike experience?

It was up to PR to validate the bike's legitimacy and shift the Bowflex brand narrative.

Leaning on Media Relations

With a slim budget, a disrupted supply chain and high expectations from Nautilus executives, our team got to work. To drum up excitement — virtually — would be a new approach for our team, but we had a strategy.

We opted to direct our attention to media reviews because they would effectively validate consumer purchase decisions, insert Bowflex into the connected fitness conversation and position us an alternative to Peloton and the many other competitors. [Research](#) shows that 77% of people regularly read online reviews and 79% trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation. Further, 94% of consumers say positive reviews make them more likely to use a business.

We needed media validation yet were allotted a sparse 10 bikes, so we needed to carefully select the journalists we placed them with.

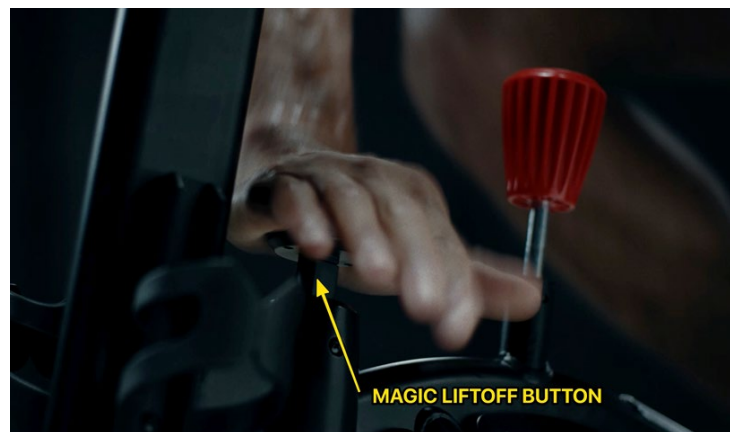
To spark media interest, we focused on messaging that would not only insert us into the connected fitness conversation, but also break through the noise with a product no one saw coming — the first leaning bike on the market. We leveraged the following messaging:

- VeloCore's industry-first leaning mode delivers results: toned and define arms and a stronger core.
- VeloCore is a completely new way to bike at home that's made to ergonomically move just like you, activating muscles in your arms and core while challenging you to exercise daily with addictive digital experiences that help you to meet your goals faster.
- Leaning side-to-side in virtual destinations mimics real-world experiences and outdoor freedom.
- The built-in HD touch screen provides limitless daily motivation through streaming content, custom coaching and more.
- VeloCore provides you with the confidence to improve performance no matter your fitness level — delivering variety through both the hardware (stationary or leaning) and the digital experience (custom coaching, Explore the World, streaming, workout videos and more).

In lieu of typical in-person media meetings, we offered media a virtual first look at the new VeloCore bike and JRNY digital fitness platform and access to product experts who dove deep into the technology and consumer research that led to the design. This provided journalists the ability to experience the one-of-a-kind bike and validate its legitimacy; and gave us a window into their thoughts and excitement to help determine if they should receive one of our review units.

Leaning with It, Rocking with It

In our initial briefing outreach, we sparked interest by teasing that Bowflex was redefining home fitness with the launch of a game-changing cardio product engineered to create an immersive experience with unlimited workouts and entertainment. Further, we really leaned into the “magic button” on the bike teasing the following image to spark interest.



Stemming from the initial pre-briefings, we sent the relevant top-tier media a Bowflex VeloCore bike review unit so they could try it out themselves. Needless to say, there were a lot of skeptics.

PC Magazine reviews editor Angela Moscaritolo, in particular, hesitantly agreed to a virtual briefing of the product, along with a review unit — just as long as it was a “*smart fitness product.*”

Once she received the Bowflex VeloCore bike and got the chance to test the magic button for herself, all hesitation was put to rest.

Her comprehensive and overwhelmingly positive review of the Bowflex VeloCore bike, covered all aspects of the VeloCore experience including price and membership features; design, specs, and dimensions; assembly and setup; the JRNY interface; her experience working out on the bike; as well as comparisons and conclusions.

Throughout the review, Angela positioned the VeloCore bike against Peloton and emphasized how the VeloCore bike provided a function that Peloton can’t — its leaning capability. **This was the validation consumers needed.**

Here are a few standout quotes from the piece:

“This Peloton competitor offers a feature you won’t find on any other indoor exercise bike available today: the ability to sway side to side as you ride.”

"In the smart indoor exercise bike market, the VeloCore stands out for its unique Lean Mode that lets you tilt left and right, and weave side to side as you ride, a feature you won't find on any competing machines at this time."

"I've been testing the VeloCore over the past five weeks. I work out on it for about 30 minutes per session, five times a week, and always end my workouts very sweaty, with a feeling of accomplishment."

"It's more than just a gimmick, because with Lean Mode engaged, you'll work your arms, core, and back in addition to your legs as you tilt left and right."

"It feels satisfying to slam down on the Lean Mode lock during a workout."

"Albeit limited in quantity at the moment, the trainer-led VeloCore classes are excellent."

"The VeloCore's video streaming integration has become one of my favorite features."

Angela highlighted how she has already completed every workout that the JRNY digital fitness platform had to offer, noting that JRNY trainer-led workouts are *"more relaxed"* than Peloton; however, both experiences are well-produced, sequenced, and engaging. Further, she noted that VeloCore's ability to lean side-to-side and streaming platform capabilities add to the bike's appeal, making the price much more justifiable.

As one of the first media to review the bike, we knew that Angela was going to set the record straight and this was going to be the start of the new Bowflex brand narrative.

The power of a review.

It's Raining Reviews

Once the PC Magazine article appeared, as well as the other reviews from the editors we pre-briefed, the flood gates of media review unit requests and consumer purchases came rushing in. Even though there was up to a three-month wait for the product, media and consumers thought it was worth the wait.

It was raining reviews, which further reinforced our key messages in in tech, fitness, lifestyle and business media, and resulted in well beyond 10 reviews units because the Bowflex VeloCore bike had become *"the bike to have."*

What the media had to say:

"I was able to try out the bike, and as someone who gets pretty bored in indoor cycling classes (no one's fault but my own), the experience was impressive. The bike has so many bells and whistles, you really have to experience it for yourself to truly appreciate all of them."

– Jill Layton, Techwalla

"This is no mere gimmick; I tested the VeloCore and found that the leaning capability really does add something."

– Rick Broida, CNET

"Besides conventional upright spinning, the VeloCore unlocks so the rider can literally lean into curves to more accurately simulate the feel of open road riding and further strengthen arms and core."

– Jonathan Takiff, Techlicious

"Bowflex's latest exercise bike is a great follow-up to their solid C6, and it has a unique trick up its sleeve — leaning."

– Darrell Etherington, TechCrunch

"Beyond streaming options, the other feature that sets this Bowflex model apart from other exercise bikes is "leaning mode," which allows the rider greater range of motion above the waist, engaging the arms and core."

– Nicola Fumo, Forbes

"Bowflex is an old name in home gym equipment, but they're still on the cutting edge. Case-in-point is their VeloCore exercise bike, which boasts a feature that no other stationary bike (even Peloton) can offer: leaning mode."

– Oscar Hartzog, Rolling Stone

"The result is a far more immersive experience than you would ever enjoy on another bike — it's so awesome to be able to lean into turns as you virtually pedal your way down winding mountain roads. You also get a better workout since you introduce your core, arms, and shoulders into the exercise."

– Zach Epstein, BGR

Additionally, the news caught the eye of marketing publication Ad Age, helping bolster the new Bowflex brand image:

"Bowflex, which late last year ran ads featuring real people, in contrast to Peloton's unrealistic holiday campaign, is marketing a new indoor cycling product — the VeloCore bike, which leans and wobbles as it would on a real road, but without tipping over."

– Adrienne Pasquarelli, Ad Age

Since the launch in late August 2020, the Bowflex VeloCore has received more than **1.1 billion impressions** from unique articles, broadcast segments, and **45 product reviews** in major publications that validated the bike's promise and shifted the Bowflex brand narrative. Finally, we were in the connected fitness conversation alongside Peloton.

In addition to media validation, the Bowflex VeloCore bike received a CES Innovation Award out of thousands of products entered. The CES Innovation Awards program, owned and produced by the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), is an annual competition honoring outstanding design and engineering in consumer technology products across 28 product categories. An elite panel of industry expert judges, including members of the media, designers, engineers and more, reviewed submissions based on innovation, engineering and functionality, aesthetic and design.

While initially we just wanted to be part of the connected fitness and indoor cycling narrative, our Bowflex VeloCore bike campaign delivered so much more — the ability to be more than just a competitor to Peloton.

We'd rewritten the Bowflex brand narrative with the (un)stationary bike that leans from side-to-side. Bowflex was no longer being compared to others in the connected fitness space, because the VeloCore bike was truly one-of-a-kind.

All it took was one reviews article to convince the naysayers — this was no gimmick.