

health club management

JANUARY 2014

No 209

THE ULTIMATE LOCKING SOLUTIONS

Ojmar's unique locking systems –
easy to use, manage and maintain

SAFE AND SECURE

at Cambridge Sports Centre

Ojmar's unique locking systems meet the varying needs of users of the new sports centre while also offering easy management and maintenance for staff

The new Cambridge Sports Centre provides a world-class facility for recreation, training and competition. Completed last summer, the development includes a sports hall, gym and multi-purpose sports area.

The facilities cater for students, sports teams and the community, placing unique demands on the centre's locker facilities. The university required a keyless locking system for its team changing rooms. Ojmar's OCS Touch system proved the ideal solution for the lockers supplied by Prospec. Simple to use, the locks require no keys or cards to operate. Users simply enter a four-digit code of their choosing to activate and deactivate the lock.

The system is robust to withstand the heavy usage of sports teams and is also IP55 certified – the highest level of water resistance available – making it ideal for humid environments like changing areas and washrooms.

In the member changing areas for staff, students and the public, the locking solution needed to accommodate the centre's RFID card, which is also used for membership, access control and cashless payments. Here, Ojmar installed its OTS RFID system. A simple one-click operation allows users to activate and deactivate the lock by pressing their card on top. Like the OCS Touch, the system is highly durable and IP55 certified.

As an accessible facility, it's essential the centre has adequate locker space to accommodate users with disabilities. Accessible lockers can therefore only be activated using a special card allocated by reception staff.

Meanwhile, lockers that are left occupied at the end of the day, in any of the changing rooms, are preset to open via an automatic opening facility to



At Cambridge, Ojmar has supplied locking systems that integrate with RFID cards, as well as touch system locks operated using a four-digit code

prevent people from using the lockers as personal storage space. Staff then collect the contents of the lockers for safekeeping, ensuring they remain free for the next day's users.

Easy management and maintenance is essential for a busy facility, and the OCS Touch and OTS RFID come together in one software package, allowing both solutions to be managed from one standalone system.

A master key system also allows the management to open and close lockers in the event of lost cards or forgotten codes without losing the original code entered by the user. The system also has an events log, which records the last 30 uses of the locker in real-time

to safeguard users and staff from accusations of theft.

The set-up of the two systems, as well as any changes and maintenance, are performed without needing to open the locks or connect to any devices. Master codes can also be altered and cards deleted by management in just seconds.

Both systems are battery-operated, standalone and can be overridden by master keys, providing protection in the event of power cuts or data outage. A hand-held, standalone programmer also allows staff to read key cards and even make new ones during power cuts. Both systems come with a two-year guarantee.

For more information: www.ojmar.com

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The campaign to present exercise as medicine has been delivered a blow with

the removal of physical activity from the QOF (Quality and Outcomes Framework) – see p10.

There was huge excitement in the sector when, in April 2013, physical activity was added to the QOF – a voluntary scheme that rewards GPs for patient care – for the treatment of hypertension. This had been a primary policy objective for ukactive and the hope was, as CEO David Stalker said at the time, that it would be “just the beginning of an opportunity to embed physical activity across a wider range of indicators for the management of chronic conditions”.

In the months since that decision, the scientific argument for viewing exercise as

exercised than if they took drugs. Only in cases of chronic heart failure were drugs noticeably more effective than exercise.

And it's not as though we were lacking evidence before that: statistics commonly quoted within the fitness industry include the fact that chronic inactivity shortens a person's lifespan by up to five years and is responsible for 17 per cent of premature deaths in the UK (*The Lancet*); that 37,000 deaths in England could be prevented each year if everyone were sufficiently active (Public Health England); and that physical activity is the fourth leading risk factor for mortality around the world (WHO).

Yet in spite of these – and many more – proven health benefits, physical activity will be removed from the slimmed-down QOF which comes into effect in April. Why?

Some GPs have blamed bureaucracy, seeing QOF as a time-consuming, box-ticking exercise. But the fact remains that, even in a slimmed-down QOF, interventions that are proven to work should remain in place. All of which suggests that GPs remain unaware and unconvinced of the benefits of exercise.

We've made some inroads: ukactive's Let's Get Moving initiative, for example – which places exercise professionals within GP surgeries as part of an integrated team (see *HCM* May 13, p22) – has been praised by leading health charity The Kings Fund.

Meanwhile, establishments such as the Institute of Lifestyle Medicine in the US (see *HCM* Sept 13, p80) are pushing the education agenda – something the UK must mirror, as without opening GPs' minds to exercise, our efforts will continue to hit a brick wall. Driving awareness and understanding will be key.

But above and beyond all of this, we as a sector must push back immediately and lobby to have physical activity – with its proven health benefits – reinstated on the QOF.

We must push back immediately and lobby to have physical activity – with its proven health benefits – reinstated on the QOF

medicine has only strengthened. Let's take just one example: a report published in the October issue of the *BMJ* – a title which has as its strapline ‘Helping doctors make better decisions’ – which showed that exercise can be as effective as many frequently prescribed drugs in treating some leading causes of death.

The report analysed 305 previous studies to compare the effectiveness of drugs versus exercise in lessening mortality among people with one of four diseases: heart disease, stroke, diabetes or chronic heart failure. For the first three conditions, the risk of death was the same – or lower – if patients

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Wearable technology enables clubs to build loyalty beyond their four walls

Wearable devices complement a health club's offering

I completely agree with Bryan O'Rourke (*HCM* Sept 13, p68) that wearable technology can create unique opportunities for health clubs and drive down healthcare costs. However, he also said such tracking devices come with risks such as increased competition. In my mind, while this is a valid point, the risks are far outweighed by the opportunities.

Operators are all keen to find ways to attract new types of members, and keep existing ones for longer. Tracking technologies have a clear role to play in achieving this. Wearables with online platforms present clear opportunities to build propositions that attract those who see the gym as unappealing, and that enhance the experience of casual members who eventually quit. The technology allows operators and PTs to build loyalty through holistic, lifestyle-based programmes that have no physical

boundaries – that do not require exercise to be carried out in-club.

The industry must embrace wearable technology, viewing it as a complement to current offerings rather than worrying it could cannibalise potential members. It won't. Holmes Place International has used Fitbug for three years and proven the hypothesis: new corporate memberships appeal to the 'hard to reach' who would never previously have joined, while traditional members feel cared about, however and wherever they choose to exercise. The technology also gives access to members 24/7 to maintain engagement and motivation – a marketer's dream.

Ignore wearables at your peril. Build them into your propositions, else they may simply be seen as an alternative.

Paul Landau
Founder and CEO, Fitbug

Clubs should consider creating balance centres

For the first time in history, there are now more people in the US who are over the age of 45 than there are under. Because of this, many new opportunities are available for fitness and healthcare. One such opportunity is a balance centre.

It's a fact that few older people are screened by their physicians for balance issues until they fall. One in three people older than 65 will fall this year, and 50 per cent will fall again in the next 12 months. Once an individual has fallen, the fear associated with falling again can lead to social isolation, depression and a downward spiral in health.

There's a clear role for health clubs to play here, as studies suggest strength and balance training programmes could reduce the number of falls by up to 40 per cent. Under-utilised space in-club could be turned into a balance centre, assessing clients and – provided their doctor is in agreement (findings should be discussed with their GP before proceeding) – offering personalised programmes led by balance training specialists.

Given the growth of the over-65 age group, there's huge potential to turn such a balance centre into a strong profit centre for your club.

Colin Milner
CEO, ICAA



A third of over-65s fall each year

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New support for CIMPSA after business plan rethink

The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMPSA) has announced that five employers in the sport and activity sector have committed to investing in the UK body following its new business plan.

CIMPSA – which provides leadership and drives standards for professionals working in sport and physical activity – has gained the support of Everyone Active, Leisure Connection, DC Leisure, the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) and GLL. The new investors have purchased more than 150 memberships for their respective teams.



Nuffield Health: Creating integrated services

Nuffield Health merges consumer and corporate

The UK's largest healthcare charity, Nuffield Health, has merged its Corporate and Consumer Wellbeing divisions to create The Wellbeing Division.

The move is designed to allow for the creation of a suite of one-stop integrated services for all customers, while expanding coverage across the country and creating product innovations in clinical and fitness areas. The charity's long-term vision is to create a unique not-for-profit health and wellbeing system that challenges the existing NHS and for-profit models.

Washington's new leisure centre gets the green light

Plans for an £11m replacement leisure centre in Washington have been given the go-ahead by Sunderland City Council.

Expected to open in 2015, with work starting in the new year, facilities will include a six-lane 25m pool and learner pool, a four-court sports hall, an additional multi-purpose hall, two glass-backed squash courts, sauna and steamrooms, a wellness centre with a 100-station gym, a separate indoor cycling facility and exercise studio, a two-level soft play area, and six external 3G small-sided football pitches.

Physical activity pulled from QOF

The failure of GPs to properly use the NHS Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) – the government's voluntary incentive scheme – will result in a dramatic slimming down of the system in 2014.

A voluntary scheme for GP practices in the UK that rewards them for good patient care, the QOF will be cut by about 40 per cent from April 2014 under the reforms.

Among the incentives to be shelved are those relating to assessing physical activity.

The scrapping of physical activity assessments comes as a blow to the health and wellness sector, as intervention programmes linked to it – such as Sport England's Let's Get Moving initiative – have proven to be highly successful.

According to uactive, if used effectively, physical activity could be employed by the



GPs need more education on the benefits of activity, says uactive

NHS manage and prevent more than 20 conditions and diseases, such as coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

David Stalker, uactive CEO, responded to the news by calling for GPs and health professionals to receive more education and training on the benefits of physical activity.

£7m 'Olympic legacy' centre for Sheffield

Sheffield has edged closer to realising its Olympic legacy programme after plans were unveiled for a new £7m sports centre and swimming pool.

The proposed centre would be built on the Thorncliffe Recreation Ground in High Green and help fill the gap left by a £50m programme of cuts, which has seen many existing facilities close, including Stocksbridge pool last April.

The new centre is expected to feature a 25m six-lane pool, community gym, dance studio and specialist health consultation rooms, bringing together physical activity and health services under one roof for the first time in the city.

Sheffield City Council (SCC) hopes detailed plans can be drawn up in spring, with a view to



The new centre is expected to feature a 25m, six-lane swimming pool

opening during the second half of 2015. Set to be funded by the government, SCC and Ecclesfield Parish Council, the site would form a sports hub of a £10m Olympic legacy collaboration between the city and Sport England to replace ageing facilities with new services.

payasUgym announces Virgin Active partnership

Online gym pass provider payasUgym.com has announced an agreement with Virgin Active that will see the website provide lead generation services to Virgin Active clubs across the UK. The deal forms part of payasUgym.com's ongoing campaign to

increase the number of people involved in health and fitness.

The service sees customers create a free online account, which they top-up with credit and then use to buy passes for any of payasUgym's listed gyms and health clubs.

Fife opens £15.3m leisure centre

A £15.3m sports and leisure centre has opened in Kirkcaldy, Fife, as part of a £55m council-led project to open three new flagship facilities in the region.

As part of the Future of Leisure programme, the centre houses a 25m, six-lane swimming pool with poolside spectating for 90 people, a training pool with an underwater movable floor and accessible family wet-side changing facilities.

Users also have access to a 60-station gym, a purpose-built aerobics studio, a four-court sports hall, children's play centre with nearby café and a meeting room. The facility also provides its own health suite and steamroom located next to the pool area.

The opening of Kirkcaldy is the first of three new centres to open as part of Fife Council's £55m investment project. The



Facilities at the newly opened centre include a 60-station fitness suite

other two facilities will open in Glenrothes and Dunfermline.

"The opening of this building marks the completion of the Council's 'Future of Leisure' project," comments Jim Leishman, provost of Fife. "These impressive new sports facilities are helping Fifers to live a healthier and more active lifestyle."

Lack of exercise policy is "child neglect"

An editorial in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine (BJSM)* has highlighted a lack of UK policy towards increasing children's exercise levels, with one of its co-authors suggesting such failings amount to the government's own definition of "child neglect".

The journal highlighted what it saw as a lack of action in terms of increasing levels of exercise among younger people, despite access to growing evidence that shows both immediate and long-term benefits of regular exercise during our younger years.

It also argued that successive governments have failed to find a successful national policy, with leadership and strategy "totally absent". "There has been a persistent failure from this government and former governments to meet children's basic physical and psychological needs," co-author Dr Richard Weiler, who is also a University College London consultant and club doctor at West Ham United, told BBC Radio's *Today* programme.



National strategy for kids' activity is 'totally absent'

Leisure Connection starts 2014 with '1Life' rebrand

Leisure centre operator Leisure Connection has announced that it is relaunching its consumer brand as '1Life'.

Following its official launch in January, the new brand will be rolled out across the estate of more than 40 leisure facilities by April.

Neil King, managing director at Leisure Connection, says: "We know that the way people use our facilities is changing. We're more than a gym, a swimming pool, a sports hall. We will be doing all we can to target and engage non-users – it's an exciting time."

Government backs staircase calorie count initiative

Public staircases are soon to be labelled as exercise apparatus when a government-backed scheme comes into force to try and make office workers and commuters across the UK fitter.

Trials at three large office buildings, including the BBC in Manchester, found that signs advertising how many calories you could burn by taking the stairs increased the number of people using them by up to 29 per cent.

The scheme is based on nudge theory, which subtly influences people's habits, encouraging them – rather than telling them – to make the 'right' choices.

Health experts class stair climbing – which burns more calories than jogging – as 'vigorous' exercise, and studies have suggested climbing stairs for seven minutes a day could half the risk of a heart attack.

The new scheme, which will see staircases labelled with calorie totals, was developed by StepJockey and funded by a £50m grant from the government's Small Business Research.



The new centre will include an 80-station gym

Work starts on Blackburn sports, swimming complex

Work has officially started on a £13.5m sports and swimming complex in Blackburn town centre, which is being built to replace the area's ageing Waves Water Fun Centre.

The development is a partnership between Blackburn with Darwen Council and Blackburn College.

The new leisure facility will feature a six-lane swimming pool, an 80-station fitness centre, a sport performance lab and a dance studio. The area's other existing leisure facility – the Waves Water Fun Centre – will be demolished by the council.

The development received planning permission in 2013, with work hoped to be completed by 2015.

DLL unveils tax break membership offer

David Lloyd Leisure has introduced a discounted health club membership scheme, offering UK companies a cost-effective way to give employees access to exercise through a payroll scheme.

The DL Flex scheme can be run as an HMRC-approved salary sacrifice scheme, either within a flexible benefits programme or as a separate salary sacrifice benefit.

David Lloyd Leisure says employees can save on average £120 (US\$193, €143) to £300 (US\$484, €359) a year on gym membership, while choosing from a range of membership schemes.



The new gym at Ribby Hall offers more than 60 stations of exercise equipment

New £1m gym for Ribby Hall Village in Lancashire

The health club at Ribby Hall Village in Wrea Green, Lancashire, has launched a new £1m gym overlooking the golf course.

The new 38sq m (413sq ft) gym at Ribby Hall – named Club of the Year at the 2013 UKactive FLAME Awards – has more than 60 stations and has doubled the quantity of free weights on offer.

Equipment includes Technogym's Unity – a swipe-screen cardio console that allows users to access websites and content during workouts – and Omnia, Technogym's functional training solution.

Curtain raiser announced for Hampton leisure centre

Vivacity, the not-for-profit organisation which manages many of Peterborough's culture and leisure facilities on behalf of the city council, will open a new Premier Fitness club in Hampton.

The Vivacity Premier Fitness centre on Hadfield Road is scheduled to open on 1 February 2014, featuring a 25m swimming pool plus a full range of fitness equipment fitted with Smart Centre performance monitoring technology. It will also offer two high-end studios, a sauna and steamroom, plus four beauty treatment rooms.

Government seeks inactivity answers

The government has launched a new All Party Commission on Physical Activity, expected to bring fresh impetus to the fight against physical inactivity in the UK.

Gathering evidence from a cross-party and cross-sector group of experts, the Commission will announce direct, policy-based recommendations to tackle the inactivity epidemic in a report to be published in spring 2014.

The new body will be run by MPs and peers and has been set up in response to the 'Designed to Move' report, which found the lack of exercise in modern daily life means today's children face a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

Government officials from departments such as health, sport and transport will give evidence to the Commission, which will



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/COMANT GOOD IMAGES

Policy-based recommendations on tackling inactivity will be proposed

include Paralympic sporting legend Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson.

Hailed by UKactive as a step in the right direction, CEO David Stalker says: "The target outcome has to be a cross-party physical activity strategy that can reduce levels of health inequality by tackling physical inactivity."

£2.5m golfing complex tees off in Sheldon

Hatchford Brook Golf Course, Driving Range, Gym and Clubhouse was officially opened by Birmingham Lord Mayor Mike Leddy at a launch ceremony on Wednesday 11 December, following a £2.5m refurbishment by social enterprise Mytime Active.

First opened in 1969, the 18-hole course has seen major renovations over the last year. Golf course amendments have been complemented by a new clubhouse offering a bar and café, high quality changing rooms and a new 100-station gym. The venue also includes a new 24-bay, all-weather floodlit driving range with a Power Tee system.

This is Mytime Active's second major investment in the region since signing a 50-year contract to run Birmingham City Council's seven golf courses last year: Pype Hayes Golf Course, Gym and Clubhouse relaunched in August 2013 following a £2m investment.

Mytime Active CEO Steve Price says: "The clubhouse looks amazing and provides



The Hatchford complex now offers a 24-bay, all-weather floodlit driving range with Power Tee system

fantastic new facilities to help people of all ages and abilities enjoy getting fit and healthy. This site cements further the great relationship we have with Birmingham City Council in delivering top-class leisure facilities."

Freedom Leisure sees opening of two revamped sites

A £3.1m, eight-month redevelopment of the Freedom Leisure-operated Hailsham Leisure Centre in Sussex has now been completed.

The project, funded by Wealden District Council, has seen the opening of two new exercise studios, including an indoor cycling

facility fitted with the forward motion video-enabled Myride+ programme.

Elsewhere in Sussex, Crowborough Leisure Centre – also operated by Freedom Leisure – held its official opening on 6 December following a £3.2m redevelopment project.

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Rugby star launches concept gym

A former énergie site in Rotherham has been given a £1.2m refurbishment and become the first i-motion gym in the UK.

The i-motion concept was created by former professional rugby player Gareth Evans. Explaining the rationale behind the creation of the new brand, Evans says he felt there was a gap in the market for a premium, low-cost gym operation that matched the quality of the more upmarket health club brands.

The 1,395sq m (15,000sq ft) facility offers four workout zones – functional, free weights, cardio and indoor cycling – and is equipped with 160 pieces of Matrix Fitness kit including Matrix S-Series Indoor Cycles.

It also features a Kaleido Vision music video jukebox, giving members access to 2,000 music DVDs from a range of genres, projected



Olympic gold medallist Dani King attended the club's official opening

onto screens around the gym, to keep them entertained while they work out.

Olympic gold medallist and Matrix Fitness ambassador Dani King MBE attended the official opening weekend at the end of November, saddling up with riders from the Matrix Fitness Racing Academy.

JoyRiders studio debuts in Weymouth

Weymouth's new dedicated indoor cycling studio, JoyRiders, is helping fitness fans get into gear with the minimum of fuss.

Located in the town's Queen's Road area, the easily accessible studio is hoping to attract men and women looking to squeeze in a workout before or after work, as well as on their lunch break.

The studio opened in October and is equipped with Schwinn AC Performance Plus bikes, fitted with monitors that display key workout information.

Owner Sam Raouf has plans for expansion and aims to make indoor cycling "a pleasurable experience, rather than a means to an end".

The studio is designed to appeal to people of all ages and fitness levels, with classes



JoyRiders aims to make cycling pleasurable, not just a way to get fit

tailored to combine powerful calorie-burning workouts with cycling-specific drills designed to improve performance and general fitness levels.

All JoyRiders instructors are fully trained with accredited certification in indoor cycling.

Crown Spa club aiming to build on Grand Prix gold

Crown Spa Health Club in Scarborough – the only independent club to win a Grand Prix gold at the Members' Choice Health Club Awards 2013 – has used the Member Feedback Report it received to further improve the member experience it provides.

"It highlighted that we needed to improve class booking and provide better online access, so we invested in an EZ-Runner online booking facility. Members can now book classes and treatments online and view all their account details," says manager Stuart Russell.

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Pulse buys pioneering firm Trixter

Pulse Fitness has acquired Trixter with the aim of becoming the leading innovator of technologically advanced fitness equipment.

The two brands worked together on Pulse's new Android-based console technology platform.

Chris Johnson, managing director of Pulse Fitness, says: "Trixter is renowned within the industry for its forward thinking with regards to technology, and we look forward to working with the team to bring our products to the forefront of interactive innovation. We're already working on some exciting products due for release in the next few months."

Announced late last year, Pulse Fitness has acquired Trixter's Intellectual Property



Trixter's Michael Rice and Pulse Fitness' Chris Johnson sign the deal

and Commercial Fitness manufacturing and distribution rights, with Trixter retaining rights to its IP for Retail Products.

Trixter will continue to operate independently under its own name within the Pulse group structure.

Gladstone to partner with Bounts scheme

A fitness app called Bounts, created to motivate and reward people for being active, has teamed up with Gladstone Health & Leisure.

Leisure operators using the Gladstone Plus2 system will be able to activate Bounts, opening the rewards scheme up to more than three million Gladstone members across the UK.

Bounts can be collected and then redeemed against national brands and local retail outlets and services ranging from Starbuck's and Sainsbury's through to local cafés.



Bounts has a range of local and national retail partners

More fitness instructors train in diabetes, obesity

Premier Training International has announced an increase of 49 per cent in the number of fitness professionals undertaking its training course to help people suffering from diabetes and obesity.

The training provider announced the figures to tie in with World Diabetes Day on 14 November 2013.

The news comes amid the revelation in recent research from Diabetes UK that suggests the number of people suffering from the condition will increase two-fold in the next 20 years.



LateralX is installed in Cardiff Blues' training gym

Cardiff Blues RFC adds Octane Fitness cross-trainer

Specialist cross-trainer supplier Octane Fitness has installed its new LateralX with Cross Circuit dumbbell into the Cardiff Blues RFC training ground gym.

The Octane Fitness LateralX is designed to give a lateral motion, elliptical movement that works in three dimensions.

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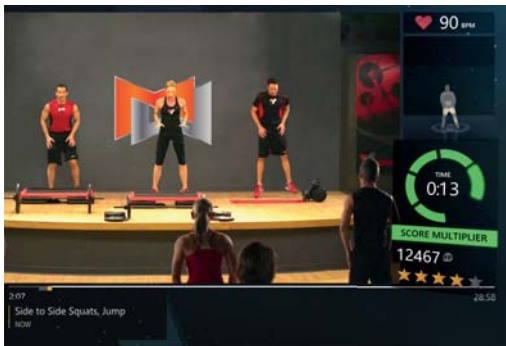
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Xbox One and MOSSA join forces



Terry Browning, president of group fitness brand MOSSA – formerly known as Body Training Systems in the US and Group X Systems in the UK – talks about an exciting new partnership with Microsoft



The 30-minute video workouts use Kinect technology to give instant feedback on form, power and heart rate

Please tell us about the Microsoft deal

We're working closely with Microsoft to deliver interactive home workouts for Xbox Fitness, the new online service on Xbox One. We've created four 30-minute video workouts for Xbox Fitness – MOSSA Core Workout, MOSSA Fight Workout, MOSSA Groove Workout and MOSSA Power Workout – which are all based on existing in-club MOSSA group fitness programmes.

The Xbox workouts use Kinect voice and motion capture technology to give the user instant feedback on form, power and heart rate, as well as providing personalised recommendations, challenges and rewards. It truly is interactive fitness.

What's behind your move into home fitness?

Until now, we've made a conscious decision not to enter the home fitness market as we didn't want to offer a compromised exercise experience to consumers. However, we felt the capabilities of this new technology provided a unique opportunity to deliver a quality home workout that also had the potential to drive new audiences into health clubs.

We know our programmes work best in a club setting, with great music from a professional sound system and the social dynamic of a group environment. But we also know that 85 per cent of the population don't belong to a health club, and we need to do

something to get those people off the couch and into a club.

How will this deal help do that?

It includes a four-year consumer-to-club promotion, whereby operators have the option to offer free passes that allow Xbox Fitness users to try out the group programmes at their local club. Users can access their free pass directly from Xbox One by clicking on a link to the MOSSA website. They then simply search for a class at their nearest participating club and download their pass.

What about existing members?

Existing members will now be able to do a familiar workout at home on those occasions when they can't get to the club – operators could even offer to incorporate the Xbox fees into their own membership rates.

Also, while the video workouts are currently only available through Xbox Fitness, we'll be evaluating whether they could eventually be offered in-club as virtual classes, alongside our instructor-led group programmes.

Why have you rebranded to MOSSA?

Our business is entering a new phase of development and we wanted a name that better reflected our vision. MOSSA means move, excite or stir in Italian, which ties in perfectly with our company tagline: Let's Move.



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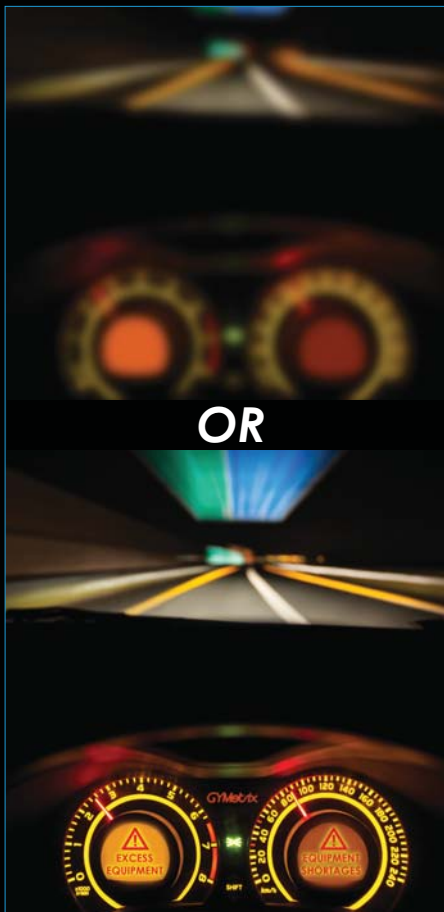
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Vertical Gym continues concept roll-out

Urban Think-Tank opened its latest Vertical Gym in November – its largest and most comprehensive facility to date. This new development forms part of the company's ambition to create 100 Vertical Gyms for the slums in Caracas, Venezuela.

"Despite the difficult political, financial and social situation – but also because of it – we continue with our commitment to the Barrios (slums) of Caracas," says professor Hubert Klumpner of Urban Think-Tank.

See *HCM* Oct 13, p68, for more information on the Vertical Gym concept and philosophy.

3i invests in discount operator Basic-Fit

International investor 3i Group has agreed to invest in Basic-Fit, the leading discount fitness operator in Europe, alongside co-founder and CEO Rene Moos, who will remain a shareholder in the company. 3i is investing approximately €110m in the deal.

Established in 2003, Basic-Fit – which is headquartered in the Netherlands – operates 200 discount gyms across the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and France. In both the Netherlands and Belgium, Basic-Fit is the market leader with 95 and 79 clubs respectively. The company also has 17 clubs in Spain and nine in France.

Vivafit continues expansion in India

As part of its roll-out in India, ladies-only fitness franchise Vivafit has launched in New Delhi. The 30-minute circuit and group exercise-based concept includes the Les Mills BODYVIVE programme.

Vivafit's mission is to help women get healthier and lose weight by changing their eating and exercise habits. It targets all women aged 14 to 80 years.

Thorstad to be CEO of merged Nordic group

The soon-to-be largest fitness company in Northern Europe has appointed its CEO.

It was announced in June that Elixia and Health & Fitness Nordic, owner of SATS and Fresh Fitness, will merge. The new company will have 2,000 employees, 181 locations and more than 500,000 members – and Olav Thorstad, CEO of Health & Fitness Nordic, has now been named CEO.

Anytime eyes Spanish expansion

Following the success of Spain's first Anytime Fitness club, which opened in Barcelona in October 2012, the franchise operator opened two more clubs in Barcelona in October 2013.

The Anytime Fitness model is based on convenience and service, with the gyms



There are plans for 200 clubs in Spain by 2018

located in the heart of the community: one of the new openings is located in Barcelona city centre, with the other near the city's beaches. Membership in the three Barcelona clubs ranges from €45–49 a month.

Rod Hill, director of Anytime Fitness in Spain, says: "We attract people with busy lives who have little time to exercise. Our gyms average around 500sq m in size, allowing us to create a warm and friendly atmosphere and offer a more personalised service."

"Members can exercise at any time of the day or night, as the clubs are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year."

All three clubs are corporately owned by Anytime Fitness, and will act as a launchpad for the brand's expansion throughout Spain: Anytime Fitness is aiming to open 200 clubs in Spain in the next five years.

Founded in 2002, Anytime Fitness is the fastest-growing fitness club franchise in the world, with more than 2,300 clubs serving almost two million members across five continents.

Clubs number seven and eight for FITLane

FITLane, which operates health clubs on the Cote d'Azur in France, has opened its seventh and eighth clubs.

The 2,000sq m club in Juan les Pins opened in September. Equipped by Star Trac, the gym offers a full range of CV and resistance equipment, alongside Power Plate vibration training. The group exercise offering includes Wexer virtual training, which allows members to take advantage of classes such as yoga, group cycling and Zumba at any point during the day.

Meanwhile, the 2,000sq m club in Villeneuve-Loubet opened in December. Facilities are similar to those at Juan les Pins.



The Juan les Pins club is equipped by Star Trac

Upskilling for disabled members in Europe

IHRSA is partnering with the European Commission in a new project – European Fitness Inclusion Training for Work (E-FIT-W) – which will help operators develop the skills needed to work with people with disabilities.

The project is being led by the UNESCO chair in inclusive PE, sport, fitness and recreation and will run for two years from November 2013, with the European Commission investing over €365,000. The project will culminate in a resource pack launch and final conference in October 2015.

Other partners in the project include REPS UK, EOSE, Palacky University (Czech

Republic) and the Polytechnic University of Madrid (Spain).

The project will embed inclusive fitness professional training within the fitness club environment, in a sector skills alliance involving trainers, trainees, employers and people with disabilities.

Justification for the project stems from the fact that people with disabilities are three times less likely to be physically active and twice as likely to be obese compared to the able-bodied population, with many fitness centre managers and instructors not confident working with people with disabilities.

ELEMENTS opens two new clubs



The new Munich club has a high-end finish, and offers a ladies-only section within its 1,300sq m spa

ELEMENTS – the high-end health club spa brand from Migros, which opened its first club in Munich, Germany, in early 2013 – has opened two further sites.

The second club opened in Stuttgart in October, with the third site opening in Munich – the city's second ELEMENTS – in November.

The 3,800sq m Stuttgart club offers a 230-station gym, plus functional training and body analysis. There are also three group exercise studios. All members have access to the results-based ELEMENTS workout programme, developed by scientists at the University of Zurich.

Facilities in the Stuttgart spa area include a Finnish sauna, massage shower, steamroom and relaxation area.

In addition to the gym and spa offering, the club also offers a 750sq m hammam facility. ELEMENTS members can enjoy the hammam for an additional fee of just €4 (giving them a towel, peeling glove, water bowl and tea). Other treatments are also available, including hammam massages and full-body mud pack (Rasul). Day guests are also welcome to use the hammam at a cost of €28 for the day.

The 4,700sq m Munich club includes facilities such as a rock climbing wall, relaxation pool and exercise pool offering aqua classes. There's also a ladies-only section in the 1,300sq m spa, where facilities include a Finnish sauna, steamroom, bio sauna, salt steamroom, relaxation pool and spa pool. Childcare is available at both new clubs.

Profile Health & Fitness opens in Malta

Profile Health & Fitness Club, an independent operation owned by Paul Sansome, opened its second location in November.

The new site – located in the Palace Hotel in Sliema, Malta – follows the success of the inaugural club, which has been operating in the Hilton Euston in London, UK, for 13 years.

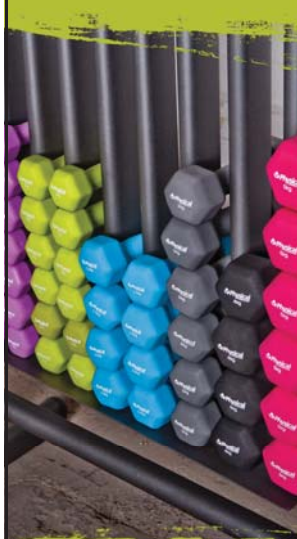
The focus is on achieving balance for total wellness, with bespoke lifestyle plans that include functional movement screening, dietary analysis, biological age testing and DNA testing. The Malta club has also partnered with a neighbouring private hospital to offer tests such as blood lipid profiling and chest X-rays.

The 280sq m club offers a functional training studio, gym, rooftop group exercise area, indoor pool with relaxation lounge, rooftop infinity pool with poolside sushi bar, and sauna/steam/UV cabins. Suppliers include Technogym, Jordan and Nike.

Membership costs €1,250–€1,800 a year. Although a package is available that doesn't include personal training, at this stage the club has a 100 per cent uptake on PT. An executive lifestyle management programme is also available for business travellers.

Sansome now has plans for further locations: three more in Malta and one in Beijing.

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Industry veteran James joins Right Directions

Seasoned pro Carey James moves in right direction

Carey James has joined management support firm Right Directions as a quality and health and safety manager.

With nearly 30 years of industry experience, and 13 as a Quest assessor, James is ideally suited to the role, which will see him assist leisure centres in developing health and safety management systems, as well as carrying out audits and helping to enhance the Quest quality scheme.

James says he's looking forward to spreading good practice further, and helping authorities overcome current hardships to maintain industry growth.



Ffello has taken over from Rosie Cooper MP

Ffello fills in as acting chair of MPs' obesity group

Stoke-on-Trent South MP Rob Ffello has assumed the role of acting chair for an influential Westminster group intent on tackling Britain's growing obesity problem.

Ffello has taken over from Rosie Cooper MP – who stepped down in November after a year at the helm due to personal reasons – to head the recently renamed All Party Parliamentary Group on Adult and Childhood Obesity.

The group works to co-ordinate MPs, industry representatives, clinicians and charities in promoting practical and simple steps to tackle obesity.

Xercise4Less beefs up boardroom



Simon Tutt, Jon Wright and Peter Boddy – driving the growth of the Xercise4Less brand and portfolio

Yorkshire-based gym chain Xercise4Less has seen two additions to its board of directors. The new arrivals form part of the brand's continued expansion across the country and follow the recent £5m investment by the Business Growth Fund.

Former Fitness First UK MD Peter Boddy joins the board as non-executive chair, working alongside CEO Jon Wright to help deliver the stated mission to 'revolutionise the budget gym sector'. In addition to his tenure at Fitness First, Boddy was previously CEO of sports nutrition brand Maximuscle and saw its successful sale by private equity group Darwin to GlaxoSmithKline in December 2010.

Also new to the Xercise4Less board is Simon Tutt, taking up the position of finance director having held similar posts at Harvey's Furnishing Group, Dwell Retail and the Elvi Group.

Of the two new appointments, Wright says: "They are the latest investment in the growth of our business. A growing trend which sees the more nimble low-cost gyms increasingly taking market share from mid-market operators means this is the time when Xercise4Less can really make its mark. Simon and Peter's involvement is exciting for everyone."

Future plans for Xercise4Less – currently operating 15 sites, predominantly in the Midlands, Yorkshire and the north-east of England – include the opening of a further 100 clubs across the country over the next five years, with agreements already signed on 20 sites.

The company's partnership with supermarket chain Tesco saw the opening in mid-November of the first Xercise4Less at Tesco gym in Stockton-on-Tees.

SportsArt Fitness stages UK reshuffle

Jeremy Jenkins has been appointed the new UK MD of SportsArt Fitness – part of a recruitment drive which has seen the international manufacturer attract a raft of UK-based talent.

Previously the UK sales director, Jenkins will use his experience to spearhead the development of the group's British market in pursuit of ambitious three-year sales targets. The company will rely on technological innovation – specifically its Green System, which helps reduce operator's energy bills – alongside the 2014 launch of over 90 new pieces of cardiovascular and strength equipment to drive the sales push.

Other new appointments include Daniel Billington and Rick Fowler as regional sales managers for the south and north respectively.

The Taiwan-based firm operates in over 80 countries worldwide and is looking to strengthen its seven-year foothold in the UK market, where it works closely with the



Jenkins: Spearheading SportsArt Fitness' drive towards ambitious three-year sales targets in the UK

Fire and Rescue Services, as well as local authorities, private clubs and personal trainers.

Outlining his vision for 2014, Jenkins says: "Following the appointment of a highly skilled and experienced team, I'm excited and confident that 2014 will be a strong year for SportsArt as we bring a number of excellent new products to the UK market."

Star Trac bolsters its enterprise

Fitness equipment manufacturer Star Trac has placed its EMEA operations in a safe pair of hands by hiring industry veteran Peter Rigg as director of key accounts for Europe, Middle East and Africa.

Rigg will be in charge of driving sales throughout his territory by securing new key account business, nurturing existing relationships and continuing to build awareness of Star Trac as a full-service provider.

"I'm excited to join such a strong and dedicated team who truly value the customer in everything they do," says Rigg. "Star Trac is guided by visionary leadership with plans to bring innovative and inspirational products to market that complement the entire line of motivating cardio and strength equipment."

Rigg brings more than 25 years of fitness industry experience, most recently holding key account and sales management roles with Physique Sports and Life Fitness UK.

During his 15-year tenure with Life Fitness UK as key accounts director for Europe,



Rigg: 'Invaluable' experience in the EMEA region

Middle East and Africa, Rigg successfully managed the world's largest commercial fitness contract for Fitness First, playing a key role in assisting its growth.

"The experience Peter brings to Star Trac, particularly with key accounts across this region, is invaluable," says John Gamble, managing director of Star Trac EMEA.

Lamrabet looking forward to challenges



Lamrabet: Personal interest in the fitness sector

Star Trac has made further changes as part of its EMEA region sales push – alongside the appointment of Peter Rigg (above) – appointing Omar Lamrabet as Middle East account manager.

Joining Star Trac from a seven-year stint in the Middle East ops team of a global broadcast and media company, Dubai-based Lamrabet arrives with a strong grasp of the territory.

A multi-linguist and qualified PT, Lamrabet is eager to get started on tapping the region's considerable potential. "I'm absolutely thrilled to be joining the Star Trac team," he says. "I have a personal interest in the fitness industry and am looking forward to developing opportunities available in the Middle East."

OCL goes local for latest batch of leisure apprentices

Oldham Community Leisure (OCL) has recruited six new leisure operations apprentices from within the local area for its paid employment training programme.

The 12-month formal training plan provides a range of key qualifications and aims to combine these with relevant hands-on experience.

Louise McGreal, head of human resources at OCL, says the programme gives apprentices an "excellent chance of being recruited for a more permanent position within the company".

Since 2009, OCL has employed more than 35 apprentices across all sites.



Todd: Experience in the NHS and education sector

Jordan Fitness welcomes HR manager Lucy Todd

Functional fitness specialist Jordan Fitness has appointed Lucy Todd as its new human resources manager, to oversee the business' continued expansion.

With over seven years' HR experience, taking in the NHS and education sector, Todd will head up recruitment, staff training and several other key areas.

The University of Lincoln graduate says: "Jordan Fitness has seen rapid growth and it's exciting to be part of the journey."

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European Perspective

IHRSA's 13th Annual European Congress took place in October in Madrid, Spain. Kristen Walsh reports on the event, which had a record attendance of over 600 delegates from 39 countries and six continents

IHRSA's 2013 European Congress got off to a flying start with futurologist Magnus Lindkvist's keynote – 'When the Future Begins: Trendspotting, Future-Thinking & the Attack of the Unexpected' – which received a standing ovation.

Lindkvist urged the attendees to create rather than compete. He noted that in the health club business, as in other industries, we tend to copy what's being done well by other clubs. This saves energy and facilitates our way of living, but it also causes problems for our businesses, which all tend to look the same.

Lindkvist noted three mistakes that he believes clubs make: mistaking what's urgent for what's important; feeding problems and starving opportunities; and pursuing uniformity rather than diversity, harmony rather than friction. We should actively pursue friction, argued Lindkvist, because change happens when we're disagreeing with one another.

He added that a clear sign you're doing something creative is when someone else hates it. When you invent a new way of doing things, you will be criticised and people will think your ideas are crazy.

He offered a framework for creating rather than competing:

- **Look for secrets:** Quoting the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, Lindkvist said: "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards." Ask yourself what important truths do very few people agree with you on? According to Lindkvist, that's where the opportunity lies.
 - **Experimentation:** An increasing focus on risk management is phasing experimentation out of companies. Make a list of 50 dangerous things to try over the next year.
 - **Failure-cycling:** IKEA recycled the idea for its business from one that failed for another company in 1940.
 - **Patience and persistence:** Odeo launched Twitter in 2006. Nothing happened for three years – then it caught on.
- "The very same idea can be a failure early on but a success later," Lindkvist added. "Stop reading news. Forget doom and gloom. Think about how you've already changed the world in terms of fitness and health. Don't just compete – create! Be brave – others will follow."

Leadership

During her general session entitled 'Top Service Culture: A Key to Success from the Inside OUT', Carla Carvalho Dias spoke of the importance of alignment, using the analogy of a symphony.

Dias, the founder of both Visão Integrada and Portugal's Top Service Academy, explained: "Just as a company is divided into departments, an orchestra is divided into sections, each of which has a leader. The leader plays a little louder than the rest so they can hear and follow. These section leaders are akin to middle managers."

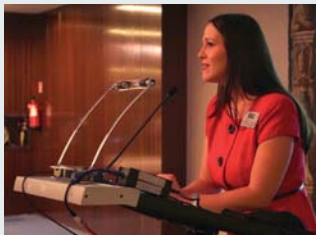
A conductor, meanwhile, must allow each musician their own creativity: "The conductor has the full picture and must allow musicians some flexibility – it's their music too. Allow them to take risks during rehearsals so there's time to make the music better for the show."

She added: "People think in different ways – they play music in different ways – but we must align them behind what we're trying to do, what music we want to play."

In his presentation entitled 'Leadership: Having Your Team Follow the Vision', speaker Justin Tamsett encouraged attendees to look outside of the industry when trying



Alongside the seminars, there was plenty of time for groups of delegates to get together and discuss and debate key issues facing the health and fitness industry



Alison O'Kane Giannaras, associate vice president of international operations, speaking at IHRSA Europe



The lively Spanish city of Madrid was the host venue for IHRSA's 13th Annual European Congress, which attracted a record number of attendees

to grow their clubs' membership and improve their operations. He noted that, when British Airways wanted to improve its operation, it didn't look at other airlines. It looked at Formula 1 race teams and how they were able to get a car back on the track in 20 seconds after a pit stop. "Your job as the owner of a business is to be abreast of all the trends," he said.

Tamsett offered the audience five tactics to get their teams working with them to achieve their vision:

- **Get your team thriving:** Give them learning opportunities and give them the opportunity to make decisions. They will make mistakes, but help them learn from those mistakes so they won't repeat them. "Minimise being horrible at work." Think about what you say and how you say it. What you consider sarcasm may be taken as bullying by someone else.

**"Stop reading news. Forget doom and gloom.
Think about how you've already changed the world in
terms of health and fitness. Don't just compete - create!
Be brave, others will follow"**

- **Set priorities.**
- **Tune up your communication:** Make sure every staff member knows what's happening in your business at all times.
- **Know the score:** Establish a scoreboard that's updated on a daily basis.
- **Surround yourself with the best people, both in terms of staff and outside advisors:** Find people from outside the industry or from another country who are experts and learn from them.

Pricing & PT

In his presentation, 'Business Modelling and Performance in the Fitness Industry', Antonio Scavem advised delegates not to discount or slash membership prices,

however tempting it might be to do so when a low-cost competitor comes to town.

Scavem, who is president of the audit committee for AGAP (the Portuguese health club association), urged middle market clubs in particular to find a unique value proposition. He said you should be able to pitch your business model in 90 seconds.

Meanwhile, in his presentation entitled 'The Business of Personal Training: Best Practices', Brent Darden - chair of the IHRSA board of directors, who also owns the TELOS Fitness Center in Dallas, Texas, US - talked about growth opportunities, and offered the following guidelines for developing a thriving personal training business in a club:

Fitness Hut CEO Nick Coutts (left) received his leadership award from the chair of IHRSA's board of directors, Brent Darden (right)

- **Price for production:** Charge customers a higher price for experienced trainers. Increase the price for trainers who are booked up and not available to take on more clients. Trainers will push back for fear of losing clients, but Darden has found there's little drop-off from clients.
- **Develop tiered pricing:** There are five levels of personal trainers at TELOS. Trainers earn more as they advance to higher levels. They also charge more per session, so the club nets more as well.
- **Focus on net revenue:** Think beyond commission and the flat rate you pay trainers when calculating programme expense. Be sure to allocate costs for benefits as well.
- **Establish incentive plans:** Get your trainers and supervisor to agree on budget goals. Let your trainers know they will earn a bonus or incentive if they hit their goals.
- **Define advancement systems:** Let trainers know how they can move up in the system (in the case of TELOS, through the five levels). Determine pay and commission rates for each level. To reach a higher level, the trainer has to be producing more revenue – it's not merely a matter of seniority.

State of the industry

On the second day of the Congress, Darden presented on the state of the European health club industry, with much of the information coming from *The IHRSA European Health Club Report 2013: Size & Scope of the Fitness Industry*.

He started off with good news: in the report, the 48,000 fitness clubs in Europe generated €25bn – about 40 per cent of total global industry revenue.

However, it wasn't all good news: more than half (52 per cent) of the European population is overweight, with 17 per cent of Europeans considered obese.

"In challenging economic times, most IHRSA members believe high taxes threaten the viability of health clubs and overall health of the people, who either won't be able to afford a membership or will no longer have a club available"



COUTTS HONOURED FOR LEADERSHIP

Among the highlights of the event was the presentation of the 2013 IHRSA European Club Leadership Award to Nick Coutts, CEO of Fitness Hut in Portugal.

In presenting the award, Brent Darden – chair of the IHRSA board of directors – noted that Coutts had worked his way up in the industry, starting as a gym instructor to eventually oversee the operations of 30 clubs for Holmes Place Iberia.

"Most recently, in the height of the recession, he bet big on our industry by founding Fitness Hut with two business

partners – a premium low-cost fitness option for a population that's financially stretched by these trying economic times," said Darden.

After the event, Coutts said: "It was a real thrill and a privilege for me and my two partners, Andre Groen and JP Carvalho, to have won the award as there were several other worthy candidates. I also greatly respect the previous winners of the award and am friends with some of them, so to have been recognised in the same way as these industry leaders is quite something."

Darden would have been remiss if he hadn't mentioned VAT: 23 nations currently levy 20 per cent or more on health club membership dues and fees. "In challenging economic times, most IHRSA members believe high taxes threaten the viability of health clubs and overall health of the people, who either will not be able to afford a health club membership or will no longer have a health club available to them," Darden said. "This underscores the importance

of getting involved with your local and national governments to make sure those in power understand the ramifications of their taxation and policy decisions on public health, as well as on business."

About IHRSA

Founded in 1981, the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association is the only global trade association, representing more than 10,000 health and fitness facilities and suppliers worldwide.

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COMBATING TYPE 2 DIABETES



New research highlights the role physical activity can play in preventing, managing and treating type 2 diabetes.

David Stalker, CEO of

ukactive, outlines ways in which this can be put into practice within the sector

Every successful sector invests in strengthening the evidence base for its services, and our sector should be no different. Research can sometimes seem a bit abstract or remote from day-to-day operations within our clubs and leisure centres, but it's absolutely not. It has to influence what we offer to consumers. What's more, if we want to expand our offering and therefore our

membership base, we have to embed evidence-based practice into the everyday running of our organisations.

Work by the ukactive Research Institute

When we recommend exercise to our clients, members and participants,

we have to be confident that what we're recommending is the best thing to do for their conditions and needs.

The ukactive Research Institute has carried out a piece of work that's brought together over 5,000 research articles to identify the best mode, intensity, frequency and duration of exercise for the prevention and management of type 2 diabetes using physical activity and exercise.

This research has culminated in a series of evidence-based exercise recommendations that have achieved the recognition of recently being published in *Diabetes Metabolism Research and Reviews*, so we can be confident of their findings. The recommendations can now be shared with the sector for use in exercise programmes: the prescription and delivery of exercise as a preventative and management tool for type 2 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes and its impact

We quite likely all know someone who has type 2 diabetes, as it's increasingly prevalent and starting to be seen as a principal public health concern. The reasons for this are clear: it's a major cause of blindness and the most common cause of kidney failure in the developed world.

In 2010, 285 million people worldwide were classified as suffering from the disease – a figure that's expected to rise to 438 million by 2030¹. Meanwhile, in the UK, the cost of treatment was estimated in 2010 to be £3.5bn a year², placing a huge strain on the already heavily burdened National Health Service (NHS).

But to understand how to treat type 2 diabetes and where exercise can come in, we have to understand what causes it. Type 2 diabetes is characterised by raised glucose levels in circulating blood, which is caused by the development of insulin resistance and relative insulin deficiency. This is where the body produces insulin, but the cells in the body become resistant to it and so are unable to use it effectively, ultimately leading to hyperglycaemia.

One of the principal functions of insulin is to regulate the delivery of



With expert guidance, exercise can be used as a preventative and management tool for type 2 diabetes

UKACTIVE RESEARCH INSTITUTE: TYPE 2 DIABETES EXERCISE RECOMMENDATIONS³

Preventing type 2 diabetes	Increase physical activity to more than 30 minutes a day, five times a week. Include high intensity aerobic exercise (more than 75 per cent of VO ₂) three times a week, combined with strength training in all major muscle groups at 70 per cent 1RM twice a week, separated by more than 24 hours.
For those who have type 2 diabetes (insulin sensitivity improvement)	Increase physical activity to more than 30 minutes a day, five times a week. Include long duration (more than one hour) moderate intensity aerobic training (60 per cent of VO ₂ max) three times a week, combined with low intensity and high repetition resistance training (50–60 per cent 1RM) in all major muscle groups twice a week, separated by more than 24 hours.
For those with type 2 diabetes and limited mobility (eg disabled, elderly populations, etc)	Increase physical activity as much as is feasible. Include low intensity aerobic exercise (40–80 per cent heart rate reserve). This should be combined with resistance training at low intensity (50–55 per cent 1RM) in all major muscle groups three times a week, separated by more than 24 hours.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/ROBERT KNESEHISE

Working the muscles during physical activity increases the production of the glucose transporter type four (GLUT 4), which in turn boosts insulin sensitivity

glucose into cells to provide them with energy. Insulin resistance or reduced insulin sensitivity restricts the ability of muscles to take up and store glucose, resulting in higher levels of glucose circulating in the blood. In a healthy person, insulin is secreted in response to these rising levels. However, if this does not occur or has little effect, blood glucose levels rise, which leads to type 2 diabetes.

How the physical activity sector can help combat this

It is, however, possible to re-sensitize muscles to the effects of insulin. Physical activity and exercise have been proven to increase insulin sensitivity, and this is how the physical activity sector can play an important role in the prevention, management and treatment of diabetes.

Working the muscles during physical activity increases the production of glucose transporter type four (GLUT 4), a protein which in humans is regulated by insulin and which impacts on the amount of glucose absorbed from our bloodstream. By increasing GLUT

4 production, we increase insulin sensitivity⁴. This means we can use physical activity to maintain or increase insulin sensitivity in individuals at risk of type 2 diabetes, which in turn may help to reduce its incidence. Not only will this have a dramatic impact on the nation's health, but it will also help with the health of our nation's coffers.

Our recommendations

The ukactive Research Institute review shows that the more physical activity you do, the higher the increases in insulin sensitivity. This means improvements will continue to increase as the amount of exercise increases, so physical activity recommendations should always be seen as an absolute minimum requirement.

Continuous aerobic exercise is effective in improving insulin sensitivity, while interval training has been shown to be effective at moderate and high intensities, prescribed according to a person's ability to meet the demands of the exercise.

Resistance training seems to be effective at intensities above 50 per cent of 1 rep

max (1RM), and this is reflected in the recommendations for exercise training in participants with type 2 diabetes (see p28). By combining aerobic and resistance training, we can offer an effective strategy for preventing, managing and treating type 2 diabetes.

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2014 DIARY



FIBO features live demonstrations alongside an extensive exhibition

JANUARY

27-28 | The 34th Facilities Management Forum

Venue Radisson Blu Hotel, Stansted, London, UK

Summary

The Facilities Management Forum is specifically organised for FM managers and directors who are directly responsible for the purchase of their organisation's facilities management products and services.

Web www.forumevents.co.uk

FEBRUARY

2-4 | Spatex

Venue Ricoh Arena, Coventry, UK

Summary

The 18th annual exhibition for the UK's largest dedicated pool and spa trade event.

Web www.spatex.co.uk

19-23 | ACSM Team Physician Course - Part 1

Venue San Diego, California, US

Summary

This course - Essentials of Sports Medicine: From Sideline to the Clinic - caters for attendees from the full range of athlete care and sports medicine.

Web www.acsm.org/tpc

20-22 | FORUMCLUB

Venue Bologna, Italy

Summary

A congress for fitness clubs, aquatic centres and sports venue managers.

Web www.forumclub.it

23-24 | Professional Beauty London

Venue ExCeL, London, UK

Summary

The UK's largest beauty exhibition, with hundreds of health and beauty brands.

Web www.professionalbeauty.co.uk

27-2 March | IDEA Personal Trainer Institute

Venue Alexandria, Virginia, US

Summary

Featuring pre-conference sessions, lectures and workshops, this event brings together a limited number of personal trainers with world-class presenters. A west coast institute takes place in Seattle on 10-13 April.

Web www.ideafit.com/ptrainer

MARCH

7-9 | ECA World Fitness Conference / OBOW Show

Venue Marriott Marquis Hotel, New York City, US

Summary

ECA World Fitness is an international organisation representing the fitness and wellness sectors. The show highlights new products, ideas and concepts.

Web www.ecaworldfitness.com

MARCH

12-15 | IHRSA 2014 Annual International Convention & Trade Show (US)

The 33rd IHRSA – International Health Racquet & Sportsclub Association – Annual Convention & Trade Show takes place at the San Diego Convention Center, with seminars, keynotes and educational sessions alongside a trade show.
Web www.ihrsa.org/convention

10 | SMMEX

Venue Wembley Stadium, London, UK
Summary
SMMEX gives buyers and specifiers from sporting clubs and associations across Europe the chance to meet with premier suppliers of unique products and services.
Web www.smmexevent.com

21-23 | International Fitness Showcase

Venue Winter Gardens, Blackpool, UK
Summary
The International Fitness Showcase is designed for fitness instructors and enthusiasts, providing three days of dance, aerobics, step, combat, conditioning, lectures, workshops and mind-body sessions.
Web www.chrysalispromotions.com

23-24 | Scottish Beauty

Venue The Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh, UK
Summary
A trade-only event bringing together products, equipment, services and training from the leading beauty, nail, tanning and spa suppliers. It offers free admission when registered in advance.
Web www.beautyserve.com

30-2 April | SPATEC Spring, North America

Venue The Ballantyne Hotel, Charlotte, US
Summary
In a series of one-to-one meetings over two dedicated business days, SPATEC Spring 2014 will bring the operators of leading American resort, destination, athletic, medical and day spas together with key domestic and international suppliers.
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

APRIL

1-4 | ACSM 18th Health & Fitness Summit & Exposition

Venue Atlanta, Georgia, US
Summary
At ACSM's 18th Health and Fitness Summit & Exposition, health and fitness professionals will explore the industry – from science to practical application.
Web www.acsmsummit.org

2 | EHFA European Health & Fitness Forum

Venue Cologne, Germany
Summary
The first forum organised in partnership by EHFA and FIBO. It will include presentations from leading scientists on the benefits of exercise, with recommendations on how the fitness sector can help combat lifestyle diseases.
Web www.ehfa.eu.com

4-6 | Australian Fitness & Health Expo

Venue Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Melbourne, Australia
Summary
Australia's largest health and fitness event, with around 300 exhibitors.
Web www.fitnessexpo.com.au

8-9 | BASES Student Conference

Venue University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK
Summary
The BASES 2014 student conference will include keynote presentations from internationally renowned sport and exercise scientists.
Web www.port.ac.uk/bases2014

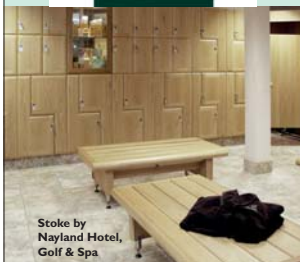
APRIL

3-6 | FIBO 2014 (Germany)

FIBO is the world's leading trade show for health, fitness and wellness: the 2013 event played host to 96,700 visitors and featured 670 exhibiting companies from 30 countries. Topics include fitness and training kit, wellness and beauty, health promotion, sports nutrition, and equipment and services, plus music and fashion. It takes place at the Koelnmesse Exhibition Centre in Cologne, Germany.
Web www.fibo.de

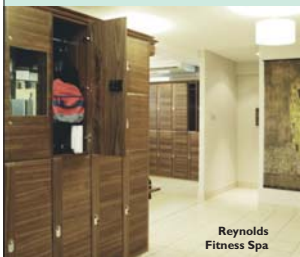
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ukactive **FLAME Conference**

- **23-26 | Russian Fitness Festival**
Venue Olympic Stadium, Moscow, Russia
Summary
Aiming to popularise and develop a healthy lifestyle in Russia, this festival also features presenters from Europe, the UK and US.
Web www.fitness-convention.ru

30-1 May | Active-net 2014
Venue Ricoh Stadium, Coventry, UK
Summary
Active-net 2014 is a new networking event launched by Leisure-net Solutions aimed at the health, fitness and leisure sectors. It will bring together suppliers and operators from the public sector.
Web www.active-net.org

MAY

7-10 | SPATEC Europe
Venue The Sheraton Rhodes Resort, Rhodes, Greece
Summary
A two-day forum of one-to-one meetings between leading UK and European spa owners and operators and leading international spa suppliers.
Web www.spateceu.com

16-18 | BodyPower
Venue NEC, Birmingham, UK
Summary
BodyPower is the fastest growing consumer fitness exhibition in Europe, attracting thousands of health and fitness enthusiasts.
Web www.bodypowerexpo.co.uk

18-19 | Holistic Health
Venue NEC, Birmingham, UK
Summary
Now in its ninth year, Holistic Health continues to support the holistic and complementary therapy market.
Web www.beautyserve.com

18-19 | BeautyUK
Venue NEC, Birmingham, UK
Summary
The only major beauty event taking place in the Midlands in 2014, BeautyUK brings together a range of products, equipment, services and training from the leading beauty, holistic, nail and tanning companies.
Web www.beautyserve.com



20-21 | SIBEC UK
Venue The Belfry, West Midlands, UK
Summary
A forum for suppliers and buyers in the leisure and fitness sectors from local authority, trust and education markets.
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

27-31 | ACSM 61st Annual Meeting
Venue Orlando, Florida, US
Summary
ACSM's annual meeting – which will include the World Congress on the Role of Inflammation in Exercise, Health and Disease – will bring together over 5,000 scientists and medical professionals.
Web www.acsmannualmeeting.org

JUNE

23-26 | 13th Annual International Conference on Health Economics, Management and Policy
Venue Athens, Greece
Summary
This event brings together scholars, researchers and students from health economics, management and policy.
Web www.atiner.gr/health.htm

30-1 July | Facilities Management (FM) Forum
Venue Whitebury Hall Hotel & Spa, Northamptonshire, UK
Summary
The Facilities Management Forum is for FM directors and managers who are directly involved in the procurement of FM products and services.
Web www.forumevents.co.uk

JULY

2 | ukactive FLAME Conference
Venue Telford International Centre, Telford, UK
Summary
The leading educational and networking event for senior level professionals and decision-makers. Culminates in a gala dinner for the FLAME Awards 2014.
Web www.ukactive.com

18-19 | FitPro Live
Venue ExCeL London, UK
Summary
Targeting PTs, instructors and fitness fanatics, this convention and trade show offers product demos, workouts and seminars from top presenters.
Web www.fitpro.com/live14

AUGUST

4-7 | 10th Annual International Conference on Kinesiology and Exercise Sciences
Venue Athens, Greece
Summary
A conference for scholars and students from applied and integrated health sciences.
Web www.atiner.gr

13-17 | IDEA World Fitness Convention
Venue Anaheim, California, US
Summary
International fitness convention and featuring educational sessions from top industry presenters.
Web www.ideafit.com/world

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DIARY

Worldwide event listings for leisure professionals

The OM Yoga Show London offers a total ►
yoga experience under one roof, with
free classes, workshops and an exhibition

► **28-30 | 15th Annual IHRSA /
Fitness Brasil Latin American
Conference & Trade Show**

Venue São Paulo, Brazil

Summary

A key health and wellness event for Latin America, featuring three days of seminars, networking and a trade show, attracting more than 10,000 attendees.
Web www.ihrsa.org/fitness-brasil

SEPTEMBER

**10-11 | Health+Fitness Business
Expo & Interbike Expo**

Venue Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, US

Summary

Since 1997, the Health+Fitness Business Expo has brought manufacturers, suppliers, retailers, buyers, press, industry influencers and fitness professionals together for business.
Web www.healthandfitnessbiz.com

**14-17 | SPATEC Fall,
North America**

Venue Scottsdale, Arizona, US

Summary

SPATEC Fall 2014 will bring together the operators of America's leading resort, destination, athletic, medical and day spas with key domestic and international suppliers to participate in a series of one-to-one meetings.
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

OCTOBER

7-10 | SIBEC North America

Venue Key Largo, Florida, US

Summary

Health, recreation, sports and fitness sectors meet with leading executives from national and international suppliers.
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

SEPTEMBER

**30-2 October | Leisure
Industry Week (UK)**

The annual trade show and meeting place for professionals from all areas of leisure, connecting them with the latest products, services and innovations.
Web www.liw.co.uk



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

13-15 | ISPA Conference & Expo

Venue Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, US

Summary

Three days of presentations on business strategy, customer service, leadership and management and the spa industry.
Web www.experienceispa.com

**16-19 | 14th Annual IHRSA
European Congress**

Venue Amsterdam, Netherlands

Summary

The Congress features presentations by executives from inside and outside the health club industry. There is also ample opportunity for networking.
Web www.ihrsa.org/congress

**22-24 | Club Industry Conference
and Trade Show**

Venue Chicago, Illinois, US

Summary

This independent event for fitness professionals will offer new education, events, exhibitors and tours.
Web www.clubindustryshow.com

24-26 | The OM Yoga Show London

Venue Olympia, London, UK

Summary

A total yoga experience under one roof, with free classes, workshops and an exhibition. In addition, the Mind Body Soul Experience covers complementary health and spiritual awareness.
Web www.theyogashow.co.uk

NOVEMBER

11-12 | Spa Life UK 2014

Venue TBC

Summary

Spa professionals can see new products, share industry insights and network.
Web www.spaconference.co.uk

19-22 | SIBEC Europe

Venue Pestana Casino Park Hotel,
Funchal, Madeira

Summary

Major operators from the UK and Europe meet with leading suppliers in a series of one-to-one meetings. There is also plenty of opportunity for networking.
Web www.mcleaneventsinternational.com

25-26 | BASES Conference 2014

Venue St George's Park, Staffs, UK

Summary

The annual conference of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences, the professional body for sport and exercise sciences in the UK.
Web www.bases.org.uk

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EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT ...

DISCOUNTING

Duncan Bannatyne caused a bit of a furore in his recent book, *Riding the Storm*, when he claimed that discounting at some of his health clubs had brought in 'problem members'.

Bannatyne said that dropping the monthly fees from £42 to £29 had devalued the brand and changed the atmosphere at the clubs. "More and more, people are trying it on, trying to sneak in a friend without paying, or making complaints in the hope of getting money back," he said.

He added that his son-in-law, who's one of his club managers, thinks his club no longer feels like a Bannatyne and is concerned about what long-time members might think.

Discounting might be good for the short-term bottom line, but Duncan Bannatyne believes it attracts 'problem members', changing the feel of a club. So is it worth it?

However, Bannatyne also said that – although he was concerned that the discount was devaluing the brand – if the company didn't adopt a strategy of discounting, it faced losing money by losing members or prospects to other clubs. Dropping the price had led to thousands of extra members, he observed.

So is that a trade-off worth making, or do clubs risk losing previously happy members – put off by the change in atmosphere in the club – as fast as

they gain their new influx of 'problem members'?

Isn't it also unfair on existing members if they have to keep paying the old price? On the other hand, if their fee is also discounted, does the discount lose its marketing impact?

In the current economic

climate, discounting can certainly make health clubs affordable to many more people who would greatly appreciate being able to join, and who would be valued members. But is this always the case? Does discounting bring problem members? Does it devalue the brand? Are there rules to follow to make it effective? Or should the industry be looking at different ways to boost membership and ensure existing prices are good value? We ask the experts....

DOES DISCOUNTING ATTRACT 'PROBLEM MEMBERS'? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

DR PAUL BEDFORD

Retention Guru • Research director

I don't think it's unusual for clubs to have problems with discounted members. One of my clients had the same issue after dropping its membership price to compete with budget gyms. It destroyed the business: they had problems with drug dealing, violence between members and towards staff, profanity and a lack of respect for the facilities. They tried to get round the problem by raising the prices again after a year, to move the discounted members on, but by this time they found that most of their original members had left.

Discounting can work if it's for a particular reason, such as a discount on the joining fee, or for a limited period of time. However, if a club does this to bring in new members, it needs to do something to reward its longstanding members.

Many gym members I interview know they can negotiate a discount on the joining fee if they threaten to join another club, or if they come at the end of the month. However, they would prefer that it wasn't a game and that there was greater transparency. For a long time, the industry has been able to charge more money than the value of its product: facilities and services have been provided, but not support. The focus needs to be on getting both the product and the price right."

**TIM BAKER**

Touchstone Partners • Chair

I have never heard that discounting attracts the wrong sort of member.


I don't know why joining on a discount should make people more inclined to sneak people in or complain. If anything, I would have thought those paying higher prices would be more inclined to complain.

Discounting is a good way of boosting memberships: discounting on the first few months can encourage people to join, and offering cheaper memberships if they come at allocated times can bring the club within the price range of more people. This doesn't mean they will cause trouble.

However, if gyms are finding they have to discount in order to attract members, it's probably because they're not offering the right product for the catchment. The maturation of the market into no frills low-cost gyms versus full-service premium clubs means there's now less need to discount.

The most important thing is for the gym to get the product right for the community it serves. Clubs need to make sure they offer value for money and treat members well. Members are far less likely to take advantage of a club that treats them well and makes an effort to know them. If sneaking guests in is a problem, why not offer cheap guest tickets or passes?"





The science of pricing: Clubs need to be tuned in to the quality and volume of supply and demand

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NEIL HARMSWORTH

payasUgym • Co-founder

Discounting is a legitimate and effective pricing strategy if services are not overpriced to begin with, so the discount is credible to the consumer. Our data suggests that

20 per cent is the optimum discount to encourage a purchasing decision, provided the original price is realistic.

However, there's a problem in the fitness industry of clubs starting with prohibitively high prices and offering huge discounts of 50 per cent or more to impress the customer. Customers simply see through the original inflated price and consider the discounted price to be a more realistic price point. This is not so much brand erosion as an enforced, realistic price reset. If you set the right price to begin with, rather than adding a margin to make your business work, you will be better placed to discount strategically.

Customers want a clear understanding of what they will pay each month, and it must offer value for money. The industry also needs to be less secretive about how it projects itself online and be transparent about prices. People no longer want to negotiate membership on an old-fashioned tour: our research highlights an 80 per cent decline in walk-in custom in the last 18 months, while online searches for gym membership increased by 70 per cent."



DAVE STALKER

ukactive • CEO

Pricing is a science, inherently linked to the quality and volume of supply and demand. If you have an incredibly high quality and effective service in an area in which people demand it, you can charge what you wish. Provide something of dubious value in a competitive market and expect to have to discount.

Altering price is a strategic decision which every operator has to make. Although it can be tempting to make a tactical discount, especially in summer, is this sustainable? Do you want to be known as an operator that reduces its monthly fees to get customers? Or should you look at pricing strategies focused on retention, to keep a member at the moment their wandering eyes begin to look elsewhere?

Your service is still not valued by the vast majority of people in your local community – that's why we're stuck at a glass ceiling of 12 per cent penetration. We've seen the dramatic success budget operators have had in attracting non-exercisers through the door, and a number of pricing promotions have also enjoyed great success in this respect. However, the challenge then becomes supporting previously inactive people to sustain the commitment they've made – and that, I'm afraid, is an even more complex science than pricing."



MARTIN LONG

This is the first new club we've opened in 10 years," says Martin Long, CEO of LA fitness, as he shows

me round the brand new LAX club, which opened at the end of October in the heart of the City of London.

"We've taken 10 years of learnings from the LA fitness chain and its diverse management team, as well as from the rest of the industry in the UK and around the world, and we've applied all that in a club we've built from scratch in a £2.5m project."

The result is a premium offering, designed specifically for a City audience, which operates under the distinct brand of LAX. "There was healthy debate over the brand – some of the early workings still had it down as an LA fitness club – but for me, it was a clean sheet of paper and I wanted to use a new brand," says Long. "We'd been looking at the London market for some time, and when this opportunity came up I saw it as a blank canvas: it really was just a concrete bunker when we got hold of it."

"If you look at the LA chain, there have been lots of acquisitions over the years – single 'mom and pop' clubs being added to the estate – and there really wasn't a clean landscape. This was an opportunity to take a very blank canvas and bring it to life. If we'd tried to do that under the LA fitness brand, we'd have been starting from behind the curve. Just putting a new name above the door was the starting point for differentiation."

"That said, we wanted to keep some association with the LA brand. LAX has a standalone distinction, but we don't hide the fact that it's linked to LA fitness by any means."

"It's similar to the hotel model in a way, where you have different levels of branding within a portfolio. If you were in an Intercontinental, for example, you wouldn't necessarily see branding for the group's other hotel chains in there."

The CEO of LA fitness talks to Kate Cracknell about the launch of the new LAX brand, positioned at the premium end of the market



Long at the launch of the LAX club

Similarly, there aren't many references to LA fitness in the LAX building. The whole front end is different: everything from the key systems to class booking to support the simplicity of the LAX brand and concept.

"However, LAX members automatically have access to LA fitness clubs, so although LAX membership cards use proximity technology – LA fitness has swipe cards – they can also be swiped in LA fitness clubs."

A focus on fitness

He continues: "We decided to set LAX at a premium level and added as much into the club as we could – all the current trends – to make it a very simple

but top-end customer experience, with a high degree of interaction and education." (See briefing box, p39)

The pressure on the mid-market over recent times – squeezed from both sides by the low-cost operators and the premium sector – has been well-documented, and Fitness First has already moved to refine its offering in a bid to move its brand more upmarket. Has the launch of the premium LAX brand been motivated by a similar rationale?

"I don't think it directly reflects that market dynamic," says Long. "LAX is simply about meeting the needs of the London market, and specifically the building above the club, where there are 5,000 employees working for a number of firms. It was about designing a concept that works for those time-hungry customers – somewhere they can get the most out of their exercise in the limited time they have available."

"That's why we've focused on short format, small group training sessions – our new LAX20 and LAX30 classes – which are included in the membership and delivered both in the functional area and on the gym floor. That's also why we haven't included a pool. If members want to swim, they can go to one of the nearby LA fitness clubs – there are several within easy walking distance – but we wanted to maximise the workout space at LAX."

In line with this very focused approach, LAX also limits its secondary revenue streams to concentrate on its core territory of fitness. "There are plenty of places in London where you can get a great coffee or a fresh juice, and we have a Tesco store next door, so there's no point us selling bottled water or snacks. We just focus on giving our members everything they need to do a great workout, with the only thing you can add being PT."

Yet surprisingly, particularly given the affluent City clientele, the club launched



The new LAX club near London's Liverpool Street has an urban design, and incorporates the latest member-focused technology



About LAX St Botolph's

The new LAX club – located in the St Botolph's Building near Aldgate and Liverpool Street tube stations – is spread over three floors, with a clean, airy, urban design conceived by Jamm Architects.

A spacious reception area occupies the ground floor, with iPads where members can tap into their MY LA account. This gives them access to services such as online class booking; fitness tutorials; a fitness review to create a personalised workout programme based on fitness levels, goals and motivation; FAQs; and

a feedback and response facility. Access to the club is via proximity card, freeing up the staff to act more as hosts than receptionists.

One floor down is the main gym, kitted out with Technogym CV and resistance equipment; changing rooms are on a mezzanine above this, overlooking the 220sq m CV area. Resistance equipment occupies a 325sq m space. Next level down is a 265sq m dedicated functional floor offering space for group training sessions, personal training and independent workouts. Kitted out by Escape, equipment includes

an Octagon rig, Bulgarian bags, steel bags and Dynamax balls.

Also on this floor is a 97sq m cycle studio with capacity for 50–60 bikes, as well as a 175sq m group exercise studio offering the full range of Les Mills classes alongside pilates, yoga and Zumba. These studio classes complement the signature LAX20 and LAX30 20- and 30-minute small group training sessions, with a total of over 150 classes a week on the combined group exercise timetable.

Finally, a Learning Pod offers a space for member education and fitness assessments.

The Learning Pod offers space for member education, as well as fitness assessments

"LAX is being used as a testbed to trial new concepts, with a view to potentially rolling some of them out across the estate"



► with just six PTs, with the expectation of reaching 15–20 after 12 months, subject to demand. "The model is different at LAX," explains Long. "We have a full team of staff, known as LAX Crew, who are non-PT and who are there to help people – particularly on the functional floor, which is manned at all times. We don't just leave people to their own devices – the LAX Crew are highly skilled and are there to make sure every member gets the most out of each workout. None of our other clubs come close to that level of added value on the fitness floor."

The slogan on the wall of reception – "Live your potential. Take the journey. Make it matter" – sums up the philosophy of the new club, he adds. "It's about taking valuable time and maximising your workout. It is about the intensity, but it's also about how we add value through variety and through the input of the LAX Crew."

A winning formula

These high levels of service and attention to detail are to be expected at a premium club. What comes as more of a surprise at LAX is the price: a relatively modest £79 a month, plus £50 joining fee.

"We've priced it very keenly, with members really only paying a small premium above our other clubs and the local competition," says Long. "Meanwhile, across London, you're seeing whole new price points coming in with the likes of Equinox and the microgyms. We believe we're offering great value for money. I think most people would expect LAX to charge a lot more than we're pitching it at."

Given this pricing structure – along with the club's high staffing model, prime City location and relative lack of secondary spend channels – how many members will LAX need to break even?

"We launched with around 1,500 members and I think it has the potential

to be a 4,000-member club. However, our target is about 2,500 members – anything north of that and we'll be doing well," says Long. He must have noticed the look on my face, as he adds: "That's surprised you hasn't it?"

It has indeed, but judging by those figures it sounds like a winning formula. So are more LAX clubs on the cards? "I'd open more, yes, and they'd be largely metropolis-based," says Long.

"There's also, within the design of the LAX brand and the structure of the offering, the option to launch a small studio format in line with the growing trend of the microgyms. The 20- and 30-minute LAX20 and LAX30 classes are very, very portable as a sub-brand."

LAX is also being used as a testbed to trial new concepts and services, with a view to potentially rolling some of these out across the LA fitness estate. Long explains: "We believe the LAX brand gives us a fair degree of flexibility going forward, including the option to rebrand some of the LA clubs where appropriate – South Kensington, for example – or to take elements such as LAX20 and LAX30 and roll those back across the LA fitness chain."

"That's important, because we have to make sure we don't lose sight of the fact that LAX is just one club. We have 80 in the estate."

Estate management

So how have things gone with the LA fitness brand since *Health Club Management* last interviewed Long in September 2009? "We're trading in a difficult marketplace, but the LA fitness portfolio has scrubbed up pretty well over the last few years of refurbishment and investment into the business."

"Are they now great clubs? I think they're good clubs. With a club like LAX, ►



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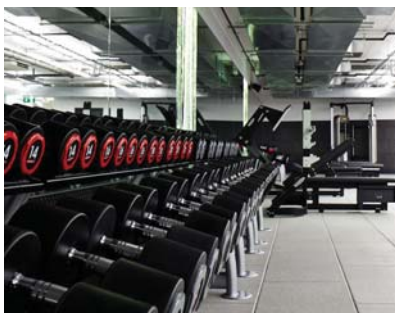
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Resistance equipment occupies a 325sq m space and sits alongside the CV area on the lower ground floor

"The issue I want to address in our clubs is staff retention, as that contributes to the friendliness and sense of community of a club"



► you can start from scratch and make it great, but it's much harder to take a chain and put change through it.

"But if you look at our member surveys, the members are happier. Are they off the Richter scale happy? No. But we're certainly not alone in that. I think the vast majority of chains are pretty well run and give pretty good service and pretty good value, but the industry still suffers from reputational problems that go back to the old times. Fair play to ukactive – it's doing a lot of work on the broader reputation of the sector – but that's still outweighed by the dissenters, by the history. We're still fighting that every day of the week.

"The other problem the industry has – and it's almost impossible to change this now – is that it's devalued itself over time. Yield has gone down over time, not up. Inflation has gone up. We have LA clubs today charging less than they did 10 years ago.

"The consumer perception now is that £50 a month is a lot of money for membership – I get members who pay £19 and use the club every single day, doing classes, and they still think they're

over-paying. Honestly, they're not even covering the water bill.

"But all in all, the majority of members are happy. We want them to have a good experience and feel they're getting great value. Do we hit that box every day of the week with every member? No, but with the vast majority we do.

"The other industry-wide issue I really wanted to address in our clubs was staff retention, as I believe that contributes to the friendliness, familiarity and sense of community in a club. Honestly, that's probably the area where we'd still like to be doing better. We've invested heavily in training and introduced a lot of loyalty mechanics – performance-related pay and so on. And I do think we give a good grounding to staff – I think we're very good at inducting, training and creating good people. I'd just like them to stay longer so we benefit from that, but gym staff come from a young, portable generation and it hasn't been easy to drive that change through the business."

Growing participation

When we last spoke, Long was very enthusiastic about the potential of the

health and fitness sector, envisaging a big period of growth ahead. In practice, gym members continue to make up no more than around 12 per cent of the overall UK population. So has Long witnessed any signs of the market growth he predicted?

"Consumer participation in fitness and lifestyle is definitely improving. The difficulty is measuring growth in one particular segment of the market, because the market has broadened, particularly in the area of outdoor lifestyle – not just boot camps and military fitness, but running and especially cycling.

"So the broader market has certainly grown; measuring growth simply in the gym sector is the hard part. We're trying to measure an uplift in just one tiny segment of a very broad market for consumer wellbeing.

"That said, there's been a lot of change in the health and fitness industry already, with operators upping their game, and I do believe there are further opportunities for growth, provided the right concepts can be designed for the right locations." ●

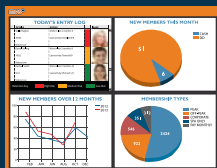
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QUALITY STANDARDS

How important is the quality of your offering in keeping hold of members?
Dr Paul Bedford investigates, in the third part of his retention series

Since the latter half of the 1980s, health clubs have evolved from small, privately owned facilities or sports centres with multi gyms into what we see today: gyms full of state of the art equipment, along with studios that once only required mats as an accessory now full of additional props and tools to deliver a wider range of classes.

And yet, while the size of clubs and their memberships has grown, the way in which the products and services are delivered has not evolved at the same rate. Some might even argue that quality in this area has gone backwards.

Clean and fresh

In our latest research, we spoke to experienced health club users with multiple years of working out under their belts, who had also been members of numerous different clubs. And we identified that what was of importance to members 10 years ago is still

important to them today – yet many operators still appear unwilling or unable to meet member expectations.

Cleanliness, for example, remains one of the most important factors in how members judge the performance of their club – and an area in which many clubs fall down. “This is the only time I share so much stuff with so many people, and with so little clothing on. If the last person left the mat sweaty, I’d rather lie on the floor than use it,” said one respondent. “You’d have thought the club would have worked out a way to avoid that by now – it’s been open nearly 20 years, with three different owners. Do none of them try to improve this or do they just not care?”

A facelift from time to time is also important in helping drive the impression of quality. Another respondent said: “Why can’t they get the basics right? It needs to be clean and working, with enough staff to help you as and when you need it. They also need to change it up every now and again so it doesn’t get boring. I’m in here three days a week and painting a wall and changing the mats every three years just doesn’t justify the monthly fee.”

Design logic

The design of a club plays an important role in selling and

retaining members, and yet design elements are often overlooked as operators seek to make maximum use of the space available.

In terms of layout, easy to navigate spaces that naturally flow from one area to another help members acclimatise and feel comfortable within the club very quickly, in much the same way that modern airports are designed to have passengers flow from check-in to security and then into duty free. In the airport, each area nudges the traveller to the next location. Similarly, clubs could ‘flow’ members through the restaurant to get to their classes, or past the free weights area to get to the cardio equipment.

On a positive note, hard to navigate gym floors are already decreasing, with the application of retail behavioural psychology and equipment layout beginning to find its way onto the gym floor. These developments allow members to make optimum use of the equipment in the time available.

“I used to have to walk around the entire gym to get a workout – one piece here, another over there. Since they re-fitted the gym, it’s easy: start at this end, finish at that end [points to a line of equipment]. I actually get more done in less time – brilliant.”

However, the devil is in the design detail. Our research shows that many respondents continue to have issues with operators’ failure to take

Cleanliness remains a key factor in how members rate their club



“Many respondents continue to have issues with operators’ failure to take into account how they will actually consume the gym experience”



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If operators investment in new equipment, they also need to train staff to support any members wanting to use it

into account how they will actually consume the gym experience.

"They have TVs on the machines and on the wall, but if you're on the cardio equipment, you should expect to be able to listen to the TVs on the wall too. It's ridiculous that you can't listen to TVs that are on different channels from the machines. I often watch the sports channels, but I can't listen to what's going on," commented one member.

Another said: "In the showers, all of the shower heads are high up. This might suit men, but I don't want to get my hair wet when I shower. Why can't they be set at shoulder height? They haven't really thought about how men and women differ."

Service standards

As the industry searches for the next big thing – the thing they hope will improve retention – answers are often sought in innovative new equipment and classes. However, while operators will spend thousands of pounds investing in these products, they often fail to train staff sufficiently to support members.

When staff are not available, members feel they have to turn to more experienced exercisers around

While the physical environment is more conducive to exercise nowadays, clubs don't appear able to match member expectations with service delivery

them – or, indeed, increasingly report conducting YouTube searches and watching the manufacturers' advertisements to learn how equipment should be used.

"We have that, over there [pointing to a suspension training A frame], but I'm not sure what to do with it," said one respondent. "I've seen the personal trainers using it with clients, but none of the gym staff seem to know how it works. When I ask for help, they just tell me to book a PT session or read the poster. Why can't they just show me what to do?"

This results in misuse or lack of use, because staff are unable to demonstrate where that particular piece of equipment could be used as an alternative to something the member is already doing.

"What happened to the fitness staff – where did they all go?" asked

one member. "It used to be that you had staff who would come and help you with things. They would write you programmes, talk to you about your day and check you were OK. What happened to them?"

Indeed, our research shows that service levels remain a particular bugbear. While the physical environment is much more conducive to exercise nowadays – with fewer rows of kit and more design – clubs don't appear able to match member expectations with delivery of service. Members aren't after the 'wow' experience every once in a while, but rather the basics being done consistently well – and this isn't generally happening.

Another finding that came out of our research is that members are happy to buy, but are unhappy being sold to. "Overnight my club turned into an advertisement for a large German car

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► company," said one respondent. "OK, I get that they want to link with other brands they think members want, to maximise advertising revenue, but that was a bit much."

Class offering

Meanwhile, in the studios, members love the diversity now offered.

However, this comes with a caveat: while there can be more to choose from, this can also result in less of what they actually want to do. Class teachers can also come in for some criticism.

"I've been told that this club pays a little more than all the other clubs locally. You can tell because all of the

teachers are good. You even have teachers who make up their own choreography rather than the same old same old. I used to belong to my local leisure centre, where I think they pay the minimum and what you get is a generic class – nothing special... just what it says on the timetable."

Retention drivers

So what's driving members' decisions to stay at particular clubs? Respondents reported staying at clubs:

- Where staff took an interest in them and not just their money.
- Where the club was clean and members could see cleaning at appropriate times.

Experienced exercisers are willing to pay more for what they want. This is reflected in the growing number of studios focused on just one activity

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The majority of members aren't looking for a 'wow' experience – just the basics done consistently well

- Where the exercise environment was designed for ease of use.
- Where they knew that proper support was available.
- Where they could see the club making some investment year-on-year.
- Where the staff appeared to be happy in their job and working conditions.
- Where the price reflected the level of service received.

Experienced exercisers are willing to pay more for what they want. In fact, some will pay more for less choice if it means they actually get more of what they want. This is reflected in the growing number of boutique fitness studios focused on just one activity – such as PT, yoga, pilates or group cycling – but with the best instructors, creating a defined and designed user experience and charging more for it.

Respondents also stated that they would be willing to – and indeed do – pay more when they can find clubs that can deliver on their expectations.

One respondent concluded: "My gym has everything I want in a club. The equipment is well maintained and clean. When they buy new equipment, they have general induction sessions on how to use it.

"The staff have been here for years – some come and go, but they always seem to get a good replacement. And they don't try and sell to you all the time like some gyms I've been a member of. They let you know what's available, but then they leave you to make the choice." ●

Paul Bedford PhD has worked in the fitness industry for more than 20 years. His business, Retention Guru, helps health club operators increase retention, reduce attrition and improve member loyalty.
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WHEELS IN MOTION



Body Bike's Uffe Olesen says indoor cycling clubs go to extremes to inspire members

So your cycling classes are always full. Does this mean your cycle offering is performing optimally? Not necessarily. Kath Hudson finds out what mainstream operators can learn from the growing number of specialist indoor cycling microgyms

Indoor cycling has become very cool, commanding high ticket prices and prompting long waiting lists. Many of the concepts have been developed by sparky entrepreneurs who have created the type of experience they were looking for themselves (see briefing box, p52). Because of this, the clubs are imbued with a sense of passion, personality and individuality. So is this something the larger chains can replicate? What lessons can full-service clubs learn from the niche indoor cycling clubs?

Make members feel special

Lesson one is to listen to what the members want and make an effort to build a relationship with them. Microgyms tend to work on a pay as you go basis, meaning there's no security of a monthly or annual contract; they have to stay responsive to members' needs and keep offering them what they want.

"It's all about relationships," says Sarah Morelli, global education and development manager for Star Trac. Are the big clubs creating relationships with their members? I'd say not. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that many big clubs are only interested in how many bums in saddles were in each class, but not which customers were there. Where's the love?"

Fergus Ahern, managing director of MOSSA in the UK, also identifies the 'bums on seats' mentality as an issue, pointing out that having full classes doesn't necessarily mean happy members, or even that members are getting results. He says members should be regularly surveyed and advised



Well-designed waiting lounges can help people switch off from their everyday life

"I'd go so far as to say that many big clubs are only interested in how many bums in saddles were in each class, but not which customers were there. Where's the love?"



Full-service facilities should consider creating a cycling club-in-club

frequent programme changes and up-to-date music to keep people engaged.

CEO of Body Bike, Uffe Olesen, says indoor cycling clubs go to extremes to offer a full-blown experience, and believes this is what full-service clubs also need to do to inspire members.

"It's important to build indoor cycling up to be a real experience, akin to going to the movies, but without the popcorn," he says. "Create a club within a club, with a separate membership, and charge extra to rent out shoes and towels. There should be a lounge to wait in before the class to build anticipation, and to return to afterwards for a smoothie. Through décor and projections, the lounge should help people shut off from their everyday life."

Carl McCartney, RPM trainer for Les Mills UK, agrees that – while music, décor and bikes are important – it's the member experience that's vital. "Indoor and outdoor cyclists are a breed apart from your typical gym-goer, so make sure you're able to differentiate your indoor cycling from the other aspects of your club. The specialist indoor cycling clubs are doing amazingly well

"Indoor and outdoor cyclists are a breed apart from your typical gym-goer, so make sure you're able to differentiate your indoor cycling from other aspects of your club"

because they're fostering a like-minded community through their members, making their clubs very sociable. Use all the tools in your arsenal to make your cycling studio a social hub."

McCartney recommends regular relaunches, endurance classes for more hardcore users, and road rides or cycling tours to strengthen the bond the instructors have with members.

Bin the strip lights

One of the things that currently differentiates the microgyms is their creative use of lighting, with the

experience often felt to be more powerful if the room is dark: SoulCycle in New York conducts some classes by candlelight, for example. Morelli suggests that full-service clubs could be more creative in this respect, such as installing a twinkle light ceiling. "People like to sit in the half dark," agrees Olesen. "Something happens when the lights go out. It becomes a more immersive experience and plunges people into the present moment."

Sound and graphics can also be used to create a cinematic feel. Get the best sound system, with big speakers at the front and back to really draw people into the experience. Have a big screen at the front to display motivational, inspiring, entertaining graphics – it could be a cityscape one day and a famous ride the next.

Olesen says that fitness club operators should think outside of the box about what will entertain cyclists during their class. He suggests themed weeks and special guests, like DJs or even dancers on stage. Meanwhile Elena Lapetra, head of Schwinn UK, says events such as cycle-related workshops and one-off ▶

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INDOOR CYCLING



New microgym Joy Riders uses creative lighting for a more immersive experience

▶ challenges around big cycling events can help build members' involvement.

But it isn't only in these dramatic ways that the environment can contribute to the experience. The basics still matter, with cleanliness key to creating an environment people want to return to regularly. Says Lapetra: "Even if clubs don't have a lot of money to invest, cycling studios can be made more inviting simply by ensuring the bikes are always spotlessly clean."

"The bikes should be cleaned after each class and have a full clean every night," agrees Morelli. "Adding a natural oil scent can help get clients in the mood to exercise, or relax, depending on the goal of the class."

Focus on results

Gary Oleinik, national sales director at Keiser UK, says technology should be used to allow people to see how they are doing in the class, enabling them to compete if they want to, but equally importantly allowing them to track their progress over time; showing participants the results of their in-class effort is key.

With this need for results in mind, he also argues that it's important to integrate a variety of intensity levels into the workout – for example, mixed terrain and heart rate-based programmes, some hills and some flats, or zone one and two heart rate levels.

Richard Baker, commercial director of Wattbike, agrees that tech-savvy members want real-time performance data, as well as good equipment that gives an excellent ride experience. He also stresses the need for clubs to invest in the best, most knowledgeable instructors to attract, retain and motivate members; microgyms not only have a rigorous recruitment process but

also require instructors to keep their knowledge up-to-date.

"Busy classes can mean clubs and instructors become complacent, not showing enough interest in updating or developing knowledge and skills," observes Lapetra. "Make sure instructors regularly update their skills to embrace the latest research, new class designs and training techniques, otherwise members will drift off to other classes or even other clubs."

Lapetra also suggests bringing in expertise from other parts of the club by offering 15 minutes of core training or flexibility as part of a cycling class: "The indoor cycling studios are by their very nature specialist, meaning they're more limited in what they and their instructors ▶



Avoid complacency: Microgyms require instructors to keep their knowledge up-to-date

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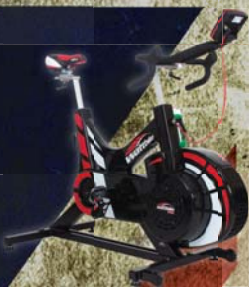
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- can offer. Larger clubs can draw on the full breadth of their offering to provide a more rounded, varied, engaging class with a broader range of benefits. This should be packaged so it's perceived as one big class, such as indoor cycling integrated with core or yoga."

Get creative

In the perfect world, your cycling studio will offer everything the niche clubs offer, continues Lapetra: spotless bikes with onboard computers linked to display technologies, stadium layout, perfect temperature and the best sound system. However, she acknowledges this isn't always practical or within budget: "But creating a wow factor doesn't always need a huge budget. It needs purpose and creativity. If you can't afford new bikes, get yours serviced – riders soon tire of rusty bikes, wobbly pedals and inconsistent resistance – and implement strict maintenance routines and studio etiquette to ensure bikes stay looking and riding their best."

"Try and get computers retrofitted – with the growing desire for measurement and tracking, this is a smaller investment that can have a big impact on riders' experience. And even if you can't afford a full refurb of the studio, a great sound system is the fuel of the class, and some quirky lighting and a lick of paint can make a big difference."

Clubs must also make sure it's easy to book into the class by offering an online booking and payment system, she says: "Do your members have to follow strict and complicated guidelines for booking classes: maximum one week in advance, queuing at reception or on the phone to book? Remove their excuses for not joining your classes. Make booking really simple, including via mobile, and ideally with a live feed to show if someone's favourite bike is still available."

It's this sort of personalised attention to detail that will really help the chains bring a point of difference to their cycling offering. As Morelli observes, boutique cycling clubs offer a five-star service – so what little touches could you introduce to make your members feel really special? Hand out fresh fruit? A smoothie? A cold hand towel?

Lapetra concludes: "Once you've gone through all the different scenarios and decided where you can improve your offering, give your studio a new name to mark a new beginning and let the world know about it." ●

INTRODUCING THE MICROGYMS

We round up some of the emerging group of cycling microgyms...

Psyde London

A new kid on the block, Psyde London opens its first site on London's Regent Street in February. Created by Colin Waggett, the former CEO of Fitness First, its objective is to create the most enjoyable fitness experience in London. In this highly designed club, where the work of London artists is on show, classes promise to be fun, as well as effective for toning and burning calories. A pay as you go concept, classes will cost £20, or £15 if you book a package of 25.

SoulCycle

Born in New York in 2007, SoulCycle offers a mix of inspirational coaching and high-energy music, with some classes that use candlelight to bring in a mental / spiritual aspect. Handweights and resistance bands are used to work the core and arms as well. There are currently 22 sites in the US, but the company plans to have 50–60 worldwide by 2015, with rumours of a possible London launch. It's not a members' club, but you have to buy a series of classes in order to book in – US\$25 per class plus US\$3 to hire shoes.



SoulCycle: Global plans

BOOM! Cycle

Currently with one club in central London, BOOM! Cycle has plans to open nine more sites across the UK capital. For £14 a class (or £9 if you bulk buy) you're promised pumping music, great instruction and high quality bikes. A range of different classes are offered including Hip Hop, Disco Cycle and a two-hour intensive session.



BOOM! Cycle in London offers classes styled around hip hop and disco music

H2 Bike Run

This London-based concept was created to allow people to cycle or run to work in the city, get a decent shower, park their bike safely and even get it serviced and have their muddy clothes cleaned. Spinning has always been part of the core offer, but other classes such as yoga and TRX are also available. The first site opened in Soho in 2011 and there are now two more in central London. Various membership options are available to take advantage of the different services. A Spinning class costs £8, or you can pay £50 a month to use all the facilities.

Cyclebeat

Launched last year in central London, Cyclebeat allows participants to opt into its Beatboard technology, which displays performance in-class. Each performance is emailed to you and saved to your account, so you can track fitness improvements. One class costs £15, or you can buy 10 classes for £120. Every new rider gets 20 days' access for £20. Monthly and annual memberships are also available.



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SITE INVESTIGATION

For any planned leisure development, rigorous site investigations are essential to establish a realistic project cost. Denis O'Brien, senior surveyor from international construction services company ISG – a key Alliance Leisure contractor – explains the basics of the process

For potential leisure projects, how important are the site investigations in the Alliance design and build process?

Site investigations may not be the most exciting part of the process to talk about, but without very detailed and rigorous surveys at this key stage, it's impossible to come up with a realistic project cost. Alliance Leisure always works to a fixed price contract, so we need to know about every potential pitfall of the proposed development site.

What's involved?

It depends whether we're looking at a new build or an extension to an existing facility. There are obviously a lot more unknowns – particularly relating to the ground works – with a site that doesn't already have a building on it.

We undertake ground investigation surveys, tree surveys, environmental

impact surveys, assess the proximity and ease of access to utilities. We also try to look for the potential show-stoppers such as former coal mines or sink holes. Of course, there are always some things you can't plan for which might significantly delay the start of the project, such as undiscovered munitions or archaeological remains, but in reality these are very rare occurrences.

When it comes to extensions and redevelopments, there's another whole tier of investigations to carry out before the project can be accurately costed.

The majority of leisure centres we're now redeveloping date back to the 60s and 70s, so we have to consider the presence of asbestos and the quality of the drains, as well as undertaking structural surveys to see if the existing structure can take the new load.

We also need to check whether the existing services provision is sufficient

Follow the series

1. Scoping / Investigation
2. Conceptualisation
3. Viability assessment & full feasibility
- 4. Site investigation**
5. Fixed price contracts
6. Overseeing the building work
7. Ordering phase
8. Client support (part 1)
9. Client support (part 2)

to supply a larger site, and carry out a dilapidation survey to check structures such as the original roof, which might be nearing the end of its life.

What are the site problems that add most to the budget?

If there are inadequate services, then the need, for example, to build a sub-station could easily add £100,000–£120,000 to the project cost.

With existing leisure centres, it might be that it's best to knock down a quarter to a third of the existing building in order to properly develop the site.

However, in the case of older buildings, it's almost always better to plan to replace some elements of the building right at the start, as the



The choice of construction method enabled The Pavilion to stay open during the build

“In the case of older buildings, it's almost always better to plan to replace some elements of the building right at the start, as the payback on this can be relatively quick. For example, we'll always introduce modern, efficient lighting to any project we're working on”



Something for everyone (clockwise from top right): Pavilion Flint offers a fitness suite, as well as a range of new facilities – ten pin bowling to appeal to families, a new pirate-themed kids' play area, and flat green bowling for the senior market



► CASE STUDY – Jade Jones Pavilion Flint, North Wales

In July 2012, Alliance Leisure completed a £2m extension and refurbishment project at the Jade Jones Pavilion Flint in North Wales.

At the heart of the project was the redevelopment of the sports hall. After carrying out site investigations, Alliance discovered that it needed new pile foundations to take the weight of the new project proposals, which consisted of an eight-lane ten pin bowling alley on the ground floor, and a four-lane flat green bowling rink on a new mezzanine level.

Because of the poor soil structure on the site, Alliance contractor ISG used a mini continuous flight auger piling

system to construct new foundations. Although this method comes at a higher cost, it meant minimum vibration and noise for the existing, occupied leisure centre, including the adjacent swimming pool facility. Choosing this building route meant The Pavilion was able to stay open for the entire 28-week build period, and therefore maintain its usual revenue stream.

Other facilities at the leisure centre include a fitness suite, a 25-metre swimming pool and children's pool, café and licensed bar, and multi-activity studios for fitness and dance classes – along with a new pirate-themed children's soft play area, which was added as part of the redevelopment project.

payback on this can be relatively quick. For example, we'll always introduce modern, efficient lighting to any building project we're working on from top to bottom, as the energy savings this yields over time can enable the leisure centre to recoup the cost of the capital outlay in just a few years.

It's a false economy to cut elements like this out of the budget just to bring proposed costs down.

How do the site findings feed into the overall process?

On the basis of these investigations, we're able to carry out a block planning exercise that comes up with the overall size and shape of the development, together with the content and what it will cost (usually within 10–15 per cent of the final fixed cost).

If there are any real show-stoppers at this stage, which is very rare, the client

can choose to walk away and just bear the cost of the site investigations.

Sometimes, at this stage, the local authority might want to scale down some elements of the project to make savings.

If they proceed with the plan, the site investigation costs are absorbed into Alliance's overall development costs. We then go on to commission architects, and draw up a more robust cost plan and a bill of quantities. ●

OLD FOR NEW

In the first of a new series, Gymtopia founder Ray Algar showcases a corporate social responsibility project in Brazil, in which gym members are asked to donate their shoes

Members need trainers – or sneakers, depending on where in the world you live – to work out, but what happens to all those shoes when the time comes to replace them? Should we throw them away or put them to better use?

Companhia Athletica, one of Brazil's most established club chains, invites its members to bring their redundant training shoes into the club, where they are laundered, bagged and tagged. The shoes are then donated to local charities that encourage young people from poor backgrounds into sport. Drop into one of Companhia Athletica's clubs and you will often see pairs of trainers hanging from the walls and ceilings, prompting interesting conversations.

This is a very special project for me personally as it inspired the birth of Gymtopia. Richard Bilton, president of Companhia Athletica, just happened to mention this project to me when I was visiting Brazil. Following our conversation, I excitedly scribbled in my notebook: "Develop a digital platform that illustrates how the global health club industry is doing good in the world."

How did the project start?

Milton Cilira, a Companhia Athletica running instructor, believed old shoes could be put to good use rather than throwing them away. The idea was pitched to his manager and took off, with the project subsequently rolled out across all 17 clubs in the estate. An impressive 700 pairs of shoes were collected to kick-start the project.

How does it work?

Members donate the trainers to their local club. Alternatively Technogym, Companhia Athletica's fitness equipment



Donated shoes are given to kids from poor backgrounds

Gymtopia – a place where clubs do social good

Gymtopia was conceived by founder and chief engagement officer Ray Algar (right), who believes the global health and fitness industry has enormous influence and potential to do good in the world, beyond its immediate customers. The idea of Gymtopia is simple: to curate and spread remarkable stories in which the fitness industry uses its influence to reach out and support an external community in need. It was created with the generous support of various UK and overseas individuals and organisations.

Read more stories and submit your own: www.Gymtopia.org



partner, organises public locations where the general public can donate trainers.

Once collected, the shoes are sent to a laundry where they are cleaned to look good as new. They are then bagged and tagged by size and gender. Finally, the shoes are delivered to local charities.

Why do this?

Many Latin American businesses have deep connections with the community, and Companhia Athletica believes in supporting projects that foster social inclusion. In 2007, it formed the Institute Cia Athletica (ICA), a not-for-profit organisation with the mission of developing a range of socio-cultural projects that improve the lives of others, using its 17 clubs as the platform.

Results so far

Companhia Athletica collects around 320 pairs of trainers a month – 3,840 pairs a year. "Philanthropy is in the DNA of our members, with São Paulo clubs

giving the most shoes," says Silvia de Fêo of the corporate marketing team.

Implications

According to IHRSA, there are 132 million gym members globally, so the industry has access to an abundance of shoes that could be re-used to help people into some form of activity. Yes, it requires a little effort, but how difficult is it to ask a member for their old shoes?

IN A NUTSHELL

Project by: Cia Athletica –

www.ciaathletica.com.br

Location: Brazil

Start date: June 2009

Project status: Ongoing

Impact: National

Charities supported: Numerous

Gymtopia keywords:

Clothing & Shelter, Health & Wellbeing, Helping Children



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ON TREND

Henry Mason of trendwatching.com identifies some of the key consumer trends for the fitness sector to run with in 2014



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/MIITH

The relentless pace of innovation and explosion of choice means consumer needs and expectations are constantly evolving, if not being wholly overturned. One certainty: health and fitness operators need to be aware of how changes in other sectors will challenge industry conventions and create opportunities for those who are alert and ready to respond to change.

Here are a handful of fresh, actionable trends on our radar that are simply begging to be applied by health clubs. The trends are in no particular order and, to keep things interesting, we haven't included the bigger, macro trends (healthy living, ageing, mobile etc) that we're sure are already firmly on your radar.

Honest flexibility

Despite clear and consistent evidence that consumers crave brands and business that are more human – love and attention is lavished on brands that 'get it' – in 2014 too many brands will continue to fall on the wrong side of this epic shift. Indeed, when asked about 'meaningful brands', most people say they wouldn't care if 73 per cent of brands ceased to exist.

Rather than waiting for your product or service limitations to be called out, do you understand what frustrates your customers, and are you then bold enough to confront these issues publicly, first, in a mature and fair way?

For example, online dress rental site Rent the Runway set up a physical showroom on New York's Fifth Avenue where members could rent a dress instantly, but also go to get measured to ensure future online rentals were the correct size. Meanwhile, the Art Series Hotel Group in Melbourne, Australia, launched an initiative that allowed guests to 'overstay' for free if their room wasn't needed by another customer.

What creative solutions to customer pain points could you launch at your club?

Internet of caring things

The Internet of Things – the idea that soon objects, not just personal devices, will be connected – will be one of the big ideas of 2014. From a consumer point of view, expect to see innovations that are centred around the Internet of Caring Things receive a warm welcome.

What does that mean? Well, start thinking not just 'connection', but objects that protect, monitor, inform and improve consumers' lives and activities. Examples include Ford's new concept car seat, which contains an ECG heart rate monitor and can help with mid-journey driver heart attacks and subsequent accidents. An onboard glucose level monitoring system alerts drivers of critical blood sugar levels. Or Riddell's 'InSite Impact Response System' American Football helmet, which contains sensors that send alerts to a

Rent the Runway measures its members to make sure all future online dress rentals are the correct size



PHOTO: MODEL

Riddell's helmet can detect concussion in players

coach's mobile phone after serious impacts, in an attempt to reduce the likelihood of undetected concussions.

Crowd shaping

Big data is another business buzzphrase on everyone's lips, and rightly so. But in 2014, operators would do well to focus on small data, and think about how to shape (and reshape) the customer experience around the preferences of the people actually present in the club at that time.

Why? Well, if big data is all about increased efficiency and benefits that flow to the operator, Crowd Shaping is all about increased relevance and tailored experiences.

CheckinDJ is a fun example of a crowdsourced jukebox, recently developed at Lancaster University in the UK. Users check into a venue using NFC, and the service then shapes the music playlist to match the overall tastes of the current audience by culling information from their social networks. Meanwhile, over in Finland, Kutsuplus is an on-demand hybrid taxi-minibus service with no set route, that instead calculates the optimal route for those on-board.

Which elements of your offering could you shape to match the preferences or needs of those using it at a given moment?

Personal touch

For many consumers, an endless array of brand websites, social media, telephone assistance, mobile apps and more have served to highlight an undeniable truth: sometimes only one-to-one human interaction will do.

And while many health clubs have many staff on-site, changing usage patterns and disruptive business models are challenging existing customer service approaches in the industry. However, developments in technology open up a whole new frontier: live video customer assistance. The benefits can be more than just cost, as by pairing customers with relevant experts, clubs can offer better service.

And if you think this doesn't sound relevant for the fitness industry, then think again. In Brazil, Fiat launched its Live Store, enabling customers to 'look around' vehicles via Fiat hosts wearing helmets equipped with micro-cameras. And in Poland, mBank customers can contact bank representatives and discuss their account via live video chat, with points and ▶

Clubs could invest in apps that monitor members' wellbeing while they work out, in-club or elsewhere



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/CHLOEADIVA

Consumers will increasingly turn to tools that allow them to reflect on their personal digital archives

- ▶ virtual badges awarded to customers who undertake financial tutorials. If auto manufacturers and banks can apply this trend, then surely health clubs can too.

Time(line) travellers

As the online space becomes increasingly intertwined with real-life experiences, consumers will seek to re-live and remember their lives, outsourcing memory to the digital sphere.

For example, One Second Everyday prompts users to capture one second of their life each day. The app can then splice the clips together to create a short film. In Japan, mobile app Reep syncs with and chronologically sorts the user's social media photo libraries and sends photos that were taken exactly a year ago as daily reminders.

In 2014, with consumers turning to services and tools that allow them to build, explore and reflect on these personal digital archives, how might health clubs apply this trend?

Consider using digital memories to remind and motivate consumers, show how their fitness has improved, or to aid performance reviews and set new targets.

Guilt-free consumption

In 2014, ethical and sustainable consumerism will remain high on the consumer agenda. One powerful dimension to focus on is consumer guilt. Experienced consumers are increasingly torn between their aspirations to be 'good', their consumerist impulses and an inability to fundamentally change their lifestyles. This will create huge opportunities for brands and services that allow them to enjoy consumption while reducing its negative impact (whether on oneself, society or the planet).

The health club industry is founded on consumer desire to alleviate personal guilt (ie living unhealthily), but think about all the other forms of guilt that consumers

might experience after using your service – regarding the environmental impact, for example.

Which brands will make as strong a commitment to social and environmental production as Chipotle, the fast food chain that recently released an animated video addressing the flaws in the agribusiness model? Or innovative smaller businesses such as Miya's Sushi in Connecticut, US, which goes beyond simply not including endangered fish – it actually offers dishes made with non-native, invasive species that are damaging the local habitat, in which eating them makes customers part of the solution. How's that for guilt-free?

Then there's the Wish Lit app, which won an energy efficiency hackathon in Singapore. It allows the user to enter the cost of a desired object and then calculates how much energy they need to save in order to purchase it. Or Peddler's Creamery, an ice-cream shop in LA, that powers its churner by asking customers to peddle an in-store bicycle.

Conclusion

Remember, these are just a small selection of the trends that will influence and shape consumer behaviour during 2014. The most important thing is to keep looking beyond the boundaries of the fitness industry, and think expansively when it comes to innovation.

Can you spot shifts in consumer expectations that are happening in parallel industries? Can you extract the ideas behind successful initiatives and apply them to your offering? Your customers won't thank you if you can't! ●



Wish Lit: How much energy must you save to buy the item you want?

Henry Mason is global head of research and managing partner at trendwatching.com. As one of the world's leading trend firms, trendwatching.com sends out its free, monthly Trend Briefings in nine languages to more than 160,000 subscribers.



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MINDBODY



Stay or Leave?

What happens when people leave our health clubs and leisure centres? We know retention is an issue, but what we don't know is how well we handle the leaving process. With anecdotal evidence suggesting it's nothing short of terrible, we asked a focus group of 12 ex-members to share their experiences.

Before the focus group took place, we set the scene by surveying 50 different leavers about their experiences. The results reveal that, despite the many personal explanations why people leave, the main reasons can be grouped into 'cost', 'moved' and 'no time' (see Figure 1).

We then asked how these leavers felt their decision to cancel was handled. Just over half (51 per cent) said it had been handled reasonably well, but more than a third (36 per cent) thought it had not been handled at all well (see Figure 2).

Lastly, just under two-thirds said they would consider rejoining a health club or leisure centre, but almost a third said they wouldn't (see Figure 3).

Why do members leave?

The focus group then explored in more depth the 12 ex-members' experiences of leaving a gym. All had recently left one of three clubs in the Norwich area of the UK: a private hotel-based club, a university-based gym, and a local authority management contractor site.

The group was first asked to reflect on why they'd decided to cancel their membership. The answers related to a wide range of personal reasons, most of which – on the surface – were beyond the centre's control. For example, several talked about lack of motivation and 'being lazy'. Jordan, a 17-year-old student, was typical of this view: "I joined with good intentions, but after just the second visit I just couldn't be bothered. It's not the gym's fault I'm just lazy!"

General lack of motivation and perceived lack of time are issues that come up regularly in Leisure-net surveys, with 'time' the number one reason people give for not being more active. Operators need to be more proactive

Why do people leave health clubs, and how are they treated during the leaving process? Mike Hill shares the findings from research carried out exclusively for *Health Club Management*

in addressing this, providing tailored support to help maintain members' motivation and working with them to find time to fit in exercise sessions.

Perceived value for money

Two of the leavers had specific issues that seemed to be major factors in their decisions to leave. Neil, 44, a quantity surveyor, said: "I was really annoyed by how they treated customers. Some new equipment arrived which I'd been using for weeks. One day, while I was working out, a member of staff asked if my induction had included this new equipment. As it was prior to the equipment's arrival I said no. The staff member told me I could therefore no longer use it until I'd had another induction. I asked if I could have this immediately and was told no, so I asked for the manager, who was also very unhelpful and said I would have to wait."

In Neil's case, this led to an immediate decision: "I told them I would like to cancel my membership

FIGURE 1: The main reason for leaving

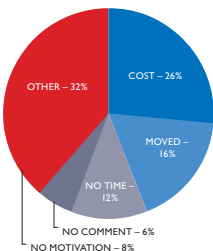


FIGURE 2: How your leaving process was handled

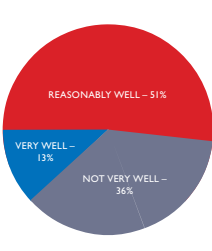


FIGURE 3: Would consider rejoining a health club/leisure centre

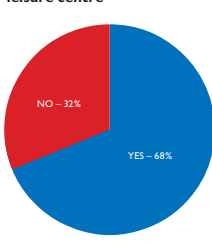




PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Handled correctly, a reasonable proportion of potential leavers could probably be persuaded to stay and give it another go

immediately. They let me leave and I will not go back."

But there were other underlying reasons for his decision to leave. He mentioned that the gym was very crowded, and that he would prefer to pay a higher membership fee for a better level of service and the advantages of a more exclusive gym. For Neil, it's about perceived value for money rather than absolute cost.

But for many of our leavers, cost made all the difference – and in most cases, their reasons for leaving were directly linked to frequency of usage. For example Ray, 32, a student paramedic, said: "I just wasn't using the gym enough.

"Evidently the health clubs and leisure centres our focus group used felt no obligation to make members feel valued"

My financial situation is difficult at the moment and gym membership seemed an easy saving. I was only a member for four months. I work near the gym but didn't attend as much as I hoped I would."

Apparent indifference

Once the group had decided to leave, how was their decision taken by the club, and how was the process handled?

None of the 12 members felt their request to leave was used as an opportunity to recover the situation. Not one was asked to discuss why they were leaving, and only two went through any sort of exit process.

Mark, 54, a retired office manager, was typical: "I rang and told them I wanted to cancel and they just said I would have to come in to sign a cancellation document. This annoyed me. I thought they would try and make me change my mind, but in fact the whole ▶

"It must be possible to treat every member's request individually and seriously, seeing it as an opportunity to re-engage them"

► process only took a minute and was a waste of my time as well as theirs!"

Neil was even more amazed by his club's response. "I didn't receive any contact from anyone – just a letter accepting my cancellation. Considering the reasons why I was leaving, this made me even more angry."

Dianne, 55, a recently retired teacher, was asked to go through her reasons for leaving, but as she explains, even this didn't feel like an attempt to dissuade her: "The young instructor was really pleasant, and just said he needed to fill in a form before he could organise my cancellation. I answered about six questions, but he didn't address any of the points I raised. It seemed a bit of a box-ticking exercise really."

One member of the group – Ben, aged 45 – actually felt obstacles were put in his way to try and prevent him from leaving. He had a back problem and wanted a six-month break: "If they'd offered me a membership freeze I would have accepted, as I do intend to start again, but they seemed to want to make it quite difficult for me to cancel. That just made me more determined."

The main feeling shared by the entire group was one of indifference. Sarah, 32, a radiologist, said: "They really didn't seem to mind one way or another, and they certainly didn't see it as a personal comment on them or their facility."

Evidently the clubs and centres our focus group used felt no obligation to make members feel valued, or treat them as individuals – both factors proven to drive customer loyalty.

Future intentions

So did their treatment during the leaving process affect the group's thoughts about joining a gym again in the future? Opinion was split: a third said they probably wouldn't consider re-joining; the others had varying views.

Steve, a 38-year-old IT programmer, explained: "I don't think I would go back to the same gym, but it hasn't put me off



ALL PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

One respondent was so disillusioned she bought a bike instead of joining a new gym

joining another. To be honest, I wasn't looking for them to change my mind – I just wanted them to make it as easy as possible for me to go."

Annie, a 19-year-old student, disagreed: "The whole experience has put me off gyms altogether. I didn't feel like I was valued as a member, and leaving just confirmed that. I'm going to give gyms a miss and just buy a bike instead!"

In conclusion, the focus group represented the findings of the wider survey fairly well. While people give a lot of reasons for leaving, most boil down to a lack of motivation (or should that be support?) leading to infrequent visits and therefore a feeling that the membership lacks value.

For some people, these feelings are precipitated by external events which truly are out of the club's control, but for most they are issues that operators could address if they wanted to, with interaction strategies put into place and appropriately trained staff to implement them.

Hold on tight

People aren't generally looking for an exit process designed to change their minds, but considering that most leavers have only been members for a short time, surely the factors that encouraged them to join couldn't have changed so dramatically?

It's therefore highly likely that a reasonable proportion of leavers could, with the right approach, be persuaded to stay and give it another go. An approach that recognised a member's

motivation levels, and acknowledged that life situations do change, would be a good start. It must be possible to treat every member's request individually and seriously, seeing it as an opportunity to re-engage with them and recover the situation.

What is certain is that most other industries would not accept such a high turnover of customers without investing time trying to recover the potential loss – and, if the member did decide to leave, at least make sure the experience was as good as possible to encourage them to come back when they were ready.

What happened last time you tried to cancel your mobile phone contract, for example? Chances are you were put through to a dedicated team member whose specific role it was to keep your business at almost any cost. While I'm not advocating that we take mobile phone companies as our role model, their dedication to keeping your business with new offers and packages designed around your individual needs is surely something we can aspire to. ●

Mike Hill is managing director of customer insight specialist Leisure-net Solutions, which conducted this ex-member research exclusively on behalf of Health Club Management. Leisure-net also conducts HAFOS, call-focus and the Fitness Industry Confidence Survey, as well as bespoke research for individual companies.
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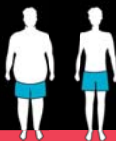
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THE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE

Health clubs must invest in upskilling health club managers if the sector is to gain credibility and build a strong future, says Liz Terry

There's never been a better time to be in the health and fitness industry. Every day, new research emerges to prove that exercise can help practically every known health problem, from depression to cancer, as well as being the most effective anti-ageing treatment.

People want to be healthy, they're learning they need to exercise to achieve this goal, and they want to do it in ways that are convenient, enjoyable and affordable: great news

for health clubs with the right business model. We could be at the dawn of a golden age, when operators grow their businesses quicker than ever before and achieve record profits and market penetration – but only if we're able to crack one yawning weakness.

That weakness is bad management: it's one of the only things that will stop the industry becoming pivotal to the lives of the majority.

We've cracked pretty much all the other challenges: industry suppliers compete to keep a flow of well-designed equipment coming to market, we're great at building clubs, and gym staff are better trained and qualified with every passing year. But the management challenge is one mountain we haven't yet climbed.

Time to upskill

People have the cash to be able to afford memberships, yet the market penetration of health clubs stands stubbornly between 12 and 18 per cent (depending on how you work out the numbers) and industry growth has plateaued, simply because of the huge levels of churn – most health clubs leak their members like a sieve.

Any service business that loses customers to this degree has to look to its people for solutions, and it's time decision-makers in this sector recognised that management is a discipline worth investing in and paying for. It's time to upskill in this discipline instead of simply promoting the most competent gym instructor.

In the UK, CIMSPA – the Chartered Institute set up to lead the charge towards industry excellence in the field of professional development – has faced

a number of challenges since it was launched and has recently undergone a comprehensive, ukactive-led review, unveiling its new business plan and governance structure in November.

Feedback gathered during the review included the need for the Institute to facilitate quality management training; many members and stakeholders also said it should be "a badge of quality". "We're aware of the challenges that face managers in the sector, whereby a third of them don't have the appropriate skills or qualifications for their role," acknowledged Steve Philpott, CEO of DC Leisure, in response to the review.

The health and fitness sector needs an organisation that can champion management training and qualifications and open a debate about how we can upskill staff; CIMSPA's restructure has been designed to establish it as the strategic lead in this area.

Good track record

We've done this before with REPs, so we know it's possible. In the case of REPs, the sector was after government recognition and cash in the form of subsidies. The sector was told in no uncertain terms that, unless health club staff were registered and trained, the government simply couldn't recognise, support or engage with the industry. That was the push we needed as a sector to get on and create REPs – the Register of Exercise Professionals.

But while our fitness instructors are now qualified and registered, we've so far failed to create the same training and career development infrastructure around our managers. There's no degree available in health club management, no proper career path to be followed and – if we're honest – fairly limited prospects for ambitious people to build big careers.

Yet done well, the job is a sophisticated, demanding and complex one, which requires high levels of knowledge in everything from exercise



ALL PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Good management is vital to the growth of the fitness industry



People want to be healthy and are learning that they need to exercise to achieve this goal – great news for health clubs

science to marketing, and from innovation in food and beverage to yield management. It also requires managers who can deliver in both B2B and B2C environments, while also seeking out and developing partnerships for outreach work.

Sector-wide responsibility

The newly revitalised CIMSPA will now set out to support the fitness sector in developing such managers, with solid career pathways that help staff progress from technical roles to management level.

CIMSPA has already received a vote of confidence from the sector, with operators such as DC Leisure investing in the development body since its business plan and governance structure were approved by members.

But the responsibility cannot rest on CIMSPA's shoulders alone. Here at

“MANAGEMENT IS WORTH INVESTING IN. IT'S TIME TO UPSKILL INSTEAD OF SIMPLY PROMOTING THE MOST COMPETENT GYM INSTRUCTOR”

Health Club Management magazine, we think health club management matters, so we're committed to raising the profile of this important area by sharing information and inspiration about best practice. In a new series that will run throughout 2014 – developed in conjunction with CIMSPA – we'll be highlighting areas of interest and sharing knowledge and expertise on health club management.

We believe passionately that it's time health club management was taken seriously as a discipline in its own right in the wider business community – but if we as a sector

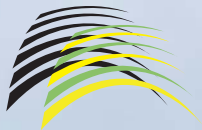
don't invest in it, value it and innovate within it, then the chance of our sector achieving wider respect and recognition is non-existent. It's time the industry put management training at the heart of the agenda. ●

Liz Terry has been writing about and analysing the global leisure industries since 1983. She's managing director of Leisure Media, which includes *Health Club Management* in its portfolio of leisure-focused magazines.

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As many as half of respondents are spending the same on using health clubs and leisure centres now as they were a year ago

GROWTH opportunities

Mintel's latest research into the leisure industry – *Leisure Review 2013*, published in October 2013 – paints a positive picture for health and fitness, highlighting consumers' reluctance to cut back their leisure centre usage, private health and fitness club membership and participation in sports.

As for many sectors, the main issue for the leisure industry has been the squeeze on consumer incomes being exerted by the combination of high inflation and low earnings growth, which means people are becoming worse off in real terms month by month.

However, the report highlights a resilient industry. Despite tough economic conditions, as many as half (48 per cent) of respondents are spending the same on using private sector health clubs now as they were 12 months ago, while 16 per cent of respondents are spending more.

In the public sector, 50 per cent are spending about the same, and 10 per cent are spending more.

Michael Oliver outlines the findings of Mintel's 2013 health, fitness and leisure reports, and offers his thoughts on the opportunities to further extend the sector's reach

Overall, roughly three in 10 Brits (30 per cent) have used a private health and fitness club in the past 12 months, with just under one in 10 (8 per cent) using one on a weekly basis, and one in 20 (5 per cent) on a monthly basis.

Wooring women

However, research finds there remains a notable disparity in health club usage between women and men in the UK – a point highlighted in the June 2013 *Health and Fitness Clubs UK* report. This is something that's not evident in the US, where there's broad parity of usage. One of the reasons for this is likely to be that health club membership is considerably cheaper on average in the US than the UK, and women tend to be

more cautious than men when it comes to making financial commitments. The rapid expansion of the budget health club sector in the UK should go a long way towards tackling this.

Other opportunities also exist to increase female membership. The main factors that potential female users say would motivate them to start using a health club are – aside from general health/wellness – losing weight, looking better and feeling better about themselves. Unsurprisingly then, when asked what would encourage them to join or rejoin a health club, women were much more likely than men to be influenced by appearance-driven factors – an unflattering remark about their appearance or fitness, for example, or an unflattering holiday photo – indicating that marketing activity focused on the physical and emotional benefits of losing weight, looking and feeling good remains a strong platform for clubs to promote themselves to potential female users.

Women are most likely to be influenced by a free trial or a pay as you go option, echoing the findings ▶



Gender disparity: In the UK, more men than women work out at gyms

“There could be an opportunity for a budget club format for families: memberships sold on a household basis”

► noted above regarding women's higher levels of caution in financial matters. Research findings suggest that potential female users have a particular concern about committing to a contract with a club, only to find they don't like it or don't use it as much as they thought they would.

Additionally, women are notably more likely than men to agree that they have, or would have, a hard time getting motivated to go to a club – but also that they would be more interested in using a health club if they had someone to work out with. This suggests some potential for developing memberships for people who work out together, such as a Best Friends deal or similar where, as long as they both visit together or each work out a certain number of times a month, they are entitled to a discounted rate. Visiting and working out together would help with motivation and improve retention rates.

‘Budget plus’

With a continued squeeze on incomes, affordability remains a significant barrier to more people joining health clubs at the moment. The current crop of budget clubs are addressing this issue pretty well and it's hard to see how else the services they provide could be delivered for less money.

The only other way would be to ‘disaggregate’ each aspect and specialise – as is the case with the emerging crop of microgym operators – or for more operators to offer ‘disaggregated’ memberships, so that if people just want to swim or to do classes, they pay only for that service and nothing else.

Another area where there could be potential would be a category of ‘budget plus’ clubs, where a slightly different positioning is adopted to broaden the appeal. There could, for example, be an opportunity for a budget club format to be developed with the aim of appealing primarily to the family market, with memberships sold on a per family or per household basis, entitling all members of a family to use the facilities and offering activities and classes which the whole family could do together. This could have the effect of establishing good (exercise) habits early on in the life of children, while at the same time ensuring that older family members look after their bodies as they grow older.

Exercise is medicine

Overall, the industry has benefited from the growing ‘exercise is medicine’ trend, with people being prescribed physical activity as an alternative to drugs to combat diseases, illnesses and ailments. Many gym and leisure facility operators



have launched dedicated programmes, along with specific memberships for those recovering from illness.

In March 2012, cancer patients at hospitals run by North Bristol NHS Trust were offered exercise classes to reduce the risk of the disease spreading or returning. The classes were devised by hospital physiotherapists for patients who had completed their medical course of treatment for cancer. Meanwhile, Aquaterra Leisure's cancer survivorship programme is free to patients registered with an Islington GP. On completion of the 12-week plan, participants are entitled to a significantly discounted membership at Aquaterra's leisure centres.

There is significant opportunity for further growth in this medical arena.

Potential members

Finally, the report looks at potential users. Future users of private health and



Many women prefer to have a workout companion – so clubs might consider a Best Friends discount

ALL PHOTOS SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

fitness clubs can be divided into two main groups: those who have been users previously, but who have let their membership lapse; and those who have never been users but say they would like to be. Lapsed users are a large group consisting mainly of under-45s, whereas those who have never been users are concentrated among the 16- to 24-year-old age range.

For lapsed users, the main reason why they stopped using a health club was that they felt they couldn't afford it. Logically, they are most likely to respond to a membership deal that's too good to turn down; this is most likely to come from one of the budget club operators.

Cost is also likely to be the main barrier for those who have never been users, who are most likely to be from the C2 socio-economic group and to describe their current financial situation as 'struggling'.

Related to cost, flexible payment options are likely to prove a key determining factor, with strong interest among potential users in free trials or pay as you go options.

Removing as many potential objections as possible – which some operators, in particular in the budget sector, have done by offering things such as day passes, no-contract monthly memberships and an option to freeze membership – is the best way for operators to encourage potential users through the doors. ●

Michael Oliver is senior leisure analyst for Mintel. Mintel's latest *Health and Fitness Clubs UK* report was published in June 2013, with the *Leisure Review 2013* published in October 2013.

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DESIGN Psychology

Influences from within and outside the fitness sector – from brands such as Apple to TV programmes such as *Grand Designs* – mean consumers are now more design-conscious than ever before. Expectations of a health club or leisure centre are now much higher than they were 20 years ago, and a utilitarian approach is no longer enough. Even in the public sector, people now expect a private sector feel – even if they're not prepared to pay the price.

But investing in a higher-end look and feel pays back, say the experts, who point out that an attractive club will encourage more people to join and spend time there – and if they like spending time there, they will inevitably spend more money. “We’ve found that a refurbishment at a tired, run-down facility can boost membership three- or fourfold,” says Martin Bransby, director at Pozzoni architects.

Indeed, Alliance Leisure spent £2.8m refurbishing Llantrissant Leisure Centre in South Wales in 2012. Subsequently, between December 2012 and September 2013, direct debit income increased by 109 per cent, and pay and play activity increased by 40 per cent.

First impressions

So how can operators tap into member psychology when designing a facility? Psyche London, a premium cycling club due to open in London next month, considered this. Founder Colin Waggett says: “We wanted to break down both the psychological and physical barriers to exercise, so people have a positive frame of mind.

“The design has been inspired by hotels and restaurants more than health clubs. It has a London rough luxe feel: polished concrete, wood, white, some primary colours and bespoke items of furniture. Artists have been used for graphics and images.”

The reception area is light, bright and welcoming. Waggett says a common mistake clubs make is constructing physical barriers as soon as clients step into the building – for example, immediately presenting them with stairs, a turnstile or a booth-style reception.

How can design be used to tap into member psychology to create an environment that's inspiring both to spend time and exercise in? Kath Hudson reports

An open, welcoming, bright ground floor space is important and, if there needs to be a turnstile, it shouldn't be the first thing people see.

“The journey through the club needs to be easy and logical,” adds Bransby. “The reception needs to be welcoming, so even if there has to be a barrier or turnstile, it still feels like a nice, open environment.”

Changing rooms are also key. Pre-workout, they will form the basis of many people's first impression of a club, and will set the member in the right – or wrong – mood for a good workout. After the workout, if people are happy showering at a facility rather than rushing off, a pleasant changing environment puts them in a relaxed ‘at home’ state of mind, potentially tempting them to stay for a juice or coffee.

Creating a buzz

Clubs also need to exude a buzzy vibe to make people want to exercise. This can be created by offering glimpses into the exercise areas, such as the pool or gym, from the communal areas. Bransby advises against having exercise studios on show, as people can be self-conscious in dance classes, but believes group cycling studios are exciting spaces that make a good internal feature. An example of this is the Central YMCA club in London, where the group cycling studio has a curved internal glass wall, allowing the waiting class to get in the mood by watching the previous class.

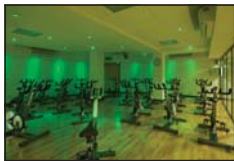
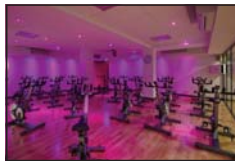
Meanwhile Jon Griffiths, UK marketing manager for Precor – which has formed Activ Design to help clubs with their design – says colour is very important. Activ Design has studied a wealth of industry research from sources like IHRSA and ACSM, as well as observing how people move in locations like supermarkets and shopping centres.

“CV zones need to be bright, because it's been shown that bright colours increase the heart rate and breathing,” says Griffiths. “Apparently using blue in the weights area will inspire people to lift heavier weights.”

He also warns against cramming in too much equipment and making the space too busy for people to want to work out: “Thirty-eight per cent of members stay because of

the variety of kit, but 11 per cent leave because the gym's overcrowded. Don't make the club too full, and make sure there are areas to stretch, as 43 per cent of people say they go to health clubs in order to stay flexible.”

Griffiths adds that it's important to make the most of the building's assets to inspire people to want to work out. If there's a good view, or a large window, place the treadmills – rather than the weights area – there.



Lighting and a glass wall create ‘theatre’ in Central YMCA's group cycling studio



easyGym's colour scheme fits well with the finding that bright colours in CV zones help raise the heart rate

Small touches

Graham Bryant, project manager for the Llantrissant Leisure Centre project, believes members can be energised and inspired without it costing the earth or requiring a fundamental re-jig of a club layout: "Users are becoming more discerning and are expecting a private sector feel in a public sector facility. We often have to create a five-star feel with a two-star budget. People's perception of public sector is that it's poorly maintained and offers function over style, but we've raised the bar over the years to address how people feel in a facility. The right design team can achieve a £70/sq m look for £25/sq m."

At Llantrissant, a wall of stripy wallpaper has been used in reception instead of paint, injecting style at a lower cost. Dominic Evans at PE Contracts also recommends being creative with walls: graffiti, wallpaper and vinyl prints are all effective without being expensive. "It's important for the whole design to work together: floors, ceilings and walls," he says. "People notice the overall design concept but not the nitty gritty. They don't take too much notice of what the floor covering is, but rather the overall feel of the place."

Creative psychology

Ian Cotgrave, MD of Createability, agrees that inspiring and motivating design can be created within a budget, provided there's ample creativity. "The current thinking is that clubs have to be bright, light, airy and contemporary," he says. With its work for low-cost operator KISS Gyms, Createability created a look around its logo of a pair of lips. A colour palette of red, grey, black and white was used, and one



Before and after (above left and right): Llantrissant's revamped changing areas

of its clubs – a 836sq m (9,000sq ft) warehouse – features LED lighting to add ambience and colour wash the walls.

In fact, clever lighting is increasingly being used to influence members' perceptions and create a feeling of quality. Accent lighting such as lights around mirrors can be effective, and for leisure centres, installing feature lighting in sports halls means they can double up as dance studios.

Mass Designers used lighting to enhance the five-star effect at premium PT facility Healthhaus, based in St Helier, Jersey. Contrast lighting, indirect lighting, pin spots (tightly controlled down-lights) and some unusual pendant lights have all been used to good effect.

Since the ethos at Healthhaus is to offer a personalised service, break-out areas have also been designed into the gym, providing a place for members to talk to PTs and gym instructors. Such design touches can help ensure members perceive the club to be collaborative and supportive, with plenty of opportunity for interaction.

Even if budgets are small, by understanding member expectations and psychology, clubs can use design and layout to enhance and influence the member experience throughout the fitness journey. ●

Industry Insights

November 2013 saw SIBEC deliver its most successful event in its 17-year history, selling out well ahead of schedule and hosting a record number of operators and suppliers. Katie Lewis reports

MEET THE PANEL

Franck Gueguen:

President, International Fitness Holdings
(Club Med Gym & Silhouette)

Kevin Yates:

Head of fitness, marketing & communications,
Leisure Connection / 1Life

Natalie Cornish (née Mumford):

Fitness & wellbeing director, Nuffield Health

Tim Foster:

Central operations director, Virgin Active



The panel debate was chaired by ukactive's David Stalker (second from right)

Taking place at the Don Carlos Leisure Resort and Spa in Marbella, Spain, SIBEC Europe kicked off with a panel debate featuring four of the industry's most influential operators and chaired by David Stalker, CEO of ukactive and board member of EHFA and CIMSPA. We round up some of the discussions.

Are we promoting the right messages to encourage more people to be physically active?

Frank Gueguen

In France and Switzerland, around 20–25 per cent of people join facilities to lose weight; 75 per cent join to improve their general health. We're trying to appeal to a very broad range of motivations and needs. As a result, we're not focused on the short-term goal – selling the weight-loss dream – but instead focus our marketing on the benefits of physical and mental wellbeing. I believe this is the right approach.

Kevin Yates

At the start of the New Year, there will be the usual bun fight for new members. Many chains will attempt to attract people with incredible money-saving promotions. This puts pressure on others to do the same and it's not the right approach for long-term sustainability.

When Dove launched its campaign using real women to promote its product range, its market share grew from 1 per cent to 6 per cent. I'd like to see the fitness sector become more professional in its marketing, thinking more long-term than quick fix.

I'd also like to see operators working collaboratively with ukactive to fund a central marketing campaign to promote the benefits of physical activity. Increasing general awareness will benefit operators.

Natalie Cornish

I agree with Kevin. The majority of people still make a choice about where to work out based on location and ease of access, so pooling resources to fund a central campaign makes perfect sense.

At Nuffield, the big challenge we face is whether to run campaigns based on our core values of wellness and health or simply jump on the bandwagon and run price-led marketing campaigns.

Tim Foster

New member motivations to join haven't changed much over the years: most still join to lose weight, get fit, tone up and generally improve their health. We'll tap into these motivations while playing to our strengths – we call it '20 per cent more for 20 per cent less', by which we mean offering exceptional value for money.

David Stalker asked the operators in the room whether they would potentially pool resources to fund a central campaign for the sector and the general consensus was 'yes'.

Functional training – the future or just a fad?

Kevin Yates

Facilities we build today will be serving communities for generations to come. Instead of churning out the same old formula such as traditional sports halls, we need to consider what will motivate the next generation to be more physically active than us. Alliance Leisure is doing some good work in this area, designing skate parks, high ropes courses and climbing facilities that appeal to the motivations of the younger generations.

The introduction of CrossFit and concepts like HIIT all help to offer a more diverse range of activities. They won't appeal to everyone, but it's important that we continue to question the traditional offering.

Tim Foster

Currently, functional training and extreme conditioning are receiving perhaps a disproportionate amount of media attention. The reality is that brands like CrossFit and concepts like HIIT are still quite niche. We need to



Together, the medical and fitness worlds have a huge opportunity to foster the genuine belief that exercise is medicine

keep this in perspective, and be wary not to disproportionately change our fundamental product in response. We need to continue to offer a core product that has broad segmental appeal and that, although providing for these trends, still keeps the overall provision well balanced.

Natalie Cornish

We need to be careful not to jump on the 'next big thing'. There's also a danger that the sedentary population jumps head-first into 'quick win' intensive programmes such as INSANITY and CrossFit, risking injury and exposing themselves to a negative experience of physical activity, which could have long-term implications.

Nicholas Hyman, Fitness First Dubai (input from the floor)

I agree that functional training is not for everyone, but in Dubai we're proving that it can be hugely successful if implemented and managed correctly.

The key to success is education. Instructing somebody in how to perform functional movements safely and effectively undoubtedly requires more time investment and more instructor skill than instructing somebody in how to use a fixed weight or cardio machine. However, once the education of instructors is

recognised as a core need, and given the necessary time and investment, the functional training concept can work. We're proving this.

Rory McGown, GYMetricx (input from the floor)

Our research shows that in many gyms, functional training spaces are under-used, with more people still using fixed weight and cardio equipment. It's a training issue – operators need to invest in instructor education to maximise usage of these spaces.

Q What do you consider to be the biggest opportunity for our sector going forward?

Frank Gueguen

Working more closely with doctors and government so that fitness appears on their agenda. This will help the sector reach a much wider audience. The sector also has an opportunity to promote the wider benefits of exercise beyond the physical. This will also help engage a bigger audience.

Natalie Cornish

Development of products that enable our brands to engage with and influence behaviours of individuals who may never visit our clubs. This is now possible through the use of activity tracking systems and online communities.

Tim Foster

To create genuine belief that exercise is medicine. In order to deliver this, the sector needs credible, academically sound, evidence-based research to convince private investors, commercial partners and in particular the government that it can make a valuable contribution to the wider health agenda. The work of ukactive's Research Institute will hopefully be transformational in this respect.

Kevin Yates

Upskilling our workforce. To be taken seriously by government, community partners and the medical profession, we need to be confident we're delivering a professional service. ukactive is placing us at the table with the right people, but we need to be confident that we have the skills to deliver.

Over the last few years, our company has worked with Lifetime to access significant sums of government funding to train our staff, but it's not enough. In addition to training front of house staff, pool lifeguards and gym instructors, we also need to invest in our management teams. Working with organisations like CIMSPA, we need to create and deliver management qualifications that provide our managers with the skills they will need to take this sector forward. ●

Free weights



New PU dumbbells from iRobic

iRobic has added a range of durable polyurethane (PU) dumbbells. The TuffTech PU dumbbells feature stylish, knurled handles which are designed to help ensure a comfortable and secure grip. The dumbbells feature raised numbers for easy weight identification and come in 1kg increments from 1kg to 10kgs, then 2.5kg increments from 12.5kg to 50kg.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

iRobic



Hammer Strength range for Anytime Fitness clubs

Life Fitness is supplying free weights as part of its contract to equip six new Anytime Fitness clubs in Leeds, Chatham, Aylesbury, Enfield, Welwyn Garden City and Stratford. Hammer Strength equipment, including benches and racks, is being installed across all the sites. Life Fitness' Synergy360 functional training rig is also being installed, which can be used in conjunction with a wide range of free weights.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

Life Fitness

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PowerBlocks offer space-saving design

Fitness Mad is adding its U90 PowerBlocks to its free weights offering. The adjustable dumbbell system is designed to be compact and easy to change and expand. The PowerBlock U90 Club Set premium model comes with a pre-built commercial four-leg stand and a flip-up instruction chart. The set offers a weight range of 2.5kg–40kg per hand. The same range of exercises can be performed with PowerBlocks as with any fixed-weight dumbbells and the square design is designed to offer increased comfort.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

Fitness Mad

New Ugi weighted soft ball for workouts



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

Gymkit

Ugi is a new weighted ball that comes with a 30-minute total body workout programme. The stylishly designed and brightly coloured weight can be squashed like a stress ball or bean bag. The half-hour training programme has been designed to be fun and effective and is suitable for all fitness settings – the programme can be carried out by individuals or in pairs at home, or in small or large group classes at the gym or studio. The Ugi Ball comes in four colours and four weights: 6lbs (purple), 8lbs (pink), 10lbs (blue) and 12lbs (green). The product is now available in the UK through Gymkit.



Tyre tipping gets a makeover with Escape's TyR

Escape has launched its new TyR product, available from January 2014. Developed around the idea of flipping tyres for fitness, the TyR is soft but heavy and has handles to add lift exercises. It has a small diameter but is still challenging to lift at 40kg, 60kg or 80kg and lands flat when pushed over for added safety. The TyR is made from layers of polymer foam and steel shot to ensure the weight is evenly distributed. The centre and all the internal edges are smooth so it provides a safe platform to jump on, off and into.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **Escape**



Jordan's free weights Core Trainer accessory

Functional fitness specialist Jordan Fitness has introduced a new Portable Core Trainer to its range of free weight accessories for home and commercial use. The 4kg Portable Core Trainer is an accessory for workout exercises including squats, multi-directional lunging, core rotations, wood chopping, overhead pressing, shoulder-to-

shoulder pressing and rowing. It fits into Jordan Fitness' Olympic Bars, techniques plates and discs and has a multi-directional swivel for rotational exercises and presses. This functionality is for increasing core stability, as well as rotational strength.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **Jordan**



New Magnum free weights from Matrix

Matrix Fitness' new Magnum weights range is designed to withstand the rigorous training of pro athletes and offer ergonomic comfort for fitness facilities. Products in the broad range include Breaker Benches, Mega Racks and multi-gyms which can be customised. The Magnum range is made from heavy-gauge steel tubing with a finish that's resistant to chips and scratches.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

Matrix



York's Pro Style Dumbbells strength line

York's new commercial Pro Style Dumbbell range is an ergonomically-designed strength and conditioning solution. Also designed for durability, the range features 2.5kg to 65kg sizes, and has saddle rack display options. York's commercial gym equipment is used by sports teams, including the LA Lakers and Washington Redskins in the US, and Northampton Saints, Saracens and Harlequins rugby clubs in the UK.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **York**

SUPPLIER SHOWCASE

We put the spotlight on a recent installation by Jordan Fitness



Instructors at The Pulse received two days of workshops to learn how to train members in the new functional space

FINGER ON THE PULSE

CLIENT: THE PULSE

SUPPLIER: JORDAN FITNESS

The Pulse – an independent health club in Ripley, Derbyshire, UK – recently chose to work with Jordan Fitness as part of its refurbishment project to create a functional fitness area.

In addition to installing a comprehensive range of new functional equipment, The Pulse also adopted Jordan Fitness' new Results Based Training (RBT) system of layout planning and training. This allowed it to create a unique functional space, accompanied by intensive workshop programmes to help ensure it delivers the best possible service to its members.

The Pulse has been operational since 1995, with a growing membership that has now reached over 1,000 people, ranging from deconditioned casual users through to serious fitness enthusiasts, and with a growing number of over-40s among its membership base.

As part of the redevelopment project to modernise its 1,115sq m (12,000sq ft) facility, Jordan Fitness and Star Trac provided the club with new equipment, flooring, free weights and plyometric platforms.

"The Pulse has a fantastic reputation in the local area for having a facility that caters for all," says Zak Pitt, sales manager at Jordan Fitness. "The team at The Pulse felt that installing a functional space was key to providing excellent service for its members."

"It chose a wide range of functional products, including Olympic training equipment and platforms, training ropes, a three-bar wing, Jungle Gym XT, Power Wheels, AlphaStrong sandbags, powerbags, and a Jordan heavy punch bag. The club also made a commitment to its members by investing in specialist training through our RBT Academy programme."

Training comprised two days of workshops on functional training programming and exercise progression, to give instructors additional tools to train members in the new space.

Phil Lake, owner of The Pulse, says: "The Jordan Fitness Academy trainers are the most inspirational fitness professionals I have ever dealt with. The workshop training included hands-on product training and advice on how to structure classes to create the best experience for our members. There was a perfect combination of theory and practical demonstrations, which means we can use this fantastic new space to the benefit of the local community."

The new functional area has helped The Pulse boost its revenue stream, hosting weekly group classes. The club also identified an opportunity to hire out the functional area to local organisations, including the local rugby team, cage fighting and athletics clubs.

Alongside the new functional zone, The Pulse also offers two dedicated cardio areas, a free weights and resistance area, a separate ladies-only gym, group cycling room, café and nutritional supplement shop. The club offers a selection of flexible membership options including student memberships, schools packages and Armed Forces discounts.

For more information: www.jordanfitness.co.uk

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