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UNITING THE WORLD OF FITNESS

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INSOURCING *p54*

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PHOTO: RSG GROUP

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New competition

The pandemic has disrupted everything and as businesses across the leisure industry reshape themselves to survive and thrive, new competition is emerging that will change the sector

Business is going to be like the Wild West for the next few years, with opportunities emerging, investors vying to back a 'sure thing', an inevitable percentage of business failures and competition coming from every direction. This much is clear from the frenzy of activity happening in the market since lockdowns started to ease around the world.

The pandemic is also re-shaping all sectors of the leisure market, making change inevitable when it comes to competition coming from new directions.

Although a big focus has been on how home fitness and digital will impact brick and mortar operations, this debate is now turning back to the reshaping of the facilities market.

The hospitality industry has been a sleeping giant in terms of its potential to harness the growth of health, fitness, activity and wellness, but the pandemic has woken it from its slumber.

The global tourism sector lost a billion trips in 2020 according to the World Tourism Organization and hotel strategists are turning their gaze to the health and fitness sector in their quest for alternative income streams from reliable, repeat customers.

We're seeing hotel operators refurbishing their gyms or opening new ones and pointing their marketing firepower at local audiences to sign up consumers as members, bringing them head to head with gym operators.

There's also an emerging trend within the hospitality sector of hotels changing to be full-service private members' clubs and this will create new competition for gyms in urban locations.

The resorts sector is eyeing the fitness market too and in this issue, we talk to Stelian Iacob, CEO of Therme Group (page 16), which is doing a global roll-out of its health and wellness day resort concept, with eyes on Asia Pacific, North America and mainland Europe.

Therme is currently on-site in Manchester UK, building a 100,000sq m resort that will accommodate 7,500 people a day. This may sound ambitious, but three more are planned for the UK alone.

PHOTO: THERME GROUP

Therme's day resorts have full health and fitness offerings

> **The hospitality industry has been a sleeping giant in terms of its potential to harness the growth of health and fitness**

Therme is a broad offering, with pools and spa and wellness facilities, as well as a programme of exercise options, fitness classes, yoga and Pilates, starting at £14/day.

The company has traded well through the crisis at its existing sites and says the model is pandemic-proof.

So with all this change happening, consumers will have an increasingly wide range of choices when it comes to what they join and where and how they spend their money.

We can expect these new businesses to invest in, join and enrich our sector, as well as representing new competition. Existing health and fitness operators and trade organisations will need to be alive to the need to respond.

Liz Terry, editor
lizterry@leisuremedia.com

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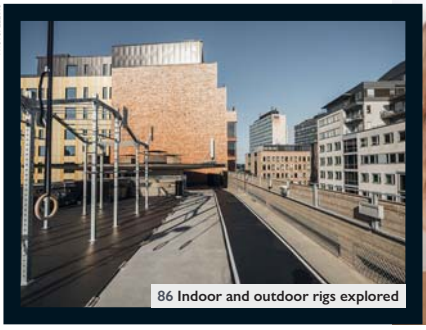

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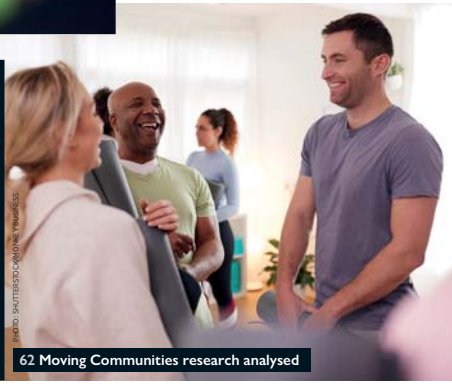

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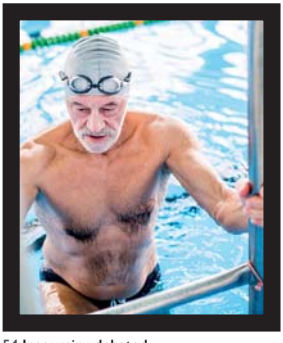

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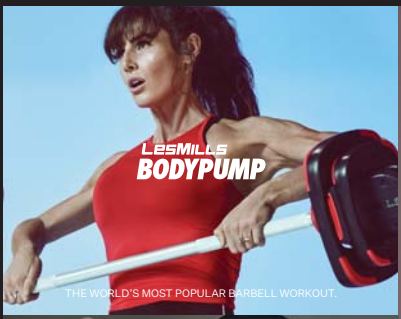

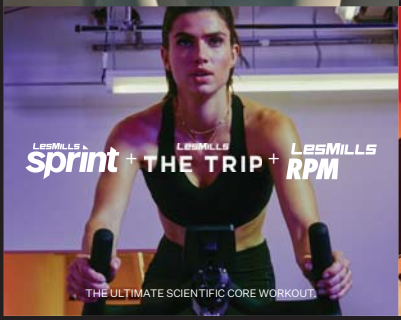

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Write to reply

Fuel the debate about issues and opportunities across the industry. We'd love to hear from you – *healthclub@leisuremedia.com*

> *Workforce mental wellbeing is a key responsibility that all employers need to understand and embrace*

Katie Lewis, Workplace Mental Wealth

Following recent coverage in *HCM* on the *Workforce State of Mind Report* – the first sector-wide exploration of workforce mental health (see *HCM* issue 3 2021 p76), my colleague Lindsey Simpson and I – authors of the report – welcome the publication of ISO45003:2021, the first global standard for managing psychological health at work.

Whilst ISO045003 is a voluntary standard, all employers should be aware of its existence and the guidance it offers. Its practical advice on managing psycho-social risk as part of an occupational health and safety management system can ensure adequate policies and procedures are in place to protect the mental wellbeing of the workforce, driving happiness, health and prosperity.

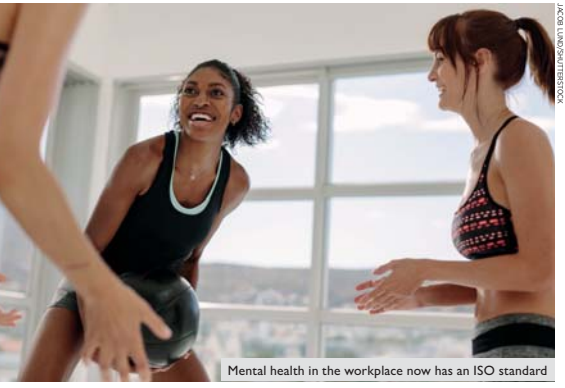
That said, ISO45003 will be an aspirational standard for many organisations and some may choose to work towards it by first committing to the Six Mental Health Core Standards adopted by The Good Work Pledge and outlined in the UK government-backed *Thriving at Work Review*.

Once these foundations are achieved, employers can then move on to focus on the attainment of the more ambitious standards set out in ISO45003.

While legislation that protects workforce mental health is not yet as robust and comprehensive as that which protects physical health, the publication of ISO45003, plus the increasing pressure to make the inclusion of Mental Health First Aiders in the workplace mandatory, is pushing the agenda in that direction.

Employers should not bury their heads in the sand, workforce mental wellbeing is a key responsibility that all employers need to understand and embrace.

- To learn more, watch the short video at: www.HCMmag.com/ISO45003
- Sign The Good Work Pledge: www.workplacementalwealth.com/pledge



JACOB LUND/SHUTTERSTOCK

Mental health in the workplace now has an ISO standard

JACOB LUND/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Retrain initiative has already requalified 18,000 people

Before Retrain kicked off, 30,000 professionals had been planning to leave the industry

Alan Cooper, Freestyle

When lockdown was eased it became clear there were thousands of staff in the industry not legally able to work because their qualifications had lapsed.

The economics of the sector were tough enough without the challenge of a workforce that couldn't legally work without their qualifications being refreshed.

Sport England and CIMSPA recognised this shortfall and launched the Retrain initiative to fast-track the revalidation of these qualifications – 11 weeks later the campaign's app was up and running and by May 2021, 18,000 people had already been able to requalify.

Before Retrain kicked off, 30,000 professionals had been planning to leave the industry as a result of uncertainty about the future.

Working behind the scenes we used agile working methods to build a digital matching tool, to identify where qualifications were needed and where training or retraining was available.

The Retrain effort rapidly got the industry back into working order, thanks to this agile approach to building the matching tool from scratch in such a short time.

For all the amazing efforts of Sport England and CIMSPA and their partners, we're still a long way from recovery – we're continuing to see the impact of the pandemic, even though restrictions have been lifted and facilities open to all.

ukactive's projections from March this year were for a potential loss of a third of all facilities and up to 100,000 jobs.

Thankfully, however, new initiatives are coming to the fore to redress this, including the Retrain programme.

Retrain has shown us the power of smart digital thinking combined with an agile approach. While we celebrate the success of the initiative, this isn't the time to stop – we need to look forward. Add into the mix much needed government support and we will help bring our industry back to life.

More: www.HCMmag.com/freestyle

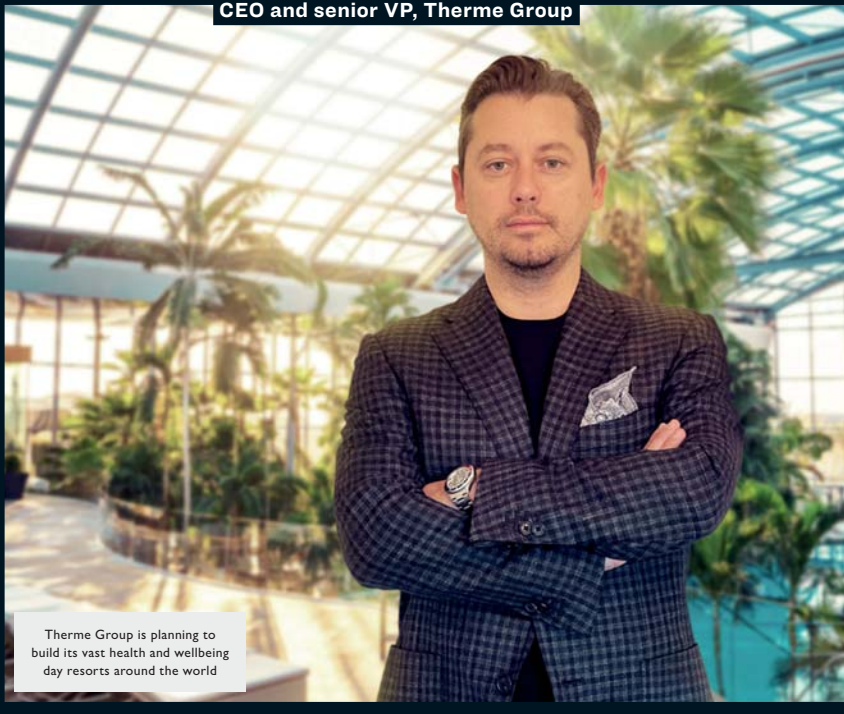
HCM people

We're seeing a much greater focus on the need to integrate healthy living into daily life and reconnect with nature and each other

Stelian Iacob

CEO and senior VP, Therme Group

PHOTO: THERME GROUP



Therme Group is planning to build its vast health and wellbeing day resorts around the world

The 28-acre Manchester site, which will have capacity for 7,500 people a day, is the first of four in the UK

PHOTO: THERME GROUP MANCHESTER

Therme Group is a rapidly expanding urban day resort developer creating vast wellness destinations around the world, offering everything from health and fitness activities to affordable wellness therapies, with a range of options such as multi-sensory saunas, therapeutic mineral pools, wave pools and waterslides.

"Our City-based wellbeing resorts have been designed to offer an urban oasis for mind, body and spirit, while redefining the concept of wellbeing, with activities for children, adults and seniors – offering them both fun leisure time and relaxation," says Stelian Iacob, COO and senior vice-president.

"Wellbeing has become a luxury for the privileged few," he says. "But looking back to Roman and Elizabethan times, thermal spas weren't just about relaxing and unwinding. They were for people of all backgrounds to meet, socialise and immerse themselves in culture in a way that benefitted all the dimensions of wellbeing: mental, physical, social and spiritual. And this is our goal."

There are four existing developments for day guests run by Therme Group and Thermengruppe Josef Wund – three in Germany and one in Romania – which welcome 3.4 million visitors a year. Most recently, Therme Group secured planning permission for its biggest venue to date – a £250m (US$353.3m, €290.4m) development in Manchester, UK. But plans don't stop there. The group is also looking at three other sites in the UK, one in Scotland, one in Wales and another near London.

On a world scale it's working on further projects in Asia Pacific, North America and mainland Europe where one has just been confirmed in Frankfurt. Iacob insists none of these have been affected by COVID-19. If anything, they've been bolstered by it.

"The pandemic has shone a light on the global wellbeing crisis," he says. "We're seeing a much greater focus, by countries, organisations and the population at large, on the need to integrate healthy living into daily life and reconnect with nature and each other."

Technically speaking

Therme Group is headquartered in Vienna, with offices in North America, Europe and Asia. It's a part of A-Heat, a global firm specialising in heat exchange engineering.

It's this background that led the company to plan and develop large-scale resorts based on thermal water.

To give an idea of size, Therme Bucharest in Romania, which opened in 2016, covers 30,000sq m and can fit up to 4,000 guests at a time. Iacob describes ▸

> 800,000 plants, including 1,500 palm trees and countless species of orchids create areas for yoga, Pilates and meditation

it as "the world's first fully sustainable thermal health resort with LEED Platinum certification".

He explains: "We use state-of-the-art sustainable systems based on natural processes to purify the environment, so guests are always breathing the freshest air and swimming in the cleanest water". Filtration systems monitor and adapt levels of airflow, heat, humidity and light, for example. Meanwhile, he says water recirculation systems create – in a matter of hours – geological processes which would normally take hundreds of years to produce water as 'clean as the purest spring water'.

The water at all of Therme's resorts is heated in a sustainable manner, whether from a natural source, such as a 3km deep geothermal well in Bucharest or via processes such as heat recovery, heat exchange, trigeneration and solar panels.

How it all started

The first resort opened in Germany in 2010 in collaboration with Wund Holding, a global developer and operator of leisure and bathing facilities.

Just before the pandemic, Therme and Wund announced a strategic partnership that sees them joining forces to drive international expansion. The move includes the consolidation of their architectural and planning services to create a new division called Therme Arc. However, specific owner/management structures have not been disclosed and Iacob says these will "vary by global region, country and project".

Wellbeing for all

"We're returning to the essence of global health and bathing traditions, but have reimagined them for the modern, urbanised world, driven by our belief in all aspects of 'wellbeing for all'," says Iacob of Therme Group's concept. The facilities do this by offering a broad range of wellness, fitness and water-based activities all under one roof, in accessible locations and at affordable prices.

The thermal complexes are split into distinct zones. In Bucharest, for example, these include Galaxy, with its 16 waterslides and wave pools and The Palm which focuses on relaxation with a huge tropical lagoon, aromatherapy pools, outdoor pool for bathing and activities such as daily, water-based fitness classes and an external beach for summer use. Elysium, for people aged 16 and over, is a wellness area that can host up to 800 people at a time. It features a panoramic pool enriched with zinc and selenium, six themed saunas, an infrared lounger area and three treatment cabins.

"The dedicated adult areas offer an essential opportunity to 'unplug' from the stresses and strains

Therme Manchester will cover 100,000sq m and is a new health and wellbeing concept for the UK

PHOTO: THERME GROUP MANCHESTER

of daily life, including the always-on digital world," says Iacob. "They enable people to focus on personal wellbeing while socialising with others and are perfect for couples, singles, groups of friends and seniors."

He feels the nature-based surroundings are a particular highlight – Bucharest has up to 800,000 plants, including 1,500 palm trees and countless species of orchids – which create areas for yoga, pilates and meditation.

Located 10 minutes outside of the capital, Therme Bucharest attracted 4 million people in its first four years and while locals are its biggest market, Iacob says it's becoming known as a worldwide health and wellbeing destination that draws visitors from the UK, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, Israel and the US.

How much does it cost to visit?

Therme venues are day attractions but partner with hotels for overnight deals. Guests buy time slots per zone – 3 hours, 4.5 hours or all day. Costs vary by time of day, whether it's a weekday or weekend and age. There are family packages and concessions for people with disabilities.

In Elysium – the most expensive – prices start at £14 in the week for an adult for 3 hours, or £15 at weekends and go up to £17 and £19, respectively, for a whole day.

In Germany the model is different. Costs change per time slot, day of the week and user, but also according to both the location of your lounger – you can view a plan of the complex online and see what's available and the type, such as a luxury lounger in a private room with F&B services.

Most visited all-season resort

Therme Group revealed plans for its site in Manchester in early 2020 and work is already underway on the development, which is located in TraffordCity, with opening on track for 2023.

Once complete, the development will cover 28 acres – the equivalent of 19 football pitches.

"This a major project for the health, leisure and wellbeing sector in the UK," says Iacob, calling it "a completely new concept for the country". The building will cover 100,000sq m – three times the size of Therme Bucharest – and will have capacity for 7,500 guests.

"The location has excellent transport links, serving a local population of over 6 million people," he explains, "which will enable us to bring an everyday holiday to people throughout the north-west of England.

"Within the first few years, we anticipate welcoming up to 2 million visitors annually, making it the most visited all-season water-based wellness attraction in the world."

The Manchester complex will be based on the zoned approach of other Therme sites, but in comparison, more space – at least half the facility – will be dedicated to adults and focus on fitness and wellness, relaxation, spa and treatments.

The show-stopper looks set to be Genesis, a new zone which Iacob bills as a "completely new concept in the world of wellbeing". While he's reluctant to give precise details, he reveals that "advanced body scanners and expert therapists will be used to personally design programmes for guests".

With worldwide expansion on the cards, he also hints at further evolution focusing on areas such as nutrition and biomarker testing, live monitoring of physiological indicators, on-site urban farming, advanced wellness concepts and even brain-computer interface therapies.

Sustainability focus

Nature, art and culture is also key to Therme's approach to wellbeing. Green building is a priority for the group and – like Therme Bucharest – Manchester will be built to LEED Platinum standards. Therme Arc has also created its own BioTrue approach to development, based on biomimicry and biophilic design principles.

A central focus of the Manchester project will be a two-acre wellbeing garden in the shape of a

PHOTO: LANO LAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

ALL ABOUT THE FOOD

F&B at the resorts is delivered by Therme RPC, a global joint venture with food, hospitality and tech consultancy, Russell Partnership Collection.

Therme RPC aims to deliver transformational food that's 'nutritious, delicious, sustainable and accessible to all'.

The aim is also to inform guests about smart food choices through an educational approach that encourages long-term, sustainable behavioural change to benefit all aspects of health and wellbeing.

Registered nutritionists work alongside food consultants, strategists and psychologists to develop options informed by evidence-based nutrition research, national guidelines, bio-individuality, food preferences and dietary needs.

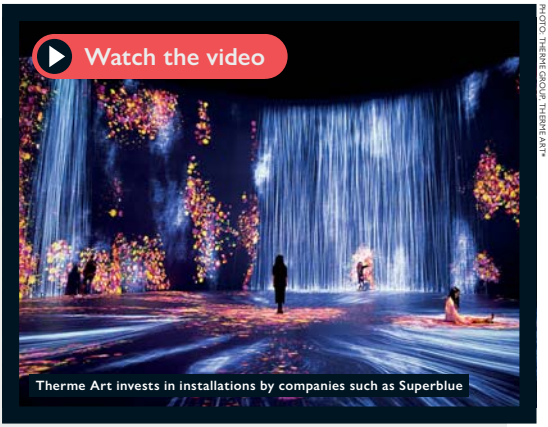
Consideration is also given to how nutrition can extend the wellbeing therapies on offer.

Therme RPC is developing sustainable technologies, including on-site hydroponic vertical farms, roof-top beehives, traditional artisanal bakeries and partnerships with chalk stream fish farms and local producers.

Training academies and knowledge centres are also available at Therme Group resorts, acting as centres for food education enrichment and engagement.

Therme Group is planning to grow food on-site hydroponically

> *Therme Art acquired the 2021 Serpentine Pavilion in June*



Therme Art invests in installations by companies such as Superblue

PHOTO: THERME GROUP, THERME ART™

Therme Art

Therme Group is just as passionate about art, culture, urban and architecture as it is about wellbeing.

Under its dedicated Therme Art programme, the company supports artists to realise large-scale, long-term art projects, which are installed in its resorts.

One example is Superblue, which specialises in digital and experiential art installations and exhibitions, another is the recent acquisition by the company of the 2021 Serpentine Pavilion, designed by Counterspace. This marks Therme Art's third consecutive year in partnership with the Serpentine.

Therme Forum and Therme Workshops are part of Therme Art's year-round programming platform that broadens conversations surrounding art, architecture, sustainability, and the future of urban environments.

● **To find out more, go to www.therme.art www.HCMmag.com/thermeart**

rose – as the national flower of England. "We've even developed technology delivering wellbeing for trees," says Iacob. "Our bespoke systems monitor thousands of trees to deliver the necessary water, cooled air and nutrients to optimise plant health."

Therme Group is also aligning itself with WELL certification, where buildings are designed according to their impact on people's health and wellbeing. On top of this, it's working on a five-year research fellowship with the University of Glasgow to investigate how architecture and the environment can foster a sense of wellness.

COVID-safe measures

"It's only natural to expect guests to have a greater focus on hygiene and safety and the important takeaway is that our facilities provide the safest spaces against COVID-19 and virus transmission," Iacob says, adding that the group already uses HEPA (medical grade) air filtration and double UVC treatment on recovered air. Ozone is used in the water to neutralise 99.99 per cent of bacteria and viruses "three times faster than chlorine-based systems".

Most new safety measures have been digital – using the existing customer wristband system to ensure zones don't go over capacity and introducing advanced online booking. Iacob says: "We've had our highest satisfaction levels ever in the past year with a minimal drop in revenue, by optimising venue usage."

He remains confident about existing sites and the global rollout. "We take the long view in our approach to projects around the world," he explains. "As a business model, a Therme project is highly resilient, with stable and strong returns and double-digit EBITDA margins in every location."

Given the company's multi-faceted wellness proposition, Iacob expects it to do well, as consumers begin to focus more on their health, saying: "We have an extremely positive view of the future. Both for the health and wellness industry and the advance of human and planetary wellbeing." ●

Find out more: www.thermegroup.com

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Stelian Iacob interview courtesy of *Spa Business* – the sister magazine of *HCM* – and editor Katie Barnes

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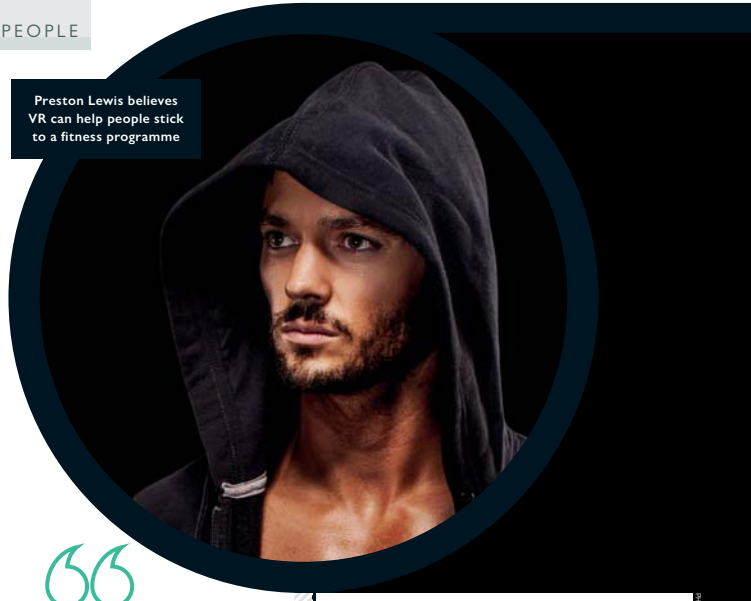


Preston Lewis believes VR can help people stick to a fitness programme

PHOTO: BLACK BOX VR

Game designers have figured out how to keep people unhealthily addicted to games. If only you could be the hero in a game that levelled up your life

Preston Lewis

Co-founder, Black Box VR

Black Box VR is the world's first virtual reality gym, combining HIIT and resistance training with immersive gaming. Co-founder Preston Lewis talks about getting people addicted to fitness through VR

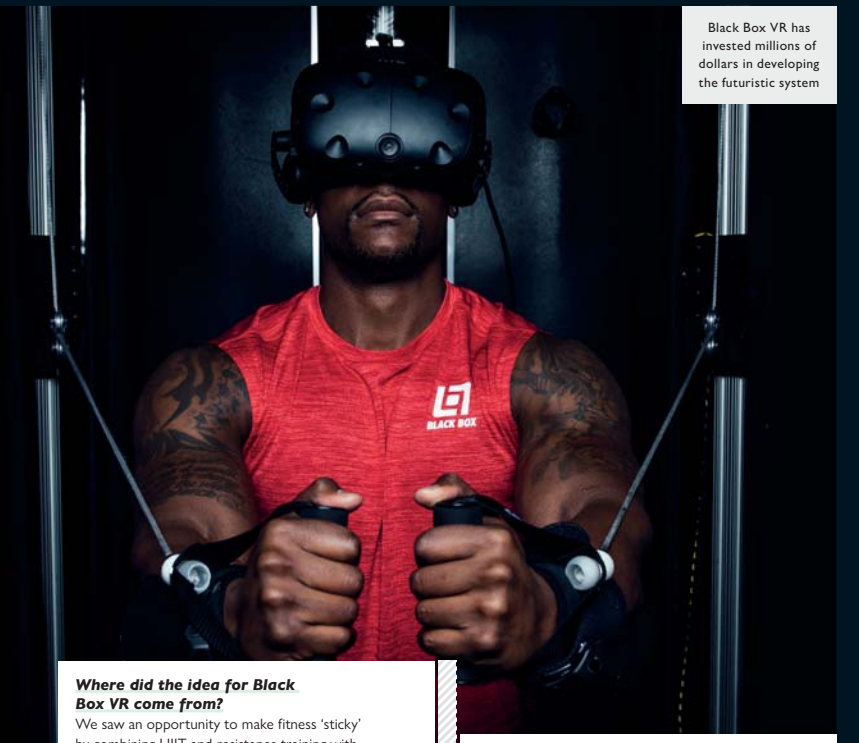
What's your background?

I'm a fitness fanatic with a love for creative problem-solving. I grew up in a very athletic family with a love for sport and fitness. Throughout my childhood, I was always training and ended up earning a scholarship for pole-vaulting in college.

I started my first business when I was 13, adopting the latest technologies to source products from abroad. I built this into a seven-figure creative agency that I ran while studying international business and finance and then sold it before joining Bodybuilding.com.

There I met my Black Box VR co-founder, Ryan DeLuca, who had started the company and together with an amazing team, we ran the most-visited fitness website in the world.

Our love of innovative tech, combined with expertise in exercise, sports psychology, nutrition and supplements helped the company grow to nearly US$500m in annual revenue.



Black Box VR has invested millions of dollars in developing the futuristic system

PHOTO: BLACK BOX VR

Where did the idea for Black Box VR come from?

We saw an opportunity to make fitness 'sticky' by combining HIIT and resistance training with VR and game design mechanics. The majority of people struggle with long-term adherence to fitness programmes – it's literally hindering billions from living the lives of their dreams – and we thought that was a problem worth solving!

Our bodies need to be tricked into sticking to a fitness programme, they literally fight against it and are programmed to be efficient with calories and to induce pain when we're pushing too hard. On top of that, working out is immediate effort and delayed reward; it lacks the feedback loops that are needed to encourage follow-through. Not to mention the boredom!

You stand in the traditional gym, looking in the mirror, doing rep after rep, bored out of your mind. Contrast that with game design – where designers have figured out how to keep people unhealthily addicted: they're effectively levelling up their game characters but levelling down their actual lives, as they remain glued to the couch.

If only you could be the hero in a game that levelled up your life... Enter virtual reality and our Black Box VR Virtual Sports Training Centers.

After trying VR for the first time, Ryan and I knew this powerful technology, when paired with science-backed resistance training principles and the right game mechanics, would be a game-changer and we decided to found Black Box VR. We vowed to create a company that would help customers transform their lives through addictive fitness experiences that harness the power of immersive technologies.

How did you develop the idea?

We knew we wanted to have a VR experience that paired with resistance training, but it was pretty obvious to us that dumbbells weren't going to do the trick. Instead, we decided to develop a special cable resistance machine. The idea came from a machine I'd trained on for pole vaulting in college.

> *We've had to create training experiences that show users how to grab handles in the virtual world that are mapped to our real-world machine*

It was rudimentary, but it could change weight and reps ranges automatically and track each rep.

We started to envision building something similar that would work in VR and be safe and effective. We worked with an engineering company and our team to develop four prototypes to get us to where we are today.

There were months where the machine was interfering with the VR and we couldn't find a solution – it was driving us nuts! Finally, we discovered a way to use a metallic 'doughnut' to fix the problem. I joked that we should put out a press release titled: "doughnut saves fitness company!"

Describe the experience

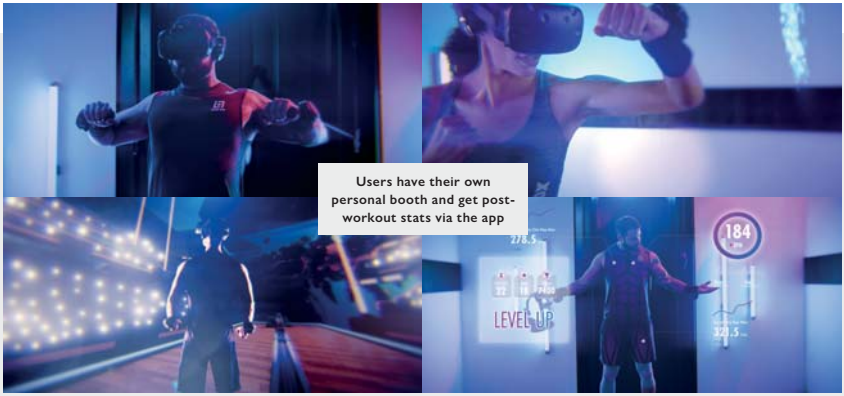
Our patent-pending Dynamic Resistance Machine provides up to 220 lbs of resistance and also acts as a controller in the VR workout. When players first step into a Black Box VR booth, they see the machine. The two handles move to allow for different movements to be made, such as squats, deadlifts, shoulder press, chest press, back row and lat pulldown.

Before players interact with the machine, they put on arm tracking pucks and a VR headset that transports them into our immersive Black Box VR Battle Arenas. In each Arena, they can see the crowd cheering them on and their opponent across the field. They can also see our machine mapped in the virtual experience and when they reach out for the virtual handles, they can feel the real handles on the machine.

After the workout battle begins, players can choose different exercises and the resistance automatically calibrates to their strength, adapting if the weights are too heavy or light, based on their rep ranges.

Each exercise movement corresponds to an in-game attack. For example, as users complete shoulder presses, they're hurling meteors at enemy units in the virtual world. The stronger the players get, the more reps and resistance they can handle, giving them a better chance at winning each virtual workout battle and taking home virtual trophies and other status items.

After each battle, the AI crunches the numbers and delivers their performance to our mobile app, where they can see their increased strength charts,



Users have their own personal booth and get post-workout stats via the app

PHOTO: BLACK BOX VR

PHOTO: BLACK BOX VR

Black Box VR transports users into another world

Black Box VR currently has two dedicated locations, plus booths in four EōS Fitness clubs

PHOTO: BLACK BOX VR

PHOTO: BLACK BOX VR

body measurements, champion upgrades, leaderboard rankings and other 'addicting' game elements that keep them coming back, getting stronger, burning serious calories and having a ton of fun while doing it.

How did you work around the issues of wearing a bulky VR headset?

We've been through multiple prototypes in the last five years and have learned a lot along the way. We tested different VR sweatbands, cable management systems, ideal room temperatures, sweat-wicking fabrics and VR headset manufacturers and this has paid off.

We've put thousands of people through our experience and the headset is now an afterthought for them. Many players come out of the experience forgetting they were even wearing them – that's a real testament to the team's dedication to solving these issues through incessant iteration.

What other issues are specific to working out in VR?

Because we're pioneers in the VR fitness space, we've had to create a lot of user interfaces and experience patterns that didn't exist before. Even issues that seem simple can take a lot of brainpower to solve. Due to the newness of the technology, it's difficult to do a Google search and find your solution!

The industry and VR community is growing rapidly, so it's getting easier to find insight, but there's still a lot of trial and error. For example, we didn't want players running into walls in VR so we had to design a platform system. We wanted players to always face the field, so we had to create a room-spinning solution that respected VR motion principles. We wanted them to be able to see where an exercise movement starts and where it ends, so we created floating objects mapped to movements.

Lewis (L) co-founded Black Box VR with Ryan DeLuca

PHOTO: BLACK BOX VR

We have to teach players that they can walk around the virtual space and we've had to create novel training experiences that show users how to grab handles in the virtual world that are mapped to our real-world machine.

Each of these issues pushed us to create new interaction patterns that were sometimes spot on in the first prototype and sometimes way off. It's fun to be able to work with our amazingly smart team and solve these challenging problems on a daily basis. The best reward is seeing players' faces light up when all the pieces come together.

Tell us more about the game

As the player slides the VR headset on, they can see their opponent as well as 'Champions' that they can use strategically in the game. The crowd cheers as the countdown clock chimes 5…4…3…2…1…GO!

The player then has the option to complete cardio movements – much like shadow-boxing – to build Champions, or they can choose to load up exercises on the Dynamic Resistance Machine.

When the machine is in position, the player can grab the real handles and start completing reps, pushing to defeat their opponent's incoming attacks. Each rep the player completes corresponds to an epic in-game attack.

Players destroy opposing Champions and collect elixir to build additional units with cardio movements. This is where the HIIT aspect comes in. The faster they build Champions with their punching and slicing, the better chance they have of winning. This keeps the heart rate elevated and provides a killer workout.

As opponents trade blows, destroy gates and obliterate crystals within the game, they collect points. The player with the most points after 30 minutes then wins the game and takes home the trophies and the bragging rights!

One of the most exciting parts is after the battle when players open the app and see their stats that were automatically tracked – we track over 50,000 data points per workout – they unlock their rewards and compare themselves with their friends and the overall Black Box VR community on the leaderboards. Then, players start to itch for their next session because they know that with it comes the chance for more prestige, rewards and levelling up, not only their in-game characters but their lives as well.

How does it track form and progress?

We use algorithms that track different points on the body and planes of movement to track each player's form and to alert them when they are outside the thresholds of the correct form.

Who is Black Box aimed at?

We believe we'll be able to reach a diverse demographic, but our core age group focus is on 25-40-year-olds who want to improve their fitness, and have an affinity with gaming.

We've seen people who enjoy gaming and competitive sports fall in love with our product. They love that it scratches the itch to compete and have fun while giving important health benefits.

Why is VR is such a powerful tool?

VR is the most immersive technology that exists. It has the power to trick the mind into thinking it's been transported to another place, the ability to give the viewer an embodied presence no other technology can. It puts the player at the centre of the journey and empowers them to feel like a superhero.

There are many compelling scientific studies coming out related to VR in the healthcare field. In one, burn victims who were normally given morphine to manage

Black Box VR has partnered with EōS gyms to offer exclusive access to the system via a membership upgrade

PHOTO: BLACK BOX VR

It's clear that combining VR gaming with fitness has the potential to decrease pain, increase enjoyment, and allow players to push their bodies further than they would normally, creating real fitness gains over time

the pain of skin-stretching were put in a simulated VR environment without morphine. Preliminary studies showed the VR was as powerful in pain management as morphine (www.HCMmag.com/chronicpain).

Other studies have shown VR's ability to make longer, more boring experiences feel shorter. We think it's clear that combining VR gaming with fitness has the potential to decrease pain, increase enjoyment, and allow players to push their bodies further than they would normally, creating real fitness gains over time.

VR's immersive nature can take the monotony out of the gym routine and make a 30-minute workout feel like 10. These are only a few things that make VR and fitness a match made in heaven.

How many VR rooms does each club have?

Typically we have around six booths per location. We have 14 in our San Francisco location.

What are your plans for Black Box VR?

We're doing a four-gym pilot through a partnership with EōS Fitness. We've installed private booths inside the gyms and members can upgrade their memberships to gain access. We're excited to get many more members into the experience in the pilot and then expand across the US. (www.HCMmag.com/eosVR)

Has COVID-19 affected your operations?

In terms of privacy and social distancing, many people say we're a perfect fitness option for the age of COVID-19, because our members are in their own private booths for each workout.

We use a third-party company called CleanBox (not affiliated with Black Box) – that uses medical-grade UV-C to sanitise the headsets between use and we've increased our cleaning procedures based on government recommendations.

Does the game change?

Absolutely – we have some people on 20-plus week streaks where they haven't missed a single workout. Sometimes we have to tell them to work out less to ensure they can recover! ●

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Preston Lewis interview courtesy of *Fit Tech* – the sister magazine of *HCM* – and managing editor, Steph Eaves

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Xponential Fitness to list on New York Stock Exchange

Global boutique fitness giant Xponential Fitness has finally confirmed its plans for an initial public offering (IPO).

The group revealed that it will list on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), although the number of shares to be offered and the price range for the proposed offering have not yet been determined.

BofA Securities, Jefferies and Morgan Stanley are acting as joint lead bookrunners for the proposed offering, with Guggenheim Securities, Citigroup and Piper Sandler as bookrunners.

Xponential is backed by entrepreneur and CEO Anthony Geisler and Snapdragon Capital Partners.

The move comes after months of speculation that Xponential was considering a listing.

The group was first linked to a potential launch onto the stock market in January 2020, but disruptions caused by the pandemic were believed to have put a stop to any plans for a listing.

Xponential has grown rapidly in recent years.

In March the group acquired boxing studio operator Rumble, adding it to its portfolio of franchised fitness brands.

> **Xponential owns Rumble, StretchLab, Pure Barre, Club Pilates, CycleBar, YogaSix, Row House, AKT and STRIDE**

XPONENTIAL FITNESS, CYCLEBAR

The group opened 240 sites during pandemic-hit 2020

As well as Rumble, the portfolio now includes Pure Barre, Club Pilates, CycleBar, YogaSix, StretchLab, Row House, AKT and STRIDE.

The group opened 394 new locations in 2019 and another 240 during pandemic-hit 2020 and recently launched five of its brands in the emerging Saudi Arabian market, including Club Pilates, Pure Barre, AKT, YogaSix and CycleBar.

More: http://lei.sr/3w9x4_H

The Gym Group's £31m war chest will fund 40 sites

The Gym Group aims to raise £31m from investors to fund 40 new sites around the UK.

The equity raise will be followed by the group setting off on an 18-month period of "accelerated expansion" as it looks to benefit from the "unique opportunities" in the commercial property market – largely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Richard Darwin, CEO, said: "Our new gym pipeline is the strongest it has ever been and we thank shareholders for their support in this placing, which allows us to accelerate our rollout to 40 new sites over the next 18 months.

THE GYM GROUP

The Gym Group plans to open 40 new sites around the UK

"Gyms have an essential role to play in the nation's physical and mental health and growing our portfolio will widen access to affordable fitness for more communities across the UK."

Since reopening its sites following the lockdowns, the group has made ground quickly in recovering its membership base. It had a total of 794,000 members in December 2019 – a figure that fell to 547,000 by February 2021. Total membership had recovered to 729,000 by 24 May 2021.

THE GYM GROUP

> **Our new gym pipeline is the strongest it has ever been**
> Richard Darwin

More: http://lei.sr/h4d2G_H

Life Time opens massive fitness resort in Boston

Health club operator Life Time has opened a luxury fitness and athletic resort experience at Northshore Mall, a shopping centre in Peabody, Massachusetts, US.

The 210,000sq ft Life Time Northshore club – situated in the Greater Boston area – is marketed as a comprehensive offer and is spread across three floors, as the operator has taken over the entirety of the former shopping mall unit.

Facilities include an extensive gym floor with more than 400 pieces of cv and resistance equipment, as well as dedicated studios for Life Time's group fitness programming – ranging from indoor cycling and yoga to Pilates – one-on-one personal training and small group personal training.

There are also two full-size basketball courts, an indoor/outdoor aquatic centre featuring leisure and lap pools and resort-style seating, a dedicated Kids' Academy with tumbling, movement, language and learning classes, creche and the LifeCafe – a nutrition-focused, fast-casual restaurant.

An on-site, full-service LifeSpa provides saunas, steamrooms and a range of wellness services from body treatments and massages to hair and nail treatments.

Life Time's president and COO, Jeff Zwiefel, said: "With the addition of Northshore, we now offer a cluster of five Life Time destinations in Boston offering amazing health, wellness, sport and lifestyle experiences."

More: http://lei.sr/f7Y5D_H

LIFE TIME

With the addition of Northshore, we now offer a cluster of five Life Time destinations
Jeff Zwiefel

LIFE TIME

The resort at Northshore Mall includes a resort-style pool

Holmes Place sells clubs to fund TRIB3 rollout

Holmes Place has confirmed to *HCM* that it has disposed of 10 clubs from its Spanish portfolio to focus investment on the growth of boutique brand TRIB3.

Speaking to *HCM*, Jonathan Fisher, Holmes Place Group CEO, said: "The Fisher family is happy to focus on the existing Holmes Place urban premium segment and continue to support and guide the impressive growth taking place at TRIB3 which we expect to be up at 25 stores by year end 2021."

The clubs were sold to a fund managed by JP Morgan and will be operated under the Forus brand.

The acquisition takes the number of health clubs operated by Forus in Spain to 44.

More: http://lei.sr/r9v4r_H

HOLMES PLACE

We're focusing on the Holmes Place premium segment and supporting the growth of TRIB3
Jonathan Fisher

HOLMES PLACE

The deal leaves Holmes Place with five luxury clubs in Spain

Kids' physical activity gets £320m funding

The UK government has confirmed that the PE and Sport Premium will continue to run during the academic year 2021-22, resulting in around £320m being invested in school-based physical activity.

Designed to encourage children to play more sport and increase both their physical literacy and social skills, the Premium will offer schools opportunities to improve the quality of PE teaching.

The Premium provides a ring-fenced top-up to school funding to ensure every primary school-age child gets at least 60 minutes of physical activity a week.

Building on the government's *School Sport and Activity Action Plan*, the funding can be used by schools alongside any money left over from the PE and Sport Premium grant this year or last.

Announcing the funding, education secretary Gavin Williamson said: "Schools can continue to prioritise children's physical wellbeing, alongside education recovery.

"Children's physical health has never been more important and this investment will build on our actions across government to support this activity – including through our *School Sport and Activity Action Plan*, and our £10.1m investment helping school sport facilities and pools."

Huw Edwards, CEO of ukactive, said: "This funding will help ensure that a firm focus on the health and wellbeing of our children is central to school life from September 2021."

More: http://lei.sr/S8Y7c_H

SHUTTERSTOCK/ROBERT KNESCHKE

The Premium guarantees an hour of activity for each child

PHOTO: MEMBERS.PARLIAMENT.UK - HTTPS://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/3.0/

Children's physical health has never been more important

Gavin Williamson

TGO launches online fitness platform

The Great Outdoor Gym Company (TGO) has launched a digital fitness platform.

The outdoor fitness equipment provider's new TGO-Activate.com service offers a range of health and wellbeing courses.

The workouts have been designed to help people address lifestyle diseases – such as Type 2 Diabetes – improve their mental health through movement and encourage exercisers to spend time in nature.

Each session has been designed so it can be completed at any location – whether at an outdoor gym or at home – with the aim of helping people incorporate movement into their everyday lives.

Classes include a six-week Type 2 Diabetes Programme by Kesson Physiotherapy, developed in partnership with Diabetes UK.

TGO co-founder Georgie Delaney said: "This is just the beginning and we are looking for more influencers and activators within the fitness space, who want to do more for the planet."

More: http://lei.sr/S8s9M_H

THE GREAT OUTDOOR GYM COMPANY

The workouts help people address lifestyle diseases

THE GREAT OUTDOOR GYM COMPANY

This is just the beginning and we are looking for more influencers

Georgie Delaney

UK scheme will reward people for exercising

The UK government has unveiled plans for a pilot scheme, aimed at using financial rewards and other incentives to encourage people to exercise more and eat more healthily.

It has launched an open tender for the "Health Incentives" programme and a six-month pilot is expected to launch in January 2022.

The new scheme will explore the best ways to incentivise adults to make healthier choices, as evidence suggests financial incentives can improve rates of physical activity and inspire healthier eating.

Keith Mills, who has pioneered reward programmes through Air Miles and Nectar points, is advising the programme and will support the government in leveraging the "very best innovation in the public and private sector" to test the role that rewards and incentives can play in encouraging healthier behaviours.

UK SPORT

This scheme could be a vital tool in plans to encourage healthier behaviours
Keith Mills

Mills said: "The Health Incentives scheme could be a vital tool in the government's plans to encourage healthier behaviours.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for businesses, the public and third sectors to come together and deliver a new and exciting way of promoting healthier habits."

The government is now looking for delivery partners and is inviting interested parties to come forward by using the "Find a Tender" website.

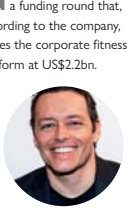
More: http://lei.sr/X6K3y_H

SHUTTERSTOCK/UFABIZPHOTO

The Health Incentives pilot is set to launch in January 2022

Gympass secures US$220m funding round

Gympass has secured US$220m worth of investment as part of a funding round that, according to the company, values the corporate fitness platform at US$2.2bn.



GYMPASS

The funding will help us fuel growth in the US and expand into new categories
Cesar Carvalho

The funding was provided by Softbank, General Atlantic, Moore Strategic Ventures, Kaszek and Valor Capital Group.

The investment follows Gympass seeing an all-time high volume in key metrics.

According to Cesar Carvalho, CEO of Gympass, many of the company's clients are experiencing usage above pre-pandemic levels, with the US and the UK leading the way.

"The funding will help us fuel growth in the US, improve product experience and expand into new categories," he said.

More: http://lei.sr/C2Y4y_H

SHUTTERSTOCK/TAVARIUS

Gympass saw a record four million monthly visits in May 2021

ukactive to 'reposition' public sector leisure

Ukactive has set out its vision to develop a national strategy for the UK's public leisure sector and to define the sector's role in delivering physical activity to the nation.

The vision is outlined in a paper – entitled *The Decade of Change for Public Sector Leisure* – and is based on a consultation with public sector leisure industry leaders, which began in October 2020.

In the paper, ukactive provides a roadmap for progress, which looks to ensure the survival, recovery and development of the sector.

The proposed roadmap has four phases and will culminate in a long-term strategic plan, designed to support the delivery of services that meet their specific vision and purpose.

"While this past year has brought significant challenges, many of which we are still facing, it has provided everyone within the physical activity eco-system with a moment to reflect," said ukactive CEO, Huw Edwards.

"It's a rare opportunity to pause and look back on where the sector has come from and to learn from the failures and the challenges that are inhibiting progression and the ability to truly transform.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the whole of the physical activity eco-system to play a positive role in evolving and re-positioning services, putting aside differences of opinion and coalescing around this common purpose."

More: http://lei.sr/8E8P2_H

UKACTIVE

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the whole of the physical activity
Huw Edwards

SHUTTERSTOCK/HALFPOINT

ukactive has drawn up a roadmap for the future of the sector

ACE launches diversity and inclusion training

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) has launched a new course called 'Taking Action with ACE: Practicing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion as an Exercise Professional'.

The organisation says it will "better equip exercise professionals to support diverse communities, use an inviting environment to boost client engagement and retention and be better advocates for the fitness industry."

"Inclusion hasn't been a priority of the fitness industry," said ACE CEO, Scott Goudeseune, adding: "This course will help exercise professionals provide effective services to communities that have felt left out of health and fitness spaces."

ACE collaborated with Jessica Jackson, instructional designer and racial equity strategist at Torrance Learning, to produce the course in six modules.

"In order to make meaningful change to systemic inequities, we need to ensure everyone has equitable access to fitness resources," said ACE president officer Cedric Bryant.

More: http://lei.sr/H4V9Y_H

SHUTTERSTOCK/RAWPIXEL.COM

Exercise professionals will learn how to support diversity

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF EXERCISE (ACE)

This course will help exercise pros provide effective services to communities
Scott Goudeseune

Calls for fundamental reform of public leisure

There is a "clear case" to evolve the purpose and role played by the UK's public leisure facilities.

In a joint statement, ukactive and the Local Government Association (LGA), outline the need for both short-term and long-term actions, in order to secure the future of publicly owned health clubs, swimming pools and leisure centres.

"In the short-term, it is essential we work together to stabilise the sector to provide a strong foundation for the delivery of necessary reform and the evolution of services available to the public," the two bodies said in the statement.

"In the longer-term, there is a clear case to evolve the purpose and future role of public leisure, implementing reforms that enable sustainability, prioritise value over cost, and that help to support the government's ambition to level-up and tackle rising health inequalities.

"We have a great opportunity to create a modernised, more resilient service that is outcome-focused and adequately meets the requirements of those most in need – delivering healthier, more active communities.

> **We must address some fundamental issues, including procurement and standards**
> ukactive & LGA

SHUTTERSTOCK/NALPRONT

The bodies will work to set out a roadmap for the sector

"At the heart of this reform, we must address some fundamental issues, including procurement, standards, data and integration with health agencies."

The industry bodies also say that the focus for public leisure operators should be on the sector playing a central role in the government's plans to "build back better" from the pandemic.

The bodies will now work together to set out a roadmap of measures for the sector.

More: http://lei.sr/d7X7n_H

Consultation to 'uncover sector's full potential'

A consultation on social prescribing and other similar health programmes will look to "uncover the physical activity sector's full potential" and define its role in the wider healthcare system, supporting the NHS.

ENGLAND NHS UK

> **The fitness industry can play a major role supporting social prescribing**
> James Sanderson

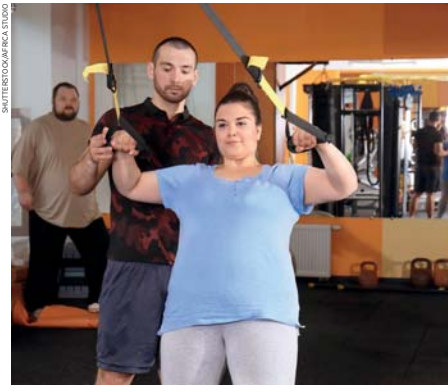
Led by industry body ukactive, the process will gauge the scale and impact of healthcare links through social prescribing within the physical activity sector.

The consultation is open to organisations that deliver social prescribing and other such health programmes.

James Sanderson, CEO of the National Academy for Social Prescribing, said: "The fitness and leisure industry can play a major role supporting social prescribing by giving people choice and control."

More: http://lei.sr/e9S5h_H

SHUTTERSTOCK/AFRICA STUDIO



The consultation will gauge the impact of social prescribing

Exercise with caution after COVID-19 jabs

There's emerging evidence that a small number of people may suffer heart problems while exercising after having an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

The government of Singapore has become the first to recommend that people who've received the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine should avoid strenuous physical activity after getting their shots, something of urgent importance to gym operators as vaccine programmes continue to roll out globally.

> **Vaccinated persons should avoid any exercise or strenuous physical activity for one week after vaccination**
> Singapore Health Ministry

The warning follows a number of people – mostly young men – suffering from myocarditis (an inflammation of the heart muscle) shortly after receiving the jab.

Singapore's Health Ministry has now urged residents to avoid strenuous exercise for a week after receiving the first and second dose of all mRNA COVID-19 vaccines.

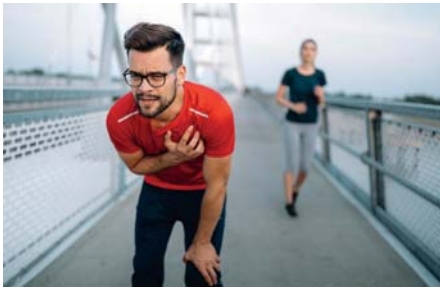
In a statement, the ministry said: "Given the emerging data on the small risk of myocarditis and pericarditis observed after vaccination with mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, the Expert Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination recommends that all vaccinated persons, in particular adolescents and younger men, who have received any dose of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, should avoid any exercise or strenuous physical activity for one week after vaccination.

"The vaccinated persons should seek medical attention if they develop chest pain or any other symptoms."

The European Medicines Agency said heart inflammation was a "very rare" side-effect of COVID-19 vaccines, and that the benefits of having the jab far outweigh any risks.

More: http://lei.sr/Y8N9J_H

SHUTTERSTOCK NDAB CREATIVITY



Some have suffered from myocarditis following their jabs

Deloitte: more than half of US homes have trackers

Fifty-eight percent of US households have a smartwatch or fitness tracker, and 39 per cent of consumers own one personally.

The figure comes from the *Connectivity & Mobile Trends 2021 Survey* by Deloitte, which shows how the pandemic has had a clear effect on people's physical activity habits. Among device owners, 14 per cent have bought their smartwatch or fitness tracker since the start of the pandemic.

The largest use among the devices reported is for health and fitness (55 per cent), primarily to measure walking steps and athletic performance, track heart health, and monitor sleep and calories. Among those interested in wearables, 39 per cent listed cost as the primary reason they haven't bought one – considerably larger than other factors.

SHUTTERSTOCK/SYDA PRODUCTIONS

A third of US consumers own a smartwatch or fitness tracker

The increased popularity of digital fitness and wearables is also having an effect on the way healthcare is delivered.

Jana Arbanas, Deloitte, said: "As wearables advance to record more discrete health, fitness and wellness data, their ability to support health care providers will likely grow."

More: http://lei.sr/B6Y4R_H

DELOITTE

> **As wearables advance to record more data, their ability to support health care will likely grow**
> Jana Arbanas

Image: https://stylepolstore.com

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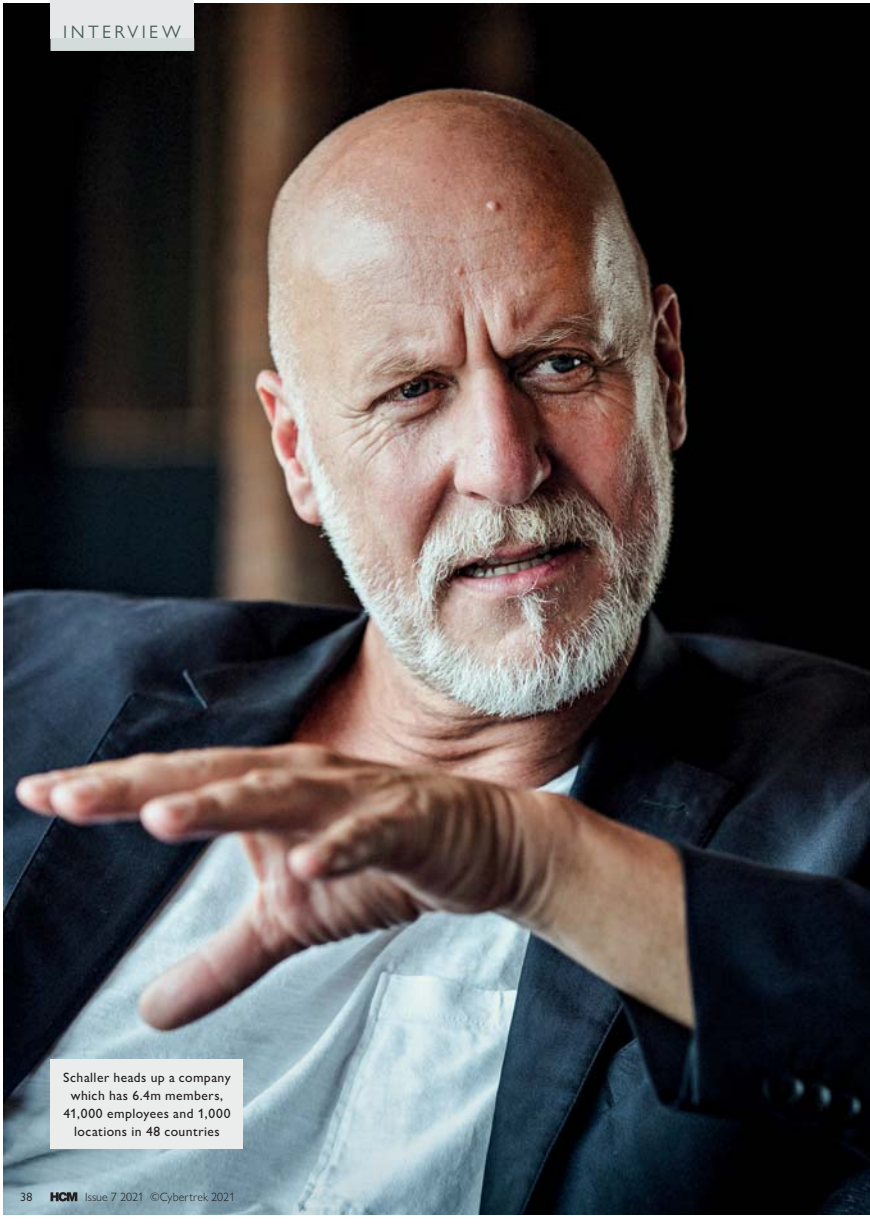


Schaller heads up a company which has 6.4m members, 41,000 employees and 1,000 locations in 48 countries

With Gold's Gym we've inherited a legacy for which I have great respect

Rainer Schaller

'After the rain comes the sunshine,' says the founder and CEO of the RSG Group. He talks to Kate Cracknell about acquiring Gold's Gym, continuing the global expansion of John Reed, and learning to live with COVID-19

How has RSG Group fared during the pandemic?

The first lockdown saw all our studios closed from mid-March to early June 2020, affecting all our studio brands equally. All locations were then open until mid-October, before the second wave hit and we had to close the majority of our studios again.

In some countries and regions, we were allowed to partially open our studios, but requirements and restrictions changed regularly across all locations.

Overall, our company-owned gyms in the US – except California – were significantly less affected by studio closures than our gyms in Europe. Fortunately, our pan-European presence helped us significantly in this regard, as we were less affected in countries such as Spain, Switzerland and Turkey than, for example, in our core market of Germany.

As a result of the ordered closure of fitness centres, the whole sector has had to contend with a decline in membership numbers and sales; our industry has lost more than a third of its members worldwide. Looking specifically at the RSG Group, it's currently difficult to predict how serious the impact of the second and third waves will be on our company's balance sheets, but certainly the new contracts that usually balance out the usual fluctuation in members were not achievable during the pandemic.

Has COVID encouraged you to adjust your strategy?

A crisis always unleashes new forces and ideas.

With our McFIT brand, for example, we set up a fully functional 'TV' channel within five days in March last year. This was used to broadcast a 10-hour live stream from Mondays to Fridays – including workouts, entertainment, interviews with well-known personalities, food and expert advice – under the slogan 'The Big Pump'. In this way, we continued to support and guide our members throughout their day. ▸

PHOTO: RSG GROUP

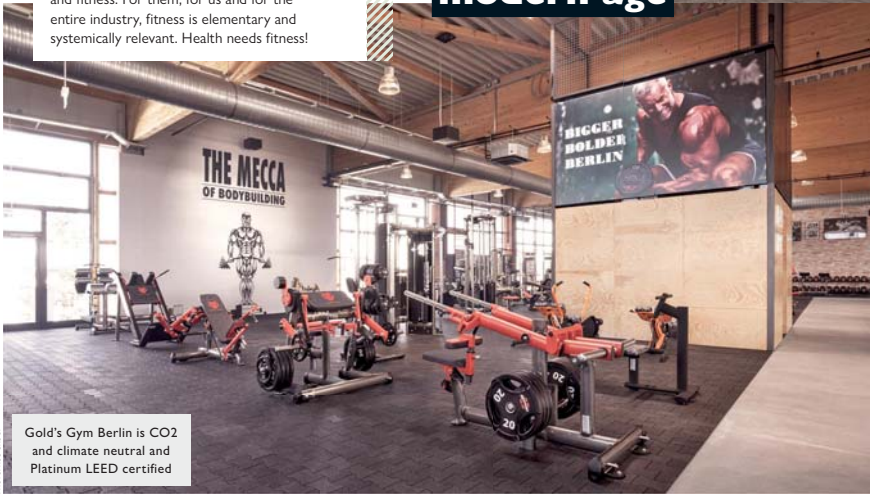
We also made our Cyberobics fitness app – with its wide range of virtual workout content – available free of charge to everyone around the world during the first lockdown.

And since the beginning of 2021, we countered the ordered closure of our gyms in numerous countries with a temporary yet innovative outdoor concept. Even with the snow still falling in many places, and temperatures below freezing, starting in February we began offering our members in Germany individual training under the open sky with our McFit brand. We've also set up outdoor gyms for our members in Italy and at Venice Beach in the US – a total of 50 locations.

We placed a special focus on compliance with all applicable laws and drew up a comprehensive legal, safety and hygiene concept – the latter with the renowned infectologist and public health expert Dr Klaus-Dieter Zastrow – to take a responsible approach to the virus.

With our outdoor gyms, we wanted to motivate the fitness community to stand up for their right to fitness. Millions of people who work out in gyms wanted to do everything they could during the crisis to maintain and strengthen their physical and mental health and fitness. For them, for us and for the entire industry, fitness is elementary and systemically relevant. Health needs fitness!

Our goal is to return to the core values of Gold's Gym, while also striking a balance between preserving its roots and leaping into the modern age



Gold's Gym Berlin is CO2 and climate neutral and Platinum LEED certified

PHOTO: FSG GROUP

Gold's Gym Berlin also offers an outdoor gym for all members

PHOTO: RSG GROUP

How popular was online training during lockdown?

Digitalisation has been making its way into every conceivable area of life for years, including the fitness industry. People want to train flexibly and independently, but without guidance, it's difficult for many to motivate themselves or to put together suitable exercises that are effective and fun. That's where Cyberobics comes in: we're convinced that a full workout without a gym is possible.

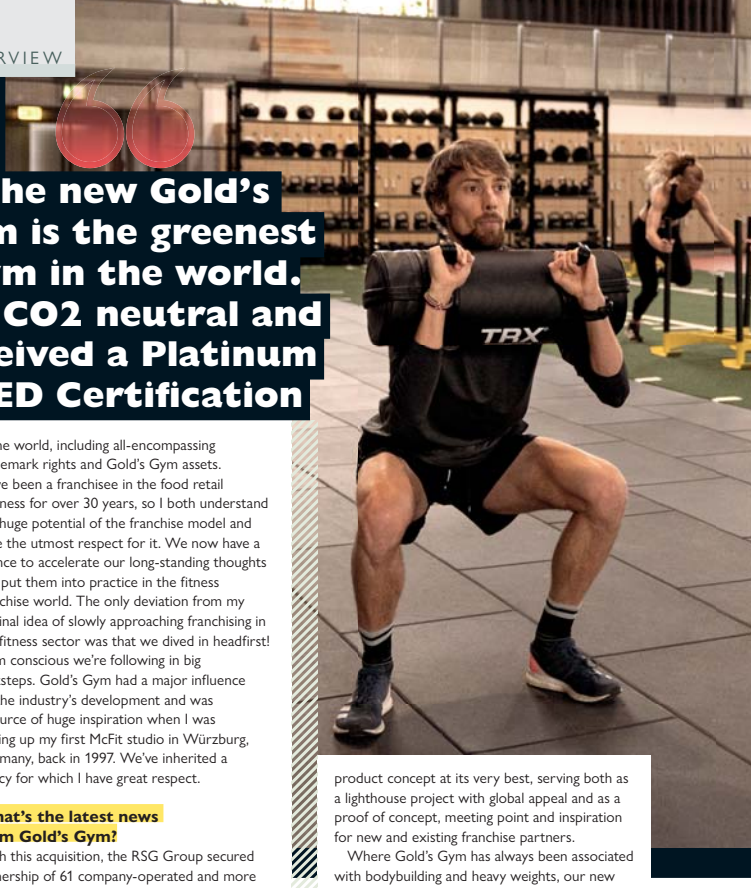
And digital solutions have become more important than ever thanks to the pandemic, with many unable to go to their gym during the months-long lockdowns. The fitness industry will need to invest even more in digital solutions moving forward, offering alternatives to only working out in a gym.

We recently built on our existing Cyberobics library by introducing Cyberobics Live, streaming around 150 live classes – 100 in German, 50 in English – into the app. This enables everyone to train flexibly in terms of time and space, while still experiencing a sense of community.

These daily Cyberobics Live classes will also be streamed in our physical studios in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and in the future throughout Europe as well as the US.

You acquired Gold's Gym during lockdown too. Tell us more

Yes, that's right. On 13 July 2020, the RSG Group was selected as the winning bidder in a court-approved auction process for Gold's Gym. With a purchase price of US$100m, we acquired the most iconic gym chain



The new Gold's Gym is the greenest gym in the world. It's CO2 neutral and received a Platinum LEED Certification

in the world, including all-encompassing trademark rights and Gold's Gym assets.

I've been a franchisee in the food retail business for over 30 years, so I both understand the huge potential of the franchise model and have the utmost respect for it. We now have a chance to accelerate our long-standing thoughts and put them into practice in the fitness franchise world. The only deviation from my original idea of slowly approaching franchising in the fitness sector was that we dived in headfirst!

I'm conscious we're following in big footsteps. Gold's Gym had a major influence on the industry's development and was a source of huge inspiration when I was setting up my first McFit studio in Würzburg, Germany, back in 1997. We've inherited a legacy for which I have great respect.

What's the latest news from Gold's Gym?

With this acquisition, the RSG Group secured ownership of 61 company-operated and more than 600 franchise-operated gyms, and I'm extremely proud that we've been able to let this brand live on and flourish under the umbrella of the RSG Group for almost a year now.

Our goal is to return to the core values of Gold's Gym, while also striking a balance between preserving its roots and leaping into the modern age: strengthening the product, revitalising the brand and driving digitalisation.

We unveiled the new Gold's Gym concept and strategy at a digital event on 26 April 2021, and on 4 June were finally able to open the RSG Group's Gold's Gym Campus Europe, in Berlin. This 55,000sq ft flagship site represents the modern redefinition of Gold's Gym and the product concept at its very best, serving both as a lighthouse project with global appeal and as a proof of concept, meeting point and inspiration for new and existing franchise partners.

Where Gold's Gym has always been associated with bodybuilding and heavy weights, our new extended concept embraces all facets of fitness training: functional, cardio and group fitness, all complemented by an excellent personal training concept. We're also strengthening the product by standardising the global appearance of the studios, focusing on the best quality and variety of equipment and facilities.

One important aspect of the new strategy is our focus on sustainability: the new Gold's Gym is the greenest gym in the world. It's CO2 and climate neutral and received a Platinum LEED Certificate – an international standard that recognises particularly sustainable construction.

The gym's cardio area features 10m-high trees that filter pollutants from the air and

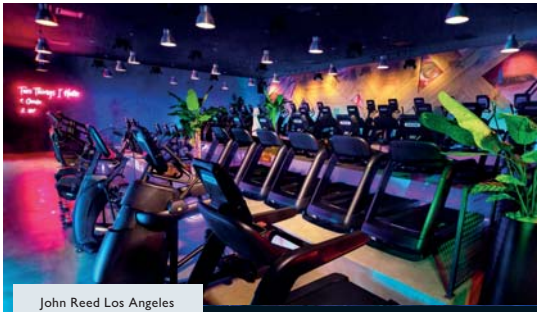
Gold's Gym Berlin includes a Performance Centre, reserved for use by athletes

PHOTO: BSG GROUP

150 bikes generate electricity to power Gold's Gym Berlin

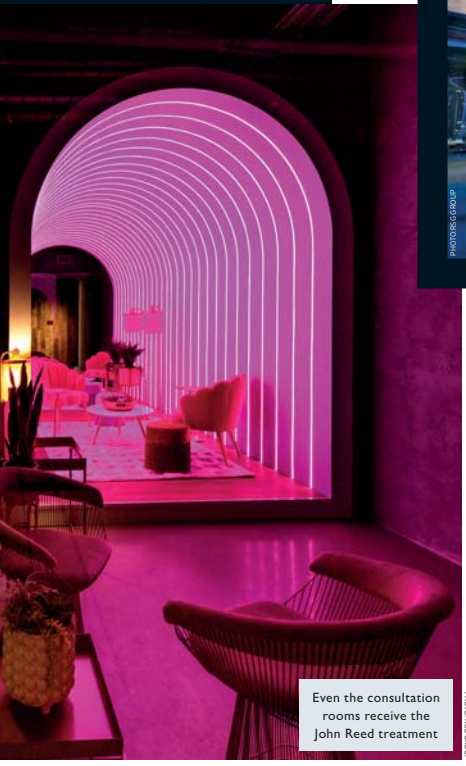
PHOTO: BSG GROUP

PHOTO: RSG GROUP



John Reed Los Angeles opened in March 2021, with street art by Robert Vargas

PHOTO: RSG GROUP



Even the consultation rooms receive the John Reed treatment

PHOTO: RSG GROUP

significantly improve the atmosphere. We've installed highly sustainable training floors made from recycled car tyres or cork. The combined heat and power plant runs on biogas; a solar 'flower' saves solar energy; wall tiles are made from recycled computer monitors; and in partnership with the Technical University of Berlin, we've developed a new technology that allows us to generate electricity from muscle power on 150 bicycle ergometers.

We've now opened another Gold's Gym in Herne, Germany – it opened on 11 June – and have further new openings planned for Milan, Vienna, Munich and many more locations, as part of a comprehensive growth strategy.

Also in June, we launched our Gold's Gym online store for fans of the brand across Europe. This brings the full Gold's Gym experience to Europe, selling a wide range of premium nutrition through to sportswear and accessories.

Your John Reed brand has launched in the US

We'd already expanded our John Reed Fitness Music Club brand into several countries across Europe, and had long planned to enter the US market by opening

PHOTO: RSG GROUP

DJs such as Benjamin Walker bring local flavour to John Reed LA

PHOTO: RSG GROUP

At all our John Reed locations globally, we link the fitness environment inside the club to the vibe of the community

a club in Los Angeles. We finally did so in March 2021, and it was an occasion I'd been looking forward to for a long time.

The US, and especially Los Angeles, is the cradle of fitness and the strongest market in the world. It's also the most competitive – but then, John Reed is a very special and specific fitness experience for an audience that's inspired by music, art, fitness and lifestyle.

At all our John Reed locations globally, we link the fitness environment inside the club to the vibe and ethos of the community around it, and the downtown Los Angeles club follows in these design footsteps.

Elements of the LA scene greet members as they enter – from art by up-and-coming SoCal graffiti artist Robert Vargas which adorns the walls, to expertly curated beats being spun by prominent local DJs such as Benjamin Walker.

We'll continue to look for opportunities to grow the John Reed footprint in the US, however, while there are numerous locations that make sense at this point, we'll take our time so as not to compromise the authenticity of the brand or the experience, just for the sake of growth. We know we have to find exactly the right locations.

You've also announced your first UK John Reed

Large cities play a strong role as centres of vibrant societies, as well as birthplaces of new music and art genres and so they're a focus of our international planning.

It's not just about the US, it's about the world – just like our community – so this year, three more countries will join the John Reed family.

The first UK location will open on London's Liverpool Street later this year. The club will occupy a 22,000sq ft site spread over two floors and will offer a mix of cosmopolitan design, live DJs and a range of workout options. Its mix of colours, forms and materials – merging fitness, music, art and design – will create the unique John Reed feeling.

We're also entering the exciting markets of France and the Netherlands, with a John Reed having opened in Rotterdam on 8 July – the 10th international John Reed location outside of our core market of Germany – with other locations including Zurich and Istanbul to follow.

Spread across four floors, the Rotterdam club features a boxing ring, a huge functional area, personal training, cardio and free weight areas, and of course a studio for professional live classes and group workouts. There will also be a bistro, saunas and spa pools.

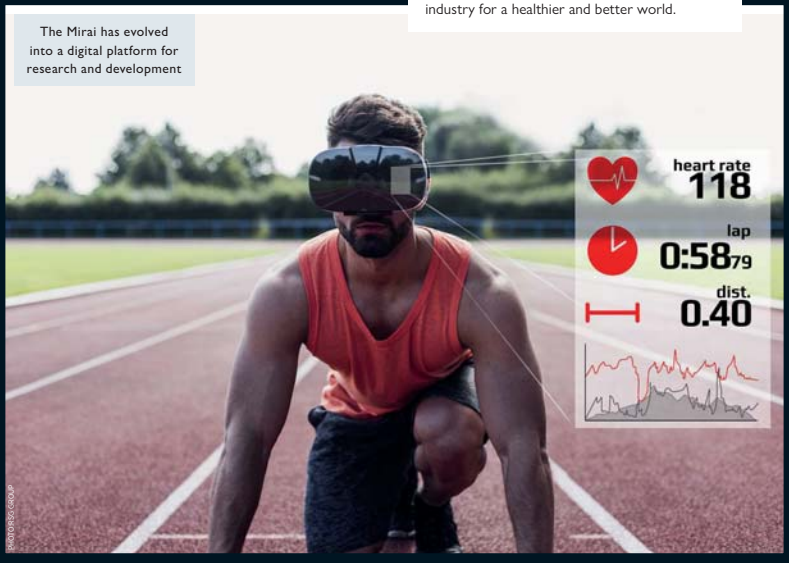
In France, we'll open up three different concepts. One will be in the 16th arrondissement of Paris and will be exclusively for women. In addition to a large spa, the club will set new standards in design, with contemporary African art pieces. The second, a 37,000sq ft site in the So Ouest department store – located in Levallois-Perret, near Paris – will adopt the theme of the Asian lucky cat, including a lucky cat store, collaborations with artists to design individual lucky cats, and much more. The third location will be in Lyon and will be a regular John Reed Fitness Music Club. All three sites are currently under construction.

What's the latest on The Mirai?

The Mirai is detaching itself from its originally planned physical location and is transferring its business model to the digital world; in times of crisis, the determined and courageous look into the future and it's essential for us to sustainably drive our vision of getting more people moving.

We've created a digital infrastructure and developed a prototype that enables the AI-powered real-time analysis and evaluation of fitness, health and movement data. There's gigantic potential for digitisation and innovation in our sector, and The Mirai will bring together the key players on a virtual platform.

Together with our partners, we're rethinking research and development in the fitness industry for a healthier and better world.



The Mirai has evolved into a digital platform for research and development

BORO9950/GROUP

Where Gold's Gym has always been associated with bodybuilding and heavy weights, our new extended concept embraces all facets of fitness training

Those who think and act in a visionary way can overcome the current crisis, says Schaller

PHOTO: RSG GROUP

What are your plans for the next year or two?

As the mantra goes: 'After the rain comes the sunshine.' Our nerves and patience have been put to the test in an extreme way during the second and third lockdowns, but since mid-June 2021, after a period in which most of our clubs were closed for more than seven months, all our company-owned sites around the globe are once again open.

Not everything is back to the way it was, but we're noticing positive signals and are slowly achieving a 'new normality'. The big challenge right now is to quickly make up for the loss of members during lockdown, getting back to the membership levels we had before the crisis.

At the same time, according to experts, we have to prepare for a permanent life with the virus. We're very focused on ensuring our members feel safe during training, and will continue to comply with all regulations and specifications regarding infection control. The motto for all of us is: 'safety first!'

What are the biggest opportunities for the sector?

The pandemic will certainly challenge some competitors in the fitness market and speed up the consolidation of the industry, but in every crisis, there is also opportunity.

The challenge for the entire industry will be that fitness studios will take on a new significance after the second and third waves of the pandemic. They will always exist, but they will no longer have the same unrestricted status as before.

In my opinion, there's a parallel with dining out where, in most cases, it's not just about eating. It's about an experience and being around people. It will be similar with gyms, where the focus will increasingly be on the experience. That's exactly why we launched the John Reed brand five years ago – a brand that's fundamentally different from the norm in terms of its design, its live DJs and so on.

Virtual training and digital workouts are also experiencing a boom and will certainly retain the importance they gained in pandemic times. Individualisation, and digitisation in particular, will play an even greater role in the fitness industry over the coming years.

We all need to offer our members completely new solutions, so they can be even more flexible in their training in the future – any location, any time. It's why we've been working in this area for years now, and it's paying off.

In conclusion, we're just beginning to see the end of the pandemic and at the RSG Group, we face the future with cautious confidence. I'm convinced that those who think and act in a visionary way can overcome the current crisis. ●

The RSG Group / a snapshot

"The RSG Group is the largest operator in the global fitness sector, with 6.4 million customers across its gyms and digital solutions," says the group's visionary founder and CEO Rainer Schaller.

"Over the past 24 years, I've succeeded in turning the first 'open-to-all' gym into a global business with 41,000 employees – including our franchisees – across approximately 1,000 locations in 48 countries. I've also continuously and passionately developed the company to build up a portfolio of almost 20 brands that embrace the full 360° experience around the member."

■ **Find out more: www.rsggroup.com**

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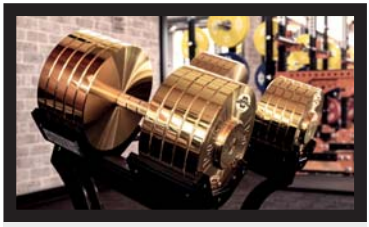
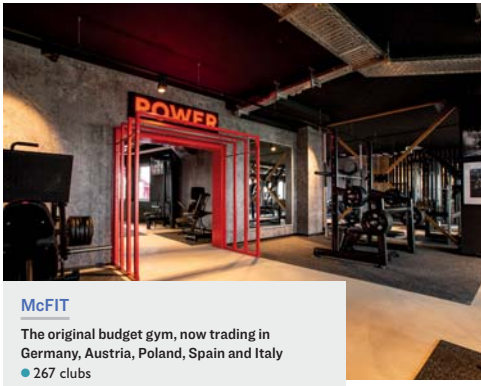


Gold's Gym

Founded in 1965 and one of the most iconic gym chain in the world. Originally body building focused, now widening the offering

- 61 owned clubs and 600 franchised clubs

www.goldsgym.com



McFIT

The original budget gym, now trading in Germany, Austria, Poland, Spain and Italy

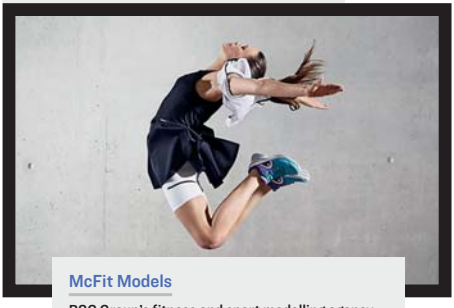
- 267 clubs

www.mcfit.com

Gold's Gym Nutrition

The sports nutrition brand of Gold's Gym, offering protein, supplements, drinks and shakes and bars

www.goldsgym.shop



McFit Models

RSG Group's fitness and sport modelling agency

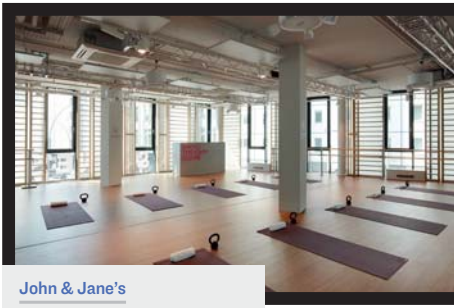
www.mcfitmodels.com

John Reed Fitness

A fitness, music and design-based concept

- 37 John Reed Fitness Music Clubs
- One John Reed Women's Club

www.johnreed.fitness



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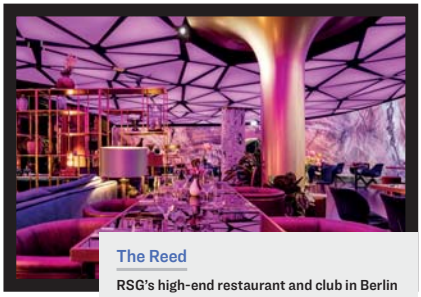
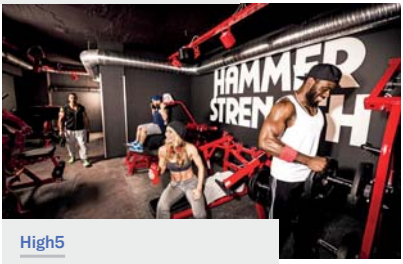


The Reed

RSG's high-end restaurant and club in Berlin

www.thereed.de



High5

Functional training gyms with American vintage and collegiate style

- 14 clubs

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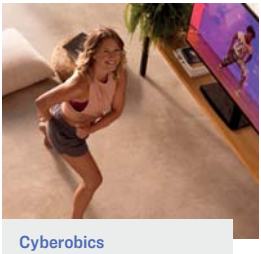

Cyberobics

Online workout and live steaming content

www.cyberobics.com

Loox

A fitness planner app with 300 workouts available

www.loox.com

Master of Enthusiasm

A unique workout experience with Tamer Trasoglu

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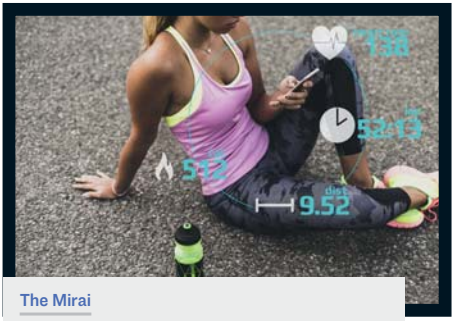
A modelling agency for high fashion and lifestyle

www.pearlmodelmanagement.com



The Mirai

A research and development centre for fitness and health

www.themirai.com

Tigerpool

Creative management agency for Marcell von Berlin, street artist duo Ron Miller and conductor Gerd Schaller, Rainer's brother

www.tigerpool.com

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Jan Spaticchia developed an exceptional senior team who are committed to taking the business from good to great

Powering forward

Empowered Brands has strengthened its leadership team with the appointment of a new chair and CEO following the untimely death of founder, Jan Spaticchia

Empowered Brands, owners of énergie Fitness, the UK's leading low-cost fitness franchise business, has announced the appointment of Pietro Nicholls as non-executive chair and the promotion of director Peter Croney to CEO. The announcements follow the untimely death of Jan Spaticchia, highly respected chair of Empowered Brands, in May.

Nicholls joined the board as a non-executive director in early 2020, following a management buy-out of the ènergie Fitness business by Spaticchia and brings extensive investment banking and commercial experience into a business that's scaling its international franchising and digital fitness business.

A fund manager and board director at alternative investment manager, RM Funds, Nicholls co-founded the £110m market cap investment company, RM Secured Direct Lending PLC in 2016.

The company is listed on the London Stock Exchange and has a focus on impact-led investment across social and environmental businesses.

PHOTO: JAN PICKUP

I expect to support the highly experienced management team to deliver exceptional results

Pietro Nicholls
Chair, Empowered Brands/énergie Fitness

énergie Fitness is the flagship IP of Empowered Brands, which has a growing portfolio of businesses

PHOTO: ENERGIE FITNESS

Pietro Nicholls' background

Nicholls started his career at Bear Stearns, subsequently joining JP Morgan and Barclays Corporate and Investment Banking. Over the last five years he has advised on and/or invested on-behalf of pension schemes, insurance companies and family offices over £1.5bn of capital across a range of asset classes and industries, including digital infrastructure, renewable energy and health and social care.

Nicholls said: "Jan Spaticchia developed an exceptional senior team at énergie Fitness who are committed to taking the business from good to great and I was delighted to accept the invitation to chair the company.

"The signing of two international master franchises, the opening of seven new UK clubs in the first six weeks since reopening (with five more by August) and a membership gain of 35,000, is a statement of intent.

"Empowered Brands' strategic partnership with RM Funds will create value for our members, our franchisees and our shareholders."

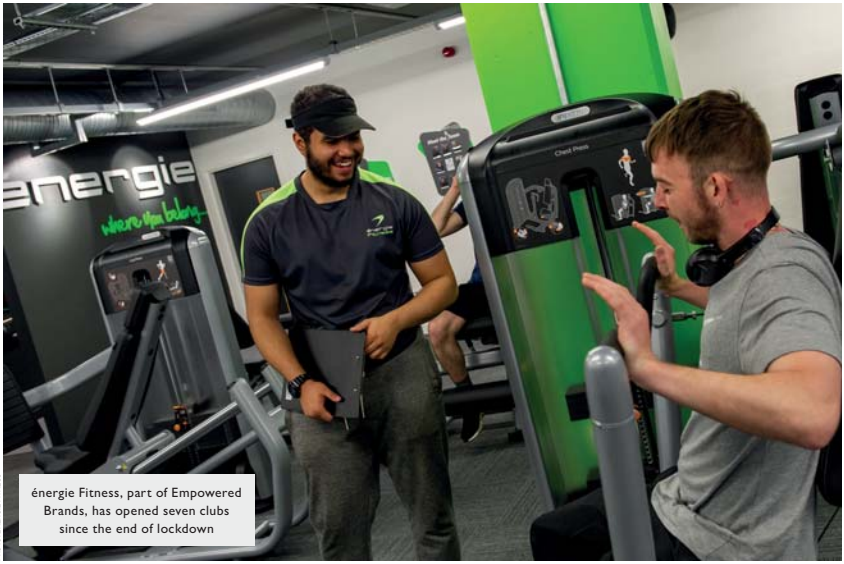


PHOTO: ÉNERGIE FITNESS

énergie Fitness, part of Empowered Brands, has opened seven clubs since the end of lockdown

"I believe accessible, affordable fitness is the best form of preventative healthcare and will expand exponentially in a post-pandemic era when governments globally will prioritise fitness, health and obesity reduction," said Nicholls. "Empowered Brands will bring product innovation into this expanding marketplace and as chair, I expect to support the highly experienced management team to deliver exceptional results."

Announcing a new CEO

Peter Croney, the new CEO of Empowered Brands is an entrepreneur with a successful track record in owning and building businesses in the corporate retailing and leisure sectors.

A strategic thinker with decades of commercial experience, Croney has been the architect of énergie franchise sales and development strategy since 2006.

Working alongside former CEO, Jan Spaticchia, he played a significant role in building the value of the énergie business, leading up to a successful sale to private equity operator, Bridges Fund Management Ltd in 2019.

In 2020 Croney – as director and shareholder of Empowered Brands – helped deliver the successful MBO of the énergie Franchise Group.

Since the MBO, Croney has focussed on product growth and franchise expansion, however, following the untimely death of Spaticchia, Croney accepted an invitation from the board to lead the company as CEO.

I'm passionate about the growth potential of Empowered Brands and developing the business as a major global player in the fitness franchise sector

Peter Croney
CEO, Empowered Brands

Croney said: "Having been part of the team driving the business since 2006, I'm honoured to step up to be CEO and to lead both Empowered Brands and its world-class IPs, including the growing énergie Fitness operation.

"I'm passionate about the growth potential of Empowered Brands globally and am looking forward to expanding the company's portfolio of brands and developing the business as a major global player in the fitness franchise sector."

More: www.empoweredbrands.co.uk

The pandemic is putting a strain on the public sector and forcing strategic decisions about facility provision

PHOTO SHUTTERSTOCK/HALFPOINT

Everyone's talking about Insourcing

With local authority facility management companies and councils under financial pressure due to the pandemic and issues emerging around health inequalities, will we see a trend towards councils insourcing the management of facilities? Kath Hudson rounds up views

For more than 30 years, outsourcing has worked well for local authorities and their leisure operating partners, but COVID-19 has provided a shake-up and made some councils question their priorities, while some operators are turning to councils for additional funds, creating a shake-up in parts of the contracting world.

With now being an unfavourable time to tender, with only a few contractors interested in launching into new partnerships, a desire to build back fairer to level out the inequalities exposed by the pandemic and with some council/contractor relationships under strain, a number of councils are considering bringing services back in-house or setting up Local Authority Trading Companies to take over the short- to medium-term management of facilities. We ask our experts for their comments.

Duncan Wood-Allum

SLC – The Sport, Leisure and Culture Consultancy

> The current crisis cannot be resolved solely by swapping from one model to another. There is no safe harbour

Due to over-ambitious bidding in the past – often driven by financially-oriented procurement processes – some leisure operators were not achieving proposed income levels even before the pandemic, which has exacerbated the current problem.

In some cases, this has resulted in councils having to find c£2m-c£5m to temporarily support services since March 2020, sometimes for contracts that generated a surplus pre-pandemic.

As a result, some councils are reviewing arrangements with operating partners on the assumption there may be a better alternative. Often there is not.

Some are having to make quick decisions, which may not have been fully explored, as to the longer-term risks and benefits, however, changing management arrangements can't negate the impact of COVID-19.

Councils need to consider what's in the best interests of their community and ensure decisions are based on need and evidence and are strategically aligned. It's essential not to overreact, but adopt a holding position to take stock, until the market has seen some recovery. It's also important to spend time considering the pros and cons of management options that have such long-term financial and social consequences.

Our advice to councils is often to stick with their current arrangements for the next 18 months, even if it's been difficult for them and their operating partners to negotiate financial support since March 2020.

However, sometimes relationships have been damaged and one or both partners want to end the arrangement. In this case, transferring services into a LATC as a 'holding position' can be a pragmatic alternative to going out to tender in the current climate, which could result in a sub-optimal contract with considerable risk and cost being transferred to the council.

Bringing services in-house will be costly but does give control to the council, although we query the long-term benefits of this.

While insourcing can make future returns on investment hard to stack up, if the political will is there to invest in an in-house model, there's nothing stopping that council doing a great job – but it will need significant resources to make a success of it at a time when budgets are under pressure.

The current crisis cannot be resolved solely by swapping from one model to another – there is no safe harbour. The focus is to ensure the service offer is shaped around what councils prioritise and can afford.

Addressing inequalities has never been more important – the risk is that finances will override this.

Now's the time for councils to review objectives and the mix of interventions to achieve these. The delivery model is the last thing they should be focusing on right now.

Services must be shaped around what councils prioritise and can afford, says Wood-Allum

> With so many leisure centres under threat of closure, local authorities are the operators most passionate about keeping them open

Karen Whitfield

South Kesteven District Council

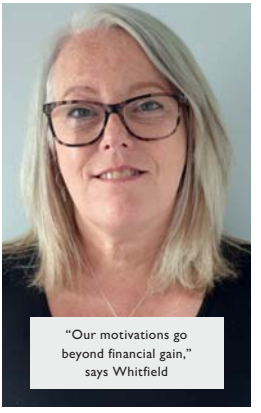
In 2019, a robust management options appraisal was carried out and we decided the best course of action was to extend the agreement with our management contractor – which was due to end in December 2020 – by 15 months.

This would have allowed us enough time to go back out to tender for a new leisure contract. Ideally, we wanted a contract that would be income-generating and would transfer operational and financial risk to the successful bidder.

Unfortunately, after the Coronavirus outbreak, companies showed little or no interest in taking on new contracts, so we had to revisit our options appraisal.

Given the new circumstances we identified an opportunity to set up a Local Authority Trading Company. Our relationship with our previous contractor had been longstanding – more than 20 years – but it was no longer sustainable.

We were having to provide significant levels of financial support with no major say in how things were done; the contract was no longer offering the level of service we wanted to provide; many staff members were demotivated and we wanted to be more hands-on when it came to mobilising our communities to be more active.



"Our motivations go beyond financial gain," says Whitfield

Having made the decision in August 2020, we had only four months to set up the company, but we achieved that goal and now everyone is excited by the change.

Although the financial and operational risk now lies with the council, it's great to be back in the driving seat. The contract is for three years, but there is the option to continue. According to our forecasts, we will be able to make a surplus in our second year of normal trading.

We have a clear vision about what we'd like to achieve and are planning significant improvements, including continuous professional development for staff, as well as looking at gaps in the provision and seeing how we can work collaboratively with other partners to persuade more people to improve their health and wellbeing.

We'll be looking to make the most of the digital opportunities, as well as supporting informal exercise such as walking and cycling. We also plan to work with Lincolnshire County Council to improve infrastructure for these activities.

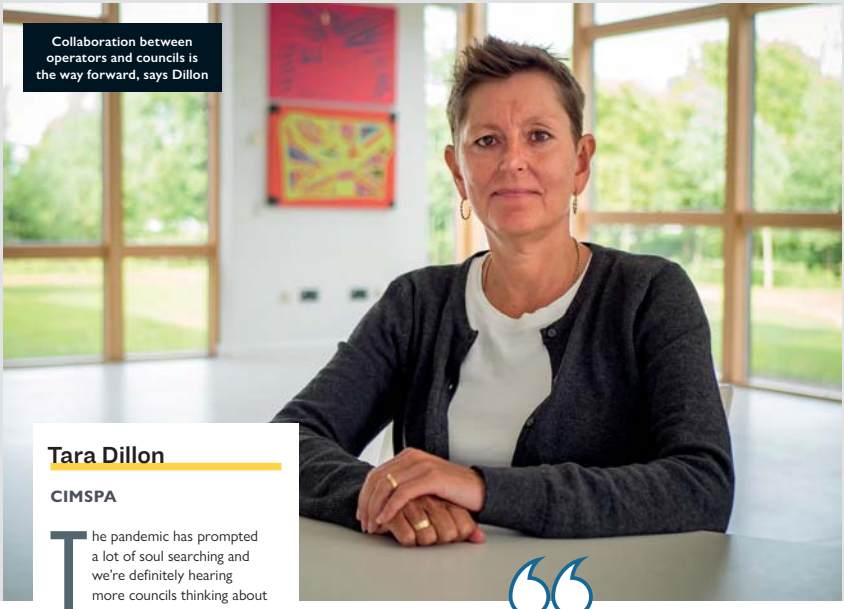
Now's not a great time to tender for new contracts and judging by informal inquiries I'm getting from colleagues in the sector, I expect more local authorities to follow our lead.

During these tough times, with so many leisure centres under threat of closure, local authorities are the operators most passionate about keeping them open. Our motivations go far beyond financial gain.

Guidance on optimising outcomes

Sport England has developed the *Strategic Outcomes Planning Guidance*, to support councils in establishing how they can shape their interventions through need, evidence and alignment with wider local strategic outcomes.

Complementing this, in consultation with the sector, Sport England is also developing the *Leisure Services Delivery Guidance* for sport, physical activity and wellbeing services relating to all forms of commissioning, whether in-sourced or out-sourced. It will be published this summer (2021) and will help councils navigate leisure services delivery issues being faced, by providing support on how to optimise their outcomes for whatever management model they choose. More: www.HCMmag.com/SOPG



Collaboration between operators and councils is the way forward, says Dillon

Tara Dillon

CIMSPA

The pandemic has prompted a lot of soul searching and we're definitely hearing more councils thinking about bringing leisure services back under their control. However, I think it's a way off becoming a trend.

In a lot of cases where it does happen, I think it will prove difficult and expensive for councils and not something they'll want to do long term, particularly given the competing priorities local authorities are facing.

My opinion is councils shouldn't rush to take their leisure services back in-house. Local authorities and management contractors should work in unison to provide the best service possible for their location. Councils should look at how they can leverage the best value out of their partnerships in order to make it work for their local priorities, such as inclusive communities, health inequalities and health priorities and when it comes to renewal, ensure those expectations and demands are written into the contract. For example, if the area is ethnically diverse, make sure there's a joint purpose to focus initiatives to increase activity levels within these populations.

> The public sector is paid for by the public purse and needs to do more to level up the health inequalities which have been made worse by the pandemic

The industry does very well at providing facilities for a relatively small percentage of the population who have chosen to be active. For commercial operators, it's fine to be chiefly targeting this population, but the public sector is paid for by the public purse and needs to do more to level up the health inequalities which have been made worse by the pandemic. This is where the opportunities lie for local authorities.

Solutions need to be found to work out how what the public sector can do to reach the communities that don't usually come into leisure centres – this will involve more meaningful contracts and services being taken out to the community and will require investment, not just financially but also by collaborative working.

Happily, we are starting to see this as a trend as well. CIMSPA is working on a skills pilot with some local authorities who have targeted services needed in their location and are then working with employers, active partnerships and local education providers to identify and provide the required skills in order for those programmes to be implemented. It's a perfect collaboration.

Martyn Allison

Social change agent and influencer

> The public sport and leisure sector is inevitably going to be reshaped by the pandemic, just as every other part of the economy will be reshaped

The shape of the sector in terms of facilities will look very different in a few years time from how it did before the pandemic.

We've already seen a few councils take the decision to bring their sport and leisure services back in house. Such a process must start with being very clear on the need for the service, the purpose of the service, the audience, the outcomes they want to achieve, the degree of influence and control the council wants to apply to how it operates and the financial objectives: whether they want to make a return on investment or are prepared to subsidise it to achieve certain social returns on the investment.

If we want to avoid unnecessary additional turbulence in the system it will require councils to be more realistic in terms of investing in value and not just focusing on the price of contracts. Equally, it will require all operators, including those in-house, to change how they work to achieve better social value, particularly in terms of addressing health inequality, rather than just health improvement. This will require far greater collaboration and much better leadership.

As a whole, the sector tends to be weaker at meeting the needs of those least well-off and with the biggest health needs, irrespective of the management model, so while we've been improving some people's health, we've actually been making health inequalities worse.

While better off, white, able men are generally well served by all the management models, families and individuals living with multiple deprivations are generally poorly served by all the models excepting the more socially-minded trusts and some in-house services, where councils see the value not just the price.

The driver of inclusive service is not necessarily the management model but things such as the quality of managers providing the service, the quality of the client, the quality of both the specification and the contract and above all the quality of leadership across both.

The public sport and leisure sector is inevitably going to be reshaped by the pandemic, just as every other part of the economy will be reshaped. My prediction is it could be reduced by 20-30 per cent as an overall outcome.

My experience of the sector shows it handles change in thirds. A third will relish the opportunity to change, reinvent itself, respond positively to the new landscape and build back better and fairer. A third will drag their feet and adapt slowly and incrementally. A third will resist change altogether and hang on to the hope that everything will go back to normal soon. This third will not be part of the future.

The third which will disappear will not be a result of the management model: it is the quality of management and leadership that will dictate the outcome. I don't, therefore, believe there will be a rush back to in-house that will impact the sector; it will be their own ability and willingness to change that will dictate their future. ●

Allison predicts a third of public sector operators will thrive, a third will survive and a third will cease to be

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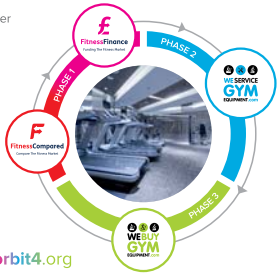

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Active Northumberland

Transforming public health

Jo Farrier, head of commercial and resources at Active Northumberland, talks about how a strategic partnership with Technogym is changing public perceptions of council leisure facilities

The Active Northumberland charitable trust manages 15 leisure facilities on behalf of Northumberland County Council. The trust is committed to helping people make healthy lifestyle choices by offering leisure services that improve the long-term health of Northumberland's huge and varied population.

The charity is also committed to creating outstanding facilities that challenge the outdated image of council leisure. At Blyth Sports Centre, for example, it has turned a 50-year-old site into a truly world-class facility.

Visionary partner

As part of its health in the community strategy, Active Northumberland has partnered with Technogym on design, equipment and digital solutions across its facilities.

"Technogym provides us with much more than equipment," says Jo Farrier, head of commercial and resources. "They're constantly innovating, which means we can invest in products that meet diverse needs. Technogym helps us interact with different groups and provide an excellent member experience every time."

PHOTO: ACTIVE NORTHUMBERLAND

Blyth Sports Centre was ripe for investment in new facilities

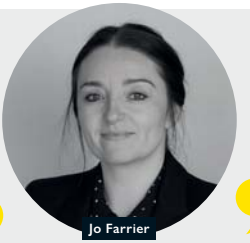


PHOTO: ACTIVE NORTHUMBERLAND

Jo Farrier

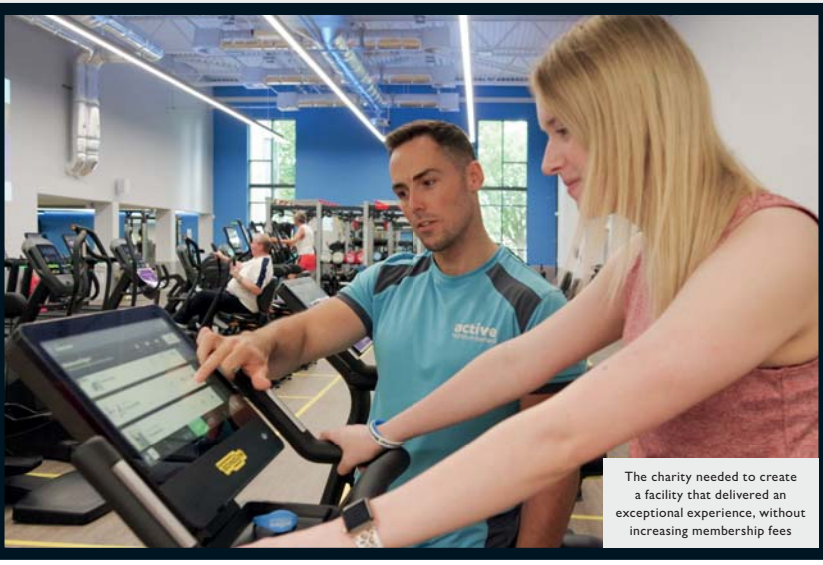
Members say they're honoured to have this calibre of digital fitness equipment in their local gym

Blyth Sports Centre is one of Active Northumberland's largest and oldest sites and was ripe for investment. The charity needed to create a unique facility that delivered an exceptional experience, without increasing membership fees.

"It was important the community around Blyth felt valued and investing in Technogym equipment shows them how much we care about their health and fitness'" says Farrier. "Blyth Sports Centre definitely has the wow-factor now and members say they're honoured to have this calibre of digital fitness equipment in their local gym."

Farrier and her team are continually thinking not just about the needs of current members, but also about what will best engage the next generation. Technogym's innovative approach to digital connectivity helps the team create a member experience that appeals to all ages.

PHOTO: ACTIVE NORTHUMBERLAND



The charity needed to create a facility that delivered an exceptional experience, without increasing membership fees

Dedicated Group Cycle studio

The next phase to open at Blyth Sports Centre will be a Technogym Group Cycle studio. The site previously had generic indoor cycling classes in a shared studio, but this is the first time it has offered a dedicated space with the Technogym format.

"By introducing Group Cycle we're providing more choice, with both timetabled classes and a digital option with virtual classes, so use of the studio space is always being maximised," says Farrier. "The class experience is fantastic, combining group exercise in a fun and interactive way. The music integrates with the visual effects and members can see their performance metrics, creating a unique and different environment for each class."

Group Cycle provides members with three experiences in a single environment, with FreeBeat, Peak and Virtual classes. Over the next 12 months, the charity will install Group Cycle at all its larger sites.

The investment in Group Cycle brings this part of the customer journey onto Mywellness, where members can view class schedules, sign up for classes, reserve their preferred bike and check class results, all within the Mywellness app.

The member journey on Mywellness

Active Northumberland is rolling out Mywellness to all its facilities as part of a drive to create a recognisable experience across all sites.

The Mywellness app is introduced as part of member on-boarding, and customers are encouraged to use it to book consultations, track their activity, access programming, and engage with the Technogym equipment.

"The members at Blyth are astonished by the Technogym smart equipment," says Farrier. "We've also added Technogym's Excite Live cardio equipment and members love being able to use the QR codes to log in and record their workouts, plus having a virtual coach there encouraging them through their session. It's very motivating and simple to use."

Future investments

With three new facilities at Ponteland, Berwick and Morpeth opening over the next 12 months, Active Northumberland is working hard to keep as many people in the county engaged with physical activity as possible.

"Working with Technogym is a real partnership," says Farrier, "The Technogym team listens, makes suggestions and comes up with the most relevant solutions for our customers. That dynamic is what makes the relationship work so well. Technogym helps us stand out and offer much more than people expect."

www.technogym.com

STRONG RECOVERY

The results from the first Moving Communities Customer Experience survey present a positive picture of overall satisfaction with local authority facilities, explains Mike Hill

The Moving Communities Customer Experience Survey is the one of the largest consumer surveys ever completed in the public leisure sector in England. Conducted during April and May 2021, it was commissioned by Sport England to measure the impact of a £100m grant provided by the government via Sport England's National Leisure Recovery Fund to support leisure centres in dealing with the impact of the pandemic.

The survey featured responses from over 50,000 individuals who visited at least one of the 1,183 local authority gyms, pools or leisure centres across 158 local authorities in England since reopening in April 2021.

The data suggests that customer expectations have been met, with overall satisfaction levels at an all-time high and a strong customer response.

The Net Promoter Score – an indicator of satisfaction and loyalty – has increased to 52 from pre-COVID industry averages of 40-45 and there's an appreciation of greater levels of cleanliness in both activity areas and changing rooms.

Most importantly returning customers have higher levels of confidence in COVID-secure measures put in place by operators, compared to previous surveys.

The Confidence Indicator Score is a metric that has been introduced during the pandemic to measure customers confidence and comfort levels when returning to their leisure centres.

- 86% prefer exercising in a local authority gym or leisure centre compared to at home or in a park
- 69% are extremely confident in COVID protocols, compared with 50-60% in 2020
- Net Promoter Score has increased to 52 from pre-COVID averages of 40-45
- 89% say they exercise more intensely in a leisure facility than in an informal setting such as home
- 90% are very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the cleanliness of the activity areas
- 86% of people are satisfied with the cleanliness of changing areas and toilets in leisure centres compared with 70% pre-COVID
- 77% of respondents say staff give them the guidance they need to be more active
- 97% say they intend to exercise at least once a week in their local leisure centre in the next six months
- Only 9% say leisure centres 'do not play' a significant role in the lifestyle they wanted to live

89 per cent say they exercise more intensely in a leisure centre than an informal setting

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/DUXX

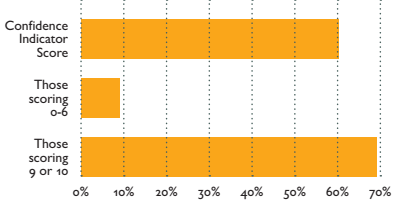
Confidence in the product

Findings from the survey suggest those who've seen the new industry protocols in action are generally pleased with both the processes and the ways in which they're being implemented – 69 per cent were extremely confident in their leisure facility, with only 9 per cent not at all confident in COVID-19 protocols. This resulted in an overall Confidence Indicator Score of 60 (See Fig 1).

This compares favourably with results from previous reopenings after lockdowns one and two, when scores were typically lower – between 50 per cent and 60 per cent throughout 2020. The Confidence Indicator Score is a calculation based on the question 'During your last visit to the centre, how confident or not did you feel in the COVID-19 related protocols in place?'

Fig 1

Confidence in COVID-19 protocols in place

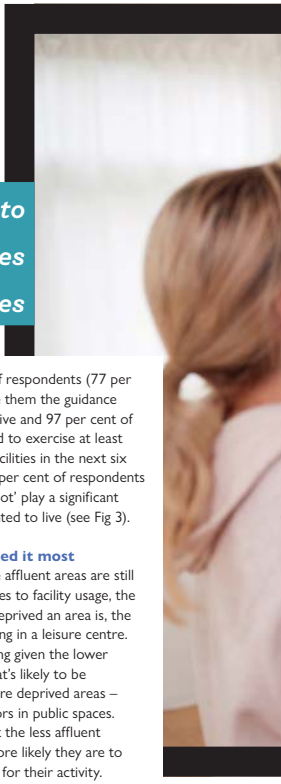


Activity levels and patterns

The findings of the survey also provide an insight into how much of users' physical activity takes place in leisure facilities as opposed to other settings.

Interestingly, it appears that those completing moderate intensity activity one to three times a week have a greater reliance on public sector facilities than those who are exercising more than this.

People also reported they are more engaged when exercising in a facility, with 89 per cent saying they exercise more intensely in a leisure centre than in an informal setting.



> *The Net Promoter Score has increased to 52, up from pre-COVID industry averages of 40-45 for local authority facilities*

Wider measures

The survey looked closely at the customer experience of cleanliness, confidence in the COVID-19 secure procedures and practices, overall satisfaction and the value team members bring to the experience.

A key driver of positive performance will likely be the cleanliness of facilities. An encouraging 90 per cent reported satisfaction (very satisfied or fairly satisfied) with the cleanliness of the activity area itself, and 86 per cent said they were satisfied with the cleanliness of the changing areas and toilets (see Fig 2). These figures are considerably higher than pre-COVID cleanliness scores – as reported by the National Benchmarking Service (NBS) in 2020 – when activity area satisfaction was at 80 per cent and changing/toilet area satisfaction was only 70 per cent.

Role of local authorities

One of the most striking findings to emerge from the survey is the engagement people have with their local authority facilities – 86 per cent of respondents said they prefer exercising there compared to a more informal environment, such as at home or in a park.

More than three quarters of respondents (77 per cent) said they felt staff gave them the guidance they needed to be more active and 97 per cent of respondents said they intend to exercise at least once a week in their local facilities in the next six months. Conversely, only 9 per cent of respondents said the leisure centre 'did not' play a significant role in the lifestyle they wanted to live (see Fig 3).

Targeting those that need it most

Although people from more affluent areas are still in the majority when it comes to facility usage, the data shows that the more deprived an area is, the more people prefer exercising in a leisure centre.

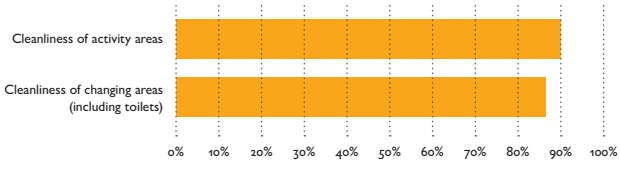
This is perhaps unsurprising given the lower quality of workout space that's likely to be available to people from more deprived areas – whether at home or outdoors in public spaces.

Simply put, it appears that the less affluent someone's postcode, the more likely they are to want to use a leisure centre for their activity.

This reinforces the important role local authority leisure centres play in communities and may also explain why a higher proportion of those returning to leisure centres are from more deprived areas, compared with 2019.

Fig 2

Very or fairly satisfied with cleanliness on last visit



The vast majority of people say staff give them guidance to be more active

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MONKEY BUSINESS IMAGES

Fig 3

Impact of local leisure centre (combined score for strongly & tend to agree %)

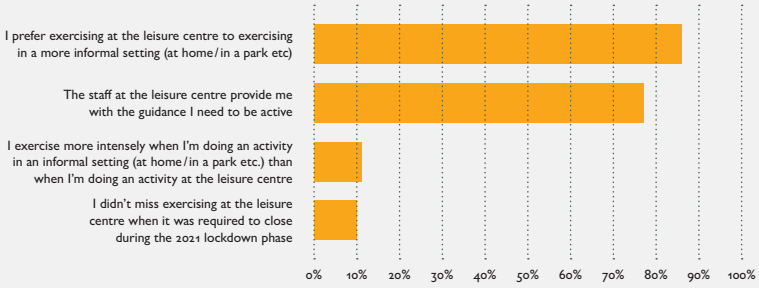
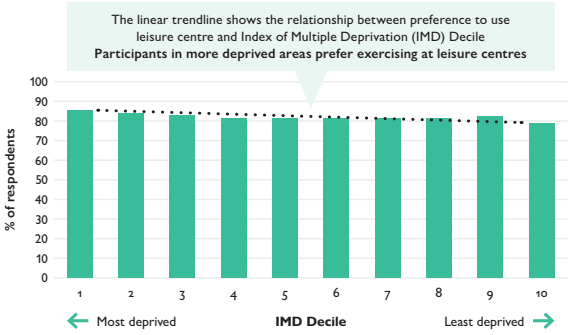


Fig 4

The link between deprivation and preference for leisure centre usage

Respondents who strongly agree that they prefer exercising at a leisure centre over exercising in a more informal setting – eg, at home or in a park – shown by IMD decile



About Moving Communities

Moving Communities is a Sport England initiative delivered by four partners – Leisure-net, 4global, Max Associates, Right Directions and Sheffield Hallam University's Sports Industry Research Group (SIRG).

Moving Communities tracks participation at public leisure facilities and provides new evidence of the sector's performance, sustainability and social value to assist local authorities, leisure providers and policymakers in supporting the recovery of public gyms, pools and leisure centres and taking informed decisions to keep people active.

The new platform represents an evolution of the Moving Communities report which has been produced annually by the ukactive Research Institute since 2017, building on ukactive's work with its public sector leisure operator members.

More: www.HCMmag.com/MCresources

Data from other sources within Moving Communities confirms this trend, showing the strong return of participants from more deprived areas and a more balanced distribution of participation across deprivation groups.

To identify this trend, researchers looked at responses to the Customer Experience Survey and analysed them against the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) – a measure of relative deprivation. The analysis revealed a direct correlation between level of deprivation and people's preference for exercising in a leisure centre, compared to more informal settings, such as at home, as shown in Fig 4.

An encouraging start

These results also show the key role played by public sector leisure centres, particularly among people living in more deprived areas.

The proportion of customers from IMD groups 1-3 (most deprived), using leisure centres during 2019 was 23.9 per cent – when customers returned in April/May 2021, it was up to 26.1 per cent.

The Moving Communities Customer Experience Survey provides valuable insight into the role that

The next Moving Communities survey will take place in September 2021

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MONKEY BUSINESS IMAGES

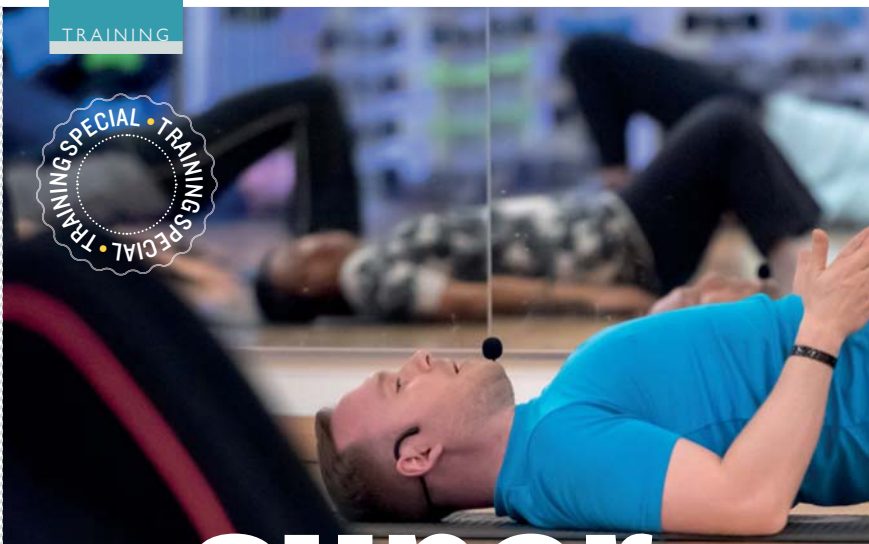
public sector facilities play in local communities. The role of the local leisure centre appears to be essential in providing physical activity opportunities, while the sector's approach to COVID-related cleanliness and protocols appears to be a key part of the return of customers.

The insight and data collected from the survey will complement the rest of the Moving Communities dataset, informing future strategic decisions that need to be made about where time, effort and money are best invested in order to most benefit local communities, with the next Moving Communities survey scheduled for September 2021.

Mike Hill is director of Leisure-net Solutions

Methodology

The Moving Communities Customer Experience Survey was carried out over a seven-week period during April-May 2021. The survey was designed in conjunction with Sport England's Insight team and builds on previous similar surveys carried out by the National Benchmarking Service. It used an online survey, distributed by participating local authorities and operators via email. The sample was, therefore, self-selective and the results have not been weighted in any way.



TRAINING SPECIAL • TRAINING SPECIAL •

super connectors

GM Active has launched a training programme to create a new generation of transformational leaders, as Liz Terry reports

Key people in Greater Manchester's physical activity and community leisure sector are being selected to take part in a new transformational leadership programme designed to steer their transition from being 'fitness and facilities' managers to becoming leaders of public health, wellbeing and communities.

Regional community collective, GM Active CIC, wants to inspire the region's community leisure workforce to offer new ways of helping people live healthy, happy and fulfilled lives in areas with some of the worst health metrics in the UK.

The programme has been created to empower staff to play a greater role in developing new wellness services and innovative, cross-sectoral responses to current and emerging population health needs.

Learners will understand the notion of 'leadership rather than management' and will be equipped to 'think aspirationally', develop high-performing teams, have a wider appreciation of the physical activity ecosystem and be capable of working in a collaborative way across this system towards the achievement of defined objectives.

Wider ecosystem

The programme will cover key topics that will help staff understand their role and look at wellness, UK NHS and social care

GM Active is aiming to pivot from leisure to wellness

This training is vital to ensure we're creating leaders who understand how they can create a joined-up approach to health and wellness

systems with a view to identifying more collaborative ways of working with other professionals and community groups.

The NHS landscape is changing and this programme will enable the learners to understand this better, and be able to identify opportunities and develop common purpose, in order that physical activity can contribute to how preventative health is tackled across the integrated care system.

Two groups of 20 sector leaders will gain the latest insight and skills to help the sector more effectively address the huge health and physical activity inequalities that exist across the region's diverse communities.

The programme they will undertake consists of five modules – each will take around a month to complete and once the learners have completed it, they'll become part of a growing transformational leadership community, meaning their learning and development has no 'finish line'.

Finally, a 100 day plan will be developed at the conclusion of the programme, set around one of the five themes of Sport England's *Uniting the Movement* strategy.

Who's taking part?

Previous educational achievement is not a prerequisite for joining the programme, as it's been designed for those within a leadership position who are accountable for navigating transformation in thinking and positioning across Greater Manchester.

Watch the video: www.HCMmag.com/transform

Key staff are being selected for GM Active's transformational leadership programme.

Our leadership programme will contribute to the sector's pivot from leisure to wellness

Andy King, GM Active

PHOTO: GM ACTIVE

The training aims to equip individuals with the skills to reimagine the sector landscape

Elaine Briggs, Future Fit

PHOTO: FUTURE FIT

GM Active Chair Andy King said: "It's vital that staff across the sector understand much more about the wider community we serve and how we can better play our part in improving health and wellbeing services for everyone across Greater Manchester.

"We need transformational leaders to help us achieve a shift in our workforce's mindset. It's clear that leaders already exist across GM Active – we want to enable these people to grow, do more and be better connected to the ecosystem they're part of.

"Our leadership programme will bolster the knowledge and understanding of our staff to meet the demands of their roles and the changing needs of our communities.

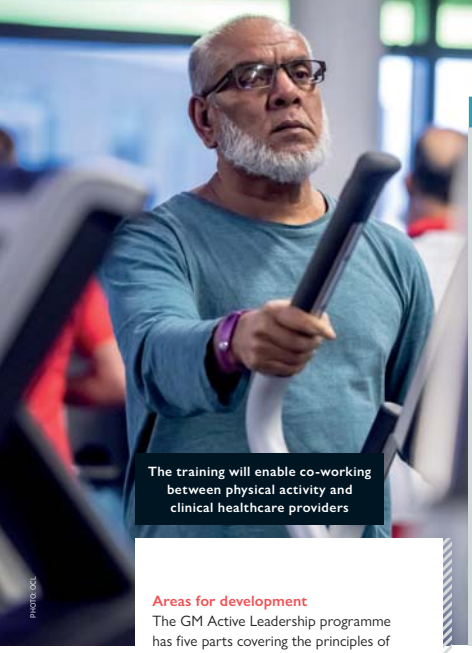
"They will have the skills and knowledge to ensure their facilities and services are part of the whole-system approach and contribute to the sector's pivot from leisure to wellness.

"We believe wellness is the development of habitual behaviour that contributes to improvement in the physical, mental and social wellbeing of an individual, so they can live a happy, fulfilled and thriving life."

Wellness is defined as the development of habitual behaviour that contributes to wellbeing

PHOTO: OCL

A distinctive feature of GM Active is the promotion of co-working between physical activity and clinical healthcare providers



The training will enable co-working between physical activity and clinical healthcare providers

PHOTO: GCL

GM Active fast facts

- GM Active is a collective of 12 leisure and community organisations from across Greater Manchester that are part of the same movement – to get more people physically active, as part of the city-region's *GM Moving Ambition and Plan*
- Focused on addressing physical inactivity and promoting health and wellbeing throughout Greater Manchester, GM Active is dedicated to helping build a healthy, happy and prosperous region
- GM Active works in partnership with organisations across the health system
- The member organisations manage mostly publicly owned leisure and physical activity assets and services on behalf of the 10 local authorities in Greater Manchester, for the good of the whole population
- Members are Active Tameside, Bolton Arena, Bolton Community Leisure, Bury Leisure, Wigan Council, Life Leisure in Stockport, Your Trust in Rochdale, Manchester Active, Oldham Community Leisure, Salford Community Leisure, Trafford Leisure and Wythenshawe Forum Trust

Areas for development

The GM Active Leadership programme has five parts covering the principles of leadership, creating culture, understanding today's leisure and wellness sector including key agendas, services and organisations; these include whole system thinking, health inequalities, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and leading for renewal.

Each module will be delivered via a number of channels, including a webinar, delivered by an experienced leisure professional, followed by an e-learning module. This will be supported by offline learning tasks, with the whole module wrapped up with a seminar, to check understanding, embed learning and allow for knowledge sharing.

Ultimately, the learners' success will be defined by how effectively they fulfil the objectives of their organisation and its contribution to improving population health across Greater Manchester.

The culture of GM Active

A distinctive feature of the way GM Active operates is the promotion of co-working between physical activity and clinical healthcare providers. Its training programmes reflect this and act as a 'skills passport' for continuous professional development in the industry.

The programme has been designed and delivered in partnership with Future Fit, supported by Greater Sport and made possible by £40k of investment from the National Lottery, through the Local Pilot in Greater Manchester with Sport England.

Elaine Briggs, director of education at Future Fit, said: "This course is the first of its kind, created in partnership with and delivered by experts in their field. The training aims to equip individuals with the skills to reimagine the sector landscape, connect with their communities and wider organisations and deliver on their local outcomes and those of the Sport England *Uniting the Movement* strategy.

"We believe this training is vital to ensure we're creating leaders who understand how they can influence change in their communities and create a joined-up approach to health and wellness, while motivating their teams through dynamic, passionate leadership."

More: www.HCMmag.com/GMActive

Delivering on Employability

Six months on from the launch of its Kickstart programme, The Gym Group is hiring the majority of trainees, as Liz Terry reports

The Gym Group confirms it has hired 18 out of 24 Kickstart candidates, as its first cohort reaches the end of the six month training period.

The Kickstart programme is part of the UK government's Plan for Jobs initiative, helping get people into work by subsidising their salaries during training.

Under the scheme, wages and costs are paid to the candidate by the government and passed on to the employer. The funding covers 100 per cent of the National Minimum Wage – or the National Living Wage, depending on the age of the participant – for 25 hours a week for a total of six months. Employers can pay a higher wage and for more hours, but the funding does not cover this.

The Gym Group committed to the Kickstart programme last year and was initially approved for 150 places. It currently has around 90 trainees going through the programme, however, CEO, Richard Darwin, says the company is in the process of applying for additional places as part of its commitment to 'driving social value in communities'.

"We're a people-focused business," says Darwin, "and are proud to play an important role in supporting local communities.

"Sustainability is a key focus for us and we're keen to do what we can to help young individuals succeed in the world of fitness. Young people have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, and schemes like this offer them the skills and tools needed to succeed in this thriving industry."

As a low-cost operator, The Gym Group – which currently has around 180 sites – has minimal staffing levels and relies on PTs to deliver services for members. The company has had an ambition to 'grow its own' for some time, to ensure it has enough well-trained staff to support its development pipeline, so the Kickstart scheme fits the bill well.

PHOTO: DEPARTMENT OF WORK AND PENSIONS

The UK's Minister for employment, Mims Davies, visited the West Croydon site in June to meet Kickstart recruits

Creating social value – the big picture

A recent report on The Gym Group indicates the company generated £1.8bn in social value between 2016 and 2021

- The research was undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University and establishes The Gym Group as the first private-sector UK company to commission an analysis of the social value created by its business.
- The methodology, initially commissioned by Sport England and the government, uses a Social Value Calculator developed by 4global in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and socio-economic data provider Experian.
- The outputs of the model are split into four core categories: health, subjective wellbeing, education and crime and are driven by the number of people exercising, frequency of activity, demographics and socio-economic factors.
- The Gym Group has been backed in part by Bridges Ventures since launch, with Bridges' social mandate influencing the way it operates.
- Bridges has four aims in making investments – healthier lives, future skills, a sustainable planet and stronger communities - hence the synergies with The Gym Group.

PHOTO: THE GYM GROUP

Young people have been hit hard by the pandemic, and schemes like Kickstart offer them the skills and tools needed to succeed in our thriving industry

Richard Darwin, CEO, The Gym Group

The programme

The Gym Group offers Kickstart recruits an intensive scheme which includes practical and academic support. The aim is to give trainees the tools to build a personal training business and the chance to find a permanent home with the company.

Candidates are given on-the-job training and the opportunity to achieve Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications in fitness instructing and personal training, as well as a first aid qualifications and their first year's insurance. They're then supported to further develop their skills and build a successful business.

Minister for employment, Mims Davies, visited The Gym Group's West Croydon site in June, to meet current and recently-hired Kickstart recruits and hear about their experiences. She said: "It's fantastic to see the Gym Group backing this scheme, helping our next generation get on track and develop the core skills needed to excel in the fitness industry."

Kickstart recruit Molly John said: "It was a genuine visit from the minister and great to see her enthusiasm for the work she's doing and how it's affecting the lives of the young people involved. She definitely wanted to hear about us and our journey. It was a pleasure to have met her and hear how she plans to continue the changes she's implementing." ●

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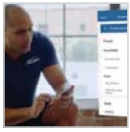

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SUPPLIER SHOWCASE

Empowering PTs to deliver online

Premier Global NASM is setting personal trainers up for sustainable success with the launch of its online training bundle and app

PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK

Premier Global NASM is enabling PTs to go digital

As the sector starts to embrace the opportunities presented by digitalisation, Premier Global NASM has launched a new Online Training Bundle and NASM Edge app to help personal trainers build successful businesses that optimises both in-person and digital opportunities.

The digital revolution has changed the world forever. Geographical barriers have been stripped away, opening doors to new, global audiences. While this creates welcome revenue-generating opportunities for personal trainers, it also presents an urgent need for tailored education and tools that drive success. This is exactly what Premier Global NASM is delivering to the market.

The education provision in the Online Training Bundle guides personal trainers through how to successfully transition their services to online delivery.

The bundle consists of: Virtual Coaching Specialist NASM-VCS, Business Accelerator Course and 12 months' free access to Premier Global's new NASM Edge app.

Supporting talent

"The backbone of our industry has always been our talented workforce," says Dan Rees, MD at Premier Global NASM. "To continue to attract talent into our workforce and 'build back better' we need to provide training and tools that set people up for success.

"In an increasingly digital world, we need to empower personal trainers to be able to build service models that embrace the hybrid model, providing a portfolio of flexible training options that helps deliver their services to as wide an audience as possible.

"We need to empower personal trainers to be able to build service models that embrace the hybrid model"

Dan Rees, MD, Premier Global NASM

"Practically, delivering services online is very different from delivering services in-person and requires a specific skill set. This is exactly what the new Online Training Bundle offers.

"We've also developed the Edge app. This is a digital business solution for personal trainers to enable the effective management and execution of all aspects of business. Our new Online Training Bundle also includes 12 months' free access to NASM Edge."

Premier Global NASM launches The Edge app

The Edge is a complete client and business management tool that also supports learners through the provision of education and exam preparation materials. ***Features include:***

- Remote live training with built-in video sessions
- Ability to manage workouts from a browser
- Scheduling and management of training sessions
- Customising workouts
- Collecting and processing payments
- Built-in chat with images and video
- Calorie counter
- Shareable performance tracking
- Exam preparation materials

The Edge will be provided free of charge for 12 months to any learners committing to the Online Training Bundle

Find out more:

Online Training Bundle:
- **www.HCMmag.com/ptcareer**

Virtual Specialisation Course:
- **www.HCMmag.com/VSC**

PHOTO: URBANHEALTHCLUB

Philipp Maier

PHOTO: URBANHEALTHCLUB

Urban Health Club is a key element of the collaborative, future-facing, urban regeneration development that is Urban Harbor. Its founder and CEO tells Kate Cracknell about his desire to create something new, extraordinary and beautiful, while at the same time improving people's health

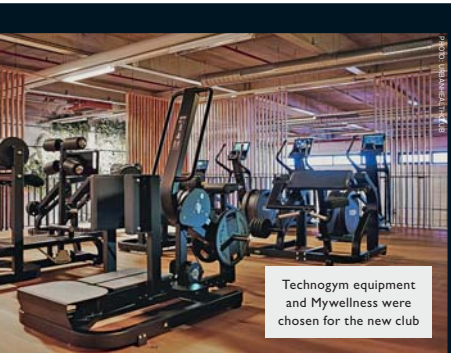


PHOTO: URBANHEALTHCLUB

Technogym equipment and Mywellness were chosen for the new club

Tell us about the Urban Health Club concept.

Urban Health Club is a €2.8m hub for fitness, wellness, athletics, calisthenics and health in Ludwigsburg, Germany and part of the Urban Harbor urban regeneration project.

We believe health should be the primary goal of every individual, so this is our focus, incorporating not just fitness but also nutrition and balance in everyday life.

At Urban Health Club, members' wellbeing comes first in a space that allows them to be together, train together and recharge their batteries.

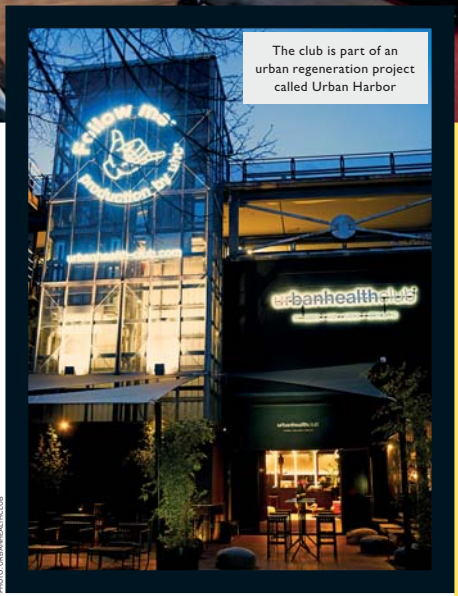
In addition to classic fitness training, we offer crosslift, dance, reformer Pilates and more, all united under the Urban Health Club brand.

Our class programme is constantly developed and adapted according to participant feedback – introducing advanced classes, for example, or creating new Saturday specials – with all classes delivered by highly educated, charismatic trainers who proactively encourage members to work out in our unique space.

Urban Health Club has also set out to create new standards in the design and digitalisation of its services, in line with the whole future-looking ethos of Urban Harbor. We've created a completely digital club where members, personal trainers, coaches and our distinct training areas are all connected, by utilising Technogym Mywellness.

From the end of July 2021, we're also adding Hyrox, having secured exclusive rights for our region. ▸

The space is set up to support a wide range of training types, from calisthenics to Pilates



The club is part of an urban regeneration project called Urban Harbor

PHOTO: URBANHEALTHCLUB

> We offer medical checks which provide a precise overview of a member's risk factors and tailor-make solutions for physical and mental health, based on actual data

> UHC Spa is open to Urban Health Club members as well as operating as a standalone business

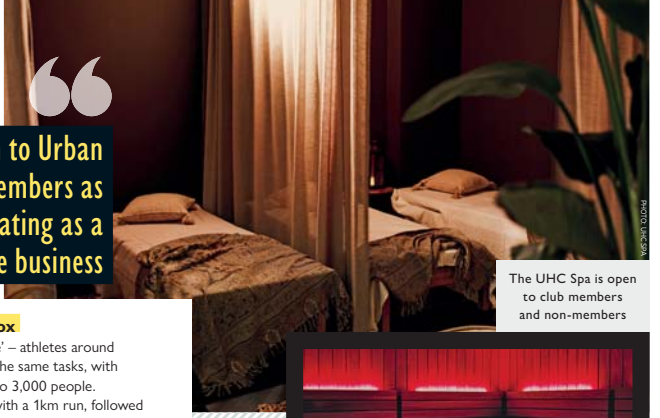


PHOTO: UHC SPA

The UHC Spa is open to club members and non-members

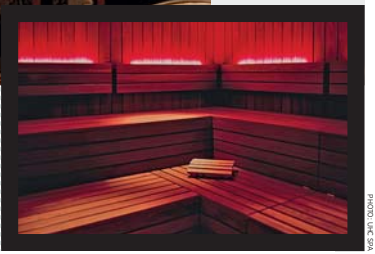


PHOTO: UHC SPA

Tell us about Hyrox

It's a global fitness 'race' – athletes around the world compete in the same tasks, with each event hosting up to 3,000 people.

Competition starts with a 1km run, followed by a functional workout which is repeated eight times. Participants wear a timing chip and get an individual 'finish time' which Hyrox aggregates to create global rankings across different age and user groups. Each season ends with a world championship where people with the fastest times from each city go head to head.

Turning to the club, what makes it special?

The interior design of Urban Health Club began with the desire for change – for something unique, extraordinary and beautiful.

My personal motto is: 'It's not about finding yourself, it's about creating yourself', and the design and architecture of the club are my own. My inspiration was drawn from various different sources and industries, but we've brought it all together at Urban Health Club in a way we don't think exists anywhere else.

We wanted to create an atmosphere of urban rhythm and relaxation at the same time, so the entire space has warm colours, natural materials and light in a way that inspires tranquillity and balance. Bright rooms and hip design elements provide a visual kick, but overall it's a clean, timeless design that dovetails well with the club's casual, relaxed atmosphere to appeal to its diverse target market.

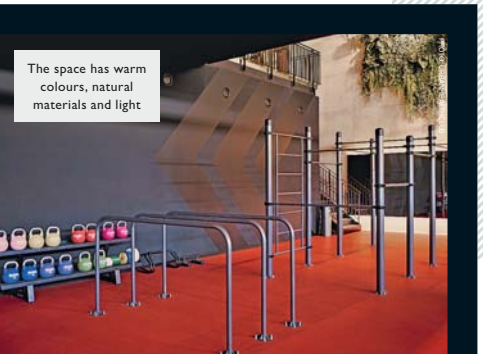


PHOTO: UHC SPA

The space has warm colours, natural materials and light

Are there complementary services?

Although it might initially seem unconnected, I need to start by telling you about Projects M, my advertising and digital agency. The M team consists of creative specialists in design, film, PR, strategy, process as well as online and offline experience. We believe digital transformation is the challenge facing every business today, and at Projects M, we love to connect offline and online to create seamless experiences.

UHC Home production falls under the umbrella of Projects M. It's an independent showroom and shop for fitness equipment and designer furniture – I'm an official reseller for partners including Smow (high-end furniture), Devine Wellness (snowrooms and heat experiences) and Technogym fitness equipment and digital connected fitness.

Other complementary businesses include UHC Spa, which is open to Urban Health Club members, as well as operating as a standalone business for non-members. With its Moroccan-style interior design, the spa offers various treatments and massages, as well as a private workout area and private day spa that can be booked.

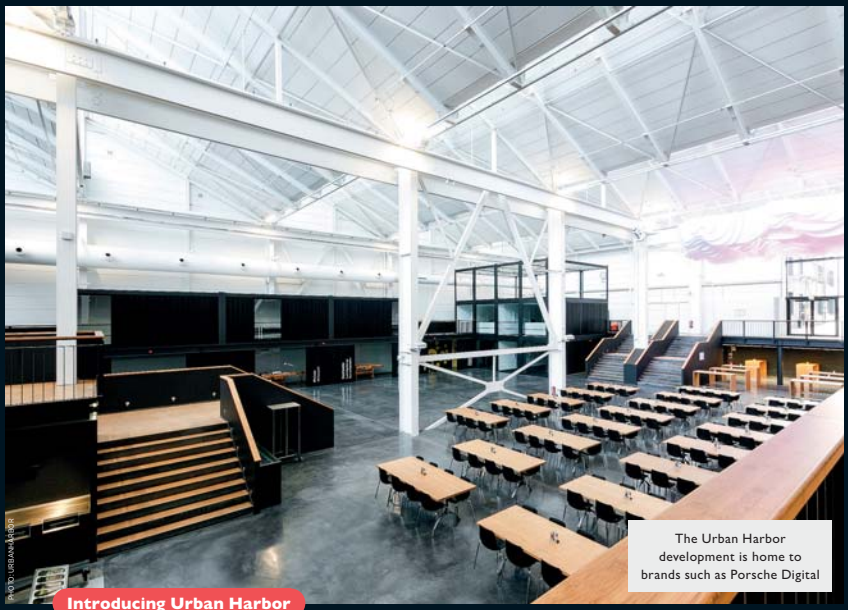


PHOTO: URBANHARBOR

The Urban Harbor development is home to brands such as Porsche Digital

Introducing Urban Harbor

Urban Harbor – of which Urban Health Club is a part – is an initiative working to redesign urban spaces and bring them back to life.

The first location is a former machine hall in the city of Ludwigsburg, just north of Stuttgart in Germany, which has been transformed by Max Maier Urban Development into a cutting-edge business hub.

Principle, Max Maier, sees people as 'space-creating beings' and makes architectural space, real estate and urban development for Urban Harbor and its people. The philosophy is to transform the old industrial area to thrive in a future context, with architectural, economic, ecological and social values uniting to create a city of the future.

The 200,000sq m of Urban Harbor is home to numerous digital start-ups, as well as the headquarters of global brands such as Porsche Design, Porsche Digital and Bosch Grow. In total, over 8,000 people come together to work in the new district "on the ideas of tomorrow".

The development has been based on creating new work and living spaces that inspire innovation and creativity by taking things out of their normal contexts and moving away from familiar working environments and classic corporate workplaces.

There's also a variety of event locations and meeting spaces alongside Urban Health Club and the UHC Home showroom, including Follow the Café / Bar – a digitally-powered kitchen where all appliances are connected to each other, quality control is in place from the field to the plate, and fresh vegan food and "the best coffee in town" are served.

"We believe true innovation does not live through the products themselves, but through the user or customer, so our focus in our Urban Health Club location at Urban Harbor is on people," says Philipp Maier.

"We create experiences. Awaken emotions. Connect personalities. Think globally," he says. "Urban Harbor is a place where culture and classicism, tradition and future, sports and lifestyle come together. It's a place where collaboration is put into practice, powered by digital processes and services. And there's more to come."

PHOTO: URBANHARBOR

A former machine hall has been transformed into a business hub

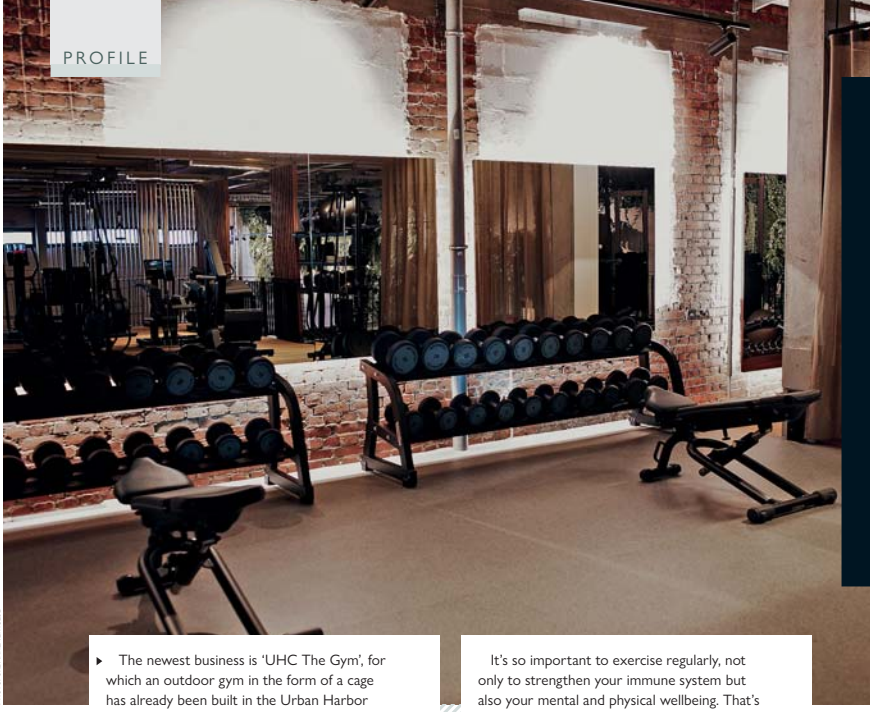


PHOTO: URBANHEALTHCLUB

- The newest business is 'UHC The Gym', for which an outdoor gym in the form of a cage has already been built in the Urban Harbor space. More 24/7 facilities will be built soon.

What are your membership options?

Urban Health Club offers six-, 12- and 24-month memberships which include indoor training, access to the spa, a range of indoor and outdoor group exercise classes, and at-home training via the Urban Health Club app.

There are various add-ons that can be booked on a monthly basis, including dance, calisthenics, crosslift, outdoor gym, Pilates reformer training and Navy Seal Workouts. There's also, as mentioned, a private workout area. Almost every member books at least one or two add-ons.

Tell us more about your app

Every member has access to our Urban Health Club app, which allows them to stay connected with our trainers and the club no matter where they are in the world. We use the Mywellness Prescribe, Self, Coach and Challenge business solutions from Technogym for this. In addition to the daily workouts, we also promote the live classes that are available on our Urban Health Club social media channels.

It's so important to exercise regularly, not only to strengthen your immune system but also your mental and physical wellbeing. That's become even more important in the difficult times we've been going through recently, with social distancing, limited options to exercise and lots of home office time. You have to make time to exercise and move, and our app helps with this.

Under the slogan 'Creating your health', I've also called on all fellow citizens – members and non-members alike – to exercise more and have made free sports and fitness sessions available to everyone through UHC Live, our online classes.

How did you navigate COVID-19?

We'd only recently opened and as a club in its start-up phase, this exceptional situation was challenging. We made the best of it by leveraging our digital infrastructure to perfect the customer journey.

We communicated via push messages through our Urban Health Club app, responded to individual customer needs and created a 360-degree user experience. This included UHC Radio, a live streaming platform that brings Urban Health Club's beat to any connected device.

Meanwhile, our membership models continued as usual [German clubs continued to collect payments

> I've called on all fellow citizens — members and non-members alike — to exercise more and have made free sports and fitness sessions available to everyone

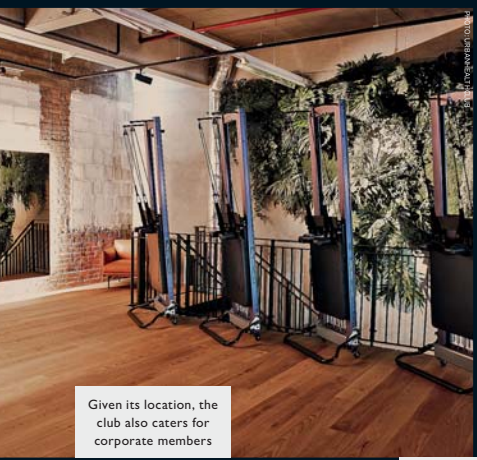


PHOTO: URBANHEALTH.EU

Given its location, the club also caters for corporate members

PHOTO: URBANHEALTHCLUB

Urban Health Club has a membership club feel with reception and vegan café

during lockdowns]. Now we've re-opened, members have received a compensation voucher which they can use to book premium classes, to use the private spa area, to pay for personal training or meals in our vegan café, and so on.

Together with the UHC community, we've come back stronger. Our members have come out to meet us with solidarity, commitment and support. Mails, calls and posts are consistently positive and very supportive of us as a club.

How skewed is your membership towards corporate?

The club isn't only designed for a corporate audience. Its diverse mix of demographics spans students and local residents as well as professionals and employees, and we work hard to build a sense of community and cohesion via events, special offers, special classes on Saturdays and fundraising campaigns. This has grown even more important during COVID-19.

We do have a strong 'Corporate Health at Urban Health Club' offering, though, with a focus on time- and cost-effective ways to keep employees healthy. The pushing back of retirement age, and growing demands on employees, means prevention is now more important than ever.

In addition to gym-based training, personal training, workshops and workouts, such as Pilates, yoga, back fit, functional training and relaxation classes, we offer various medical checks and screenings. These provide a very precise overview of the member's current situation, allowing us to assess individual risks and to factor in muscular imbalances and tailor-make solutions – both for physical and mental health – based on actual data.

We also offer occupational health management and at-home programmes to keep members motivated beyond our club, with the ultimate goal of ensuring healthy, motivated, fit employees.

And it's well worth the investment on the part of employers: healthy employees with increased motivation and company loyalty – as well as lower levels of absenteeism – result in a high cost-benefit ratio. The average return on investment is 1:4.

What are your plans moving forward?

The immediate future will see us completing our 24/7 outdoor gym and building the rest of our new 'UHC The Gym', which will also be 24/7.

Further locations are also planned in various metropolitan areas over the coming years.

I then intend to re-imagine the Urban Health Club concept at least every five years. ●

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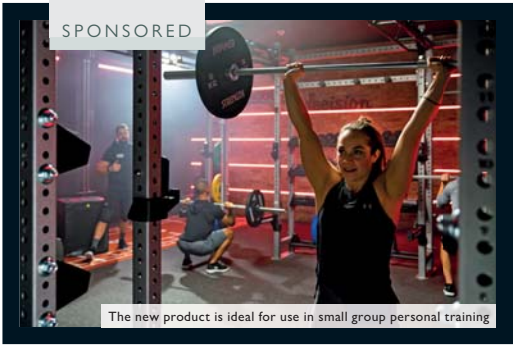


The new product is ideal for use in small group personal training

PHOTO: LIFE FITNESS

The Official Hammer Strength Box creates a unique exerciser experience that at-home and virtual workouts simply cannot replicate

Frank van de Ven, VP International, Life Fitness

Introducing the Official Hammer Strength Box

With gyms reopening as the fitness industry recovers from the impact of lockdowns, members are seeking social interaction and engaging training experiences in a small group setting

In response to these demands and in line with a number of popular industry trends, Life Fitness has launched the Official Hammer Strength Box, a unique and complete small group training offering from performance training specialist, Hammer Strength.

Made up of three workout zones, the Official Hammer Strength Box incorporates barbell training, functional training with Hammer Strength accessories and high intensity interval training on cardio equipment. Together, the three zones deliver an intensive small group training programme for up to 12 participants.

The Box offers over 30 preconfigured workouts, designed with maximum variation and effectiveness for participants of all fitness abilities. Workshops are delivered as part of all installations to support trainers with programme delivery and to allow instructors to focus on form and coaching techniques.

Suitable as an in-club solution or standalone studio, the flexible design means that the space can also be used for personal training and individual workouts, outside group training sessions.

As part of the full package solution, facilities can choose from a range of design concepts incorporating integrated lighting and sound, flooring and artwork, to create an immersive training environment and to inspire and motivate exercisers. Bespoke designs are also available.

Frank van de Ven, VP International at Life Fitness said: "The Official Hammer Strength Box creates a unique experience that at-home and virtual workouts simply cannot replicate.

"An all-in-one solution, it brings together best-in-class equipment, effective workouts, and a motivating environment, designed to inspire and help members get results.

"For facilities, it's an exciting and unique selling point that will drive member retention and acquisition."

● To support the release of the Hammer Strength Box, Life Fitness is also launching a new blog series, *'How to create a successful group training experience for your facility'*, examining post-COVID opportunities and how facilities can maximise these in a group training setting, as well as how individuals seeking experiences and belonging can translate into the gym environment. Sign up at: www.HCMmag.com/lifefitnessblog

PHOTO: LIFE FITNESS

The Official Hammer Strength Box from Life Fitness

FLOORING

The foundation of every fitness experience

Every gym design project should be designed from the floor up, says Physical Company's James Anderson. He tells *HCM* why

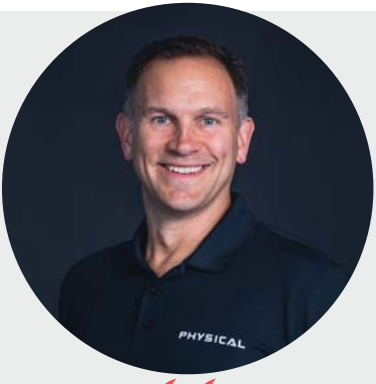


PHOTO: PHYSICAL COMPANY

With specialist flooring now available for every type of activity, it's no overstatement to say your flooring choices are as integral to the member experience as the fitness equipment you install

The right choice of flooring can make a workout more enjoyable, more impactful, not to mention safer and better for the body," says James Anderson, sales and marketing director at Physical Company.

"Gone are the days when gym flooring would be an afterthought – a case of installing carpet tiles across the majority of the fitness space, with some basic free weight tiles in a dumbbell area. Nowadays, flooring is the foundation on which you build your fitness experiences – it underpins and plays an active role in the entire workout.

"With specialist flooring now available for every type of activity, it's no overstatement to say your flooring choices are as integral to the member experience as the fitness equipment you install," says Anderson, "It's why we encourage every one of our customers to design their fitness spaces from the ground up."

Packing a punch

"The flooring is an integral element to the overall aesthetics of a space. It can offer clear lines, impactful designs, great colour options, and will support your gym's overall brand statement," he says.

"You're also looking for it to hold up to the traffic a commercial gym floor is subjected to, which is why every one of our flooring solutions is thoroughly stress-tested.

"That includes our market-leading Turfgrass solutions – artificial turf, including the hugely popular Customgrass sprint tracks – that brings an outdoor training experience to the gym floor.

"We can collaborate with Turfgrass to create customised turf tracks in just 4-6 weeks. You provide us with your logo, your slogan, your colour scheme; Physical Company's in-house design team then creates an eye-catching design to suit the training requirements and the brand.

Your flooring underpins your entire operation and determines the user experience

PHOTO: PHYSICAL COMPANY

"It's a great way to create instant impact on your gym floor. It's also incredibly robust, thanks to a method of stitching branding and markings into the turf at the point of manufacture," says Anderson. "It means the markings and logos are integral to the product, rather than being painted on, or cut and glued in as separate elements, as can be the case with some other products.

"The result is a single piece of flooring that looks great, is extremely durable and withstands constant heavy use – so it's no surprise it's become a go-to for operators across the sector, from énergie Fitness and GLL, to boutique-turned-franchise The Shredquarters and personal training brand Six3nine."

The basics, covered

"Easy to clean, comfortable, long-lasting, versatile, non-slip, safe – all of our flooring solutions tick these boxes as standard. We also place a big focus on vibration and sound absorption, making our products ideal for free weight areas and high-impact aerobics studios alike."

"It's not just about having high-quality flooring, either," Anderson observes. "It's about having the correct type of high-quality flooring for the activity. Too soft or hard, for example, and you'll negatively impact the training experience; it may even cause injury to exercisers' joints, or lead to damage of the equipment or sub-floor.

"That's why we offer an unparalleled range of options to ensure every area of your facility has precisely the solution it needs. From free weight flooring to artificial turf, functional training flooring to shock pads and far more besides, our products span a variety of materials, dimensions and thicknesses to ensure we can meet your needs, whatever floor space you're looking at.

"Ecore Athletic is another of our highly-valued partners. Its products are second-to-none, its warranties impressive and its eco-agenda embedded in every product," he says.

Best sellers

"I'll name-check a few top-sellers, starting with Bounce 2," says Anderson. "This beautiful flooring looks like real wood, but acts like rubber, absorbing impact and being quiet underfoot, making it perfect for mixed-used studio areas, while being durable enough for cardio equipment and light weights.

"Performance Rally flooring is ideal for functional areas, with a wear layer that's fusion-bonded to a shock-absorbing base layer. It's engineered to cushion the impact force related to aggressive functional training, providing the user with a performance improving, body-protecting training surface.

"Also in high demand is the Performance dB (SmashTile) – designed for areas where extreme durability and ultimate sound and shock absorption are required – and Performance UltraTile, a rubber floor tile with a patented ultra-high-density wear layer on a moulded base – ideal for moderate to extreme weight training. With their range of colours, and shock- and sound-absorbing qualities, both are popular solutions for free weight areas.

"Quite simply, whether you choose products from our carefully selected partners or our high-quality Physical range, we guarantee a world-class solution to literally underpin your fitness offering.

"We believe you will not find a better gym flooring portfolio anywhere on the market."

More: www.physicalcompany.co.uk

WHAT'S NEW IN RIGS?

Rigs have been central to gyms for years. Now suppliers tell us how they're evolving to meet the changing needs of clubs and clients

PHOTO: ELEIKO SPORT

PHOTO: ELEIKO SPORT

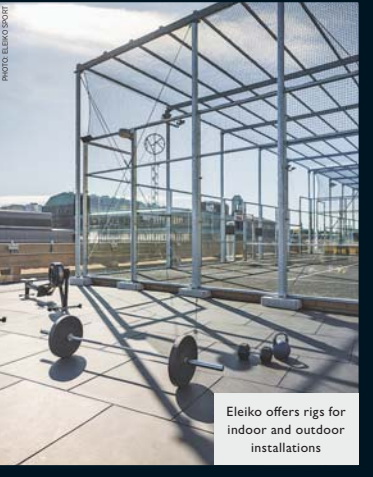
One of the most popular elements is the adjustable pull up bars, which make transitions between taller and shorter athletes very easy

Dale Beech
Eleiko

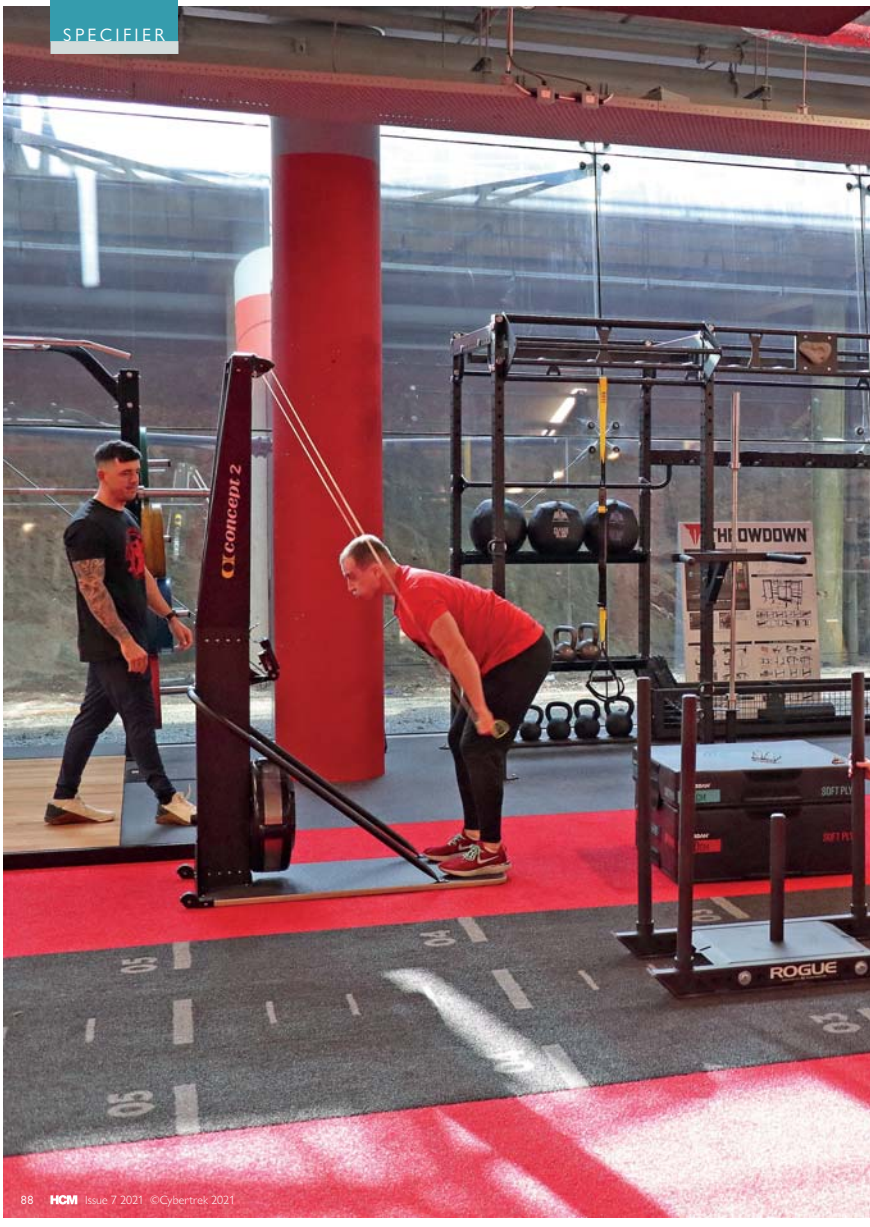
The beauty of our XF80 rigs is the versatility and scalability – the modular design lends itself to hundreds of configurations. One of the most popular elements is the adjustable pull up bars, which make transitions between taller and shorter athletes very easy. This has been especially popular within facilities that are encouraging teen or kids' classes.

Eleiko Education has its role to play within our rig installations, in particular the Eleiko Functional Training course, which is often delivered to upskill personal trainers on the increased training options available with our rigs, or for gym-goers who manage their own training plans.

PHOTO: ELEIKO SPORT



Eleiko offers rigs for indoor and outdoor installations


concept 2
THROWDOWN
ROGUE

Core's Throwdown rigs can be customised for indoor and outdoor spaces

PHOTO: CORE HEALTH & FITNESS

New lines for outdoor use are given a hot-dipped galvanised finish

PHOTO: CORE HEALTH & FITNESS

It's common to see a club ordering two rigs for a single facility; one for indoors and one for outdoors

David Parkinson
Core Health & Fitness

As facilities are reopening, they're looking for ways to freshen up their clubs and excite members into returning. We're seeing more facilities creating new functional training spaces or updating existing ones.

One of the more exciting ways they're doing this is by offering outdoor workouts centred around a functional training rig (see above). In fact, it's very common to see a club ordering two rigs for a single facility; one for the indoor space and one to be placed outdoors. This attests to the growth in popularity of functional training and the excitement around this equipment.

Throwdown – a Core Health & Fitness brand – offers customisable rig solutions for outdoor spaces. We recently launched our XTC, Compact XTC and XTR lines in a hot dipped galvanised finish, which allows the rigs to be placed outdoors while being protected against the elements.

This provides versatility for club owners when it comes to turning their available space into a functional training classroom that can create new revenue opportunities and better recruitment, while keep members coming back for more.

PHOTO: JORDAN FITNESS

PHOTO: JORDAN FITNESS

Outdoor rigs can create COVID-secure individual training spaces

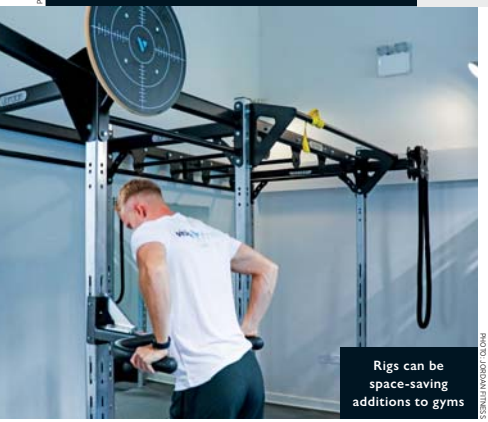


PHOTO: JORDAN FITNESS

Rigs can be space-saving additions to gyms

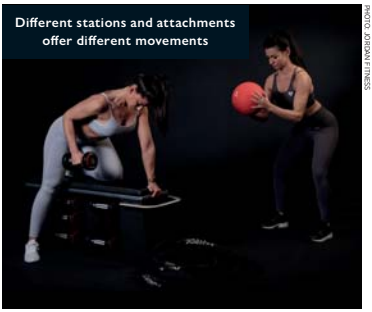


PHOTO: JORDAN FITNESS

Different stations and attachments offer different movements

PHOTO: JORDAN FITNESS

Multifunctional rigs are a great way for club owners to run classes or PT sessions in a dedicated space

Scott Lamber
Jordan Fitness

Demand for space-saving equipment is already a priority for most boutiques and small box gyms. The pandemic has brought the need for more personal, individual training spaces to the forefront of people's minds and this new way of training is set to be in demand, even after all restrictions are lifted around the world.

Multifunctional rigs are a great way for club owners to run classes or PT sessions in a dedicated space. Depending on the rig, different stations and attachments offer different movements. Dip bars offer many alternative exercises, including push-ups, rows, and planks. Steps are perfect for plyometrics and cardio. Wing attachments are for pull-ups or hangs and are ideal for a Jungle Gym or TRX.

Gresham's School, for example, uses rigs in a different way – with an obstacle course proving a good way for students to be active and have fun on the rig.

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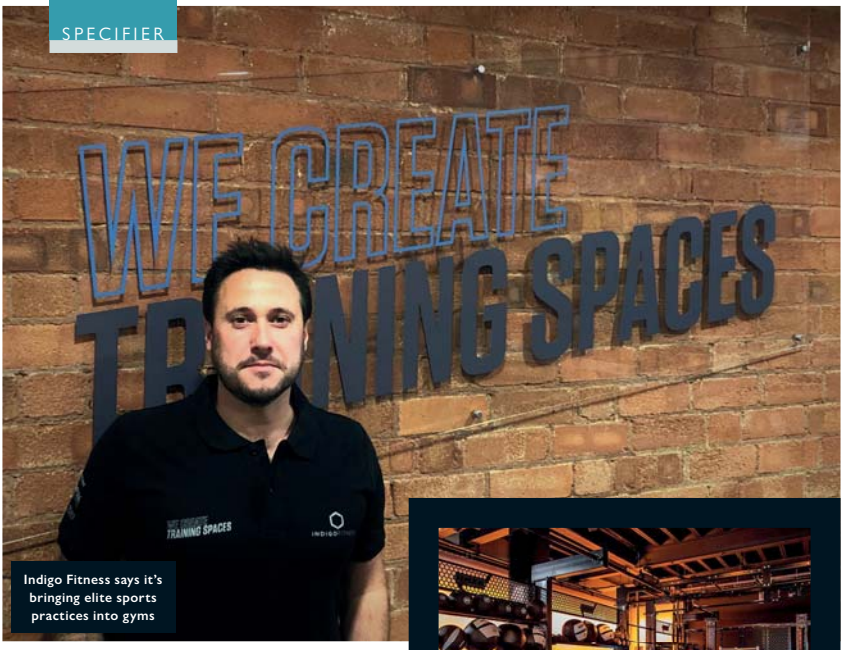


Indigo Fitness says it's bringing elite sports practices into gyms

PHOTO: INDIGO FITNESS

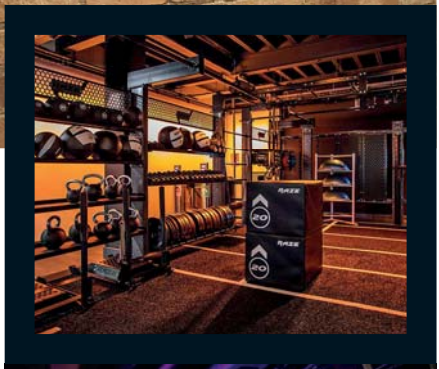


PHOTO: INDIGO FITNESS

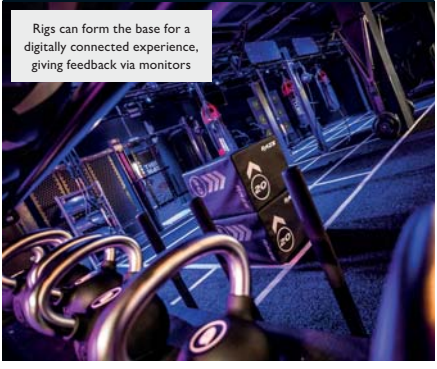
Instant feedback can be displayed on integrated TV monitors to enhance motivation and engagement

Gary Oleinik
Indigo Fitness

For those looking to bring their rigs and racks into the 21st century, we integrate technology into our rigs in the form of velocity-based training devices or heart rate telemetry systems.

Using practices out of the elite sports market, clients can now begin to get instant feedback while using their rig – for example, seeing their live heart rate or the power developed during a kettlebell swing or jump.

All feedback can be displayed on integrated TV monitors to enhance motivation and engagement during classes or PT sessions.



Rigs can form the base for a digitally connected experience, giving feedback via monitors

PHOTO: INDIGO FITNESS

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Product innovation

Steph Eaves rounds up the latest launches in health and fitness

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM

Technogym's new Group Cycle format meets different needs and moods, explains Nerio Alessandri

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM

● **Results are projected on a huge video wall**

Technogym's Group Cycle format is a riding experience with an immersive environment that constantly changes according to the beat and with visuals and metrics that motivate the rider.

The experience offers different classes that combine music, visual effects and performance data to create interactive training that inspires people to move.

A huge video wall allows riders to visualise personal and class results and immerse themselves in the atmosphere. Videos give riders a boost when they need it most.

Technogym founder and CEO, Nerio Alessandri, said: "Our strategy is to offer cycling and fitness enthusiasts a personalised training experience based on passions and needs to enable them to reach their goals."

"Our strategy is to offer people a personalised training experience based on passions and needs"
Nerio Alessandri

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
TECHNOGYM

Core Health and Fitness announces two new bike launches, says Lou Atkinson

Core Health and Fitness has announced the launch of the Schwinn Z and X Indoor Cycling Bikes, which have been designed to simplify the user experience, while expanding instructor possibilities.

Every club, every coach and every rider will be blown away by what it can do for them
Lou Atkinson

Users can choose between a competitive class with Zone Training (Z Bike) or a captivating class based on the Experience (X Bike).

The Z bike allows riders to climb through four zones determined by individual effort, enabling riders of all fitness levels to feel accomplished. Four different LEDs on the forks light up to show rider zones.

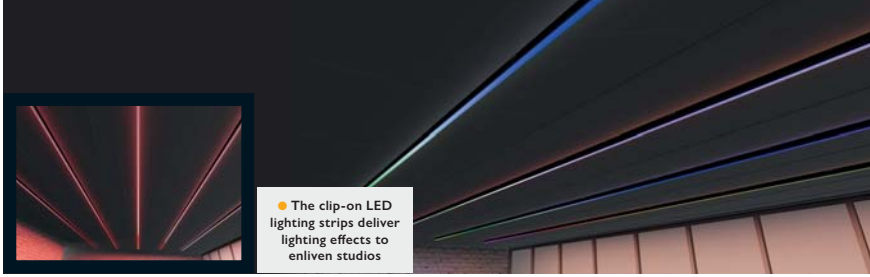
"This bike is a gamechanger!" says Lou Atkinson, Schwinn lead master instructor. "It brings new opportunities to connect with members – every club, coach and rider will be blown away by what it can do for them."

PHOTO: CORE HEALTH & FITNESS

● **The new Schwinn Z and X Indoor Cycling Bikes**

The X Bike allows for "the instructor, the music and the mood of the studio to take the spotlight, delivering feel and consistency so riders can focus on being immersed in the experience."

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
CORE HEALTH



The clip-on LED lighting strips deliver lighting effects to enliven studios

"A great atmosphere is just as important to the fitness journey as the right workout routine, says LEDSnaps' CEO, Ian Kirby

As we move through 2021, gyms and leisure centres can expect demand in membership to increase, but retaining new members will be the challenge.

After more than a year of having their lives turned upside down, customers are looking for gyms and fitness centres that can offer that extra motivational factor – namely a great atmosphere.

At LEDSnaps, we're aware of the financial strain government lockdowns have put on the fitness industry and how important it is to get new and existing members back into the gym.

Set the mood

When COVID-19 struck, LEDSnaps CEO, Ian Kirby, recognised that businesses that survived the pandemic would be tight on cash and resources.

By offering an affordable immersive lighting system to set the fitness mood and add atmosphere to classes, he believes gyms, studios, leisure centres

and health clubs are more likely to attract and retain new members.

"We've developed core technology to bring a 'plug and play' system to the fitness market, with no complicated installation or computer programming required," says Kirby.

"Designed and manufactured in the UK, LEDSnaps is a fully immersive lighting system that enhances all types of fitness classes, including yoga, Pilates, cardio and cycle classes."

LEDSnaps is an innovative solution to traditional, more expensive immersive fitness lighting, offering a professional system with operational simplicity at greatly reduced costs.

The set-up is quick and simple to install onto all ceiling types, can be expanded to grow with the business and be transferred easily to different sites and ceilings.

Keep the offer fresh

"We understand changing trends and the need to constantly refresh to keep customers satisfied," says Kirby, "so we also offer an option for users to receive regular updates to their lighting sequences.

"These are just some of the benefits LEDSnaps can bring to your business.

"We've gone a step further and created a grant to support operators as they transition back to a sustainable operating model through 2021," he says.

"Through this grant we'll donate a complete LEDSnaps system to the fitness operator we think would benefit the most from having the lighting system installed in their facility. Email us if you'd like to know more at info@ledsnaps.co.uk

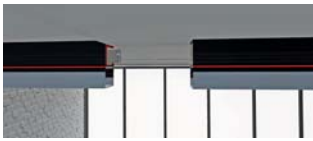
"We're committed to supporting customers on the road to success. Add atmosphere, add members, add LEDSnaps!"

More: www.ledsnaps.com

We'll donate a complete LEDSnaps lighting system free of charge to the fitness operator we think would benefit the most from it

Ian Kirby, CEO LEDSnaps

The units snap together and can be installed on any ceiling – they're also easy to move



OCS Smart allows your locker system to be truly hands-free
Aitor Elorza

● The Ojmar smart lock can intergrate with in-house applications

PHOTO: OJMAR

Ojmar's OCS Smart lock can be controlled by mobile phone or smart watch, says Aitor Elorza

Ojmar has launched OCS Smart, a smart lock that can be controlled via a mobile phone, tablet, or smart watch using Bluetooth. It pairs with the OCS Smart app for installation and usage.

In addition to the touchless features via Bluetooth, the lock has a keypad backup, while the battery lifespan gives up to five years use.

The keypad is crevice-free and waterproof and the wireless system was designed for simple installation.

The lock is equipped with manager- and user-programmable features, including private and public settings, audit trails, rental durations, scheduled automatic openings, and the ability to allocate lockers by QR code or permits sent via email, or social media.

A software development kit is available for integration with in-house applications.

Ojmar's Aitor Elorza, said: "OCS Smart allows your locker system to be truly hands-free."

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
OJMAR

Sport Alliance has launched its Magicline software worldwide in English, reveals Maike Kumstel

Sport Alliance has launched an English version of its gym management software, Magicline, for the global market.

The Germany-based company has already launched in several European countries, including Spain, France and Italy.

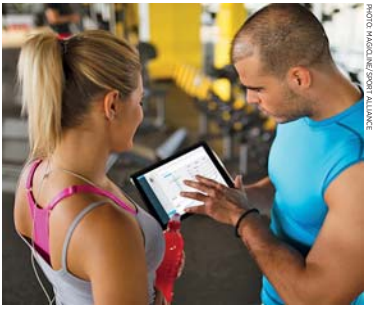
"As a successful software provider in the European market, we would now like to help gym operators worldwide with the digitalisation of their fitness and sports facilities," said Sport Alliance CEO, Daniel Hanelt.

One of the first gyms to use the global Magicline version will be RSG Group's John Reed club in London.

Our mission is to accelerate gyms' business by digitalisation
Maike Kumstel

Sport Alliance's ecosystem has been a co-driver in RSG Group's race to become the world's largest fitness operator – all RSG studios in Europe run on the system.

Magicline's Maike Kumstel said: "The strong partnership with a global player like RSG gives us the opportunity to develop an innovative flagship with our software and to set a benchmark in a new country. But we also work with small independent studios that are future-oriented, ambitious and keen to scale up with us.



● Sport Alliance is going global with its software in English

PHOTO: MAGICLINE/SPORT ALLIANCE

"Our mission is to accelerate gyms' business by digitalisation. Our ultimate goal is to revolutionise the fitness industry with our customers globally".

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
SPORT ALLIANCE

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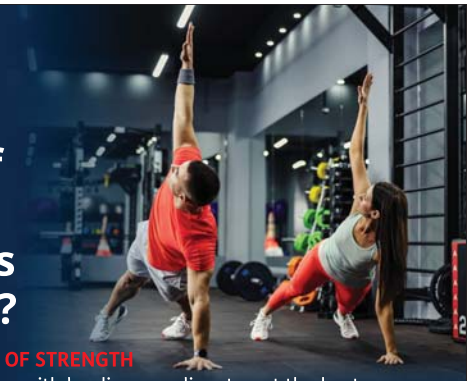
Thinking of changing your fitness equipment?



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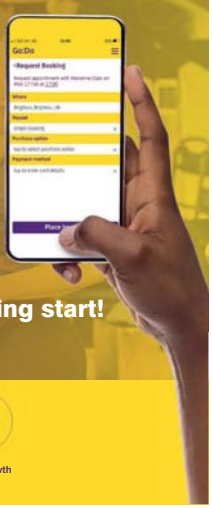

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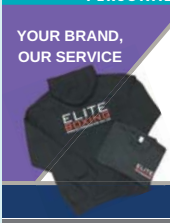

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30 minutes of daily exercise 'not enough'

A new study claims being physically active for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, is not enough for those who spend the rest of their time being sedentary

Research by Columbia University and an international team of scientists looked at data from six studies of more than 130,000 adults in the UK, US and Sweden.

The authors used a technique called compositional analysis to determine how different combinations of activities affect mortality – from moderate to vigorous exercise (activities that increase heart rate) and light physical activity (such as casual walking), to sedentary behaviour.

It found the benefits of 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise depend entirely on how you spend the rest of the day.

Although the current recommendation of 30 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity reduced the odds of an earlier death by up to 80 per cent for some – those who sat for less than seven hours a day – it did not reduce mortality risk for individuals who were very sedentary (over 11 to 12 hours per day).

> 30 minutes of exercise represents just two per cent of your entire day. Is it possible that our activity habits for just two per cent of the day are all that matter when it comes to health?

Breaking the cycle

Interestingly, the researchers identified multiple ways to achieve the same health benefits from exercise.

For example, people who spent just a few minutes engaging in moderate to vigorous physical activity lowered their risk of early death by 30 per cent – as long as they also spent six hours engaging in light physical activity.

"For decades, we've been telling people that the way to stay healthy is to get at least 30 minutes of exercise five days a week," says Keith Diaz, PhD, assistant professor of behavioural medicine and director of the exercise testing laboratory at the Center for Behavioral Cardiovascular Health at Columbia University.

"But even if you're one of the few adults who can stick to this advice, 30 minutes represents just two per cent of your entire day. – is it really possible that our activity habits for just two per cent of the day are all that matter when it comes to health?

"It's not as simple as checking off the 'exercise' box on your to-do list, a healthy movement profile requires more than 30 minutes exercise a day. Moving around and not remaining sedentary all day also matters."

Sebastien Chastin, PhD, professor of health behaviour dynamics at Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland and lead author of the study, added: "Getting 30 minutes of physical activity per day, or 150 minutes per week, is what's currently recommended, but you still have the potential to undo all that good work if you sit too long."

The research was published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

More: www.HCMmag.com/30mins

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