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REOPENING

The industry roars back

Social media winners

p54

Getting investment

p60

Hybrid model

p78



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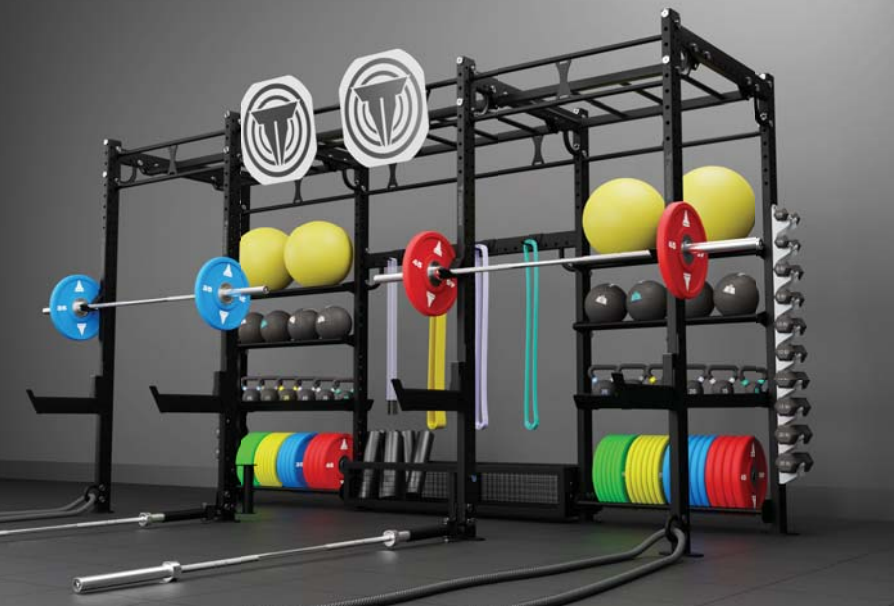
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Time to muscle up

The pandemic is stretching the industry to the limit and it's a time none of us will ever forget. Moving forward, we need to make a plan to ensure we're better prepared to represent ourselves in the corridors of power

On 25 June, we published a global exclusive – research from the University of Oslo which showed there is “no threat of increased COVID-19 spread” at fitness facilities, even when intensive training takes place.

The story has gone on to be our best-read ever, with hundreds of thousands of shares from people all over the world. It has also been republished everywhere from *The New York Times* to *The Washington Post*.

The research – ‘Randomised reopening of training facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic’ – has been challenged, debated, lauded and dismissed, but most importantly, it has opened a conversation around how we – as a sector – are going to transact with governments and decision-makers going forward.

The fact only one academic institution in the world chose to explore the safety of using gyms in the age of COVID-19, indicates a lack of rigour in our sector, showing that we are not yet properly geared up to represent ourselves at the highest levels.

This kind of research should have been happening everywhere, creating a global picture of gym safety to inform the development of operating procedures and strengthen our position in discussions with governments.

The agonising negotiations which have been going on with government-mandated scientists around reopening show clearly that we lack evidence to defend ourselves and lack heft as a sector.

They've also revealed mind-boggling levels of ignorance about the way we work and the contribution we make to society and to people's mental and physical wellbeing.

Going forward, companies which are making profits out of this market need to start to put a little more resource into national and global strategies to defend and champion the sector in the corridors of power.

Before COVID-19, we were a successful market, but also a young one, still a little scrappy and with an entrepreneurial culture. We must come out of



Now is the time to step up and prove our worth

“ We must come out of COVID with a new mantle, forged by the challenges we've faced. It's time to invest in getting some real clout ”

the other side of COVID with a new mantle, forged by the challenges we've faced – seasoned, savvy and with a strategy to prove our worth, defend our corner and make sure the people in power are in no doubt about the value of our work. It's time to muscle up and get some real clout.

Obesity drives COVID-19 deaths, numerous studies show exercise defends against it and helps people recover from it. We know we can operate safely. Now is the time to step up, to prove it – and to evidence it.

Liz Terry, editor
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HCM CONTENTS

Uniting the world of fitness

JULY 2020 No 280



78 Paul Bowman makes the case for a hybrid model



44 The Undeatable campaign hits TV screens

07 Editor's letter

12 Write to reply

Readers respond to Colin Milner's 'Challenging Ageism' column and Liz Terry's editor's letter from HCM June

14 HCM People Dave Courteen

The CEO of Mosaic Spa & Health Clubs talks about his new book – *More To Gain Than Just the Game*

18 Debra Wein

The City of Portland in Maine, US, is investing in a wellness programme for its entire workforce. We talk to the founder and CEO of Wellness Workdays

22 Dan Bond

CrossFit Fort Ashton's owner shares insights into how he built his tribe and got them through lockdown

24 HCM News

Stay up to date with the latest news in health, fitness and physical activity

32 Interview Francis Ottevaere

The CEO of JIMS Fitness explains his reopening strategy, which sees new member sales up 200 per cent

38 What members say

New research gauges the feelings of members about returning to the gym



16 Dave Courteen's new book



SHUTTERSTOCK/JACOB BLUND

64 Post-lockdown, member feedback is key



PHOTO: JIMS FITNESS

32 JIMS Fitness' CEO Francis Ottevaere



PHOTO: EGM

73 EGYM and Wattbike's immunity programmes



PHOTO: PRECOR

86 The fusion fitness trend provides opportunities for creativity

44 Undefeatable

This charitable initiative is supporting people with health conditions and disabilities to get into physical activity

54 Welcome back

Who's winning on social? An analysis of social media responses to gym chains' reopening videos

60 The fightback begins

Nadim Meer advises operators on how to position themselves as an attractive prospect for investment

64 Is the gym safe?

Blair McHaney has developed a guide to navigating customer sentiment

68 The way I see it

Francesco Arlotti

Technogym's head of digital solutions shares his thoughts on how operators can ensure their future success

73 Best defence

The impact of exercise on the immune system has never been more important. We look at immunity-boosting protocols from two equipment developers

78 Interview

Paul Bowman

The CEO of Wexer says COVID-19 has changed customer expectations and operators must adopt a hybrid physical/digital model to survive post-pandemic

86 Fusion fitness

Combining fitness elements is making strength training more accessible

92 Matrix Showcase

University College Birmingham has invested in elite performance equipment

94 Speedflex Showcase

Speedflex has partnered with Everyone Active to deliver a new boutique concept

96 In the spotlight

We take a look at the six winners of the FIBO Innovation and Trend Awards 2020

99 HCM directory

Find suppliers of products and services



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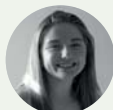
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Write to reply

● *It's our duty to maintain online solutions so older and vulnerable people don't become the forgotten COVID generation*

Stuart Lockwood, CEO, Oldham Community Leisure

In HCM June 2020, Colin Milner spoke about an increase in ageism during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the fitness industry could, and should, respond.

At Oldham Community Leisure (OCL) we have been actively addressing this issue since lockdown began, conscious that with all over-70s labelled as vulnerable and shielding, many would be decreasing their activity levels and increasing risk factors for disease.

We opted to actively manage the situation, launching our REACH exercise referral scheme classes online, so older people in our area could still exercise safely. The internet is awash



with online workouts, but we hadn't seen any pitched at the right level, intensity and duration for vulnerable people with health issues.

Anyone, even those with chronic medical issues, reduced mobility or underlying health conditions, can follow the REACH chair-based virtual sessions.

The Friday Club, our scheme set up to reduce loneliness, also moved online.

We knew regular participants would be missing not just the exercise, but also the social contact. Social isolation is such a key factor in health, so providing positive social connections to the truly vulnerable was a priority.

What stands out to me is that, in providing these virtual classes, we also helped older adults regain some



control over their lives at a time when their freedom and independence had been so badly impacted.

Many had never used platforms like Zoom before and learning to use them for exercise opened up new ways for them to connect with family as well.

Normality isn't returning for the vulnerable any time soon – it's our sector's duty to maintain online solutions so that older and vulnerable people don't become the forgotten COVID generation.

● *Many labelled as 'vulnerable' use lifestyle services, and the fitness industry needs to respond robustly to avoid an increase in lifestyle-related disease*

Stuart Stokes, MD, ReferAll

In response to Colin Milner (HCM June 2020), who discussed the issue of increased ageism during the pandemic and the challenge now arising of getting over-70s back into exercise post COVID, I agree entirely.

Everyone over 70 has been bundled into a high-risk category and encouraged to stay at home, regardless of their health and fitness levels. In these groups, developing physical activity habits and making behaviour change remains crucially important, despite their opportunity to visit a facility being curtailed.

All-cause mortality continues to happen, irrespective of a global



pandemic and for many, doing nothing is a greater health risk than doing something.

While we can't lose sight of all the other risk factors that are still out there, I acknowledge that re-opening for vulnerable groups is going to be a real challenge.

Even as shielding measures are eased, many will be reticent to return.

Numerous online exercise resources have been created during lockdown, but now questions are arising around how this online provision should continue.

For operators offering lifestyle services such as cancer or cardiac rehab, diabetes prevention or exercise on referral (EOR), this digital provision will be a lifeline – the only way forwards for some time.

Many over 70s, labelled as 'vulnerable' and 'at risk' use lifestyle services, and the fitness industry needs to respond robustly to avoid stagnation within this demographic which could lead to an increase in lifestyle-related disease.

The focus up until now during lockdown has been mainly one-way presentation, and our customers tell us they're being asked to evaluate remote provision and demonstrate its value in comparison to face-to-face. So I urge operators to grow their online service for EOR and rehabilitation groups and embrace more two-way digital communication.

Vulnerable older people who've been isolated for some time will value two-way feedback and engagement, and it will help with physical progress too.

Would you support an industry-wide Net Promoter survey to monitor effectiveness and efficiency?

David Monkhouse, Leisure-net Solutions

I read with interest your editor's letter in the June issue of HCM about the importance of customer insight to fitness operators.

We've been overwhelmed by responses to the two surveys we published recently. The *Post Lockdown Recovery Survey* was completed by 65,000 people. The *Return to Swimming Lesson Survey* generated 47,000 responses.

People want to let organisations know how they're feeling – now it's up to us all to maximise this data, create insight and put actions in place – based on insight – to make a difference.

We've always believed in the power of data and insight and while there are many organisations that agree, some still only do research when they have to and see it as a 'nice to have', rather than being essential.

Insight puts the customer or non-customer into the heart of the planning



process and large samples allow for detailed analysis of how different demographics think and feel.

There's always a challenge when it comes to understanding the answer to qualitative research questions – how do we get a handle on masses of open text?

We work with insight service, MyCustomerLens – a great service that gets to the 'sentiment' of open text, whether that be from a survey or social media feeds, enabling us to glean a clearer picture of how people talk about us.

Those taking the time to give us additional comments are our most engaged customers and we need to nurture these relationships to improve.

As we recover and start to maximise the CMO's message of our 'right to physical activity' we'd like consumer

insight to become part of how we do things, giving our customers the opportunity to inform us and then taking action as a result of this feedback to make a difference to their lives. This is more important now than ever.

Would you support regular research, such as an industry-wide Net Promoter Score, to monitor effectiveness and efficiency?

This would create a national picture – a view of what's happening in different locations, by operator or by site. It would also give the opportunity to identify best practice and learn from this to create exponential growth and help us to address inequality in provision and opportunity.

If you're interested in getting involved with a national survey, please get in touch: davidmonkhouse@leisure-net.org



We map optimal customer journeys for different demographics as they're beginning their transition to an active lifestyle

Steve Mann, Places for People Leisure

I read your editor's letter in June HCM with interest and agree that the industry must embrace customer insight.

At Places Leisure our mission is to put our heart and soul into 'creating active places and healthy people'. My role, as director of physical activity, is to work with the team to develop an offer based on the specific needs of customers and move away from a one-size-fits-all approach.

This is only possible with deep insight into the needs and behaviours of our customers.

We've made a significant investment in seeing life through the eyes of our customers, introducing a modern methodology under the leadership of head of customer experience, Andy Glover. The way we collect data is bespoke to the customer's own



journey and where they are in their relationship with us.

We've worked hard to prove that we are listening at all levels of the business. Our centre teams engage with customers on individual feedback and our project roadmap is proof that from the board down, what's at the top of our customers list is also at the top of ours.

A starting point in our approach is recognising we get a lot right and as a result are comfortable approaching customers with a positive mindset.

Just by asking if we can thank a member of the team, our surveys generate over 10,000 individual 'thank you's' for team members each year – a huge help in gaining buy-in from our centre-based colleagues.

As an example of how we translate this insight into strategy, we know that customers who identify as still 'learning'

the gym as opposed to 'liking, loving, or living' it, give us an NPS of -35 if a member of the fitness team does not interact with them, as opposed to +23 if they receive regular interaction.

We've also begun to map optimal customer journeys for different demographics as they are beginning their transition to an active lifestyle – ie, activities and experiences that provide both short-term appeal, and the best possible chance of long-term adherence.

To incorporate this knowledge into our customer proposition we've developed a series of new memberships under the heading *IntoActive*.

Designed to create a bespoke pathway for those just starting out, or coming back to exercise after a break, these memberships give us the chance to ensure those learning the ropes get all the support they need, and whether it be digitally or as part of scheduled interactions are encouraged to experience the full breadth of our offer.

Courteen's book has been shortlisted for the Illustrated Book of the Year award



I set myself the goal that if I found someone famous to write the foreword and a publisher, then I would write the book

DAVE COURTEEN

MD AND CO-FOUNDER OF MOSAIC SPA AND HEALTH CLUBS

A book written by Dave Courteen has been shortlisted for the Illustrated Book of the Year in the annual Telegraph Sports Book Awards.

Courteen, CEO of Mosaic Spa and Health Clubs, has been in the fitness industry for over 30 years. He wrote *More To Gain Than Just The Game* after his daughter, Rose, persuaded him to write another book eight years on from having his first book published – a journal-style account of his wife's battle with breast cancer called *The Last Chocolate Brownie*.

We talk to Courteen about the journey of creating the new book.

What was the catalyst that prompted you to start writing?
I've always enjoyed writing as a way of relaxing and switching off.

The idea started out as a simple photographic book featuring the stunning work of Richard Dawson who takes some amazing action shots of the World Tennis Tour we hold at our Shrewsbury Club twice a year.

Over dinner with friends, they suggested I tried to weave some stories around the photos and so the idea was born. I set myself the goal that if I found someone famous to write the foreword and a publisher, then I would write the book.

I met someone at the club who worked for a publisher and they were really keen to get involved. Finally, I asked Judy Murray if she would write the foreword and when she said she'd be delighted to, I decided I'd better get writing!

What was the vision and purpose you set out with?

It was, and is, a passion project. I'm passionate about sport and believe it has so many benefits beyond simply the fun of the game.

It teaches us so many life lessons – how to work in teams, how to achieve goals, how to win with humility and



Courteen's new book, *More To Gain Than Just The Game*, was designed in collaboration with Andy Stewart



We're doing staff training sessions in COVID-19 so they understand what's expected of them – to deliver on the standards that have been set, but not to turn into security guards

to lose with dignity. It's about building resilience and overcoming adversity.

I wanted to write a book that conveyed that message about sport through seven simple stories, based on professional tennis players I met at our tennis event.

I also just wanted to enjoy the process of creating a lovely coffee table-style book that had great images and powerful stories, which was creatively designed and would be something I could be proud of.

What did you learn through the process of evolving the book?

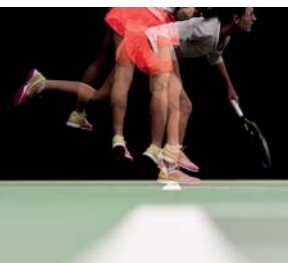
That you don't make any money being an author! Writers get three per cent of sales.

I've never had anyone edit my work before and I found that a fascinating and enjoyable process and loved working with Andy Stewart the designer. He's added so much to the book through our collaboration and I loved watching him bring the pages to life.

What did you learn about yourself while writing it?

That I work well when there's a deadline and also that wine makes me write more creatively!

I think the key thing I discovered is that writing is something I really enjoy, but it's a hobby and I wouldn't want to do it for a living. ➤



► **How would you describe the effect sport can have on someone's life?**

Sport provides such a profound benefit to individuals who learn to love a sport.

This is summed up in one of the stories in the book – Luca is nine years old and was struggling at school, underperforming in his classes and couldn't break into friendship groups. He lacked confidence.

He couldn't find a sport he loved, but came to watch the World Tennis Tour at Shrewsbury and decided he wanted to give it a go. He loved it and has gone on to play competitively and become a county champion.

The big effect is that his confidence has grown, he's formed friendship groups and his school achievement has skyrocketed. His parents and teachers say he's a transformed character.

Do we value sports participation enough today?

Probably not – we need to start by making it a higher priority in schools. I

do think that Sport England and many of the NGBs are now doing a better job of promoting sport and participation.

Will you write another book and if so, what will it be about?

I know that I'm old enough to never say never but right now there are no plans. I would need to have a clear idea and purpose to write another book – so if that happens then who knows. I certainly won't be doing it to make money!

What's happening in your business right now?

We're gearing up for reopening in our clubs and spas. We're taking a balanced view and planning to be very clear with our members about the steps we'll take to minimise risk, but we'll also be asking them to play their part in terms of observing social distancing and being sensible.

Staff won't come in if they're ill and will wash their hands regularly. Hard surfaces will be wiped down and, where we can, we'll prop doors open so they don't have to be touched.

There'll be a one way system and screens at reception and each member will be given a freshly laundered cloth and a bottle of anti-viral spray on arrival – we'll ask them to wipe down all equipment before and after use.



Sport teaches us so many life lessons – how to work in teams, how to achieve goals, how to win with humility and to lose with dignity. It's about building resilience and overcoming adversity



"Who is Federer Playing?"

I've watched tennis in some fairly alternative locations but, in the summer of 2016, I found myself sitting in the lounge of my uncle's care home watching Roger Federer walk out onto court with a relatively unknown British player called Marcus Willis.

I'd spent 10 years as a television player and my uncle had been in the same home. I was travelling home from a business meeting and realised I wouldn't be back in time to watch the match so I decided an unexpected stop to see my uncle would be for him. He would be grateful for a visitor and I would be able to take pictures of the tennis and get the stories in the book.

A note for both of us

Because the longer I talk to Roger, the more I realise how much he has given me. I was able to watch him play and see the way he plays. I was able to see the way he plays and see the way he plays. I was able to see the way he plays and see the way he plays.

It is a pleasure to have a player who is so good at what he does. I was able to see the way he plays and see the way he plays. I was able to see the way he plays and see the way he plays.

He was a great player. I was able to see the way he plays and see the way he plays. I was able to see the way he plays and see the way he plays.



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Photographer, Richard Dawson, shot all images in Courteen's new book

What does your risk assessment tell you about reopening?

So long as social distancing is observed, the main threat is going to be the virus being transferred on hard surfaces. The issue is going to be – for example – people exercising hard and the droplets coming out and going onto – say – the console of the treadmill. That's going to be where you'll catch it if you touch the console and touch your face.

We're going to focus on those issues – put a list together of all the things we're going to do and then explain what we expect members to do – respect other members, respect the social distancing and don't come to the club if you're feeling unwell.

Don't use the changing rooms unless you have to. Arrive on time, but don't arrive early – we'll have a 15 minute gap between classes to maintain distancing and give time for cleaning.

But we won't be policing people in the gym. At the end of the day, they're adults and we have to rely on them to be sensible. We won't be taking people's temperature before they can come in.

We can't remove the risk completely, but that's OK, because the same risks exist everywhere and the government has said it's now safe for us to go out. When they say it's safe to go to the gym, we must assume they've done the risk assessment that says the chances of you catching it are lower than the benefits of using the gym.

We're doing staff training sessions in COVID-19, so they understand what's expected of them – to deliver on the standards that have been set, but not to turn into security guards. ●



LIFE LESSONS

The stories embellish these key life lessons and there is a story/chapter on each:

- Strive to be excellent in all you do
- Always show up, no matter how unimportant or important the event is
- Never fear the big ask
- Identify the gaps in your game – your weaknesses – and find a work-around
- Find your 'thing' and then focus on it
- Leave a legacy. Actually we all leave a legacy, the question is how good do we want it to be?

Photos were taken during the World Tennis Tour at the Shrewsbury Club



I've always felt that if individuals had more education and understanding of nutrition and healthy lifestyle principles, we could literally change lives

DEBRA WEIN

FOUNDER AND CEO, WELLNESS WORKDAYS

Wein: If people had more education about healthy lifestyle, we could literally change lives





Employee workplace wellness in the face of COVID-19 is more important than ever

The City of Portland in Maine, US is investing in a customised wellness programme for its entire workforce. The local government authority – which employs more than 1,400 people – has appointed corporate health specialist Wellness Workdays to create the programme.

It's the latest contract for the company, which is also working with Harvard School of Public Health on a large-scale study into the effectiveness of worksite wellness programmes.

Tell us about the deal you've struck with Portland

More organisations and municipalities are learning the true benefits of strategic and comprehensive approaches, which include promoting a wellness culture, enhanced employee recruitment and retention, lower absenteeism, greater productivity, decreased presenteeism and lower healthcare costs. Thus, we are seeing an increase in the number of organisations focusing on wellness – both in the public and private sectors.

What will the wellness programme look like in practice?

We've developed a customised wellness programme that incorporates our wellness technology platform with a hands-on approach for employees. Our benefits and wellness portal provides employees with personalised wellbeing strategies, education on

Wellness Workdays is collaborating with Harvard on health research

a wealth of health topics and fun challenges, while allowing them to track their progress, sync fitness devices, communicate with health coaches and access a wealth of wellness content.

It also seamlessly integrates with our one-on-one health coaching programme. In addition to personal health coaching, employees will participate in wellness activities and education related to preventive and self-care, nutrition, physical activity, resilience, financial wellness, sleep and smoking cessation.

Are you looking to use this deal as a springboard to secure other contracts?

Our first goal with the City of Portland is to develop a great relationship with our client and its employees and ensure employees are engaging with the

programme and developing healthy habits and achieving positive health outcomes. We have found that the best way to win new work is to do a great job for our clients. The stories sell themselves – and our happy clients tell their colleagues!

You're involved in a research project with Harvard School of Public Health?

Yes, Wellness Workdays is spearheading a multi-million-dollar corporate wellness research study with the Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health. The funding for the project is coming from pretty esteemed institutions – Harvard University, MIT and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The study will evaluate the effectiveness of wellness programmes on employee health, productivity and healthcare costs and has been a great opportunity to contribute to research and advance the efficacy of wellness.

The study has been underway for approximately two years now and is scheduled to last one more year (until 2021). It is a double-blind study that will measure the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach to employee wellness in an under-served environment – a diverse and dispersed, multilingual workforce earning minimum wage, many of whom do not have access to technology at work.

Preliminary results of the study have found better health outcomes and



We're offering virtual components to our programmes

behaviours, including better weight management and more regular exercise.

In addition, there were a number of other positive improvements, including:

- consumed more fruits and vegetables
- consumed whole grain and reduced fat foods
- lower unmanaged stress
- had fewer smokers
- had less alcohol use
- an increase in the number of recommended screening tests
- more likely to read the nutrition facts label
- used fewer emergency ER visits
- lower medical spending
- more visits to their doctor

We were pleased that we were able to see some significant behaviour changes in this population group, as well as true changes in the conversation around wellness both at the clubs and with senior management.

How competitive is the US corporate wellness market?

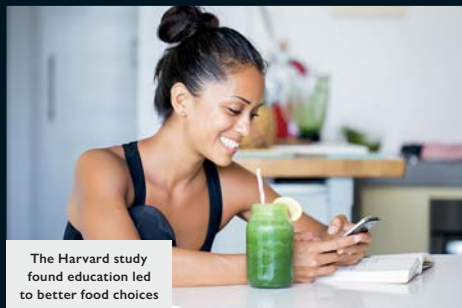
The market is competitive. More companies are offering various wellness programmes for employers.

Some sell off-the shelf programmes or implement technology that employees can use to self-direct their wellbeing. Often there's one piece of the puzzle offered – but not a strategy to pull the pieces together.

There's room for growth in the industry for companies that are creative and forward-thinking, as there are very few organisations that do wellness well.

Do you work with gyms and health clubs?

We have clients with on-site fitness centres and we work with their staff to make sure they're trained and know how to implement our programmes. We also partner with corporate fitness centres that need a wider breadth of wellness programmes, including access to personal health assessments (an integrated, online survey to assess health and lifestyle behaviours and provide feedback on current and future health risks), biometric screening and technology to provide infrastructure for their programmes (eg. online tracking, points programmes, health tracker integration, self-directed education and wellness challenges).



The Harvard study found education led to better food choices

You also have a medical advisory board?

They are instrumental in supporting our programmes and providing insight to the latest trends in health and wellness. With the guidance of this board, we employ a scientific approach when developing our programmes. Each aspect is developed from evidence-based conclusions from current research on nutrition, fitness and worksite wellness.

How have you responded to the pandemic?

Now the majority of our clients' employees are remote, we've taken steps to ensure employees are still engaging in our wellness programmes. Employee wellness in the face of COVID-19 is more important than ever. Data confirms that individuals with chronic



Wellness Workdays' programme has been found to prompt lower levels of unmanaged stress

About Debra Wein

After earning BS and MS degrees in nutritional sciences and applied physiology from Cornell and Columbia, Wein became a registered dietitian. She then co-founded Sensible Nutrition to teach individuals and organisations how to improve health through nutrition.

After designing and developing employee wellness programmes, Wein realised she could have a greater impact by focusing on employee populations. She founded Wellness Workdays in 2004 and became a certified Wellness Programme Director and a certified Wellness Council of America (WELCOA) faculty member.

She also developed the Wellness Workdays Dietetic Internship (WWDI), which trains 95 dietitians a year, who focus on areas of worksite wellness, health promotion and nutrition.

Wein credits her passion for wellness to experiences during her formative years.



"When I was growing up, several family members suffered from chronic diseases and in past generations the idea of prevention, chronic disease management and the ill effects of smoking were not as well appreciated," she says.

"I began to understand that many health problems could be avoided with proper nutrition, exercise and lifestyle choices.

"It astounds me that 80 per cent or more of all healthcare spending in the US is tied to the treatment of conditions rooted in poor lifestyle choices.

"Chronic diseases and conditions – such as hypertension, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis and multiple types of cancer – are among the most common, costly and preventable of all health conditions. I've always felt that if individuals had more education and understanding of nutrition and healthy lifestyle principles, we could literally change lives."

It astounds me that 80% or more of all healthcare spending in the US is tied to the treatment of conditions rooted in poor lifestyle choices

health conditions such as hypertension, obesity and diabetes are at greater risk of complications from the coronavirus.

To address the needs of remote workforces, we've re-examined each client's wellness programme communications strategy to determine whether they need to make any changes to reach and engage their employees.

The most effective programmes take into account the current work from home situation that so many employees find themselves in, and incorporate everything from physical and mental health to exercising with kids and healthy eating programmes.

We've moved all of our programming online and our technology platform allows us to consistently interact and engage with employees. We're offering virtual components to our programmes,

including workshops, videos and wellness coaching to facilitate fitness and proper nutrition. The virtual programmes provide employees with the opportunity to come together and socialise with one another, helping them feel connected, engaged and more productive. Additional programmes that may be helpful to a remote workforce include offering employees reimbursement for ergonomic home office equipment, hosting virtual workout classes for employees and their families, and offering cooking demos to provide suggestions for quick and healthy meals.

What other initiatives have you been delivering?

We recently launched our "From Surviving to Thriving" programme, which we're offering to all US employees,

whether they're current clients or not. The initiative is designed to help employers improve employee wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic and focuses on employee engagement, communications and population health management.

It includes easily accessible and frequently updated resources for employers, including checklists and case studies, complimentary webinars led by industry experts, thought leadership articles, and 90-day complimentary access to our wellness portal.

While the technology includes all aspects of wellbeing, employers can choose to target specific campaigns during the 90 days that address their employees' needs, including resilience and positivity, mindfulness, financial wellness, healthy eating and/or physical activity. ●



We'd explained leading up to the lockdown that if everyone decided to freeze or cancel, then there would be a possibility of not having a gym to come back to

DAN BOND

OWNER, CROSSFIT FORT ASHTON

Can you give us a short overview of your career background?

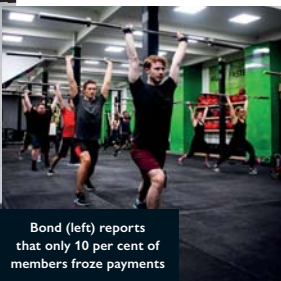
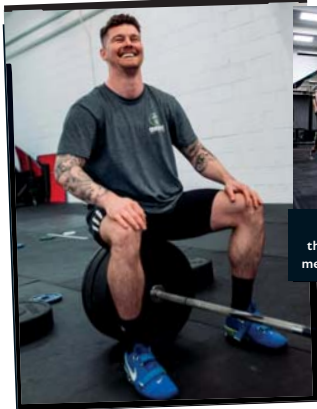
I started training under the CrossFit methodology in early 2012, began working in the fitness industry later the same year and opened CrossFit Fort Ashton in 2015. My time in the fitness sector has been a mix of me working as a personal trainer at David Lloyd, coaching generic fitness classes at local gyms and coaching at a number of Bristol based CrossFit boxes.

How was the Fort Ashton club tracking before COVID hit?

Pre-lockdown, CrossFit Fort Ashton was as busy as it's ever been. Fully booked classes with waiting lists, consistent joining enquiries and a solid membership base of around 300. Obviously our core programme is CrossFit, but alongside that we also run a weightlifting programme and more recently we had begun a weekly gymnastics class.

How have you looked after your members during lockdown?

When the announcement was made that we would be closing, we



Bond (left) reports that only 10 per cent of members froze payments

acted a few protocols that we felt would help our members whilst they had no access to the gym.

We lent the majority of our equipment out to members. Barbells, weights, kettlebells, dumbbells, sandbags, skipping ropes and more. We tried to make sure as many members as possible had something.

We began a 'home workout' programme. This consisted of daily workouts, which had bodyweight options for people with no kit, and limited kit options for those with something. We also created a YouTube channel where we uploaded demonstration and explanation videos to go alongside the daily workouts.

We began online classes via Zoom; this way people could still receive coaching while they were training.

On top of the Zoom workout classes, we've also been doing a Friday night social on Zoom, which has included quizzes, scavenger hunts, Bingo, games of Cards Against Humanity and more.

Basically, we've been doing as much as we can to keep the members engaged with us and to keep them fit throughout lockdown. We've also done some live Q&As, and nutrition content with the coaches.

In what other ways have you kept in touch with members during closure?

Alongside our online classes and all of the above, we've been sending out a weekly newsletter every Sunday evening. This consists of relevant information regarding the gym and all that's going on, plus useful information and content such as





stretching and mobility videos, shout-outs to members on their birthdays and just letting everybody know what's happening and that we're being proactive in our approach to the situation.

We also sent every member a hand written, wax sealed letter – a little note to let them know we're thinking about them and that we're here if they need us.

How have you managed memberships during this time?

We closed at the end of March. We took payments for April as usual and during that month we had around 10 per cent of members freeze. From there we reduced our membership fees by 40 per cent, and since doing that we've only had a few people freeze.

We'd explained leading up to lockdown that if everyone decided to freeze or cancel then there would be a possibility of not having a gym to come back to. The culture and community at CrossFit Fort Ashton is incredible and the support from members has

been amazing. We've been able to keep some staff wages going and make some improvements to the actual gym space.

How did you feel about the controversies surrounding CrossFit CEO Greg Glassman [who resigned after posting a racist tweet]?

What I will say is this; I communicated our position in relation to this matter to our members and it has been fully supported. We didn't agree with Greg Glassman's comments and HQ's silence [in relation to Black Lives Matter] doesn't align with our values as a gym.

However, I do believe change can be better achieved from within and at the time of this interview we will be remaining as a CrossFit affiliate.

Do you have advice for other operators on how to look after members during difficult times?

From what I've witnessed, especially locally in Bristol, everyone has been



My advice would be to keep members in the loop on what's going on or on what you're thinking

on top of this and doing a great job. Nationally, most CrossFit gym owners have been doing similar things and the sharing of information has been next level. The community within CrossFit has been invaluable to us.

My advice would be to keep members in the loop. Even if you're unsure, communicate that. It'll be appreciated over silence and uncertainty. ●

UK gym sector navigates complex negotiation to get opening date

The UK's fitness industry can finally get back to business on Saturday 25 July, following the government's announcement that gyms and leisure centres can reopen their doors to the public.

Culture minister, Oliver Dowden, made the announcement on 9



We're confident that by 25 July, we will be in a position where we can reopen gyms

Oliver Dowden

PHOTO: MICHAEL DOWDEN/GETTY IMAGES

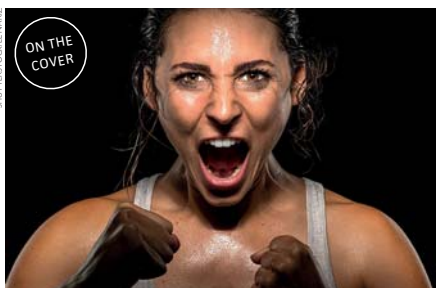
July, stating that he was "confident that by 25 July, we will be in a position where we can reopen gyms."

The permission comes nearly four months after the entire sector was put into lockdown (on 23 March) and follows a long period of intense lobbying by industry body, ukactive and leading operators from across the sector.

This saw ukactive taking a delegation of government and public health officials, including members of SAGE, on visits to a number of gyms and leisure centres on 1 July.

At a DCMS select committee hearing on 7 July, ukactive CEO, Huw Edwards said these site visits enabled government representatives to move "from theoretical discussions to operational decisions, once

SHUTTERSTOCK/EL MARIZ



Operators are gearing up to open with COVID-19 restrictions

they were able to see how the sector is going to operate."

Discussions with government and SAGE representatives have been wide-ranging, with sticking points – thought to include issues around air circulation in

gyms – threatening to derail talks at one point, however, an agreement was reached based on agreed COVID-19 operating standards, to be published by ukactive.

More: http://lei.sr/t8d9T_H

Research indicates gyms pose no additional risk of catching COVID-19

A large-scale academic study* has concluded that there is "no threat of increased COVID-19 spread" at fitness facilities, even when intensive training takes place.

A team of researchers at the University of Oslo, led by professor Michael Bretthauer, investigated SARS-CoV-2 transmission – and whether it was attributable to gyms.

"Our trial showed no virus transmission or increase in COVID-19 disease that was related to the opening of gym facilities," said Bretthauer.

The research studied 3,764 members of the public, aged between 18 and 64



SHUTTERSTOCK/ALFINGO IMAGES

No increased COVID-19 spread with safety measures in place

years, who had no COVID-19 relevant comorbidities.

Roughly half (1,896) were given access to visit gyms, while the other half (1,868) – a control group – were not.

The former were given access to five clubs – SATS Sjølyst and CC Vest (two health clubs owned by Nordic fitness giant SATS), STOLT Stovner and Rommen (both

operated by gym chain STOLT Trening), and EVO Bryn (a gym owned and operated by EVO Fitness Group).

Those visiting a gym had to adhere to virus prevention guidelines from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health.

"Our trial sought to test if the closure of gyms is needed, or if open facilities can provide enough hygiene and social distancing to prevent virus spread," said Bretthauer.

"As our results show, there was no increase in COVID-related disease due to the opening of gyms..."

*Peer-review pending.

More: http://lei.sr/k9V4f_H

Consumer confidence rises as people prepare for reopening

UK consumer confidence has improved significantly since the beginning of the lockdown, with a fifth of households now thinking they will be better off in the next 12 months.

PwC's June 2020 Consumer Sentiment Survey puts overall confidence at -11, a huge improvement on the -26 figure at the start of the lockdown.

Those aged between 18 and 24 are the most optimistic (+24) while the 45-64 year-olds are the most pessimistic (-24). Encouragingly, the survey also showed that the majority of households have been unaffected financially.

The survey also gives cause for optimism to the UK's



There's an opportunity for operators to maximise consumer willingness to spend

Lisa Hooker

battered leisure sector, as it suggests that consumers have eagerly waited for the reopening of leisure businesses

When asked if they were missing their regular activities, nearly a third of gym goers (30 per cent) said they missed it "a lot".



SHUTTERSTOCK/NOVA CREATIVITY

Those aged between 25 and 34 are keen to return to the gym

Gyms also came on top as the activity people are prepared to return to 'immediately' (17 per cent), while air travel was the activity with the least amount (7 per cent) of "immediate returnees".

"The reopening couldn't have come at a better time,"

said Lisa Hooker, consumer markets leader at PwC.

"There's every opportunity for operators to maximise consumer willingness to spend through the summer once they are safely able to open."

More: http://lei.sr/C82zh_H

Xercise4Less deal to be completed 'when gyms reopen'

Budget fitness chain, Xercise4Less, will have a new ownership structure and financing set-up by the time the UK's gyms open their doors on 25 July.

The chain, which operates 51 gyms across the UK, was put up for sale in May 2020 by its current investors, directors and shareholders, which include the BGF Investment Fund and Proventus Capital Partners.



The sale process has finished and the transaction will complete when the gyms reopen

Xercise4Less

Speaking to HCM, a spokesperson for Xercise4Less said a deal was being completed in time for the reopening of the fitness industry.

The exact makeup of the shareholding structure and the new funding arrangements have not been revealed, nor has the mechanism by which this has been achieved in terms of financing.

"The sale process has finished and the transaction will complete when the gyms reopen, at which time we will be able to share more details," the spokesperson said.

More: http://lei.sr/b2U5m_H



PHOTO: XERCISE4LESS

The chain, with 51 gyms, was put up for sale in May 2020

#DoingOurBit creates free online workouts for NHS staff

Three industry firms – Active IQ, fibodo and Study Active – have teamed up to create a free, bespoke online fitness platform for NHS staff.

Called #DoingOurBit, the platform offers unique, individual workouts personalised to the needs of NHS staff.



#DoingOurBit will stand the test of time and prove valuable to NHS staff

Jenny Patrickson

The content has been created by volunteer personal trainers, who were invited to 'give back' to the hard-working NHS professionals by providing healthcare staff with brief, but effective, workouts suitable for the home and for between shifts.

A launch group of 27 volunteer instructors has created more than 40 workouts for the platform – ranging from relaxation sessions, stretching, low-impact and bodyweight workouts, to more energetic high-intensity routines.

The project is the brainchild of Julie Davis, deputy chief operating officer at the Clinical Research Network West Midlands.

Jenny Patrickson, Active IQ managing director, said: "When we heard Julie's idea,



The project is the brainchild of Julie Davis (centre, white shirt)

we set out to help create something personal and friendly but also of the highest quality and integrity.

"Our External Verifier team stepped up to share their expertise to check the safety and quality of all the workouts.

"In this way, #DoingOurBit will stand the test of time and prove valuable to NHS staff long after lockdown."

#DoingOurBit first went live on 15 June.

More: http://lei.sr/R4G5c_H

Natalia Karbasova spins off FitTech Summit from Burda

Natalia Karbasova has set up a new company to run the FitTech Summit, the conference devoted to fitness technology and the future of wellbeing and active lifestyle.

The event, which is held in Munich, was previously run by the German publishing and media conglomerate, Hubert Burda Media.

The newly-established FitTech Company will control and deliver the event, with Karbasova as CEO.

"Our goal is to create a common global narrative around technology in fitness, wellbeing and health and connect diverse market



Natalia Karbasova is CEO of the new FitTech Company

players to bring holistic healthy lifestyles forward," says Karbasova. "By doing this, we will help more people worldwide to develop health awareness in a scalable way."

As Burda's creative evangelist and head of Burda Bootcamp, Karbasova launched the FitTech Summit 2018 to address this rapidly growing market. Before that, she

founded local conference Startup Day'nNite, which was later discontinued to focus on FitTech.

More: http://lei.sr/F6Y4v_H



Our goal is to create a common global narrative around technology in fitness

Natalia Karbasova

GLL's Belfast transformation wins RICS social impact award

Belfast's £105m Leisure Transformation Programme has been recognised for its social impact by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

The programme won the leisure category at the inaugural RICS Social Impact Awards, Northern Ireland.

The awards recognise the built environment's "positive and transformational contribution to society".

In their assessment, the RICS jury said: "We were impressed by the way the programme achieved its goal of ensuring that everyone has access to modern, fit-for-purpose leisure facilities."

The programme involves Belfast City Council investing



Belfast now has a huge number of top class public facilities

Gareth Kirk

£105m over a 10-year period to improve its leisure centres, programmes and services.

Delivered in partnership with GLL, the project forms part of the council's £325m physical investment programme.

The project includes the redevelopment of existing



The centres are managed by GLL and equipped by Technogym

centres and the creation of a number of brand new facilities.

All the centres are managed by GLL under the Better brand and are equipped by Technogym.

"Technogym helped us ensure that every facility has the same selection of

equipment, as part of the commitment we've made to deliver a top-quality service for every community. Belfast now has a huge number of top class, public facilities," said Gareth Kirk, GLL regional director.

More: <http://lei.sr/q4F6vH>

Gympass launches 'Live Classes' – operators gain extra revenue

Corporate fitness sales specialist Gympass has launched a new 'Live Classes' service which will enable its operator partners to host and monetise live workouts as part of their online offering.



Live online workouts have seen a tremendous rise in popularity of late

Eamon Lloyd

The solution allows fitness operators to schedule classes for Gympass members, with the operator receiving payment for every person who signs up and takes part.

This will allow operators to gain revenue, both through their own platform and through the Gympass app, for the same live content.

"Live online workouts have seen a tremendous increase in popularity, so not only are we providing a platform, but we're also monetising them for our partners," said Eamon Lloyd, head of partnerships for UK and Ireland at Gympass.

More: http://lei.sr/U4r3m_H



Gympass members can take part in live classes at home

Spaticchia leads successful MBO – re-acquires énergie Fitness

Jan Spaticchia, founder of énergie Fitness, has led a successful management buyout to reacquire the business which he founded in 2003.

Spaticchia sold the company to Bridges Fund Management in August 2019, however, in May, the directors of énergie brought in FRP Advisory to

recapitalise the business. FRP decided on a sale, which attracted a number of bidders, with Spaticchia's MBO named as the winner.

HCM understands the sales process completed on 22 June for an undisclosed sum, with the management team being backed by RM Funds, the company's existing secured lender, and a consortium of ten private investors.

This includes several of énergie's original founder-shareholders, such as Steve Philpott, David Beattie and the Ashley family. Spaticchia has also reinvested.

A new company has been formed to acquire the business, trade and assets of the énergie Group, with a 'significantly strengthened executive' and a new corporate structure.

PHOTO: ENERGIE FITNESS



Spaticchia has bought back the business he founded in 2003



We'll work together to ensure énergie continues to deliver its brand of fitness

Jan Spaticchia

Global expansion will be handled by a newly-established subsidiary and led by a yet-to-be-appointed MD.

Spaticchia will work as executive chair, while Peter Croney and Fintan Donohue will take up board positions.

Spaticchia said: "We'll be working together as a team to ensure énergie continues to deliver its very special brand of fitness to the benefit of everyone in its community."

More: http://lei.sr/A8C6Q_H

Black Lives Matter: Sport England to fund 'innovative solutions'

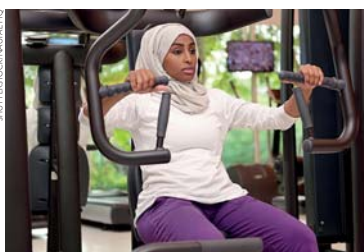
Sport England has begun a search for "innovative solutions" which can reduce inequalities in society – and help those most affected to get physically active.

The grassroots body is looking for individuals and organisations with programmes and ideas which can help break down barriers to exercise.

A particular focus will also be on solutions which help those affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We're looking for solutions specifically developed to support women, people on low incomes, people from

SHUTTERSTOCK/NAUFAL HO



Sport England is looking to break down barriers to exercise

BAME backgrounds, disabled people or people living with long-term health conditions," Sport England told HCM.

Successful applicants will be supported with a

combination of funding, advice, training, insight and access to connections across the industry.

Sport England chief executive, Tim Hollingsworth,

added: "We believe that now is the time to act, innovate and do things differently to affect positive change."

More: http://lei.sr/y3u7A_H



We believe that now is the time to act, innovate and do things differently

Tim Hollingsworth

Technogym launches live and on-demand classes

Technogym has announced the launch of live streaming and on-demand classes.

The new content will be delivered via the Technogym Mywellness app.

The service will offer operators the opportunity to stream their own content to their community whenever and wherever they are, so users can connect to their favourite classes and instructors.

Operators will also have access to a library of Technogym classes, featuring ready-to-use content created by Technogym to integrate into their own content libraries.

"This is a new business opportunity for clubs for



This is a new business opportunity for clubs for member engagement and attraction

Nerio Alessandri

member engagement and attraction," said Nerio Alessandri, founder and president of Technogym.

"In the current challenging times, Mywellness has been playing a fundamental role in supporting operators to connect, engage and

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM



Technogym is creating its own content for the new service

coach their customers during the lockdown and has also been supporting operators' comprehensive re-opening strategies.

"We've already introduced new features, such as the ability to book gym floor sessions, classes and

swimming times, providing members with a seamless customer experience.

"Now, thanks to Mywellness app 5.0, the opportunity for operators to engage with more users has been extended."

More: http://lei.sr/j3k4f_H

Gold's Gym creates small-box concept to drive expansion

Gold's Gym is battling to get out of Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection by innovating its business model and going after a wider market.

The company has announced the launch of a

smaller footprint model to its range of franchise offerings to make the brand more attractive to franchisees with smaller budgets and enable more mass-market penetration globally.

The new model will target those with an investment range of US\$1.5m (€1.3m, £1.2m) to US\$2.5m (€2m, £2.2m).

Gold's Gym CEO Adam Zeitsiff said: "The new scalable footprint model is designed to maximise flexibility by giving franchisees more affordable investment options, while delivering high-quality fitness."



The new scalable footprint model is designed to maximise flexibility

Adam Zeitsiff

More: http://lei.sr/e6B4G_H

PHOTO: GOLD'S GYM



Gold's small box option will start at US\$1.5m and 10k sq ft

Study: physical activity prompts a 'clean-up' of muscles

Physical activity is found to prompt a clean-up of muscles by increasing the activity of protein Ubiquitin, which tags onto worn-out proteins and causes them to degrade.

It's universally accepted that maintaining muscular function is essential and a big part of the human body's ability to do

so depends on proteins – the building blocks of muscles.

The proteins do, however, degrade when worn-out and are eventually eliminated in a clean-up process that allows them to be replaced by freshly synthesised proteins.

While extensive knowledge has been accumulated about how muscles regulate the build-up of new proteins during physical training, much less is known about how muscle contractions and exercise serve to clean-up the worn-out proteins.

Now, researchers at the University of Copenhagen's Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports, have demonstrated that a single, intense, 10-minute bicycle ride results in a significant increase in the activity of

SHUTTERSTOCK/WANBREAKEMEDIA



The study showed that exercise increased Ubiquitin activity

Ubiquitin, the 'death marker protein' and a subsequent intensification of the targeting and removal of worn-out proteins in muscles.

Professor Jørgen Wojtaszewski, one of the researchers, says the findings

serve to strengthen the entire foundation for the effect of physical activity.

"Basically, it explains part of the reason why physical activity is healthy," he said.

More: http://lei.sr/n58p_H



Basically, this explains part of the reason why physical activity is healthy
Jørgen Wojtaszewski

Exercise and bone health could be the key to anti-ageing

Exercising increases levels of a protein hormone secreted by the bones which has a powerful anti-ageing effect on the rest of the body.

Osteocalcin, which is secreted by osteoblasts (the cells that synthesise bone), has been proven to be one of the elements that bones use to "communicate" with the rest of the body – by participating in a network of signals to other organs.

Now, scientists have suggested osteocalcin could also be key to ensuring muscle and brain health.

Gerard Karsenty, who has studied bones – and

SHUTTERSTOCK/WANBREAKEMEDIA



Exercise stimulates the secretion of Osteocalcin

osteocalcin specifically – since the 1990s, has found a link between exercise, bone health and anti-ageing.

Karsenty conducted a series of experiments which showed

that increasing the levels of osteocalcin reverses age-related ailments, improving muscle mass and memory.

Encouragingly, separate research has shown that



The link between exercise and osteocalcin could be promoted to keep people active

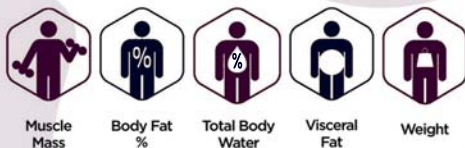
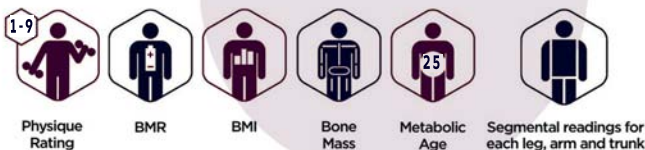
Mathieu Ferron

one of the ways to naturally maintain levels of osteocalcin is through exercise.

In a recent interview with the *Guardian*, Mathieu Ferron, a former student of Karsenty, said that the link between exercise, osteocalcin and anti-ageing could be promoted in order to encourage people to stay active in later life.

More: http://lei.sr/y5j8H_H

HOW HAS LOCKDOWN AFFECTED YOUR FITNESS JOURNEY...?



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The pandemic has sped up our progress towards the strategy we'd outlined – to become a coaching company that happens to have clubs and support people in achieving their goals, wherever they choose to work out

Francis Ottevaere

Returning to 80 per cent attendance in just a few weeks after re-opening, the CEO of JIMS Fitness talks about his COVID-19 strategies with Kate Cracknell

Tell us about reopening

We decided to go beyond the government's compulsory measures, while at the same time trying to make our clubs feel as normal and welcoming as possible.

I attended a webinar with Will Wang, CEO of Will's Gym in Asia, and his words really resonated with me. He explained that perception is reality – that clubs need to regain the confidence of their members, and that if gyms don't go far enough in their measures they might lose those members.

We surveyed our active members and the three measures they find most reassuring are, firstly, the fact they have to reserve a slot to come and train. We've divided our days into 1hr45 blocks, separated by cleaning sessions in which we sanitise all the frequently touched elements in the club: door handles, vending machine screens, card machines and so on. We can't clean all the equipment though – it would make the cleaning phases too long – so members are asked to clean all equipment before and after each use.

The second and third most popular measures are compulsory disinfection

of hands on the way into the club, and temperature checking every member on entry: we send them home if they have a temperature over 37.5°C.

We can't eliminate all risk, of course, but we believe we've done everything we can to make our members safe – and feel safe. We now have testimonials from members and have been in the news on French-speaking TV. This has helped spread our message of reassurance.

Interestingly, our survey has found that in our locations, younger people are more negative and sensitive than older people, and that women are more positive about our measures than men. This surprised us.

Another finding is that those with high purchasing power are less comfortable about attending the gym than those with lower purchasing power. We're adapting locally based on this feedback and the profile of each club.

What shape is the business in?

We reopened our clubs on 29 May in Luxembourg, and 8 June in Belgium, and we've come out OK. Not great, and the second half of this year will be a challenge, ▶

Catch-up is already happening. We're up to 80% of the visits compared to the same day in 2019 and membership sales are up 150-200%



Members report feeling confident in the clubs' COVID-19 measures



► but I think the fact we were able to pay our bills throughout the crisis, without needing any government loans, is testament to the strength of our community.

We've only lost 8.7 per cent of our members over the 10 weeks of closure – admittedly that's helped by our 12-month initial contracts – and our attendance figures are quite good, especially as social distancing means we can only have one member per 10sq m of floor space.

In Luxembourg, on our first day of opening, we had 52 per cent of the check-ins compared to the equivalent day in 2019. In Belgium, it was 65 per cent.

Catch-up is already happening. In Belgium, we're up to around 80 per cent of the visits compared to the same day in 2019; cumulatively since re-opening, we're at around 70 per cent. Meanwhile, sales are 150–200 per cent compared to last year.

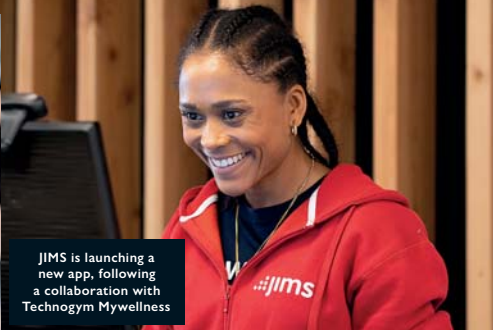
At our three clubs in Luxembourg, attendance is cumulatively up to 61 per cent – from 52 per cent on day one – and over the weekend just gone, we were at 80–90 per cent compared to the equivalent weekend last year. Sales are sitting at 100–150 per cent compared to 2019.

[All figures @ 22 June 2020]

And the longer-term impact?

It has sped up our progress towards the strategy we'd already outlined for our business: to become a coaching company that happens to have fitness clubs. That's now our ambition: to support people in achieving their goals, wherever they choose to work out.

Obviously, digital is the tool that will allow us to turn this vision into reality. We see digital as the way to make personalised services more efficient and more effective.



JIMS is launching a new app, following a collaboration with Technogym Mywellness



JIMS is building club-in-club boutiques based on things such as boxing and cycling

Can you elaborate on your digital strategy?

The online work we did during lockdown with Technogym was effectively a chance to test the features of a new app powered by Mywellness, which is now being finalised to incorporate our online learnings over recent months.

Starting from September this year, we'll offer three distinct types of membership.

If you just want to come in and use our equipment and classes, that's fine. You'll pay €20–25 a month.

If you want to be coached, you can choose a membership – priced at €35–37 a month – that gives access to the club and our new app. You'll receive personalised online support, with a certified coach – one of our team – following your progress and offering advice, motivation and new programmes as needed. This will be supplemented with in-club tests and consultations, but essentially it means you can train, with our support, wherever you choose: in-club, at home, in the park.

The app will also feature on-demand and live streamed classes, again powered by Mywellness through our partnership with Technogym; you'll even be able to see your friends in the class.

Finally, we're rolling out a club-in-club model, creating boutique studios inside our facilities for a premium group training experience. We first trialled this at the Gare du Luxembourg, where we were offered a 2,000sq m space on a take it or leave it basis.

It's larger than our usual clubs – which typically measure 1,200–1,600sq m, with a classic offering of cardio, weights, functional training and studios – we decided to trial in-house boxing and CrossFit-style boutiques.

These initial boutiques went very well: we found that 50 per cent of the customers were our existing members who had traded up.

We're now creating boutiques in every club, and where we have clusters of clubs, make them complementary. We're considering boxing, CrossFit-style training, pilates, yoga and cycling.

The company retained and paid its team during the COVID-19 lockdown



► If you take this membership option, you'll have access to the club and the boutique classes, and very likely our digital support too – we're finalising the details as we speak. As an example, boxing will cost €40–50 a month, CrossFit-style training around €70–80.

What are your growth plans?

For now, our primary focus will be on our product: launching and embedding the three types of membership.

It might even be that we launch a fourth membership category, for those living in areas where we don't have a physical club. That question is definitely on the table: can we effectively motivate and coach people through the app alone?

We're also in discussions with Telenet, the largest cable provider in Belgium, about a TV channel to stream our group exercise.

That might involve a newspaper-style model: get some content for free, upgrade to get all our digital content, and then you might decide to also pay to come into our clubs.

We may open more clubs – perhaps two to four a year – but only if good locations come up. We're not under any pressure to open a certain number of clubs in a certain timeframe.

The focus is on executing our vision: first and foremost, to be a coaching provider. ●



JIMS has 28 clubs in Belgium and Luxembourg and plans to add 2-4 more a year

We offer career progression and decent pay and retain 85–90% of staff each year

A twist in the tale

"Back in 2008, in the grip of the financial crisis, I was let go from my job in private equity. It was the best day of my life," says Francis Ottevaere, founder and CEO of JIMS Fitness.

"I'd seen the success of Fit4Free in Holland and I confess that, at that point...well, let's just say modesty isn't a common trait in private equity! I initially saw fitness as an investment and went into it with a confident 'I'll just do this and it will work' mindset.

"Thankfully, that confidence wasn't misplaced. I started out in 2010, buying a club in Ghent and rebranding it as JIMS Fitness – a name that, honestly, came down to the availability of domain names – and in the last 10 years we've built 28 clubs in Belgium and Luxembourg."

He continues: "The name isn't totally arbitrary. We wanted a brand that conveyed a sense of there being someone on-hand to support you in your training, helping you reach your goals. Because our philosophy is to start



with the people – our staff and our members – rather than the equipment, as is the case with some of our competitors.

"We invest in our staff. We train them,

which isn't compulsory in Belgium. We offer career progression and decent pay and we retain 85–90 per cent over the course of a year. Ours is a stable community of people who help build the experience in, and the reputation of, our clubs."

He adds: "Funnily enough, the story has a bit of a twist in that my former colleagues in private equity are now the investors in BasicFit.

In 2013, I got a call from my old boss asking if I would sell, but I declined – I have a great team, a brand we can do more to build and many opportunities in Belgium where the majority of our clubs are.

Fitness is a young, innovative sector, with fresh perspectives as new players enter the market. It's an exciting place to be.

"This isn't just an investment for me any more. It's something I love doing."

COVID-19 crisis

What was your response to lockdown?

It all happened very quickly: we only had a few days' notice before we had to close, which happened on Friday 17 March in Belgium and soon after in Luxembourg.

Our first focus was our members: how to compensate them for the closure, how to ensure they felt fairly treated, and how to keep them engaged.

We asked them what compensation they wanted and distilled this into four options. However, I made a video in which I explicitly asked if they could – if possible – choose option one or two, because option four was the worst for us. Our members proved to be incredibly supportive.

The first option was to continue paying membership, but with a temporary reduction of €5 per payment. This reduction will continue until these members have recouped the full cost of membership paid during lockdown: in the long run, they will have had those 10 weeks for free. Around 40 per cent of our members took this option.

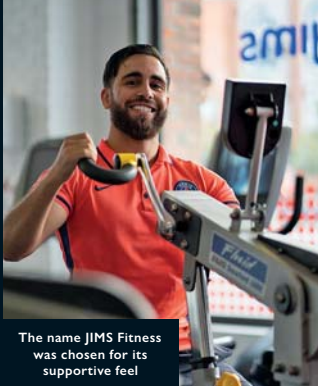
Option two was to continue paying in full, with the promise of a nice surprise at re-opening. Around 20 per cent of our members chose this route and will now be very well looked after. Alongside club access, they will get digital support for free, as well as some nice freebies. And we'll actively involve them in our decisions, to ensure we're supporting them as they would like.

Option three was to extend the end date of membership by the length of lockdown, which 10 per cent of our members chose. And then option four, taken up by 30 per cent of our members, was to immediately freeze membership.

How did you keep your members engaged?

With money still coming in, we could continue to pay our staff. We didn't lose a single member of our team during this crisis.

In turn, this meant we could use our instructors to create online content: Instagram and Facebook Live for classes, which we filmed in our clubs, and online



The name JIMS Fitness was chosen for its supportive feel

coaching to support members who wanted to do non-group exercise training at home – bodyweight functional training and so on.

Using Facebook and Instagram as we were, we couldn't measure class attendance, but we found members were very open to online coaching during lockdown: 6–7 per cent used this service, which as a new concept we felt was quite good.

All our online services were open to all members, for free – even those who had frozen their memberships. People were losing their jobs. We understood that not everyone could afford to pay.

In phase two of lockdown, we were also allowed to start running outdoor training sessions. These sessions were also offered for free: we accepted making a financial loss in order to support our members.

It's the same with group classes now the clubs are open: we have limited capacity, but we pride ourselves on offering live classes only in-club – no virtual. Until social distancing eases, we accept we will be making a loss by paying live instructors.

We're in discussion
with Telenet cable TV
to stream our group
exercise classes

JIMS only lost 8.9 per cent of members during the 10 week closure



A return to 100% membership will require recruiting members away from other facilities

21% indicate they're fairly/very likely to switch to another facility when they reopen

what members say matters

New research from the US shows Millennials and Gen Z may be slow to return to gyms, while women are more hesitant than men. Club Intel's Steve Tharrett reports

A destructive storm descended on the US fitness industry in March 2020, spawned by the COVID-19 virus. Within a month, 90 per cent of fitness facilities were closed in 46 States.

By 1 June – earlier in some parts of the US – operators were entering or preparing for phase one reopenings and after experiencing a period of hibernation, clubs and studios were emerging from their COVID-19 slumbers.

This reemergence is cause for celebration, but also trepidation. Operators are scrambling to identify the best practices for reopening, to meet reopening guidelines set out by their respective States and to reduce the anxieties and concerns of consumers.

This dawning of a new era reminds us of a speech Abraham Lincoln gave the US Congress in 1862 when the nation faced what many saw as an insurmountable challenge: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate for the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new, we must think and act anew."

This era, framed by COVID-19, is truly a new era – one piled high with challenges and one that requires new thinking, new planning, and new acting.

Three dimensional thinking

The challenge of reopening exists in three dimensions, but we've seen the industry – in most cases – brainstorming solutions in two dimensions. Yes, reopening requires adherence to government guidelines – the first dimension. Secondly it requires new thinking that addresses members' anxieties around returning – the second dimension. What we believed was missing is the vital third dimension – understanding what the members really feel.

We were keen to establish the deal breakers

they needed to see being addressed before they would return to the gym and to find out which of their past behaviours and experiences would subconsciously influence their decision to return.

In mid-May ClubIntel launched a study of 2,000 US health and fitness facility members in 20 major cities across all seven US census regions to identify pre-pandemic behaviours and then look at the impact of COVID-19 during and after the closures. The study, called What members say matters – what members say is needed if health and fitness facilities want them back, was sponsored by Life Fitness and Les Mills.

Our first goal was to explore members' likelihood of returning to their facility, selecting another facility, or not returning and pursuing another path. Secondly, we wanted to see if previous behaviors and experiences, or current sentiments would be predictors of their returning or not returning.

Ultimately, we felt this member-driven insight would assist operators make more educated and informed decisions regarding their reopening strategy. We believe 'The secret of changes is to focus all your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new,' Socrates.

The way forward

Lao Tzu, the father of Taoism, said "New beginnings are disguised as painful endings." As fitness operators emerge from closure it represents for many a painful ending and a new beginning.

While we can speculate on what's needed if we are to arise from this painful experience and prevail, nothing can guide us better than the voices of members – absent them and any decision you make will be akin to applying a two-dimensional solution to a three-dimensional problem.

● To download a copy of the report, go to HCMmag.com/ClubIntel1



SHORT STORIES FROM THE DATA

The research brought forward a wealth of data and insights that operators can utilise to frame their reopening strategy. Here are some of the key findings:

1 Commitment matters

Member usage prior to covid-19 closure is a powerful predictor of return – 52 per cent of members who work out at least 12 times a month said they were 'very likely' to return compared to 37 per cent who attended eight to 12 times a month and 22 per cent who visit one or fewer times a month.

Interestingly, the level of usage doesn't seem to have a material impact on the decision not to return, but it does have an impact on the desire to return: we found that members who use their club or gym fewer than eight times a month are half as likely to express strong sentiments about returning.

2 Rebuilding will be needed

Around 65 per cent of US members say they are very likely or fairly likely to return. We consider this a powerful testament to how challenging it will be for clubs and studios to see a return to 100 per cent of their pre-COVID membership numbers.

Following this, 19 per cent are undecided and 16 per

cent say they're unlikely or very unlikely to return.

So it's reasonable to predict most operators can expect 65 per cent to 84 per cent of their members to return. A return to 100 per cent will likely require recruiting members away from other facilities, not an impossible task, since 21 per cent indicated they were fairly likely or very likely to switch allegiances to another facility when they reopen.

3 It will be a staged process

The process of members returning will be a staged process. 34 per cent indicated they'd return in the first week, 34 per cent between one and four weeks and 25 per cent between one and three months. This means clubs and studios must expect a slow and steady climb.

Member
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return

52 per cent of members
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said they were 'very
likely' to return



Millennials and Gen Z
represent the largest
generational segment
of the industry

4 Sex differences will matter

Women are more hesitant than men, with fewer women indicating they're very likely to return (33 per cent women vs 42 per cent men). More women indicate they're unlikely to return or haven't reached that decision yet (50 per cent vs 43 per cent) and when it comes to how quickly they'll return, 39 per cent of men say the first week compared to 29 per cent of women. If you're in the US and your business is geared toward women, expect it to be a longer and more challenging process to rebuild your membership base.

5 Be alert to age differences

Baby Boomers are the generation most likely to return and return faster – 74 per cent of Boomers and older say they're very/fairly likely to return, compared to 59 per cent of Gen Z

and 61 per cent of Millennials.

While it's encouraging that the older generations are enthusiastic about returning, these findings sound an alarm bell when it comes to the hesitancy of Millennials and Gen Z, since they represent the largest generational segment of the industry

6 Control the things you can

The decision to return is dependent on a variety of factors operators can't control. We looked at 19 influences with respect to member's decision to return.

Two were related to whether local governments are able to provide consumers with evidence that sufficient tests COVID-19 tests are available and being able to show consumers that the number of reported cases has declined over the previous two weeks.

Other influencers members reported as being extremely important are:

- Management keeping members out of the club who show symptoms
- Disinfecting equipment after each use
- Having immediate access to hand sanitising stations
- Enforcing limits on facility and group exercise capacity



Focus on customer insight
to really understand
what is motivating
your members

KEY TAKEAWAYS

If your business previously required 5k members to be profitable, can you reinvent your value proposition to be successful with only 4k?

Reinvent

Think, plan and execute differently: this data points to a new era for the industry, characterised by lower membership numbers, progressive ramp-up periods, and more scrutinised business practices.

Factors such as age, gender and past behaviour are extremely important variables – if your business previously required 5k members to be profitable, can you reinvent your value proposition to be successful with only 4k? To accomplish this, build a plan that allows you to be profitable under these new circumstances.

As Mark Twain said, 'The best predictor of future behavior is past behaviour'

Dive into customer insight

Get to grips with your database to prevail and thrive. Understanding the past behaviour and experiences of members will improve your successful rate when it comes to getting them back. The research clearly shows that knowing usage levels, length of membership, gender and age is critical to understanding how your reopening strategies will be received.

Tell them straight and be accountable – even if it requires you to take a stand

Take a strong position

Authenticity and transparency are more important than ever – members are saying they want operators to tell them straight what's happening with respect to the virus and their club and to hold staff and members accountable to reinforcing policies, even if it requires taking a stand.

Members expect managers to stand strong behind their decisions, if they don't, it will lessen their likelihood of returning, or of staying when they do return.

The provision of virtual fitness content is an important influence on members' decision to return

Get virtual

Operators seeking relevance to Gen Z, Millennials and women need to commit to providing virtual fitness content. This emerged as generally being critical during lockdown, but our study shows virtual was used primarily by Gen Z, Millennials, and women. These groups also rated the provision of virtual fitness content as an important influence on their decision to return.

The data also shows that nearly as many members are 'very likely' to continue using virtual fitness content as those who are 'very likely to return' to their former club.



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Sport England has teamed up with 15 health and social care charities to find ways to support people living with 10 different health conditions to be physically active. Kath Hudson finds out more



It's all about treating people as people first, not the condition first

Almost half of England's population has at least one long-term health condition and as we now know, this not only undermines their resilience, it also leaves them vulnerable to COVID-19, which has exacted an especially cruel toll on people with underlying health issues. This Sport England initiative, called We Are Undeatable, will help to strengthen our defences against COVID-19 and improve health generally across these population groups.

Although physical activity can reduce the risk of developing further chronic conditions by up to 40 per cent, people with a long-term health condition, or who are disabled, are more likely to be inactive.

Research shows that 41 per cent are inactive, compared to 20 per cent of those without a health condition.

This is a statistic which Sport England is keen to change, particularly as the UK chief medical officer's physical activity guidelines highlight that moderate physical activity can help manage more than 20 chronic conditions, including coronary heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, mental health problems and musculoskeletal conditions.

Almost half the population of England has at least one long term health condition

According to the Stroke Association, 30 minutes of moderate activity for at least five days a week can reduce the risk of a stroke by more than 25 per cent.

The resulting intervention, the We Are Undeatable campaign, is a first-time collaboration between Sport England and leading health charities. Each charity has been empowered to find ways to promote and facilitate exercise for their audiences.

Unique approach

"These charities have unique insights into the ups and downs of living with a long-term health condition. Sharing that insight is really important for Sport England and the sport and physical activity sector, so we can learn from it," says Sarah Ruane, Sport England's strategic lead for health.

"We're working collaboratively to bring together our insights and expertise to develop a programme of work to engage and support people to have the best possible life. Our overall ambition is to challenge the status quo, ▶

Sport England is collaborating with leading health charities

The work underway...

● Age UK

An insight project will develop and test methods, strategies, messages and communication channels for engaging with inactive older people, as well as understanding the barriers and how to remove them. Findings will be used to develop a practical implementation model.

● Alzheimer's Society

A Dementia Friendly Guide will be produced by gathering insight from people living with dementia, and their carers, to understand the barriers to participation in sport and leisure. This will shape the resources produced for providers and the actions they need to take to support people with dementia and those caring for them.

● Asthma UK

A two-year project will work with children with asthma and their parents and teachers to unpick barriers to exercise and then design an innovative intervention, building a prototype which can be tested on a larger scale.

● Breast Cancer Now/ Breast Cancer Care

Research will look at why women with breast cancer are inactive, what interventions would work most effectively to change this and how older women can be supported to maintain positive changes. The aim will be to



develop a physical activity behaviour change intervention tailored to the needs of people aged 55+ with breast cancer.

● British Lung Foundation

This project will develop an evidence-based service using telephone health coaching to empower people living with lung conditions to become and stay active. The helpline team will give advice to callers and signpost them to health information and local activities. Those requiring additional help will be offered specialist support involving motivational interviewing to build confidence.

● Diabetes UK

An insight project is underway to help understand the evidence around physical activity on clinical diabetes outcomes (type 1 and type 2) and prevention of type 2. It will also help to understand the barriers to changing behaviour and carrying out more physical activity. Longer term, the intention is to utilise insight to inform an appropriate physical activity behaviour change intervention.

● MS Society

This project will test a helpline response programme, recruiting a dedicated information and support officer who will work with callers to help them change their behaviour.

● Rethink Mental Illness

This project will assess whether barriers for people living with severe mental illnesses – like bipolar disorder and schizophrenia – can be overcome by embedding physical activity into peer support groups. A toolkit will be co-designed with people who have experience of these illnesses and physical activity experts, and will be piloted in six local groups and evaluated prior to a three year rollout.

● Stroke Association

The role of personal digital interventions to aid retention and improve motivation will be tested, as well as one-to-one peer buddies to help motivate those affected by stroke to stay active. This will be co-designed with stroke survivors in four geographical regions.

● Versus Arthritis


Versus Arthritis will work with those affected by the disease to co-design a programme to support people with a range of musculoskeletal conditions, targeting those who are least likely to be physically active and most at risk of discontinuing physical activity due to pain or comorbidities. It will determine the best way of tackling barriers and building opportunities to increase activity in a sustainable way.



- push physical activity higher up the agenda and make sure people are being supported to be more active in a way that works for them."

Although it might be assumed these charities represent a minority, almost half of the population lives with one or more of these conditions. "It's all about treating people as people first, not the condition first and supporting them in the best way possible to be active," says Ruane. "We want it to become the norm that someone with a health condition automatically receives support to become active."

Removing the barriers to participating in physical activity could have profound benefits for many people's quality of life and longevity, as Brian Down, deputy chief executive of Rethink Mental Illness points out: "People with conditions like schizophrenia die on average



Removing the barriers to physical activity could have profound benefits


15 to 20 years earlier than the rest of the population, largely due to preventable physical health problems caused by a number of factors including the side effects of medication.

"We believe that supporting people to become more active will help bring down this scandalous figure."

We want it to become the norm that someone with a health condition automatically receives support to become active

Celebrating victories

The insight work showed that the barriers to entry tended to be linked to confidence and motivation, as well as time and energy. Some felt they needed advice on how to go about becoming active. There were also some condition-specific barriers, such as an unpredictable condition making it hard to commit to a routine and the concern that exercise might make it worse. Surprisingly, access and price – often cited as a barrier in Sport England's research – was considered less of an issue.



Barriers to entry tend to be linked to confidence and motivation, rather than access and price

Sport England will track the success of the campaign with a qualitative study

The resulting projects will aim to identify and remove the common barriers which are stopping people from exercising. "Although all conditions and all people are different, there was one common issue which kept coming up and that was that all conditions are unpredictable and how people manage them on a day-to-day basis really varies," says Ruane. "The shared sentiment was that small victories need to be celebrated. That was what brought everyone together and could speak to a large audience."

Coming out of lockdown

The impact of lockdown lifting and the easing of restrictions is exciting for many, but for those who have been shielding, or self-isolating due to their age or a pre-existing health condition, this news is likely to be met with anxiety and unease.

Consumer research, conducted by We Are Undeatable in June, highlighted the impact that lockdown lifting is having on people with long term health conditions; 55 per cent of people report feeling anxious about lockdown lifting, with a quarter saying that they are still afraid to leave the house, and one in five admitting to not leaving their home since mid-March – except for emergencies.

Therefore, the next phase of We Are Undeatable's campaign will be focused on helping people adjust to life after lockdown, both physically and mentally.

The way people manage their conditions varies greatly

To do this, We Are Undeatable is introducing new measures, including digital tools, such as a new library of customisable mini-workouts that are perfect for starting out with a new activity and a virtual assistant tool on social media to help with activity planning and motivation.

We Are Undeatable's new TV advert is now on air, and shows people navigating the ups and downs of managing their condition, and finding ways to get moving in these unusual times. The advert was shot entirely in lockdown. ●

More: <https://weareundeatable.co.uk>

LOOKING long term

Active IQ has partnered with leading experts at Nuffield Health who, alongside its chief medical advisor, Dr Dane Vishnubala, have created a new Level 3 Diploma in Working with People with Long-term Conditions

In the UK, an estimated 15 million people are living with at least one long-term health condition. This number is rising year-on-year, placing a huge burden on the NHS, social care providers and the economy.

As we start to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, people with complex health needs are even more vulnerable, as their non-urgent health care requires them to wait their turn.

The NHS Long-Term Plan has placed a significant focus on prevention rather than cure and social prescribing and other initiatives look to take some of the pressure off front-line healthcare staff,

by asking health and physical activity professionals to support the agenda, get the nation moving and encourage people to make healthier lifestyle choices.

Expertly developed training

So how can the industry support this plan? CIMSPA has announced a new professional standard – Working with People with Long-term Conditions – which identifies the knowledge and skills needed to work with this client group in a range of settings.

The qualification includes the latest thinking and current best practice when managing a variety of long-term conditions which are increasingly being encountered by exercise referral specialists, including:

- Diabetes and metabolic conditions
- Cardiorespiratory conditions
- Musculoskeletal conditions

- Cancer
- Dementia
- Fibromyalgia
- Mental health conditions
- Hypo/hyperthyroidism
- Connective tissue disease
- Neurological conditions, such as Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis and Parkinson's Disease

Higher skillset

The greater depth of content, combined with the deeper understanding and higher skill set to support this client group, enables fitness professionals to cover the majority of conditions likely to be presented by referred clients.

Further valuable insight when working with clients who need to modify their behaviour and lifestyle to accommodate their health condition comes in the form of behaviour change techniques including 'motivational interviewing'.

"Exercise can be a hugely impactful intervention for those suffering from a variety of long-term health conditions,

Bringing together allied health professionals to create this new qualification has successfully aligned the health and fitness and medical sectors

Jenny Patrickson, MD, Active IQ

JACOB LINDSAUTTER/ISTOCK



The new diploma enables exercise professionals to support people with long-term health conditions



as our flagship programmes have shown," says Justin Jones, head of physiology and clinical development lead at Nuffield Health. "This qualification will help to equip fitness professionals with the knowledge and skills required to support their clients in achieving the level of health and fitness they aspire to, whether that be maintaining, developing or recovering."

Major change

"The is one of the largest changes to the exercise referral qualification in over ten years, with more conditions now included, the qualification is far more comprehensive," says Dr Dane Vishnubala, chief medical advisor for Active IQ. "The move away from calling it exercise referral is an important one."

"Many clients who use personal trainers or members who use the gym have long-term conditions and, therefore, having the knowledge and skills to manage these should be an essential skill for all fitness professionals."

"Our industry can play a huge role in helping to treat long-term conditions through exercise and be a key partner to health care professionals. I hope in years to come this is a qualification that will help to transform the health of the millions of patients who we see in the NHS with long-term conditions."

Social prescribing

"As fitness professionals, we are the experts in exercise, and this is where we can add the most value," says Jones. "The very best personal trainers recognise their own professional limitations and stick to their scope of practice."

"Getting to know the other supportive resources within their local community could help them actively signpost those in need to further support and this more holistic approach to an individual's wellbeing presents a massive opportunity for fitness professionals."

Nuffield Health has a multidisciplinary team of health and wellbeing professionals working within its fitness



This is one of the largest changes to the exercise referral qualification in over ten years. Being able to manage long-term conditions is an essential skill for fitness professionals

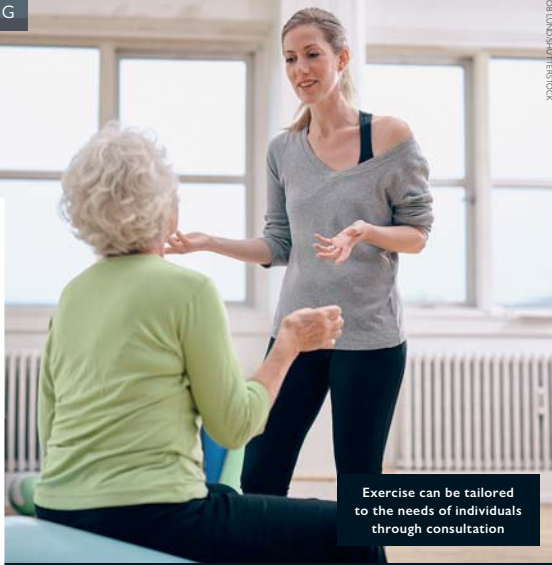
Dr Dane Vishnubala

Get started today

Train now in readiness to play your part in the nation's recovery

There's no time like the present to upskill – fitness professionals should take the chance to adapt and improve their knowledge and skills to be able to support individuals, either in facilities as they reopen or in the outside environment.

- Healthcare solutions through fitness programmes will be key after lockdown.
- The Level 3 Diploma in Working with Clients with Long-term Conditions can be studied online.
- All modules are fully adapted to suit remote learners.
- Online resources include: webinars, digital materials and one-to-one tutor guidance.



Exercise can be tailored to the needs of individuals through consultation



This more holistic approach to an individual's wellbeing presents a massive opportunity for fitness professionals

Justin Jones, Nuffield Health

► and wellbeing clubs, many of whom have access to an integrated medical centre. "Seamless referrals between colleagues, including GPs, physiologists, emotional wellbeing therapists, and physiotherapists fully supports a 360-degree approach to physical health recovery and emotional wellbeing," explains Jones.

Making the connection

"The medical profession is increasingly aware of the power of exercise in supporting a wealth of long-term conditions. Uniting the health and fitness sector with the medical world is more important than ever," he says.

"Being able to refer patients and clients to fitness professionals with specific skills working with people who have long-term conditions is the final piece of the jigsaw."

Jenny Patrickson, managing director of Active IQ says: "Bringing together allied health professionals at Nuffield Health and our chief medical advisor, Dr Dane Vishnubala, to create this new qualification has successfully aligned the health and fitness and medical sectors.

"Social prescribing presents a huge opportunity for the leisure industry to meet growing health demands within society. This new qualification will

give fitness professionals the skills and confidence they need to help make a difference to people's health.

"Conversely, training fitness professionals to this higher level will also give community healthcare professionals the confidence to refer their patients to physical activity facilities."

"It's important to recognise that while exercise is good for us all, you can't prescribe the same exercises to everyone and expect the same outcome. In fact, it may be dangerous to do so," warns Jones.

"This is why we need highly skilled PTs who are able to adapt the principles of exercise to the client in front of them, depending on their aims, goals and comorbidities.

"This qualification will teach exercise professionals about the limitations of long-term health conditions, the consequences of taking certain medications and how to adapt training programmes accordingly," he concludes.

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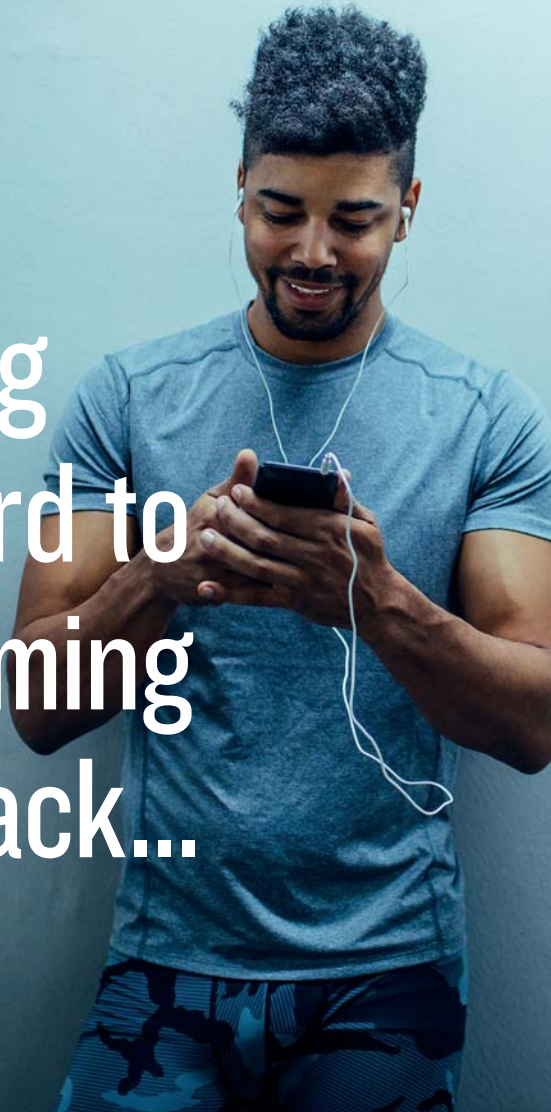
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We're
looking
forward to
welcoming
you back...



As some of the UK's top gym operators unveil their reopening videos, insight specialists, Paul Roberts and Mike Evans, analyse members' reactions on social media

We're looking forward to welcoming you back." It's the sign-off line for many of the information videos gyms released in the run-up to reopening.

But how welcoming does the experience look to members and how well are these videos addressing the questions members want answered?

When consumers need questions answered, they turn to social media. They want authentic information fast. The answers they get can come from the brand itself, or from other customers. To support members, Bannatyne has been actively responding to its members via @Bannatyneshelp and PureGym has been actively responding using #PureHelp.

In the week before lockdown gyms saw a spike in Twitter activity. Members were asking each other about the hygiene/cleanliness of their local gym, and reporting back when experiences missed their expectations.

The new customer experience

We expect to see a similar Twitter spike as gyms reopen. Until then, the chatter is focusing on hopes, fears and questions.

In our work, we've looked beyond the questions about possible opening dates to see what else is on members' minds.

Not surprisingly, as new reopening videos are released, they come with a chorus of excitement. Members reply that they can't wait to be back.

For example, PureGym members have been missing everything from spinning classes and steppers through to the atmosphere and feeling good at the end of a workout. One member tweeted "I forgot how much the gym helped me mentally until recently". Another just said "OMG I literally can't wait for the day you give us the go ahead!!"

A member of The Gym tweeted that "I need my gym back." Then explained "My motivation to train at home is slowly disappearing... I went from five days a week at the beginning of lockdown to two days this week".

One David Lloyd member summed up the feelings of those who love to hate the pain "I neeeeeed to be back at the gym (and I never thought I would hear myself say that)".

Not all good news

But this isn't how everyone feels. Even among regular gym members, the videos aren't convincing everyone. Previous experiences have left them sceptical about how well the plans will work. The new processes have left them wondering if the experience will be worth the money and effort.

To draw out some details, we analysed 10 days of Twitter comments that tagged seven large gym chains: PureGym, The Gym Group, David Lloyd, Bannatyne, DW Fitness First, Xercise4Less and AnytimeFitness.

We've summarised the emerging themes and questions under four headings: value for money, community, convenience and peace of mind. ▶

Value for money

How do I make changes to my membership?

Gyms moved fast to freeze memberships in March, avoiding a wave of cancellations. The harder part is when and how to unfreeze memberships.

Looking at the average sentiment, David Lloyd Clubs had the highest proportion of negative tweets. Their members have been asking about and debating refunds. The vouchers and passes on offer have been described as being of a higher value than a refund. However not all members see these as better value for money.

Across all gyms, members have been asking about how unfreezing will work. Some members of each chain are getting frustrated by the cancellation processes. They don't

want, or can't afford to be charged when memberships are unfrozen.

A DW Fitness First member summed up the feelings of members across several gym chains when asking "How do we give notice to cancel when nobody answers the phone or responds to tweets/messages?"

For other members, the need is for a flexible approach to unfreezing. A David Lloyd member commented that there's been "no mention about the option to remain frozen if you don't feel a gym is safe yet".

Pure Gym is handling this issue well, replying to individual social media posts and offering to extend the freeze to all members who don't yet feel comfortable attending.

Convenience

How will queues and bookings work?

From this, some members have concluded that a booking system would be preferable to queuing up. But this raised further concerns when people reflect on how well class booking systems worked in the past.

One tweeted "At first I thought a booking system would be better, but then I thought of all the times people have booked into classes in the past and haven't turned up. It would be the same in this situation, people booking and then not turning up."

The solution, for the likes of PureGym, is that their app shows how busy the gym currently is. However, this message doesn't seem to have got through to everyone yet.

The prospect of queues has also had people asking if it's really a one-size fits all approach, or whether there will be a VIP line for members who have a pre-booked PT session or class.

Members are questioning whether there will be a VIP booking option

Community

How will you avoid the previous over-crowding?

Gyms have been going to great lengths to show how they are separating workout areas and adding social distancing to queues. However, some members have been reflecting on how busy their gym was before.

Assuming demand is as high, but capacity is limited, they can't see how the plans will work in reality.

One asked "You advised customers to visit the gyms at quieter times but as soon as the gyms reopen, there will not be 'quieter' times, as it will be a high demand. How will you manage to control this?"

Another asked "Will you be restricting the numbers, as just before lockdown this was limited to 200, which in my opinion is still too many?"

Peace of mind

How will you sustain the hygiene standards?

Hygiene is always an emotive topic, as members judge the quality based on expectations and past experiences.

Most feedback is not collected in real-time, leaving members to make generic criticisms that gyms can't easily address, however, COVID-19 is changing this – members are becoming more conscious of the hygiene they expect, and how that compares to what went before.

Tweets and Instagram posts are focusing on two main areas. How clean they believe their gym will be kept, and how well members will contribute by wiping down.

Perceptions vary greatly, with one Pure Gym member saying: "Your gyms are always filthy." A Bannatyne member tweeted "Bannatyne gym in Birmingham was cleaner before lockdown with hand sanitiser dispensers and equipment cleaned by members and staff."

But hygiene responsibilities don't just rest with staff, a PureGym member said: "You're lucky if 1 in 20 people clean what they use. Personally I think staff should be super strict and anyone seen using something and not cleaning it should be asked to leave".

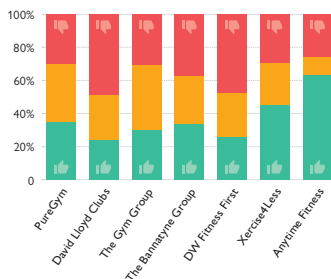


Social media chatter can give operators vital insights into customer sentiment

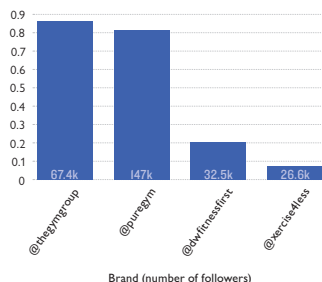
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Gyms have been going to great lengths to show how they are separating workout areas and adding social distancing, however, members have been reflecting on how busy the gym was before

Sentiment of the tweets mentioning each brand



% of followers who've viewed the information video + actual numbers



SOCIAL MEDIA STORM

Absolutely gutted to hear gyms won't be reopening soon – as a recovering alcoholic/addict who suffers from anxiety and depression the gym is an integral part of my recovery and life

Will priority be given to those members that have continued to financially support the gym throughout the pandemic, if you revert to online booking for a gym slot?

Is the membership going to be cheaper too?

Gyms are vital for our mental & physical health. Just look at the distances @puregymofficial & @thegymgroup have gone to ensure the safety of their staff & members. Oh, and in addition to that, the majority of PTs are self employed and relying on our gyms being open to live. We're on our knees atm, BUT it's okay because... pints are okay??

I'm guessing that those who continued their membership through the closures will be given preference when access finally returns?

It only takes one person with COVID-19 to walk in and undo everything you have done – I know you have said "if you have had symptoms don't come to the gym", however, some people don't show sign of any symptoms yet have it. With all this in mind, I don't see myself returning to the gym soon

So there's no guarantee we get into the gym straight away and we may have to queue to get in?? Why wouldn't you adopt a time booking system so as to not waste peoples' time?"

When I finish work at 5pm I want the gym. At this time it will be full and I'll be waiting in a queue. I need the gym on my time when I need it – that's why I pay for it. I will be back when it gets back to normal

Seriously love this gym too much, can't wait to see all the lovely staff again

I can not wait!!!!
Bring on the gains!


Can't wait. I've turned into a pudding. Me and my pals were on a roll in the gym Monday to Friday at 4.30am and just getting the love for it again after a good few years out

My quads have halved in size!

Due to my mental health I won't be able to return any time soon. I struggle with queueing due to paranoia and anxiety. I have to get in, do what I do and leave. I will need to extend the pause or cancel for the time being

Can't wait to be back, not easy to keep on track when u r surrounded by all the comfort food!

Can't wait to get back and work off my lockdown love handles!



It's time to showcase
the great experiences
gyms can still offer

THE NEED TO RE ENGAGE MEMBERS

Ultimately, social media analysis shows how many members love the gym, with one writing: "Lockdown would've been a breeze if gyms were open," and another saying: "The delay to reopening is desperately sad. For the first time in my life I think I'm getting a gut."

The upshot of this analysis is that members are divided. Some can't wait to get back, some are more cautious, and some want to cancel and spend their money elsewhere. One described their gym membership as a 'luxury they can no longer afford'.

It's vital that operators engage with members emotionally as well as logically.

The "we are ready" videos – aimed at government as well as members – are a good start. But they've focused on facts, and how the supply-side of the equation is changing. The experience will be safer, but not necessarily as compelling in the short-term. Based on the comments members are making, gyms need to go further.

The benefits of being in a gym, rather than exercising outside or at home, aren't obvious to everybody. The buzz that members get from a great class or weights session isn't obvious when seeing footage of empty gyms and closed off equipment. Among the 'sleeping' members who've kept paying without attending, this need is even greater. They're going to notice their DD coming back, and they're going to question its value.

So now we've had the 'what's changing' videos, we need the 'what's still the same' videos. Aimed squarely at existing members, it's time to showcase the great experiences gyms can still offer.

Paul Roberts and Mike Evans run insight company, www.mycustomerlens.com



**The buzz that members
get from a great class
or weights session isn't
obvious when seeing
footage of empty gyms**

*Equity funding could drive some
of the much-predicted consolidation
in the boutique sector* ”

THE FIGHTBACK BEGINS

Change is coming, with consolidation likely in the market – especially in the boutique sector. Nadim Meer advises operators how to position themselves for investment



Nadim Meer

As lockdown restrictions begin to lift, fitness businesses are focusing on navigating the new (socially distanced) landscape and getting a better idea of the impact the pandemic is having on their business model and longer-term financing requirements.

Some will not survive and some will not reopen. However, this will allow other operators space to grow and develop in a market that's less crowded compared to the pre-COVID landscape.

In terms of sources of finance, operators will need to look for suitable sources of funding that fit their business model – one realistic target for raising capital will be the private equity and private capital community.

While some investment activity is on hold at present, history suggests that following a crisis there is a flight of capital towards private companies. If you add to this the fact that pre-COVID there were many private equity funds sitting on significant amounts of uninvested capital and that – historically – their best returns have been made when investing in

the aftermath of a crisis, many private equity investors will be keen to return to the market and deploy capital as soon as possible.

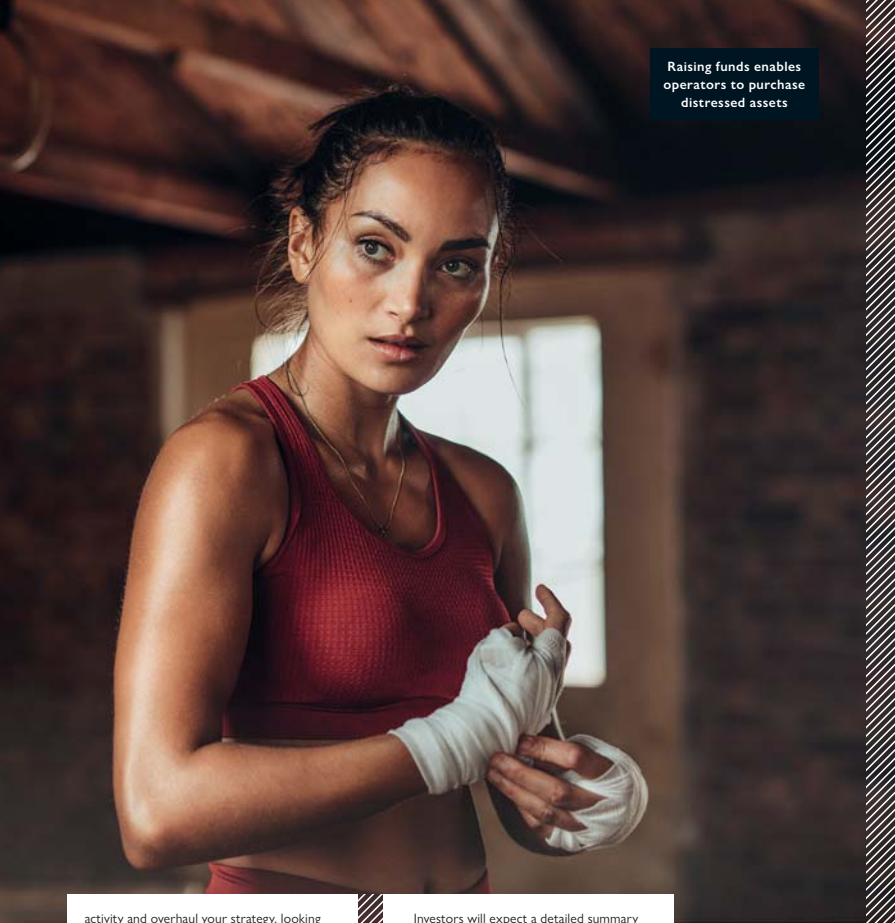
In terms of timing, however, we are unlikely to see much private equity investment before Q4 of this year. Valuations are too uncertain and few investors would be prepared to hand over their cash without having met the management in the flesh.

Although we're hearing about some deals which have been completed over Zoom, for the majority of investors, this isn't a substitute for meeting face to face when it comes to the private equity investment world.

This will be challenging news for businesses that are experiencing a cash squeeze, as rent and other payments become payable and the furlough scheme is wound down, however, it does allow those that are better capitalised the luxury of time to plan and position the business for investment.

Get ready for investment

Now is the time to prepare – take a long, hard and dispassionate look at all aspects of your operation. Innovate, improve digital



activity and overhaul your strategy, looking ahead three to four years. Do everything you can to position your business as best-in-class.

If a business in the fitness sector makes it through to Q4 this year, it will have done everything it can to reduce costs, manage its cash and ride out the storm. However, in order to raise equity funding, you'll need to create a credible, sustainable plan for growth, including an information memorandum setting out details of the business, as well as the ways you plan to achieve growth (expanding the digital offering, franchising, licensing, acquisitions and/or opening new sites, for example). You'll also need financial projections and legal and financial due diligence materials.

Investors will expect a detailed summary of the impact of COVID-19 on the business. Counterintuitively, this is a great opportunity to showcase investability, the strength of the management team, resilience to shock and the ability to adapt, evolve and survive. These are essential components investors look for.

The COVID report should address:

- Any immediate action you took to protect the business (eg. rent deals, furlough, adaptive working programmes for staff, VAT, PAYE, business rate deferrals, applications for CBILs, etc.).
- How you adjusted your business model and working practices. This may still be evolving, but should be clear by the time you fundraise.

Fallout from the pandemic will see consolidation in the boutique market

JACOB LUND SHUTTERSTOCK

- Preparedness for a second lockdown and ability to withstand further shocks.
- Customer retention rates after reopening.

Another key consideration will be the need to be realistic about the value of the business now. 'Top of the market', full valuation deals, with shareholders selling out completely, are unlikely to be seen for a while. However, less aggressive deal structures that offer investors some form of downside-protection and an element of shared risk will be most common.

This may look unattractive on paper, but if it's the price to be paid for securing funding to scale up and grow – and to build a war chest that allows the business to thrive and outperform competitors – it may prove to be a wise decision three to four years down the line.

Consolidating the boutique sector

For those in the boutique sector, equity funding could now drive some of the much-predicted consolidation in the sector. There are close to 300 studios and boutique gyms in London alone and the cash constraints caused by COVID-19 will be having an impact.

The logic of bringing a number of boutique brands under one platform, offering best-in-class activity to the same customers, as well as avoiding the margin erosion of ClassPass, may be unstoppable.

Historically,
private equity's best
returns have been made
when investing in the
aftermath of a crisis

Boutiques that emerge from the crisis will find that a strong brand, a compelling online presence, customer loyalty, a robust financial model and a strong management team will all make them attractive to investors, as platforms from which competitors are acquired and roll-outs are executed.

The challenge for boutiques will be to try to be the ones that drive the consolidation rather than being subsumed by it. ●

Nadim Meer is head of private equity at Mishcon de Reya



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Is it safe for me to use your club?

IHRSA's Kristen Walsh gets a briefing from Blair McHaney on how operators can use gym member insight to inform reopening decisions and practices

As the world moves out of lockdown, a few developments seem inevitable: there's a likelihood of a resurgence of the virus, the return to normal will require the creation of a vaccine, and the resurrection of the economy will be gradual and challenging.

Members whose clubs have reopened, or individuals who – in ordinary times – would be considered prospects, will have concerns. Some are out of the exercise habit, others will have become comfortable with at-home workouts, perhaps some will have suffered financial setbacks. Many, given the uncertainty, will have adopted a wait-and-see attitude about new commitments of any sort.

But the number one question is undoubtedly, is it safe to make use of a club? And the number one imperative is to ensure it is.

A data-driven strategy

Few people know this better than Blair McHaney, a 40 year industry veteran and owner of two WORX (workout prescription) fitness facilities in Washington State, US. McHaney is also founder and CEO of Member Experience Metrics (MXM), a research, consulting and educational firm.

MXM is a corporate partner of Medallia, the customer experience management software supplier that works with companies such as Airbnb and Mercedes. MXM uses Medallia's technology in its consultancy work with its 700 client clubs.

McHaney also employs Medallia in his own facilities to design data-driven member-experiences. "We practice what we preach in our own clubs," he says. "Our clubs are our laboratories."

Medallia SaaS platform

The Medallia SaaS platform allows users to establish in broad terms how gym members feel, and what they're thinking, about their club. What do they like or dislike?



What would they like more, or less, of? What issues are they concerned about?

That information is put in the hands of owners, managers and front-line staff to drive improvements.

"Understanding your members' concerns is essential to your reopening success," says McHaney. "One of a club's most valuable assets, as we come out of this crisis, is hearing the 'voice' of the consumer. If

that's not a leading indicator of what's happening in your club, you're flying in a thick fog without instruments.

"Club operators should be listening to their customers, doing their best to improve operations, and monitoring feedback to anticipate and exceed their new expectations," he says. "You can't market your way out of the pandemic. You can only behave your way out of it."

Customer insight

Since April, MXM has been using a lockdown survey system – a combination of two surveys that encompass the lockdown and startup phases of clubs' reinvention – and using this to support the two WORX gyms, MXM clients and also the wider fitness industry.

The system (details at the end), enables operators to add their own logo, incorporate it into an email, send this out to their members and then use the reporting and analytics provided by MXM to mine the data for insights about member attitudes and behaviours.

The picture that emerges provides a guide to what clubs have to do to gain (or regain) the trust and business of members and prospects.

Find out more at www.HCMmag.com/MXMsurvey.

What's being learned

As facilities worldwide reopen, it's clear customers will judge whether re-launched businesses sink or swim. "You need to communicate and to convince, through your daily operations," says McHaney. "You may think you're succeeding, but you won't really know until you hear it from your customers."



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*You may think you're
succeeding, but you won't
really know until you hear
it from your customers*

You can't market your way out of the pandemic. You can only behave your way out of it

FIVE STEPS TO SAFETY

Based on member feedback, McHaney has developed a template, called Five Steps to Safety, that operators can draw on when formulating their reopening plans

1 Encourage every member to roll up their sleeves and clean

Do everything possible to make it simple for members to police themselves when it comes to cleanliness and responsible behavior.

Do your members know what's expected of them? Rules and regulations should be specific and easy to understand and implement. If there's a violation, there should be a clear and well-defined follow-up policy.

2 Ensure every member of staff is a compliance ambassador

"Two factors critical in driving customer loyalty are cleanliness and staff friendliness," says McHaney.

"You have to teach staff to be compliance ambassadors, in order to sustain cleaning practices, while remaining courteous. Club operators need to set and enforce clear standards for performance, while maintaining a delicate balance."

3 Distribute cleaning substances widely (and keep them full)

This is one of those issues that needs to be revisited regularly on the basis of member comments or surveys. "You think you have enough spray bottles or sani-wipe dispensers out there, but then you get feedback saying, 'It's too hard to find a spray bottle,'" observes McHaney. "You think, 'I was sure 50 was more than enough,' but your scores are soft on this, while the edge on member's voices are hard."

Once, while reviewing his research, McHaney found one word kept

surfacing. "The word 'empty' started to appear a lot," he recalls. "It was a revelation. Not only do you need wipes, towels and cleansers; you also need to make sure containers are never, ever empty. It only needs to happen once and people remember."

4 Be generous with the hand sanitiser

Battery-powered sanitiser dispensers should be available both outside and inside the main entrances, in locker rooms and in high-touch areas.

Other tools for minimising contact and contamination include battery-operated soap dispensers; automatic doors and foot and forearm door openers.

MXM's data indicates that making hand sanitising easy is critical to members' likelihood-to-return. "You don't have to have hand sanitiser stations everywhere," says McHaney. "You could, for example, distribute hand sanitising bottles with your club's logo on them, which members can refill as needed."

5 Educate, market, and advertise

Make sure members know in detail all you're doing to keep them safe: "You'd better be good at communicating that you're best-in-class at doing this," says McHaney.

Signage and well-informed staff should inform customers about the importance, and benefits, of the club's new operating procedures. Videos explaining and extolling its behind-the-scenes practices to guarantee member safety should also be prominent on the club's website and social media pages. ●



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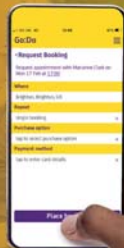
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{ *The way I see it* }

*Consumers are already
digitally addicted.
They're there, waiting
for us to catch up*



Francesco Arlotti

Digital acceleration

As Technogym launches its new virtual and on-demand services, Francesco Arlotti, head of digital solutions, shares his thoughts with HCM



*We must understand what consumers want
– focus on their needs rather than ours – and
steer away from commoditising our product*

*The digitisation of
the sector was going
to happen anyway.
COVID-19 has simply
accelerated the
digital transformation*

*This crisis is an
opportunity – it's
thrown a spotlight on
why our penetration
rates were stagnating
and forced us to be more
creative in meeting
customers' needs*

*An exclusively
offline model is
not a good option.
Neither is exclusively
online. There needs
to be a blend*



Clubs have a real possibility to become wellness hubs and completely innovate their business models – for example, by interacting with insurance companies, medical organisations and the corporate world



A digital proposition can only be effectively monetised if it's seamless

The pandemic has given consumers a greater appreciation of good physical and mental health and handed us a more receptive audience

We need to move members away from free fitness content on Facebook and Instagram. Operators need to re-establish a more regular relationship with members

Our goal is to leverage the huge ecosystem we've created to offer people training experiences in line with their goals, personality and passions

{ *The way I see it* }

Home is a safe space for people with safety concerns around COVID-19, as well as those who haven't used a gym before. Don't fight the safe space, be in alliance with it

15 million people across 15,000 clubs globally are registered on Technogym's Mywellness system. It's about helping operators stay connected to their members 24/7

Gyms and home fitness are not competitors, says Ariotti. People are getting accustomed to training in both



{ Just because you're market leader for phase one in the development of a market, that doesn't mean you'll still be market leader through the second, third and subsequent phases. Technogym didn't fall into this trap. We continually evolve and develop. With digital, nothing ever stands still }



We're launching a library of virtual on demand classes created by Technogym; if operators want to upload their own classes, they can do that too. Also launching is Coach Live video chat: live streaming where instructors can see people training at home and feed back on technique

Read the full interview with Francesco Ariotti in the Q2 edition of Fit Tech magazine. www.fittechglobal.com/archive

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Best Defence

Finding the best ways to boost immunity using exercise has never been more important. Two fitness equipment developers have taken up the challenge, with protocols that assist in strengthening the body's defences

If there's a positive to be found in the COVID-19 pandemic, it surely must be society's awakening as to the importance of staying healthy as a defence against illness, and the vital role exercise plays in this. According to research collated by the NHS, exercise can reduce the risk of major illnesses by up to 50 per cent, and lower your risk of early death by 30 per cent. As people around the world went into lockdown, exercise suddenly became a daily habit, rather than a forgotten chore.

Now gyms around the world are reopening, two fitness equipment developers – EGYM and Wattbike – are directly addressing the question of how exercise can best be utilised to boost the body's defences to disease.

Their solutions consider three main risk factors. Firstly, immunity declines with age. This could explain why Covid-19 has proved to be particularly dangerous to older adults. According to Dr Nir Barzilai, scientific director of the American Federation for Aging Research, vulnerability increases start around the age of 55, when natural killer cells that usually fight infections become less effective at destroying virus-infected cells.

Secondly, excess fat tissue increases inflammation. Obese or overweight individuals are almost twice as likely to die from COVID-19 and influenza. Thirdly, studies also show that patients who have type 2 diabetes or other metabolic syndromes are ten times more at risk of dying from COVID-19.

With an ageing population and a growing obesity epidemic, a high percentage of the population is extremely vulnerable to potentially life threatening infections such as, but not limited to, COVID-19.

"The pandemic has heightened awareness of immunology and the vulnerability of certain demographic groups to infection," says Andreas Grabisch-Mikula, data and sports scientist, EGYM. "Long after COVID-19 has been controlled, the benefits of a strong immune system will remain."

"Through the application of training programmes based on scientific evidence, exercise can play a key role in the fight against infection for everyone, especially older adults, obese adults and those with underlying metabolic health conditions."

Eddie Fletcher, Wattbike lead sport scientist agrees: "Sport and exercise science has always been the bedrock of everything we do. With the pandemic shining a light on the unhealthy state of the world, we decided it was time to explore the sometimes complicated relationship between exercise, the immune system, and medical conditions."

*We take a closer look
at the products from
EGYM and Wattbike*



EGYM • Immunity Boost



Andreas Grabisch-Mikula is data and sports scientist at EGYM

What is it? A 30 minute strength training programme, supported by a pre-workout stretch routine and a light cardiovascular cool-down

The science:

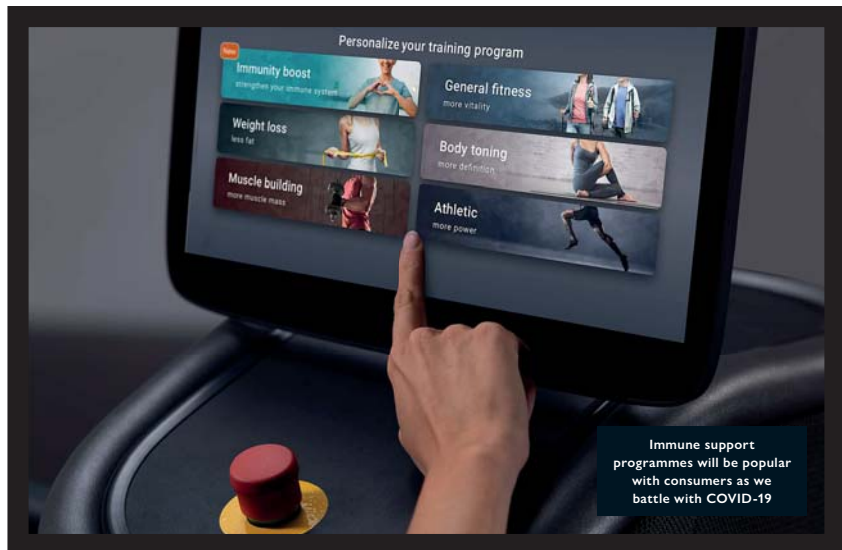
"Exercise immunology is a relatively new area of scientific research, with 90 per cent of the papers on this topic published in the last 30 years, but the evidence supporting the positive impact of strength training on the immune system is compelling," says Grabisch-Mikula. "There's also significant evidence to suggest a positive correlation between cardiovascular activity and a reduction in inflammation," he continues. "Boosting immunity and suppressing inflammation have been scientifically shown to improve an individual's ability to fight infection. Having completed an extensive review of literature on these two subjects – long before COVID-19 became a global threat – we set about designing an exercise programme that would trigger these specific responses. The result is our Immunity Boost programme."

The main premise of Immunity Boost is based on the physiological effects of strength training on the immune system. Professor Janet Lord, director of the Institute of Inflammation and Ageing at the University of Birmingham explains: "Skeletal muscle helps the immune system, because muscular contraction produces small proteins called myokines, that seek and destroy infection in the body and keep inflammation from getting out of hand."

However, scientific evidence suggests that long and strenuous workouts can cause something called the 'open window effect'.

This theory proposes that short-term suppression of the immune system can follow an acute bout of endurance exercise, creating a window of 3-72 hours during which time there is an increased susceptibility to the onset of upper respiratory illness.

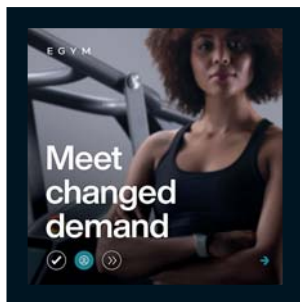
"To maximise the training benefit," explains Grabisch-Mikula, "The EGYM Immunity Boost programme provides optimal intensity and progression to promote the release of as many protective myokines as possible, but without activating the open window effect and increasing the risk of infection."



Immune support programmes will be popular with consumers as we battle with COVID-19



The Open Window effect proposes that short-term suppression of the immune system follows an acute bout of endurance exercise, creating a window of increased susceptibility to upper respiratory illness



The programme:

Designed to be completed at least twice per week, the 12-week Immunity Boost programme is split into four training phases, which ensure that the user progresses at an effective, safe rate, firing up immune responses, while protecting the negative effects of over-training.

The programme includes intra-set pauses, meaning that rather than a set of 15 reps, the set is broken down further into repetitions of five, broken by a pause before completing the next five. The effect of this is a decrease in exertion and an elevation of intramuscular bloodflow, which protects against suppression of the immune response.

Immunity Boost appears as a pre-programmed, 30-minute, strength training plan and is available on EGYM's Smart strength training circuit. Once the user has performed a single-rep isokinetic strength test on each piece of equipment and provided personal data, such as gender, age and weight, the programme prescribes bespoke intensity, sets, repetitions and cadence in the optimal mix, to fire up the immune system, while also protecting against the immunity suppression associated with over-training.

EGYM recommends a stretch routine prior to each strength training session, to increase lymphatic flow and improve oxygen flow – both



factors which activate the immune system. A cardiovascular cool-down completes the session.

According to a paper by Hooren & Peake (2018), an active cool-down can prevent the depression of levels of circulating immune cells.

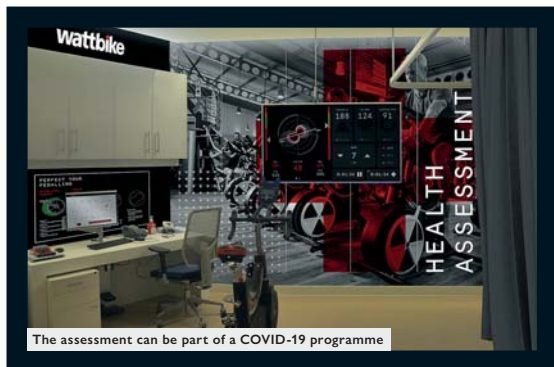
Get on board:

EGYM is presenting Immunity Boost in a number of formats to ensure accessibility to as wide an audience as possible.

The programme is prescribed through the EGYM Smart strength circuit, supported by the Smart Flex mobility circuit.

Progression can also be logged and monitored through the EGYM Branded Member App and for operators who don't have access to Smart Flex or Smart Strength, a modified version is available via the EGYM Branded Member App – currently available free of charge through the COVID-19 re-opening phase.

More: www.HCMmag.com/immunityboost

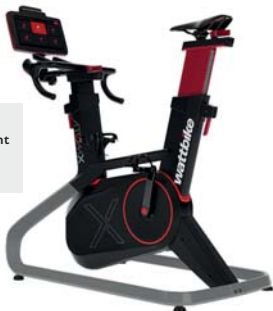


Wattbike

● The Wattbike Health Assessment

What is it? A test that shows individuals their current health and fitness benchmarks; and assigns a personalised training plan and individual training zones to improve their health and decrease their risk of developing a health condition

The Wattbike Health Assessment programme is free of charge



The science:

Research into the benefits of exercise have identified cardiorespiratory fitness (CRF) as an accurate way to measure someone's physical health – in simple terms it indicates how effective the body is at transporting oxygen to the places it's needed. Measuring someone's CRF clearly shows their 'functional capacity'.

Having good levels of CRF is dependent on the status of a linked chain of processes in the body, which operates through the respiratory, cardiovascular and skeletal muscle systems.

A growing number of studies have found that CRF is a more powerful predictor of mortality risk than most other traditional indicators, such as hypertension, smoking, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. Mounting evidence has firmly established that low levels of CRF are associated



with a high risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality rates attributable to various cancers.

Although it's not a diagnosis test, the CRF test can function as an initial risk assessment, and can be used as a preventative measure to determine if an individual is at particular risk of developing cardiorespiratory or metabolic disorders based on their CRF score.

The health assessment:


Wattbike has created an easy-to-do, accessible and accurate test that gives each individual their CRF score and predicted VO₂max to show people their current health and fitness benchmarks. Following the test, the system provides a personalised training plan and individual training zones that will increase their CRF score by the end of the recommended training block.

The training plan is crucial, because according to Dr Richard Simpson, an associate professor at the Department of Nutritional Sciences, Paediatrics and Immunobiology at the University of Arizona, with each bout of exercise, and particularly whole-body cardiorespiratory exercise, millions of immune cells are immediately mobilised. Especially those types of cells that are capable of recognising and killing virus-infected cells.

Partnership with BUPA:

The Wattbike Health Assessment can be accessed via the Wattbike Hub app and is free of charge to access. Thanks to an official partnership with Bupa, anyone can sign up to undertake the Wattbike Health Assessment at numerous Bupa clinics around the UK or even at home. www.HCMmag.com/healthassessment

With each bout of exercise, millions of immune cells are mobilised, especially those that kill virus-infected cells



*If you don't have
a hybrid digital/
physical model,
you won't survive*

PAUL BOWMAN

To stay relevant and at the heart of the fitness experience, gyms and studios must rethink the customer journey, creating packages that match the online fitness behaviours that have been forged in times of crisis, says the CEO of Wexer. He speaks to Kate Cracknell

Has COVID-19 changed the way you perceive the fitness future?

Put bluntly, if you don't have a hybrid digital/physical model, you won't survive. I'm more certain than ever of this. Think about how disruptive low-cost was for those who didn't respond quickly enough. Digital will be equally disruptive.

It's no longer a question of 'do we go digital?' The only question is: do you merge digital into physical, or physical into digital? Which is most likely to succeed? I genuinely believe it will be the latter. The hybrid model is the way things have to be moving forward.

What was the standout change for you during the lockdown?

My biggest learning throughout this crisis relates to home-grown talent: new fitness rockstars have been born.

With the entire sector forced to pivot to an online model to provide workout content to those stuck at home, instructors have come to the fore. They've produced some excellent content and reminded us how good they are.

As we continue towards a hybrid future, we need to recognise the power these instructors and trainers hold. They're now the content creators. They can engage large audiences and are hugely valuable. We need new career paths

that maximise this, empowering them to take more ownership of content-related projects that enhance and build operators' brands.

I'm not alone in this opinion. I recently heard an interview with Gold's Gym CEO, Adam Zeitsiff, in which he stressed the importance of using your own talent to drive in-club and digital customer journeys.

Zeitsiff was clear the home fitness experience must be delivered on your own platform, not a third-party channel – like Instagram or YouTube – which you can't monetise or use to generate any brand loyalty.

This is the biggest mistake operators have made in the rush to get online. Third parties offered quick, easy solutions, but clubs have effectively given away their contacts, their opportunity to gather data and insights and their ownership of the customer relationship to these B2C platforms. They now have to wrest it back.

What evidence do you have to support the case for a hybrid future?

We were seeing strong growth in on-demand fitness before COVID-19. Spend on traditional gyms and classes grew around 5 per cent in 2019; on-demand fitness spend jumped nearly 59 per cent in the same year.

This growth was from a small base: online accounted for only 6 per cent of the market, set ▶

We did some research comparing monthly turnstile swipes with online classes during lockdown, and found the correlation was 96 % – people were maintaining their usual routines

► against the 72 per cent share enjoyed by traditional health clubs. However, the trend is there. Not only that, but on-demand retention figures beat most traditional operators: about half of online fitness customers are retained for nine months or more.

Our growth trajectory echoes these findings. In 2019, we saw a 66 per cent growth in the number of Wexer Virtual classes being run around the world – up to 10 million from 6 million in 2018 – and a 59 per cent growth in mobile revenues.

So, digital fitness was already growing fast. Then COVID-19 happened and things accelerated exponentially: we had clients whose online user base grew 10-fold almost overnight. An insightful new report from Mindbody, published in May, made similar findings. Between March and May 2020, during COVID lockdown, 71.5 per cent of its respondents had taken part in pre-recorded virtual classes, and 81 per cent in live streamed classes – up from 17 per cent and 7 per cent respectively in 2019.

How about the response from consumers?

During lockdown, online was one of people's only options, but they certainly maximised these opportunities to stay active. We did some research with three of our clients, comparing the usual monthly turnstile swipes with online classes attended during lockdown, and found the correlation to be 96 per cent – that is, almost exactly the same number of online workouts being done as would normally be done in-club. Neither was this skewed by online 'super users': the operators reported that people were to a large extent maintaining their usual routines.

Many respondents in the Mindbody survey were exercising more often: the proportion of people exercising on a daily basis jumped from 5 per cent before lockdown to 22 per cent throughout the period March – May 2020,

CHROMA/SHUTTERSTOCK

If we can get people hooked on our content, there will be a larger number interested in fitness when we're able to operate normally

driven both by having more time on their hands and by the convenience of online platforms.

It seems this shift towards online is not simply a temporary measure for some people: 43 per cent said that, post-lockdown, they would continue to do at-home virtual classes, as well as going back to the gym. Of those, 60 per cent expected to add two or three live streamed workouts a week.

As we emerge from lockdown, consumers have a greater understanding of the value of fitness and the options available to them beyond the gym. We're projecting the delivery of 25 million workouts through our ecosystem in 2020, for example.

Is hybrid the right model for every operator?

I believe it is. Before COVID, the boutique sector was the only one I was in two minds about: the brands were strong enough to be able to extend into the online space, but equally the in-person experience was hugely important. Now – at least for the foreseeable future, with in-person capacity limited due to social distancing – even just from a commercial standpoint, I believe every club and studio has to adopt a hybrid model.



About Wexer

The company is a digital fitness provider whose 'ecosystem' of products is designed to enable operators to own members' in- and out-of-club fitness experiences through the provision of a hybrid offering.

Wexer Virtual is an on-site solution, designed for big screens in group exercise studios. It offers 1,500 virtual group classes, curated from 60 content partners, all of which can be scheduled or made available on-demand.

Wexer's mobile portfolio includes three products: a white label app; an SDK (software development kit) solution, which allows content from the Wexer App to be integrated into operators' own apps; and the Wexer Web Player, a white label, password-protected portal that can be accessed through any internet-enabled device.

This allows operators to upload their own live streamed and on-demand content, featuring their own instructors, as well as providing an on-demand library of 600 virtual classes from Wexer's global content partners – the likes of Zumba, Cyberobics, Intelligent Cycling, MegaMace and Boxx, among many others.

Complementing these core products is a series of partnership products, including heart rate training system Wexer Beat – created with Motosumo – and Body Bike Switch.

However, it does require flexibility and a new approach to membership structures. It also requires operators to be nimble, because priorities are shifting fast. Clubs must get used to testing small and fast among members, former members and prospects – quickly learning as they go.

What might new membership structures look like?

Online content can't be free forever. It has to be monetised. However, if operators just look at their current membership packages and try to crowbar digital in as an add-on, they'll limit their creativity. They'll also fall into the trap of overtly attributing a price to an online offering that was previously free, and that's a difficult conversation to have.

What's needed is a fresh approach that combines digital support and physical attendance into new membership tiers: the more a member pays, the more personalised the offering becomes online and the more human elements there are to it.

Clubs could even test dynamic pricing, whereby members pay less per experience the more experiences they book. That could be a way to drive

revenues – because the end goal for most will still be high-yielding memberships. However, there does need to be far more flexibility and choice in membership structures than has been the case to date.

It's hard when operators have previous revenues in mind. The instinct is to look at how the sustainability of the physical offering might be affected, if a lot of members opt for a digitally-skewed membership that commands a lower price tag.

However, it's important to recognise that digital opens you up to a bigger audience. There may be less revenue per head, but there are many more heads to go after. In fact, during lockdown, 40 per cent of all spend on live streamed and pre-recorded workouts went to businesses those individuals had never physically visited.

A hybrid model offers potential to grow your market, so it's time to be bold and rethink pricing and membership tiers.

Any other thoughts for operators looking to adopt a hybrid model?

Map out your entire online customer journey and your entire in-club journey and review them with a ►

► critical eye. Where do they overlap? What can you add to them? What are their respective USPs?

We know exercising 2+ times a week drives loyalty to the platform or brand facilitating it, so start with the objective of getting people to work out three times a week. Where might that mean a digital workout and where it might be in-person?

And how do you combine all of this into new packages that put the customer first, making sure you're offering something for everyone, wherever and whenever they want it?

Pre-COVID, digital was seen as an online extension of the in-club experience, but lockdown has flipped this on its head. Clubs should now start with the home fitness journey, working out how to gain a competitive advantage here, before working out how to dovetail physical visits into this.

What might the digital element of a hybrid model look like?

We're likely to see three content prongs: professionally produced live streaming of operators' top stars; amateur live streaming by local instructors; and a large on-demand library.

You need all three prongs to engage all audiences. Lockdown has shown the power of gyms' own talent, and we know live streaming delivers high levels of

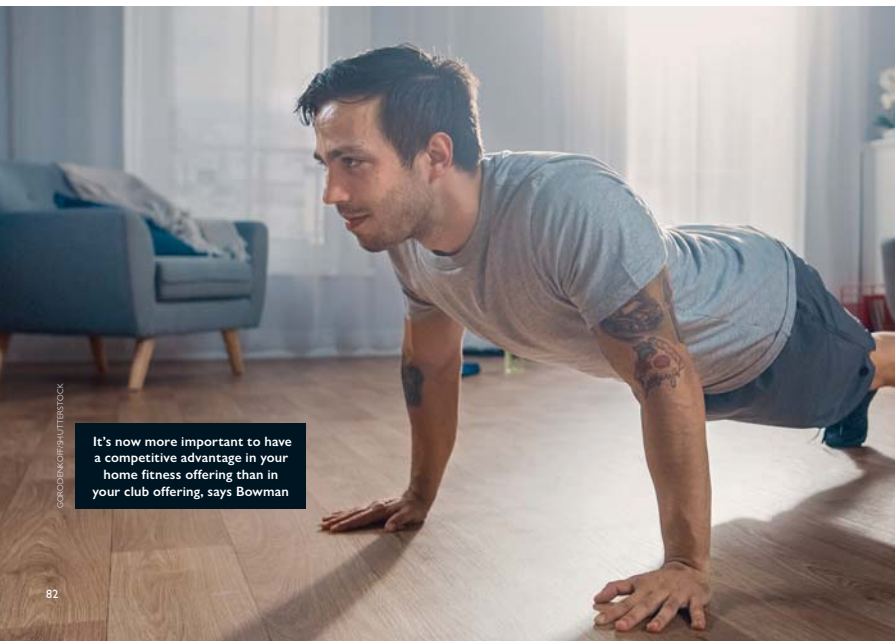
engagement. But online requires strength in depth to be sustainable, with multiple class options available in every class type and every length, because people only do the same online class twice before they look for something new. This compared to doing the same in-club virtual class eight times. In-club it's about the social. Online it's all about variety.

What innovations are you working on?

With the above three prongs in mind we've evolved our Web Player product – an online fitness platform we can white label for clubs that can be accessed on any internet-enabled device. It's password-protected, so it can be monetised.

The Web Player has always provided access to hundreds of on-demand, music licence-free classes, curated from our global content providers. The classes mirror those available on Wexer Virtual, meaning people can enjoy the same on-demand classes at home as in-club. There's something for everyone, and variety within each workout type – a useful resource as clubs re-open and instructors have less time to spend on content creation.

However, going back to my main learning from this crisis, clubs will want to use their own instructors to create their own content, so last month, we launched Web Player Connect – a new solution



It's now more important to have a competitive advantage in your home fitness offering than in your club offering, says Bowman



Wexer Virtual can serve up scheduled and on-demand content in-club



Operators should start with the home fitness journey, working out how to gain a competitive advantage here, before working out how to dovetail physical visits into this

- ▶ that's integrated into the Web Player and that gives operators their own TV channel, at no extra cost.

Clubs can use Web Player Connect to stream their own content on their own branded platform, meaning all three prongs of digital content sit together in the same monetisable, branded space.

For quality control, all Web Player Connect content goes into a production folder, allowing HQ to review before sending it live.

Will the in-club experience also change?

In clubs that have already re-opened, we're seeing higher demand for virtual classes. This is currently the only way to take part in group exercise in many clubs, and with social distancing meaning reduced capacity, classes are regularly full.

We expect live streaming to come into its own, both to members' devices out of the club and to overflow zones in-club.

But we need to think more creatively, including making physical visits more of a VIP experience.

In April, we did member research via clients in Australia, Germany and the US, and members told us they expected their clubs to reward them for being loyal online members. As an example, while social distancing remains in force, they felt only those who regularly did online classes with a specific instructor should be given the chance to book into a (limited capacity) live class with them.

This need for VIP in-person experiences will continue in the long-term too, even once there's a vaccine or the pandemic is under control. Training at home is just so convenient; home is where the bread and butter of fitness will now happen. People will still be willing to pay for programming, expertise and support, but the baseline of this will be delivered online via convenient, high-quality, personalised fitness content.

In-person will have to be more special, with experiential events that take place both in clubs and at other great locations via partnerships. We'll see a rationalisation of club portfolios and a growth in VIP pop-up experiences.

What re-opening challenges do you foresee?

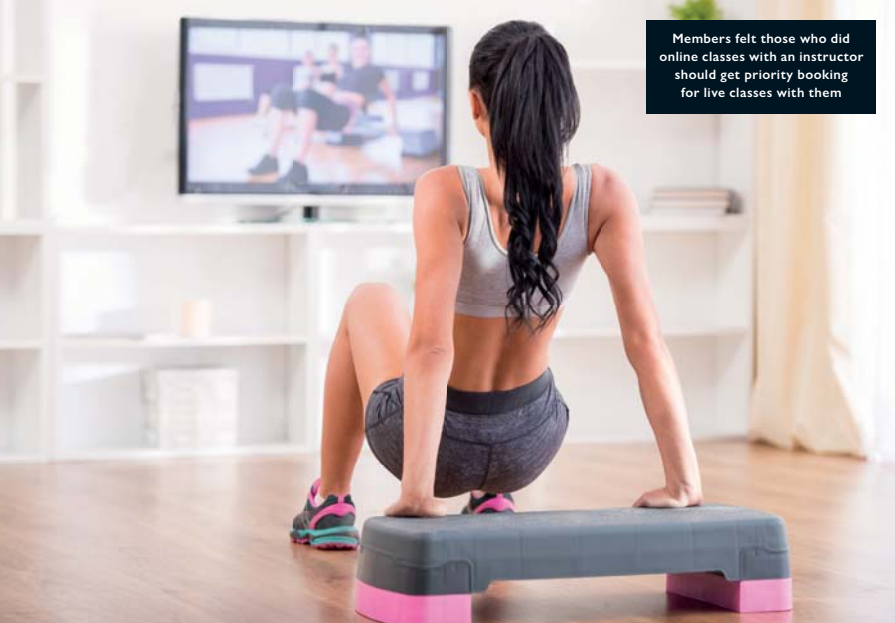
Whatever the re-opening criteria agreed by governments around the world, we know we can do it: our sector is good at operations.

Our biggest challenge isn't an internal one. It's that some consumers don't trust each other to do the right thing: to stay a safe distance away, to clean equipment after every use, not to cough on each other.

Until there's a vaccine, the question is likely to remain in people's minds: do I really want to exercise at the gym? People want to be active, but they don't want to be at risk. Particularly in those markets heavily impacted by COVID, it will take time for attendance numbers to return to normal.



Members felt those who did online classes with an instructor should get priority booking for live classes with them



And that's why I believe operators need to look first at their digital home fitness journey, then dovetail a VIP in-person experience into this. It's now more important to have a competitive advantage in your home fitness offering than in your club-based offering.

What excites you most about the move to digital?

In recent years, fitness has been all about consolidation – low-cost and premium operators squeezing the mid-market to the point of being price-driven.

All of a sudden, we have a real opportunity to add bucket loads of value. As an industry, we're being forced to work out a journey that engages more people in fitness – and as a result, this is the time when we can shoot up to 20 per cent population penetration, and beyond.

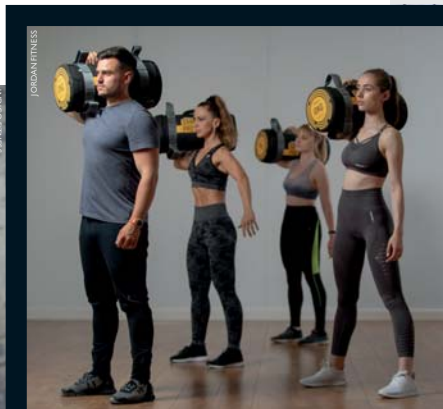
Clubs need to get better at analysing the user data that online platforms gather. We've talked about personalisation for years. Digital fitness is the way to speed it up – it's both the tool to gather the data, and the channel through which to deliver personalisation. That's hugely exciting.

If we can do all this well, and get people hooked on our content, there will be a far larger base of people interested in fitness when we're finally back to being able to operate clubs normally. These are the members of the future. That is, unless providers such as Instagram grab them first. And that's why it's important for operators to own their online experience. ●

***During lockdown,
40% of all spend on
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individuals had never
physically visited***



INDOOR FITNESS



Fusion fitness opens up the opportunity to get creative with a wide range of equipment

FUSION FITNESS

Fitness enthusiasts are on the hunt for new ways to elevate their workouts. Fusion fitness is fitting the bill by making strength training more accessible

Fusion fitness combines elements into a single format. Popular examples include 'Piloxing', a mix of Pilates and Boxing and the combining of group exercise with cardio and strength training. "Fusion classes combine cardio, strength training, bodyweight movements and mobility," explains Matt Cottle, master coach at Precor. "They're accessible and scalable to any member of the gym community and enable members to experience continuous improvement through high-intensity interval training, so they never hit a plateau."

As fusion fitness evolves, it's becoming tech-driven, in terms of delivery and member experience. This is leading to greater opportunity for interactive, immersive and on-demand workouts, where gym members can combine their favourite equipment and training methods with personalised, engaging content – a fusion of physical and digital. "Technology and content are the present and future of the industry,

creating countless possibilities for fusion-style workouts," believes Jill Drummond, from Freemotion Fitness.

The growing demand for multi-discipline workouts means we'll see ever more creativity from operators, dreaming up previously unseen combinations of training methods to entice new and existing members through the doors.

What's causing the boom?

The industry has moved to a more experiential model, largely propelled by Millennials and Gen Z, who value experiences over material assets.

"Fusion fitness is adaptable and is especially beneficial for anyone looking to make new friends while they enjoy a multi-discipline workout," says Marc Edwards, from the Jordan Training Academy. "It's possible to train every movement pattern in a single session and there's social interaction and subsequently a feeling of integration."

Another factor is workout efficiency – fusion workouts allow exercisers to

PRECOR/QUESTNAX



Safeguard open spaces
and don't crowbar
them in at the end of an
equipment-centric design

squeeze more into every session, as Matt Gleed from Matrix Fitness explains: "Gone are the days where members used to spend hours in the gym doing an hour of cardio, then some strength, before heading poolside, they want the most effective workout in the most efficient timeframe. This is why combining, or fusing training techniques has become popular, especially for small group training."

The mass appeal of fusion fitness is also thought to be contributing to the growth. "It's suitable for all ages, genders and abilities – fusion fitness offers something for everyone," says Ben Steadman, from Pulse. "Couple this with great locations and venues and the fusion market is thriving. Amazing lighting and sound, combined with an engaging experience are driving this market forward."

Don't forget the bigger picture, says Physical Company's James Anderson, who believes fusion offers the variety people crave: "Functional training is also fusion fitness. While many see it as a series of strength exercises, it's a catch-

all term that encompasses a wide variety of exercises and disciplines, making it the ultimate full-body, fusion workout.

"We're encouraging operators to shift their mindset," says Anderson. "Free weights, group exercise, functional, and small group training are the styles members are increasingly looking for, and this demands a new approach to facility design. You have to safeguard open spaces and not crowbar them in at the end of an equipment-centric design.

Strength and group ex

The list of strength training benefits is long – increasing bone density, metabolism and lean muscle mass while improving body mechanics and decreasing the risk of chronic disease. However, statistics from uKactive suggest only 24 per cent of women and 34 per cent of men aged 19 to 65 are performing two strength training sessions a week, as per the government's guidelines. The question is, why? ▶



Ben Steadman

***Strength training
used to be male-
dominated, but
fusion fitness
has made it a
free for all***



Pete McCall

Small group training on a rig can combine strength with HIIT, making it the epitome of fusion fitness

Trygga Fitness does fusion

Trygga Fitness Sweden has created new workouts including "HIIT n RUN" that combines HIIT and aerobic exercise to build strength, stamina and endurance.

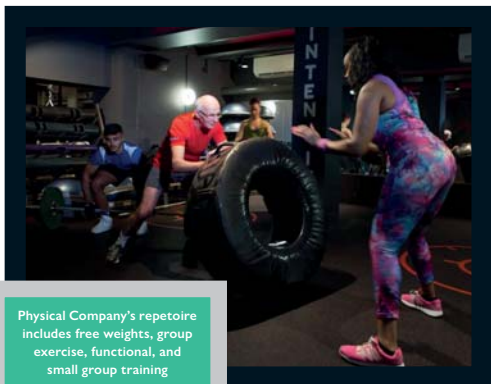
Offered in one-hour sessions and led by an experienced instructor, the class incorporates training with dumbbells, treadmills, benches and the Core Health & Fitness BoxMaster conditioning machine to deliver a full-body cardio workout.

- The most likely reasons are fear of injury, gymtimidation, a shortage of strength training knowledge, lack of funds to hire a PT, a dislike of strength training, or a combination of the above.

Strength training in a group exercise class or a small group training programme has the power to overcome these barriers, explains Drummond. "Fusion workouts offer a taste of multiple formats, they don't require participants to be an expert in any one area. They thrive on variety and they're the perfect way to introduce a new format to your members without the gymtimidation."

Gleed believes fusion workouts hold the key to encouraging a higher percentage of a gym's community to incorporate strength training into their routines. "By mixing group exercise and strength, you reach new target groups. Members who never prioritised strength training on the gym floor find it fun and accessible in a group setting," he says.

"Fusion fitness has made strength training exciting, immersive and different," says Steadman. "Historically, strength was seen as male-dominated and group exercise was a female domain. Fusion has made this a free-for-all. There are many incredible group exercise offerings that are as effective for men as they are for women and vice versa."



Physical Company's repertoire includes free weights, group exercise, functional, and small group training

Fusion fitness is evolving and being influenced by other emerging areas of the industry, so partnerships between operators and suppliers are essential. "We're listening to operators and offering them special touches that aid the delivery of a premium fusion experience," says Steadman. "Tech is playing a major role in our equipment in 2020. Making experiences more immersive is a big part of the success of the fusion fitness market."

Tom Rooke from Indigo Fitness says: "Strength training has been around for years but recently, interest in it has grown, due to CrossFit-type workouts and their exposure on social media. This increased knowledge in the wider public has allowed for stigmas to be countered and overcome."

Indigo Fitness is working with operators to create tailored solutions by combining experience and innovation. "We enable operators to deliver fusion fitness by combining knowledge of strength training with bespoke manufactured rigs and storage with suitable flooring; this lifts training areas to the next level," says Rooke.

"Small group training on a rig can combine strength training with high-intensity interval training for up to 10 or 12 people at a time," which is "the epitome of fusion fitness," says Pete McCall, master trainer at Core Health & Fitness. "Any of these products and programmes – combined with a talented and engaging coach – can deliver the solutions operators want to provide for members."

PaviFLEX

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PaviFLEX

GYM FLOORING

STRENGTH



Fusion at TigerFit

Chris Clark, co-owner of TigerFit in Minneapolis with his wife Tracie, believes in a training model based on mobility, stability and strength. They specified the Freemotion Fusion CST to create a total body workout that fuses cardio with strength.

Through his background working with elite athletes, Clark has created a 45-minute Fusion CST workout, as well as combining Fusion CST with other calorie-burning equipment such as the Freemotion Incline Trainer.

Athletes training at TigerFit have been able to focus on strength while also improving agility and speed.

He said: "Soon, we'll be blending Fusion CST workouts with the new Freemotion CoachBike to create a new cardio and strength experience."

GET KITTED UP

The surge in fusion fitness is causing many industry manufacturers to develop equipment, gym layout and education solutions

Freemotion Fitness has invented a new fusion fitness machine, with programming, called Fusion CST (Cardio Strength Trainer), which will launch summer 2020. "It's geared at countering gymtimidation while providing a great experience," says Drummond. "Enabling individuals that are nervous about hitting the weight section a chance to do weight training, together with cardio, in one of the most popular formats – group training," she says.

"Members get the benefits of strength and cardio – burning fat and building muscle in record time. Another feature of the Fusion CST is its open design, which makes it accessible to all and challenging for each individual."

The connection between equipment and education is paramount, as Gleed explains: "Matrix Fitness has developed programmes and equipment to provide operators with options to incorporate fusion fitness."

"The Sprint8 programme, which can be used across all cardio equipment, creates a 20-minute workout to target the four pillars of fitness; strength, endurance, power, and cardio, in a workout with undulating periodisation."

"We've also developed MX4 and MX4 Active small group training programmes to combine cardio and strength for active and deconditioned users, so there's a class for every ability," he says.

According to Cottle, Precor is also enhancing its fusion fitness offering by devising programmes that enable operators to maximise their equipment. "Precor offers kit tailored to fusion-style workouts, such as the Queenax rig, which



Matrix Fitness has developed programmes and equipment for fusion



Jill Drummond

Fusion workouts offer a taste of multiple formats – perfect for adding variety

offer a choice of exercises and group training options. To complement this, the Precor Coaching centre has created programmes to add value to operators and infinite fusion fitness training options, which will launch later this year."

Jordan Fitness has turned its attention to programming, as Edwards explains: "Fusion fitness is a perfect blend of every modality of functional training and for us, has led to the creation of our Ignite Group Exercise Programme."

"Made up of six elements of movement-based activities, IGNITE workouts (Pump, Strike, Lift, Swing, Move, Stretch) use a mix of functional equipment, from studio barbells to sandbags in the pursuit of individual performance." ●

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The background of the advertisement is a photograph of a gym setting. In the foreground, a woman with blonde hair in a bun is lifting a yellow dumbbell with both arms. To her right, a man in a red long-sleeved shirt and grey trousers is also lifting a purple dumbbell with both arms. In the background, another man in a black t-shirt is using a piece of gym equipment. The overall atmosphere is active and inclusive.

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MX4
By **MATRIX**



The new gym has a diverse range of equipment from Matrix

Elite partnership

University College Birmingham has invested in elite performance facilities for students and staff, in partnership with Matrix Fitness

Functionality for both the student gym and the human performance centre was key, but the visual impact was also a driving factor," explains Elaine Limond, assistant dean of sport. "We chose to work with Matrix Fitness because their tender demonstrated their experience working with universities, their understanding of our vision and the added value they bring to their clients."

The new commercial gym has a mix of Matrix Fitness cardio equipment with 7xi entertainment consoles, the Matrix Versa Dual Strength series of resistance equipment and – due to student demand – an increased free weights area and functional training space, including a Matrix Double Mega Rack.



"This wasn't just about supplying gym equipment, but about supporting a team from start to finish during an incredibly visual install"

Stephen Nutt, Matrix

Human performance lab

The teaching space comprises a 550sq m Human Performance Centre with a 70sq m human performance lab that includes a multitude of elite performance equipment and incorporates two 84 inch computer screens for teaching purposes, to show live data from the force plate under the 35m sprint track.

"Both facilities are on the top floor of a stunning new building," Limond continues. "The power racks run down the full length of a glass wall and are the first things visitors see, creating an impressive visual effect."

"Our staff and students love the new offering and, having opened before lockdown began, our members had a chance to enjoy the new facilities."

"Within the first week of opening, gym memberships had increased by 50 per cent. Now we're looking forward to welcoming our community back."

Delivering on a vision

"The Matrix Fitness team was supportive and responded quickly to all our needs," explains Limond. "They brought our vision to life and offered valuable insights throughout, making suggestions for many things we hadn't considered."

"With their support, we've futureproofed the facility, while still offering flexibility, which is important, as sport is a growth area within the University."

"The equipment fitted the bill in terms of functionality and visuals."



"The Matrix team brought our vision to life and offered valuable insights throughout, to enable us to futureproof the facility"

Elaine Limond, UCB

Student support

The facilities give students insights into elite performance training methods in preparation for careers after graduating. They also attract athletes in a wide range of disciplines who are excited to train within the centre, further supporting student development.

Stephen Nutt, head of sales for the education market at Matrix Fitness added: "This wasn't just about supplying gym equipment, but about supporting a team from start to finish during an incredibly visual install."

"The team involved academic staff – a refreshing approach that enabled us to design and create these elite performance facilities in record time."

Find out more: www.matrixfitness.co.uk



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"Everyone Active is the perfect partner for us, as its membership contains such a vast range of ages"

Paul Ferris, Speedflex UK & Ireland



Studios are welcoming for all age groups, while the concept is non-DOMS

Thriving together

Speedflex has created a synergistic partnership with Everyone Active to deliver a new boutique concept – FORTIS Powered by Speedflex

Leading HIIT training specialist Speedflex is working with Everyone Active to create the ultimate group fitness experience.

The concept, FORTIS Powered by Speedflex, takes place in stunning new boutique studios, specially created within Everyone Active centres.

These offer Speedflex's famous, 'HIIT without the hurt', a high-energy group workout in a boutique setting, which leaves participants free of next-day-DOMS.

The concept

Everyone Active wanted something to elevate the member experience and the partners began discussions in July 2019, entering into a joint venture to create an experience which takes Speedflex to the next level.

It was agreed an exclusive brand would be developed, with Everyone Active creating the look and feel and Speedflex bringing its experience in programming, training and equipment.

"We wanted to create something different for customers," says Duncan Jefford, regional director for Everyone Active. "Speedflex is unique and the programming, combined with the look and feel of the studios, is different from anything else in the market."

"Because it's non-DOMS exercise, customers won't feel muscle soreness the next day, despite having done an intense 30-minute workout. The beauty of it is, you could take a class seven days a week."



"The beauty of it is you could take a class seven days a week"

Duncan Jefford, Everyone Active

The studios

As Everyone Active has such a wide membership base, from Gen Z through to the over 70s, both brands needed to ensure they created the right environment that would appeal to all.

The goal was to create a contemporary design, without using the dark disco feel which is popular with so many boutiques.

This resulted in a gold scheme that creates a cutting-edge design, while still retaining a warm welcoming feel. Each studio has a textured black matte wall and a neon LED sign displaying the concept strapline. Ceilings are matte black and lights with gold reflectors help achieve a warm effect.

The studios include FORTIS branded auxiliary stations for an unlimited variety of workouts, combined with a full MYZONE set-up to provide members with heart rate data and feedback on their effort level.

Participant data is displayed on an LED video screen designed to fill almost an entire wall and provide high-quality visuals.

Delivering FORTIS

As a joint venture, both brands are fully invested in the project to ensure the concept delivers the best possible experience.

Everyone Active is using an instructor teaching hybrid model, deploying members of its fitness team who've gone through a programme of training with Speedflex's team of master trainers, while also recruiting new instructors externally.

Each studio has 10 qualified instructors – the aim is to have 120 to 150 within the next year or so.

Plans for the future

Since launching in January 2020, three FORTIS studios have been created; Chichester, Hemel Hempstead and London, with plans to launch 15 in total – three in London and 12 outside.

"Everyone Active is the perfect partner for us, as its membership contains such a vast range of ages," says Paul Ferris, CEO, Speedflex UK and Ireland. "FORTIS, Powered by Speedflex, is the ultimate in inclusive workouts. A 22-year-old member can be in a class with an 82-year-old and they can both work out to their maximum with no aches and pains the next day."

Find out more: www.speedflex.com



In the spotlight

Although the show has been rescheduled, the six winners of the FIBO Innovation and Trend Awards 2020 have still been announced. We take a look at the companies whose developments help motivate people to live healthier lives

THE PANEL

An international panel of experts was once again responsible for assessing the quality of submissions for the 2020 awards. Members included:



**Prof Dr
Ingo Fröböse**

University professor
for prevention and
rehabilitation at
the German Sport
University Cologne



Dr Niels Nagel
Office manager
at DIFG eV



**Prof Dr
Thomas Rieger**

Professor for sports
management at the
University of Applied
Sciences Europe



**Natalia
Karbasova**

Founder of FitTech
Summit



Anja Beverwijk

Communications
executive and
event director at
EuropeActive

HCM is global media partner of FIBO



Category: Digital Fitness

Exhibitor: Sphery AG

Product: The ExerCube League

An entirely new form of competition took home the award in this category.

The ExerCube is an immersive, functional fitness game that's suitable for both training and competition.

The game challenges the body and mind simultaneously and can be adapted to fitness level, gender and age.

FIBO says, "Sphery has taken advantage of eSports' popularity to offer people an attractive and integrative entry to the world of fitness."

The league presents fitness studios with a training programme that's motivational. Sphery is also hoping to reach active eSports athletes, for

whom this game can serve as a supplementary training tool to help combat the physical problems associated with playing games while sitting.

The ExerCube League is the 'physical eSports league for everyone.'

The panel's assessment:

The ExerCube League serves the exergaming market and is based on scientific studies. The winning product opens up new ways to motivate people to take up and pursue training over the long-term, with a combination of physical activity, gaming and cognitive learning. This cognitive learning represents a new growth market for the fitness industry.



Category: Lifestyle, Life-Balance & Wellness

Exhibitor: JK-International GmbH

Product: Ergoline Sun Angel Spectra

The 2020 winner in the category 'Lifestyle, Life-Balance & Wellness' is the Ergoline Sun Angel Spectra. This Medical Active-certified sunbed has an integrated skin sensor that measures the sensitivity of the user's skin to prevent sunburn.

The Sun Angel offers a 'Vitamin D Programme' without direct tanning, as well as an entirely UV-free beauty programme for skincare and collagen formation.

The Robert Koch Institute estimates that more than half of all German adults suffer from insufficient vitamin D. The Sun Angel offers a way of creating this vitamin in

the natural way, using controlled UVB light.

The panel's assessment:

The Ergoline Sun Angel Spectra offers a new interpretation of sunbeds and tanning in fitness studios, giving them a larger role within the framework of health and prevention.

In recent years, trends have seen people moving a greater share of their activities indoors, resulting in less exposure to sunlight. This has had an impact on people's health, such as through insufficient levels of vitamin D. The winning product closes the gap between societal requirements and trends and biological necessity.

Category: Health & Prevention

Exhibitor: Schwa-medico GmbH

Product: Symbiont

Symbiont offers a combination of real-time training data with electro-stimulation training.

This certified medical product makes it possible to compare perceived exertion during training with objectively measured values such as pulse, HRV, EMG, movement sensors and body composition in real time. This allows the optimum documentation and management of individual progress.

Symbiont supports all forms of conventional training activities, as well as EMS training. Its wireless technology makes it easy to use.

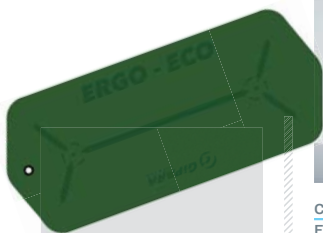
Users can share some or all of the results achieved, progress made and data generated in

any form required. Links to doctors, therapists, trainers, coaches, team members and social communities are available at the touch of a button.

The panel's assessment:

Symbiont makes it possible to connect EMS training with the collection of a wide range of biophysiological data. This leads to the optimisation of training control and monitoring in EMS training, while increasing its effectiveness and efficiency. At the same time, the tool can be used independently of EMS training, such as for measuring body data in other training situations – examples include utilisation as an assessment tool for strength training.



**Category:****Ecology & Sustainability****Exhibitor: IMG Quality****Design Sp. Z o.o. Sp. k.****Product: Ergo-Eco Mat**

A fully recyclable training mat is the winner in the category 'Ecology & Sustainability'. The Ergo-Eco Mat is primarily composed of sugar cane, which entirely replaces the resins that would normally be used. This mat's environmental footprint represents a valuable sales tool. Furthermore, the fact that it contains no hazardous substances means users training with this mat are also protecting their own health.

Fitness studios can demonstrate their ecological responsibility by using these mats. The Ergo-Eco Mat is also impressive when it comes to functionality, offering good shock absorption during training and excellent durability.

The panel's assessment:

The Ergo-Eco Mat is the right product for the times – a training mat that is fully recyclable, helping reduce waste.

As it becomes ever more important for society as a whole, and, therefore, also for the fitness industry, to develop products that are sustainable and environmentally friendly, this mat – made out of sugar cane – is an excellent example of an innovative solution.

The Ergo-Eco Mat boasts all the advantages offered by plants – including the absorption of CO₂ and reduced emissions.

It can be employed just like a conventional mat and satisfies all use and durability requirements.

**Category: Performance****Exhibitor: Eleiko Group AB****Product: Evo Rotating Dumbbell**

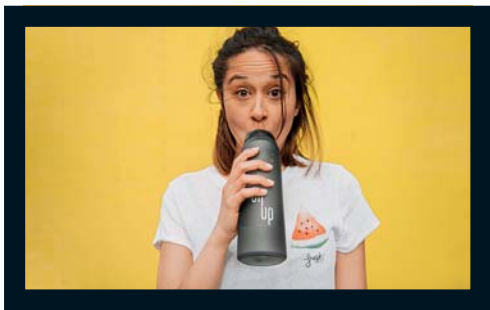
Evo Rotating Dumbbells are equipped with a rotating grip that allows users to lift them in a controlled and secure fashion. Their design creates a grip diameter that is significantly smaller than conventional dumbbells, making the Evo Rotating Dumbbell suitable for a wider range of users.

The dumbbells' special grip design also has a patent pending.

The panel's assessment:

The Evo Rotating Dumbbells' rotation mechanism makes it the first to simulate barbell training, raising strength training with free weights to a whole new level.

"Utilisation of Evo Rotating Dumbbells' makes it possible to raise trainees' motivation, while stimulating improved results," said the judges.

**Category: Start-ups****Exhibitor: air up GmbH****Product: Air Up**

Air Up is the world's first drinking bottle that lends flavour to water using only scent, and it has been selected as the winner of the FIBO Innovation Award 2020 in the start-up category.

The Air Up bottle relies on retro-nasal olfaction through the mouth. The bottle's replaceable scent pods add fragrant air to the water as it is drunk. When the water is swallowed, these scents separate from the water and rise through the pharynx to the smell centre, where they are perceived as taste. The beverage

itself continues to be pure water.

With its innovative product, Air Up has declared war on the excessive consumption of sugar in soft drinks, offering an effective aid for people who do not like to drink plain water.

The panel's assessment:

Air Up is offering a novel new drinking experience – pure water is transformed into a taste experience without adding anything whatsoever. In this way, Air Up is one of many innovative start-ups addressing essential issues such as sustainability for the fitness industry and providing new solutions. Air Up is a unique new product that unites two sensory qualities: taste and smell.

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