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Sowing seeds

A court has ruled that local authority leisure services in the UK – including health club memberships – are VAT-free in law, but will councils bank this windfall, or use it to promote physical activity?

In this issue of *HCM*, we highlight a court judgement in the UK which has ruled that local authority leisure services should not be subject to VAT.

On page 14, Nick Burrows, local government VAT expert and director at PSTax, explains the case in detail, including the points of law considered by the courts and the reasons for the ruling.

The upshot is that local authority leisure services that are managed in-house will no longer be required to charge, collect and pay VAT at 20 per cent on their income, while still being able to claim it back on costs. As Burrows says, "This is a rare case of an unqualified VAT win for local authorities."

Added to this, the ruling means these services should never have been subject to VAT in the first place, so councils are now able to apply for rebates on tax paid.

With finances tight due to high fuel prices, this windfall will come as a relief to the 20 per cent of councils that are still managing their leisure services in-house, but the big question is whether the money will be shared in any way with communities, or whether councils will keep prices the same and bank an additional 20 per cent from every sale.

We hope some of this money will be used to encourage physical activity and wellbeing via subsidies or targeted free access, as numerous research studies have found that certain people – particularly from vulnerable communities – are deterred by cost.

Where councils make this choice, we urge them to monitor and analyse the effect this has on the wellbeing of those impacted, so we can better understand the way price reductions and subsidies improve wellbeing.

Understanding this is important, most especially given the courts ruled council leisure services should be VAT-exempt because they operate under a different statutory framework from the private sector – one that requires them to do all they reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder; improve their area's economic, social and environmental wellbeing; safeguard and promote the welfare of children and; improve public health – including providing services or facilities.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MAKSIPOIT

The windfall could be used to encourage participation

Council leisure services that are managed in-house are no longer required to charge VAT, while still being able to claim it

Targeted subsidies can be life changing. My dad was given a free swimming pass as a child and through this, fell in love with the sport, competed, became a coach, teacher, lecturer and ASA Tutor, helped start various national championships and the British Swimming Coaches Association, as well as founding five swimming clubs and a swimming school. Largely as a result of that free pass.

So let's sow some positive seeds with at least some of this money, giving more people the chance to live healthier, more active lives that benefit their communities.

Liz Terry, editor
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Uniting the world of fitness

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PHOTO KINEZIS

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*Source: 2021 Global Fitness Report, Les Mills

lesmills.com/uk/ultimate

Write to reply

Fuel the debate about issues across the industry and share your ideas and experiences. We'd love to hear from you. letters@leisuremedia.com



Reducing our impact on the environment aligns us with the ambitious goals of our local authority partners

The journey towards net zero carbon

Chris Hebblewhite, GLL

We've taken an important next step towards powering our facilities with renewable energy with the announcement of our first green gym.

Charlton Lido and Lifestyle Club in South East London has a 350sq m gym with over 40 pieces of equipment, many of which are self-powered. Since installing

a 38 kW solar array, the power generated has capacity to operate the gym entirely by renewable energy for the first time. The panels are delivering 35,000kWh of renewable power and saving seven tonnes of CO2 per annum.

Our social enterprise is all about making a difference for communities



Chris Hebblewhite

PHOTO: GLL

and the climate crisis is already having an effect on them.

We missed out on the government energy support given to cultural institutions, such as libraries and museums, so have made the investment from our capital reserves as part of our journey towards net zero carbon. Our HQ also has a solar array and battery storage.

The investment comes on the back of a multi-year journey to make the business more sustainable, reducing waste, CO2 and energy consumption under our Respecting the Planet corporate value. We're also working closely with our partners to invest in the environment.

Customers and staff are benefitting, knowing that respecting the planet is an important part of the purposeful business they've chosen to be a part of.

PHOTO: GLL



Seven tonnes of CO2 are saved annually at GLL's Charlton Lido and Lifestyle Club

Elite athletes spend years training, with huge boosts to longevity



This is a powerful message at a time when the industry is seeking ways to articulate and amplify its impact



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/SALTY VIEW

The lifespan boost of physical activity

Ray Algar, Oxygen Consulting

In April, I was excited to publish research – co-authored with Professor Les Mayhew, associate head of global research at the International Longevity Centre (ILC) – that increases our understanding of exercise and life expectancy.

It explores an intriguing question: do Commonwealth Games medallists live longer than their general population counterparts? We know athletes dedicate years to training, but does this translate into a longevity boost?

We analysed the lives of 4,000 male and female medallists covering 88 years of data, going back to the first Commonwealth Games in 1930 and discovered significant boosts – for example, 29 per cent in male swimmers and divers – equating to 5.3 extra years of life – and 25 per cent in male track athletes.

Weightlifters also showed a 24 per cent gain which translates to around 4.5 extra years of life, while female

competitors across a range of sports experienced a 22 per cent increase, equating to 3.9 extra years of life.

Although we didn't attempt to explain what was driving this, other studies have shown athletes are better protected from cardiovascular diseases, some cancers and respiratory diseases.

How can the global fitness industry use and message the results of this and other exercise-related longevity research? The exciting takeaway is that general population exercise studies, such as *Generation 100*, also discovered a boost – especially with higher intensity exercise (www.hcmmag.com/Generation100).

The clear message is that structured exercise and everyday physical activity are not only good for health but also for a longer life. The industry has a vital role to play in translating these findings into practice and encouraging more people to embrace physical activity.



PHOTO: RAY ALGAR

Ray Algar

This is a powerful message at a time when the industry is seeking ways to articulate and amplify its impact.

As more consumers, employees, suppliers and investors seek mission-first, purposeful organisations to associate with, it's rewarding to know organisations across the entire industry ecosystem are promoting this remarkable 'product' with such an effective 'active ingredient.'

The other important message in this research is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach; different activities can have similar benefits, so everyone is free to choose the ones they identify with and enjoy. ●

HCM people



This is a rare case of an unqualified VAT win for local authorities. Not only will most of their leisure facility income be VAT-free, but their VAT costs will still be recoverable

Nick Burrows

Director, PSTax



Nick Burrows is a local government VAT expert

JAMES GIBSON/ALAMY

There's been a change in the law in relation to VAT on leisure. Tell us what's going on

In March this year, the UK government's tax office – HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) – announced a significant change to the VAT treatment of local authority leisure services that could add hundreds of thousands of pounds to overstretched local authority budgets.

Before March 2023, local authorities managing leisure facilities in-house were required to treat services such as gym memberships and other facility visits as business activities for VAT purposes and pay 20 per cent tax to HMRC from the income. Now, HMRC's revised treatment of VAT has ruled that these services are classified as 'non-business' supplies for VAT purposes.

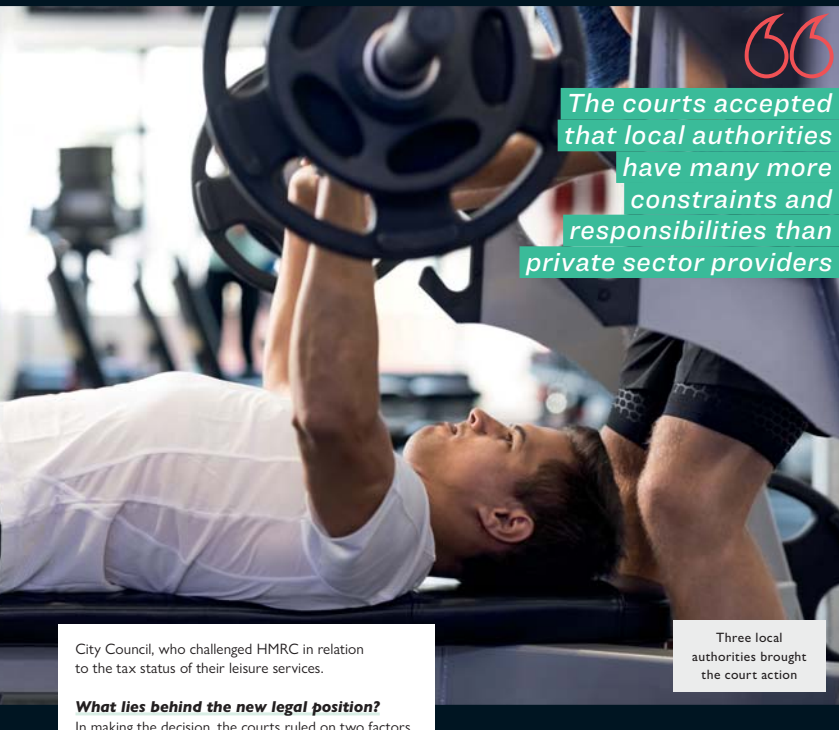
Why does this matter?

This is a rare case of an unqualified VAT win for local authorities. Not only will most of their leisure facility income be VAT-free, but their VAT costs related to leisure services will still be fully recoverable.

How did this ruling come about?

The change is the result of court action by three local authorities – Midlothian Council, Mid-Ulster District Council and Chelmsford





The courts accepted that local authorities have many more constraints and responsibilities than private sector providers

City Council, who challenged HMRC in relation to the tax status of their leisure services.

What lies behind the new legal position?

In making the decision, the courts ruled on two factors. Firstly, whether local authority leisure services are provided under a different statutory/legal framework from those provided by the private sector – and as a result, can be treated as ‘non-business’ for VAT purposes – and secondly, whether this non-business treatment would significantly distort competition with the private sector. Both parts of the test have to be met for an activity to be classed as non-business.

In the test case, the courts accepted that local authorities have many more constraints than private sector providers, saying it’s clear that the particular matrix of legal conditions within which local authorities operate differs from those of private sector companies.

HMRC did not appeal on the competition point, so the case was successfully concluded.

How were statutory and non-statutory considerations taken into account?

There’s a legal obligation to provide leisure service in Scotland and Northern Ireland, while in England

Three local authorities brought the court action

and Wales, it’s not statutory and legislation governs the way local authorities provide the service in a way that’s different from the private sector. The differences between the nations explains why there were three councils in the litigation – one from each jurisdiction.

What points of law were involved?

There were a number of pieces of legislation referred to in the case, but the primary one was Section 19 of the *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976*.

Other legislation that could have had a bearing on this decision includes *The Crime and Disorder Act 1998*, which imposes a duty on local authorities to do all they reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder, including anti-social behaviour and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment; *The Local Government Act 2000*, which requires local authorities to prepare strategies for promoting or improving their area’s economic, social, and environmental wellbeing. ►

- ▶ including a requirement to consult in respect of those strategies; *The Children Act 2004* which imposes an obligation to make arrangements for ensuring that their functions are discharged regarding the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children; *The Local Government Act 1999*, which imposes a Best Value obligation regarding economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, with the last referring to the legitimate social benefits that derive from an activity and finally; *The Health and Social Care Act 2012*, which provides for duties to improve public health, including taking steps to provide services or facilities.

Can you foresee this change impacting the way services are delivered?

VAT is just one consideration when it comes to how councils decide to configure their contracts. PSTax works alongside Lisa Forsyth and her team at Max Associates, who are experts at supporting councils with all the other considerations.

We've worked with many local authorities where VAT has been the crucial factor because of local circumstances, but that's not always the case. It might be possible to optimise the tax position by reconfiguring contracts in collaboration with contractors, but each case would need to be considered individually and take into account all other relevant local factors.

Tell us about the historic VAT rebates

Local authorities can make a one-off refund claim for VAT they've previously paid to HMRC. This is because the court's judgement means it was always the case that local authority leisure provision was non-business for VAT.

Four-year historical claims are normally as far back as you can go with VAT, but some councils put in claims years ago, anticipating this new judgment and so we know of examples where councils are claiming for as many as seven years' VAT.

Also in 2009, a one-off 'window' opened for historical refund claims for all VAT-registered bodies following a court judgement. Claims could be submitted – in principle – for the period 1973-1996/7. Some councils may have submitted such a claim for leisure services.

Which activities are covered by this?

HMRC hasn't yet published extensive guidance about which services will be covered. However, we believe gym memberships will be covered, based on the judgment that led to the policy change.

Many local authorities have submitted refund claims for historically overpaid VAT, including income from gym memberships and HMRC's response to these claims will confirm their position. From a local authority perspective they will expect gym memberships to be included in the new ruling. If HMRC's view is different, there might be more litigation.

Are there usage limits on the refunded VAT?

There are no VAT rules that say what councils must do with the refunds in this type of scenario.

If the case is appealed, money could be repayable

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALAN BORDOZ



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/GRAND MCTURE

The change affects the 20 per cent of councils that manage facilities in-house

Will councils be obliged to reduce prices rather than retaining the rebate?

Changing prices would be a decision for each local authority.

Can private sector operators appeal? If they can and they win, will monies need to be refunded?

It might be that HMRC waits a while before paying any claims in case of a judicial review. If HMRC makes refunds and a legal challenge later succeeds, I believe HMRC has the power to claw back the VAT refunded. Whether HMRC would do that is unclear.

There's a legal concept known as legitimate expectation that could protect local authorities that have received refunds and HMRC might decide it would be too difficult to pursue the refunded VAT.

Do you expect private sector operators to appeal?

I haven't heard of any suggestion of a judicial review yet. There have previously been challenges to HMRC decisions such as this which relate to whether or not competition would be distorted. In the waste collection sector, for instance, Max Recycling



From a local authority perspective they will expect gym memberships to be included in the new ruling. If HMRC's view is different, there might be more litigation

complained that HMRC had not considered the economics, but the appeal was not successful.

Do you have any insights into the scale of the impact that this change in the law is likely to have?

Our partner, Lisa Forsyth, reports that more than 20 per cent of leisure facilities are currently owned and managed in-house by local authorities across the UK, based on information from TLDB. ●



We're working on a superyacht that has three separate gyms – one each for the owner, the guests and the crew

Tim Colston

Co-founder, Superyacht Fitness



Tim Colston

Tell us about the new business

Superyacht Fitness has been established to deliver innovative solutions that will maximise both physical and mental wellbeing on board, for owners, guests and crew alike.

Using our experience and knowledge we assess, tailor and deliver strategic on-board gym equipment packages, based on superyacht insight. The aim is always to skillfully utilise whatever ratio of 'size:space:use' exists for those on board, providing customisation – from initial concept to design, implementation and ongoing solutions.

Whether the development is aimed at charter guests, owners or crew members, the team evaluates the needs of the vessel in order to cultivate a dynamic environment in which people can achieve personal goals.

Who's on the team?

Glen Taylor and I are co-founders. Glen has 16 years experience in the yachting industry, and having founded the Maritime Division of RDT Ltd in 2006, he established that business as a leader in the superyacht world.

I've been in the fitness industry for 35 years – as MD of Keiser UK for 15 years, before setting up Tenth Avenue Leisure, providing a discreet, bespoke service to high net worth families and elite sports personalities.

How did the idea come about?

I was in a meeting with the personal assistant of a high net worth family to discuss their new home gym and

in conversation the client talked of life on-board their 80m Superyacht. Up to that point I hadn't considered there being a business opportunity in that sector.

Within a month of this meeting the stars aligned and I was introduced to Glen by a mutual friend. He told me at length about the sector and particularly the mental health problems often experienced by members of boat crews.

Glen was passionate about making a difference and it was clear that between us we had the experience and drive to do something, so 18 months later we shook hands and started the Superyacht Fitness business.

We decided not to rush into the business and travelled extensively to yacht shows talking to industry leaders, crew, owners and suppliers to understand the issues and opportunities. Through Glen's network it was tempting to jump in at the deep end, but we decided to take the time and build a business model that would stand the test of time.

Who owns the business?

Glen and I are founders and co-owners.

Who will you be working with in terms of partnerships?

Part of the 18-month lead up to launch has been focused on finding the right partners for each area of our business and we regard this as an ongoing process.

We've established strong relationships with key equipment suppliers, elite personal trainers, physiotherapists, psychologists, mental health



Superyachts can take from 3-5 years from concept to launch

PHOTO: SUPERYACHT FITNESS

specialists, wellness experts and nutritionists and have also partnered with existing superyacht businesses who have similar philosophies to ours.

What demand are you expecting?

There's a real issue with crew welfare and a desire within the industry to do something about this, so demand is high for a company that's looking beyond the supply of a beautiful gym.

New superyachts can take 3-5 years to go from the drawing board to being launched, so this is a business that will take time to establish itself, however, there are always existing vessels being refitted and we're working with these as well.

Can you describe some of your installations?

Each is very different due to their size and the owner's preferences – in fact, no one installation is the same.

We're working on a superyacht that has three separate gyms – one each for the owner, the guests and the crew. We're also in talks with a smaller superyacht that has no gym facility, but a desire to provide mind and body support.



I was meeting with the personal assistant of a high net worth family to discuss their home gym and the conversation turned to life on-board their 80m superyacht

What are the differences between a boat-board gym and one on dry land?

The first consideration is the actual physical weight of the gym equipment and the space that's available, as yacht designers are often keen to keep the overall weight down from a technical point of view. Considerations such as being able to secure



► the equipment down in high seas is also vital. Furthermore, the owner of a superyacht wants to have state-of-the-art equipment that not only looks amazing, but also does the job properly.

We also have to take into account having partners that can support us and the vessel if something goes wrong with a machine. Can they respond to a problem when the gym is in the middle of the Mediterranean or in the Caribbean? We offer a global service and maintenance agreement to give peace of mind to the superyacht but that means having the right people around us.

From my background working with sports scientists and athletes, we are at the cutting edge of innovation and we like to bring this into the superyacht environment.

In what ways are you marketing the new company?

In the first instance we have called upon Glen's extensive network. He's a very well respected member of the community and it's a very small industry, so it doesn't take long for word to spread.

We've also enlisted the help of a specialist maritime marketing agency which has worked with us to launch our brand. They've been incredible and have seen our vision and desire to make a difference.

Are you connecting the new business with the health and fitness industry?

Absolutely. For example Myzone is a central part of our offering. We see it as the glue when it comes to creating a superyacht community for crew.



I've previously worked with founder Dave Wright and an exclusive arrangement was agreed with him very early on. Myzone a key driver of our business model.

Crew can use Myzone on shore or at sea. We can create friendly challenges among individual yacht crews, yacht versus yacht, country versus country and so on. So long as we encourage fun, community and a sense of belonging and spread the positive word of exercise and wellbeing.

What's the current price range for an on-board gym?

It's impossible to estimate a price due to how personalised it is and the number of gyms that each yacht may have. What I've enjoyed doing is surprising people when it comes to how little it can cost to exercise.

Crew can work-out in the engine room or in the tender garage using accessories that cost very

little. On the flip side, an owner's gym can be the height of luxury and be very expensive. We take every gym and every person and create the best possible space for their individual needs.

Where does the fit-out take place? Do you have a specialist shipyard?

There are a number of specialist shipyards around the world and we're able to work with them all.

New-builds and vessels that are being refitted all have their own potential issues and as with any project, the earlier you can be involved the better. The planning has to be done in much more detail when you're working on superyachts, due to the limited space and their unique nature.

What kind of areas are being repurposed when it's a retrofit?

In the main, retrofitting is usually about taking out an old gym and updating it with new.

There are also fads that come and go and create opportunities – for example, cinema rooms are sometimes taken out to make way for a gym or perhaps a gym combined with a golf simulator. Making use of all spaces is always considered.

Do you also supply spa and wellness facilities?

Spa and wellness is also very important in the life of a superyacht and we'll soon be making an announcement in this regard. ●

There's a real issue with crew welfare and mental health and a desire within the industry to do something about this

Superyacht Fitness offers a global service and management agreements



We need to view stress management as seriously as we do medical disease

PHOTO: ELISSA EPEL



Elissa Epel

Professor of psychiatry and behavioural science; author, *Stress Prescription*

Best known for her pioneering research linking stress to the shortening of telomeres and immune cell ageing, Epel has just written a book – *The Stress Prescription* – to help people to take control of their stress in just seven days.

"I use the word prescription because we need to view stress management as seriously as we do medical disease," Epel tells *HCM*. "The vast majority of us are living with too much daily stress and it's ruining our life.

"We're living in tough times and need more robust tools and stress management practices for daily life. Stress can feel like a filter that masks the beauty in front of us. But we don't have to live that way."



After decades of studying the subject, Epel felt compelled to share her insights on how to reshape our relationship with stress into one that's healthy and humorous. She's broken them down into seven steps – "potent easy strategies proven to be effective" – that each require just a few minutes a day:

- Embrace uncertainty
- Put down the weight of what we can't control
- Use our stress response to help overcome challenges
- Train our cells to "metabolise stress" better
- Immerse ourselves in nature to recalibrate our nervous system
- Practice deep restoration
- Intersperse our busy schedules with moments of joy

Meditating and being
in nature are proven
to relieve stress



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/LEA

"With some relatively simple new habits, we can train the mind and body to experience the inevitable stresses of life in a positive way that's actually healthy for the body," she says.

Epel sees the book being particularly useful to both operators and health and wellness lovers. She says: "Using these techniques, people are better equipped to reap the positive effects of time spent at retreats and spas and on their general wellbeing and benefit from these experiences for longer.

"In fact, studies have shown that people who are more experienced in meditation show more immediate physiological benefits from health interventions such as retreats." ●

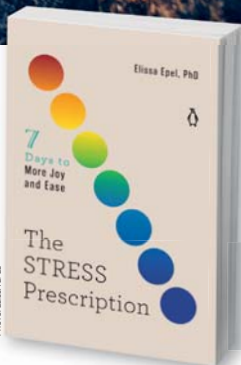


PHOTO: ELISSA EPEL

Epel's new
book gives
insights
into stress
responses

Legal ruling scraps VAT on gym memberships

Councils in the UK will benefit from hundreds of thousands of pounds of extra revenue due to a change in VAT legislation.

Prior to March 2023, local authorities managing in-house leisure facilities were required to treat income from services such as gym memberships as business activities and pay VAT to HMRC on takings.

Now, a revised treatment of VAT states these services are classified as 'non-business' supplies for VAT purposes.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/BERNARD

The change means local authorities pay no VAT on their in-house leisure services



PHOTO: NICK BURROWS

This is a rare case of an unqualified VAT win for local authorities

Nick Burrows, PSTax

The change, the result of challenges made by three local authorities in 2020, means local authorities pay no VAT on their income and can also reclaim all the VAT they incur on the related costs (revenue and capital) unconditionally.

Tax expert Nick Burrows, director at PSTax, told HCM: "This is a rare

case of an unqualified VAT win for local authorities. Not only will most of their leisure centre income be VAT-free, but their VAT costs related to leisure services will still be fully recoverable." To read HCM's interview with Nick Burrows, turn to page 14.

More: http://lei.sr/p6e5k_H

Serco Leisure takes over David Lloyd club



PHOTO: SERCO

The former David Lloyd has a 200-station gym and swimming pool

Serco Leisure is taking over the management of a health club previously operated by David Lloyd.

In February, David Lloyd notified members at Lockmeadow club in Maidstone that it would be closing the club at the end of May.

Serco Leisure then entered into talks with Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) regarding the possibility of keeping the club open.

On May 16th, it was announced that Serco Leisure and Maidstone Leisure Trust would become the new operators at the club, which has a swimming pool, 200-station gym and sauna/steam room. The facility will continue to operate as a private members' club.

Simon Lane, Serco's MD for Leisure and Micromobility said: "This



PHOTO: LINDSEY/SHAWN LANE

This is a fabulous opportunity for Serco Leisure

Simon Lane, Serco Leisure

is a fabulous opportunity for Serco Leisure in the region. We are the trusted operator of two facilities in the town already, which will have played in our favour when discussions about the future management of this club were taking place."

More: http://lei.sr/d2d8A_H

European fitness market in strong recovery

The European fitness market has experienced a “strong recovery” after two difficult years that saw huge disruptions due to the pandemic.

According to the *European Health and Fitness Market Report 2023*, published on 16 May by Europe Active and Deloitte – the number of gym memberships in Europe increased by around 7 million during 2022, marking an 12.3 per cent jump from 56.2 million in 2021 to 63.1 million.

The figures mark a significant recovery for the sector. During 2020, a year defined by the pandemic, the number of active memberships across European health clubs fell by roughly 10 million – or 15.4 per cent – from 64.8 million in 2019 to 54.8 million.



PHOTO: EUROPE ACTIVE

We're confident of achieving our ambition of reaching 100 million club members by 2030

Herman Rutgers, EuropeActive

Herman Rutgers, Europe Active Ambassador and co-author of the report, said: “Based on the strong rebound, we're still confident of achieving Europe Active's ambition of reaching 100 million members of health and fitness centres by 2030”.

More: http://lei.sr/R8J9e_H



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/PROPELIMAGES.COM - YURIA

Gym memberships are up in Europe

Julia Klim reveals Equinox Circle programme

Lifestyle brand, Equinox has signed a deal with eight high-end consumer brands to create a new loyalty programme of benefits for members.

Called Equinox Circle, the initiative is the brainchild of Julia Klim, VP of strategic partnerships and business development for the high-end fitness company.

Each of the eight partners will deliver unique offers to Equinox members in a move designed to add value to their membership, which can cost up to £250 in the UK and between US\$170 and US\$290 in the US.

The brands signed up for Equinox Circle are shoe and fashion retailer **StockX**; luxury watch marketplace **Bezel**; private helicopter and seaplane company **Blade**; wearable tech firm **Oura**; restaurant booking platform **Dorsia**; members-only boutique travel agency **Indagare**; meal delivery service **Provenance**; and supplements specialist **Thorne**.



PHOTO: EQUINOX

Equinox Circle partners are in everything from nutrition and fashion to travel

Klim, who has been with Equinox since 2019, said: “From nutrition and supplements to travel and fashion, members often look to us for guidance. These conversations were the catalyst to developing this highly curated offering, and doing so in a way that only Equinox can.”

More widely, Klim is working to build a strategic partnerships arm

for the business through Web3 and ‘reimagining the role of health and wellness in fashion and culture’.

● Equinox has told *HCM* it plans to appeal a recent race discrimination ruling following which a former employee was awarded US\$11.3m by the US courts. Get the detail at www.HCMmag.com

More: http://lei.sr/Y5B6_F_H

Solidcore aims to double in size after investment

Boutique fitness operator, Solidcore, has opened its 100th studio in the US.

Located in Santa Monica, California, the milestone site was launched on the back of Solidcore securing new strategic funding from private equity firm Kohlberg & Company.

Solidcore will use the investment to expand further across the US, with plans to open around 25 studios this year. According to Bryan Myers, president and CEO, the



PHOTO: SOLIDCORE

Solidcore workouts are performed on a bespoke reformer called Sweatlana



PHOTO: JENNIFER BROWN WARR

In 2023, the goal is to meet consumers where they are

Bryan Myers, Solidcore

company is aiming to more than double in size, with plans to establish more than 250 studios globally in "the next three to five years".

Myers said: "This new strategic investment reinforces Solidcore's strength, especially since there has been no other premium-boutique fitness player to receive

this type of investment in the current economic environment.

"In 2023, the goal is to 'meet consumers where they are'. 'This means bringing new studios to communities where the workout doesn't have a presence yet.'"

More: http://lei.sr/E3n9c_H

Urban Gym Group expands with Amsterdam club



PHOTO: ANDREW CLINE

TrainMore offers members a €1 discount for each workout they do

Urban Gym Group is adding to its growing network of fitness clubs with the opening of a premium TrainMore site in Amsterdam.

TrainMore Beethovenstraat will feature a large gym floor and the brand's trademark training environment, which includes group exercise studios, live DJs and regular member events, such as locker room parties and challenges.

The club – the 29rd in the TrainMore portfolio – will offer the brand's reward concept, which sees members receiving a €1 discount for every workout they do.

The growth of TrainMore follows the permanent closure of the company's High Studios brand on 1 April this year – members were offered the opportunity to

transfer credits to other UGG clubs or to apply for a refund, with the move signalling a new focus on the TrainMore brand.

Neil Randall, CEO of Urban Gym Group, said: "The opening of TrainMore Beethovenstraat at the Zuidas, shows our continued drive and focus in helping our members achieve their potential. Soon we will be able to announce many more.

"We have a strong pipeline of new properties through our links with property portfolio owners who see the value we add to their schemes."

TrainMore is one of five fitness and wellness brands operated by Urban Gym Group, which is owned by Marjolijn Meijer and Jordy Kool.

More: http://lei.sr/Y6s8r_H

Seneca Polytechnic is redefining wellbeing

Seneca Polytechnic in Toronto, Canada, has revealed plans for a multi-million-dollar health and wellness complex based on indigenous design, sustainability and inclusion.

Described as a “transformative destination”, the hub will offer health and wellbeing services, teaching and learning, fitness and sports facilities, recreational spaces and a ‘spiritual connection’ with its surroundings.

Designed by integrated practice, Dialog, in partnership with indigenous design firm, Two Row Architect, the building design draws inspiration from the medicine wheel – sometimes known as the Sacred Hoop – which has been used by generations of various native American tribes for health and healing.

The project will transform a decades-old sport centre into a dynamic multi-storey health and wellness complex that delivers traditional medicine, counselling, recreation and varsity sports facilities.

Funding is from the Polytechnic, the Seneca Student Federation and Student Athletic Association.

“The Health and Wellness Centre expresses Seneca’s commitment to a holistic approach to the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual elements of wellbeing for our students and employees,” said David Agnew, president of Seneca Polytechnic. “We’re excited by the opportunity to bring the entire community together in a beautiful place that reflects our values.”

More: http://lei.sr/V8W3W_H



PHOTO: DIALOG

The centre was designed by Dialog

EuropeActive begins the hunt for new CEO

EuropeActive is starting the hunt for a new CEO as Andreas Paulsen has indicated he’ll be heading back to his career in public affairs and academia once his successor is found.

Paulsen – who was first appointed acting president in 2019 and then interim CEO at the beginning of the pandemic – will continue to serve in post until the end of 2023 to allow for a smooth transition.

The recruitment process will be overseen by EuropeActive’s board.



PHOTO: EUROPE ACTIVE

Paulsen was appointed acting president in 2019 and CEO during the pandemic



PHOTO: EUROPE ACTIVE

During Andreas’ tenure EuropeActive went through a fundamental renewal

David Stalker

David Stalker, President of EuropeActive, said: “We’re deeply thankful for Andreas’ service to the Association and to the industry.

“We are of course regretful to see him leave his post, but warmly congratulate Andreas on his exciting future career in public affairs and academia and we are very happy to know he will

remain involved as a passionate supporter of Europe Active.”

Paulsen said: “It’s been a hugely inspiring and educational professional experience and I’m proud to pass the baton of leading this great organisation at a point where the association is much stronger.”

More: http://lei.sr/f6N4h_H

Jack Shakespeare joins 4Global from UK Active

Jack Shakespeare, UK Active's former director of research, policy and communications, has left the organisation to join UK-based data, services and software company 4Global as director of strategic projects.

Shakespeare spent more than six years at UK Active and joins 4Global at a time of significant national and worldwide growth for the company, which is in the middle of rapid expansion into new territories and markets, including Europe and North America.

He will oversee the delivery of all consultancy-led projects, leading 4Global's team of consultants and engaging directly with clients and stakeholders from across the industry. Shakespeare's role will

As data becomes available and shareable, its work truly has the power to transform our sector

Jack Shakespeare



PHOTO: UK ACTIVE

Shakespeare will oversee the delivery of all consultancy-led projects

also include being responsible for continuing key strategic partnership with sports bodies and health bodies, working on major national projects to evaluate social value – as well as continue the expansion of the company's European DataHub project, which it is conducting in association with EuropeActive.

Shakespeare said: "4Global plays a vital role in making sure inclusive sport and fitness are at the heart of our communities. As data about physical activity becomes ever more shareable, 4Global's work truly has the power to transform our sector."

More: http://lei.sr/g8U8e_H

Center Parcs UK is up for sale – price £5bn



PHOTO: CENTER PARCS

Center Parcs was founded by philanthropist, the late Piet Derksen, in the Netherlands in 1968

Wellness operator, Center Parcs UK and its six holiday villages have been put up for sale by its Canadian owner, Brookfield.

The private equity group – which specialises in property and renewable power – is believed to be looking for around £4bn-£5bn for the business, which it acquired from US-based private equity group, Blackstone in 2015 for £2.4bn.

Each of the holiday parks features a fitness element and spa, as well as a range of physical activity options.

According to its latest results, Center Parcs' sales quadrupled to £503.4m in the year to April 2022, compared with the pandemic-affected year before. EBITDA was £245.6m compared with a loss of £11.9m in

2021 and profit of £200m in 2020.

Center Parcs opened its first property in the UK in Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire, in 1987, before opening new sites at Elveden Forest, Longleat Forest, Whinell Forest and Woburn Forest.

In 2019, it opened its first village in Ireland (County Longford), adding to its five English sites. There were plans to develop a seventh site in Sussex, Southern England, which were pulled due to environmental concerns.

The group spent £48m in the year to April 2022 on maintenance and investment capital expenditure and says it's engaged in renewing headleases on both Longleat (expires 2073) and Woburn (expires 2109).

More: http://lei.sr/D7N9u_H

The background of the advertisement features a close-up of a woman's face, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. On the left side, there is a tall, black, vertical device, the Seca TRU, which is a body composition analyzer. It has a flat base for standing, a vertical column, and a horizontal arm with a sensor at the end. The text "THE TRUTH IN FITNESS" is overlaid on the image. "THE" and "IN FITNESS" are in white, while "TRUTH" is in red.

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Everyone Active and Marvel tackle barriers



PHOTO: EVERYONE ACTIVE

Everyone Active will offer participants the chance to train for free at their local leisure centre

Leisure operator Everyone Active has joined forces with Superhero Series powered by Marvel, to increase opportunities for people with disabilities.

The Superhero Series – the UK's only mass-participation sports series dedicated to people with disabilities – will be supported through sponsorship and free training facilities at Everyone Active facilities for all competitors.

The partnership will kick off with The Superhero Series At Home event. A virtual race open to everyone from 8 July to 6 August. The event will see teams participating at home, in the garden or at a local park to complete a combined distance of 51,060km.

With more than 2,400 participants, aged 3-81, already signed up, the first



PHOTO: LINDSEY WILKINSON

We're proud to support this fantastic series of events

Rebecca Phillips, Everyone Active

event of this year's series will see people with any kind of disability come together to compete in challenges.

Everyone Active's strategic lead for health and wellbeing, Rebecca Phillips, said: "We're proud to support this fantastic series of events."

More: <http://lei.sr/55d7C>

Colston and Taylor launch Superyacht Fitness

A new wellness brand is targeting the superyacht market with bespoke health and fitness solutions.

Founded by entrepreneurs Tim Colston and Glen Taylor, Superyacht Fitness is offering a range of services – from designing and outfitting gyms to providing fitness programming, personal training and coaching.

Colston is a fitness industry veteran and former MD of Keiser UK, while Taylor has spent more than 16 years in the yachting sector.



PHOTO: SUPERYACHT FITNESS

The company is targeting the superyacht market with bespoke health and fitness



PHOTO: SUPERYACHT FITNESS

The key to wellbeing is a holistic approach

Glen Taylor and Tim Colston, Superyacht Fitness

Superyacht Fitness has also partnered with fitness personality and coach, Richard Callendar, who is leading on personal training provision.

According to Colston, the company will deliver on four key pillars of wellbeing: mindset, movement, performance and strength.

"At Superyacht Fitness we believe the key to wellbeing is a holistic

approach, encompassing the concepts of mindset, movement, performance and strength," he said. "From initial concept through to installation, the process is bespoke, discreet and delivered on time."

To read HCM's interview with Tim Colston, turn to page 14.

More: http://lei.sr/8u3G4_H

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Peloton to reinvent itself as part of rebrand

Peloton has announced a major rebrand as part of a 'realignment' of its services. Announcing what it calls a 'next chapter', Peloton said the rebrand will see it broaden its remit from being known predominantly as a hardware company, to one focused on programming and offering fitness to "everyone, at any level, wherever they are". At the heart of the changes are three new membership tiers and a new content feature called



Peloton: a major change in direction, from exclusivity to inclusivity



PHOTO: PELOTON

We're shifting perceptions from fitness enthusiasts to people at all levels

Leslie Berland, Peloton

Peloton Gym, which will be available across all membership options and – in a major shift – marks the brand's first offering in which workouts are written-out, demoed in a supporting video and designed to be done at the user's own pace.

Leslie Berland, Peloton's chief marketing officer, said: "We're

reflecting the vibrancy and fullness of everything Peloton has to offer.

"We're shifting perceptions from in-home to everywhere, from fitness enthusiasts to people at all levels and from exclusivity to inclusivity across all Peloton members, present and future."

More: http://lei.sr/D7B3M_H

Whoop adds Strength Trainer function



PHOTO: WHOOP

Ahmed says Whoop is first to market with functionality that measures muscular load

Whoop has launched its new Strength Trainer feature, allowing members to measure strength training exercises and assess the impact of muscular load.

The feature will track exercises, reps and weight usage in order to quantify muscular load – using its accelerometer and gyroscope sensors to calculate the strain that is put on the musculoskeletal system.

With the launch, Whoop says its 4.0 wearable becomes the first device able to measure how strength training impacts the body.

"Other wearables only track the load on the cardiovascular system that elevate heart rate during exercise," said CEO, Will Ahmed, "however, weightlifting predominantly



PHOTO: WHOOP

We're proud to release a feature that helps coach our members while strength training

Will Ahmed, Whoop

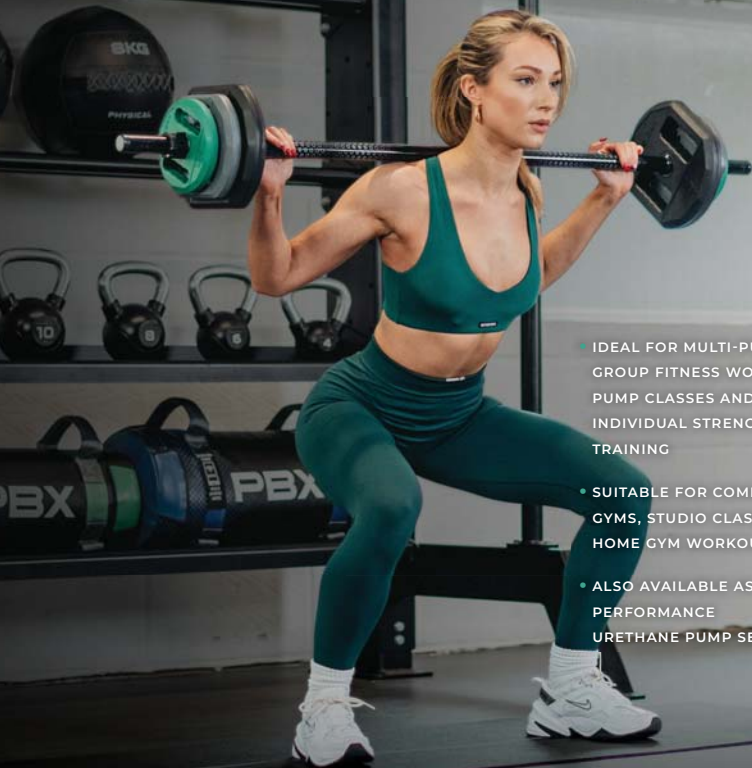
stresses muscles, bones, joints, and tissues, not the heart.

"This represents a new frontier for Whoop," said Ahmed. "We're proud to be first to market and release a feature that helps coach our members while strength training."

More: http://lei.sr/C4R3R_H

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Entertainment centres tend to be busy during the day, while gyms are busy early morning and evening



I had the idea to use the same brand and same space to do both **fitness and entertainment**, but with different opening hours



XAVIER LÓPEZ ANCONA

Founder, Kinezis and Kidzania

What was the inspiration for Kinezis?

I founded Kidzania – an entertainment concept where children can role play different occupations – 25 years ago. It has been very successful and now has 29 centres in 22 countries. I wanted to incorporate a new concept and a separate growth opportunity and spent two years travelling the world looking for opportunities, visiting 32 countries, 52 cities and 400 properties.

Everywhere I went I saw a strong trend for health and wellness, as well as active entertainment, such

► as trampoline parks, which inspired me to come up with a completely new concept based on health.

When I started doing research it became clear that wellness is the future. Although obesity is a problem all over the world, there's also evidence to show that people want to exercise more and eat better.

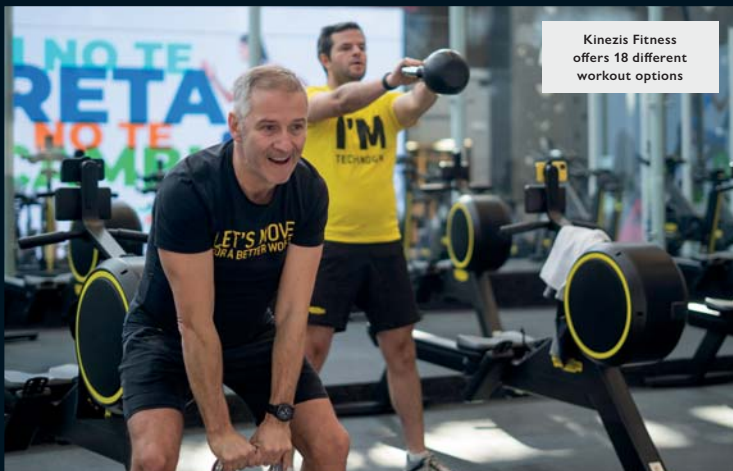
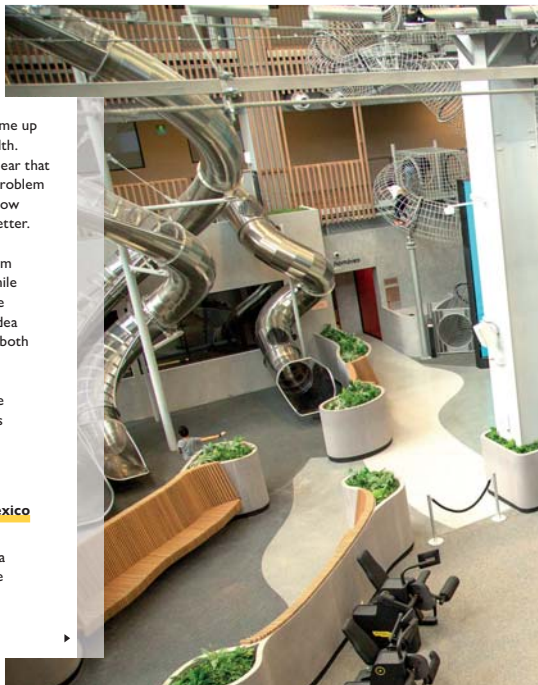
I bought a lot of reports about gyms and found out that worldwide – 85 per cent of gym goers go before 10.00am or after 6.00pm, while entertainment 'purchases' normally take place between 10.00am and 6.00pm. So I had the idea to use the same brand and same space to do both fitness and entertainment, but with different opening hours. Nobody has done this before.

We've also broken the rules by having three businesses in one: Kinezis Fun, Kinezis Fitness and Kinezis Health. We wanted to go into wellness, we're very good at entertainment and it made sense to tap into fitness.

Tell us about the concept launched in Mexico

Kinezis Fitness offers 18 different workout options, including treadmills, cycling, rowing, a running track, a Spartan-style obstacle course and step track, weights and free weights.

There are also seven studios for yoga, Pilates, functional training, barre, dancing,



Kinezis Fitness offers 18 different workout options

The new centre incorporates Kinezis Fun, Kinezis Fitness and Kinezis Health

¿ENTRENASTE HOY?
Kinezis



**When I started
doing research,
it became clear
that wellness is
the future**

The first Kinezis is open in Tlalnepantla de Baz, Mexico, with further sites planned



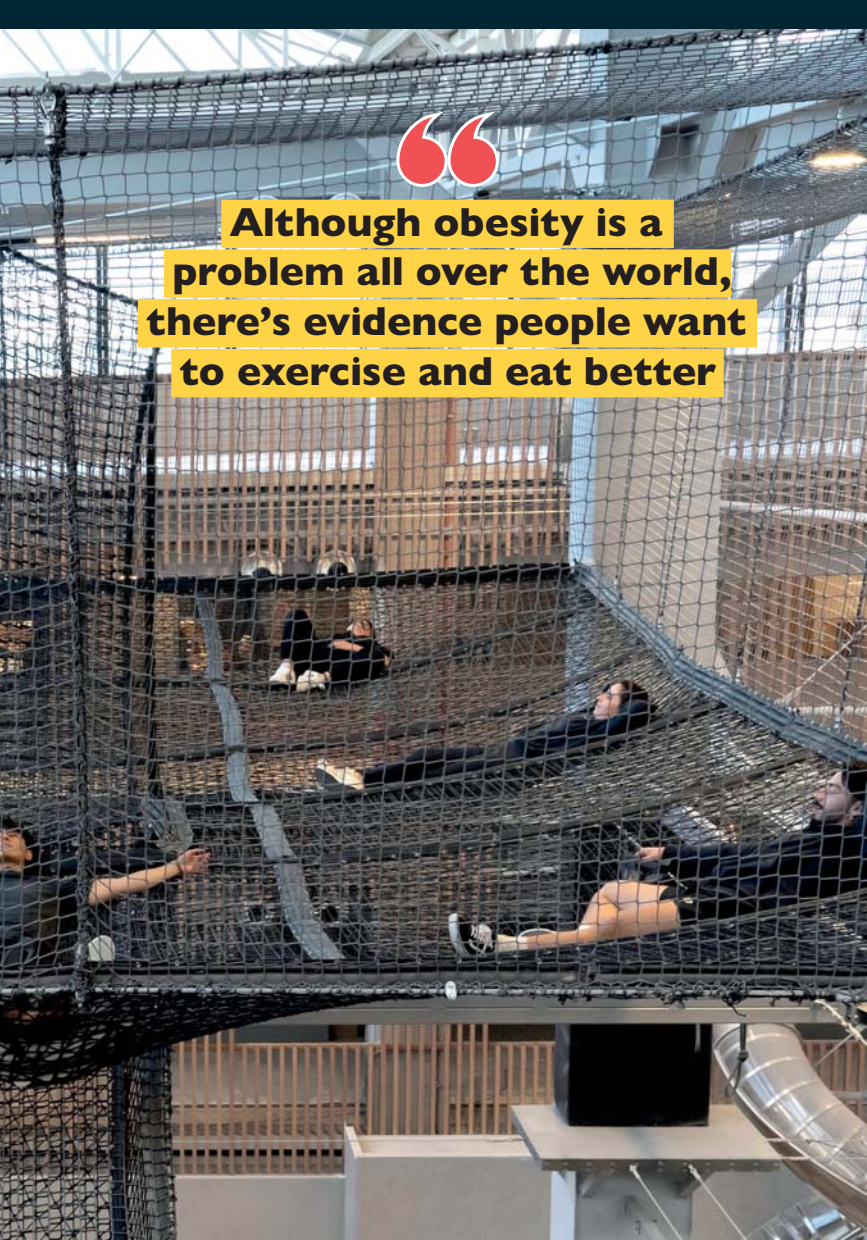
PHOTO: KINEZIS



Kinezis ranges across all vertical space in the four-storey building



Although obesity is a problem all over the world, there's evidence people want to exercise and eat better





**The emphasis
is very strongly
on movement
being fun**

Aerial bikes are an innovative way for members to exercise

- boxing and aerial silks, with four classes every morning and eight every evening.

There are spaces to work, as well as pet care and childcare offering fun activities for children aged one- to five-years-old and dogs. We're going for a boutique approach with immersive environments with 9m x 4m screens and excellent coaches, including some of Mexico's best athletes.

Kinezis Fun is all about adrenaline with six different style climbing walls, including bouldering, cloud climbing, net climbing, a hamster tube and the first speed climbing wall in Mexico.

The site is four storeys high, so there are a number of fun ways to climb up and then drop down, such as the vertical drop and free fall, slides, trampolines, bouncing nets, and inflatables. There are also aerial

bikes hanging on wires which people can ride around and a zip line goes around the shopping centre.

Nowhere in the world has all this content together.

Visitors are given a wearable bracelet which monitors everything they do, including counting calories burned and eaten, steps made, their heart rate and blood oxygenation, but although we monitor all this, the emphasis is very strongly on movement being fun.

Kinezis Wellness is the third piece of the jigsaw, with a spa that includes the first hammam in



While customers are having fun and getting fit, they can also benefit from childcare and petcare services



PHOTO: KINEZIS



There's nothing like this in the world, so marketing has been a challenge, especially as Kidzania has good brand recognition

- Mexico, treatment rooms, a sauna, hot tub, ice bath and hanging hammocks for relaxation.

An array of wellness services is on offer, including body composition scanning, access to nutritionists and bloodwork. Going forward we'll also be employing psychologists.

In the event space we're running workshops on things such as the Wim Hof Method, Ayurveda, meditation and sound healing.

How much does it cost to use?

Access to Kinezis Fun can be per class, by day pass or by buying a bundle of classes or a membership.

There are two types of membership: US\$120 a month covers the use of the gym, classes, petcare, childcare and access to the co-working space. For another US\$40 members can also use the spa and have one treatment a month.

Classes cost US\$12 each and there are discounts for bulk purchasing of 5 per cent for five and 10 per cent for 10, while our Kinezis health offer is charged by the service.

It's incredibly ambitious, what has the main challenge been?

There is nothing like this in the world, so marketing has been a challenge, especially as Kidzania has good brand recognition in Mexico, so people assume this is a venue for children.

People who are into entertainment aren't drawn to the gym and gym-goers aren't drawn to entertainment centres, but once they visit they really get it.

We're finding the repeat business is good and our reviews and exit research shows that people are very happy with the experience.

Going forward, we'll be working on how to get the marketing message across more effectively.



As an entertainment and fitness concept, Kinezis is the first of its kind

Access to Kinezis Fun can be by class, by day pass, via a bundle or a monthly membership





PHOTO: KINEZIS



PHOTO: KINEZIS



The centre is designed for adrenalin junkies

▶ What lessons have you learned so far?

This is our prototype and we'll test it for one full year to see what works and what doesn't and adapt the product. Even now, after two months, we're already thinking of changes. It has a footprint of 6,000sq m, for example, but this is too large and I think future sites will be about 70 per cent of this size at 4,000-5,000sq m.

We've also learned not to have six restaurants with six separate kitchens.

We wanted people to walk and climb their way around the four storeys, but we're finding that one set of stairs isn't enough to accommodate this across such a large site so we will need to add more.

The site in Mexico has a footprint of around 6,000sq m and is the brand's prototype



The Kinezis brand has opted for a boutique approach with immersive environments

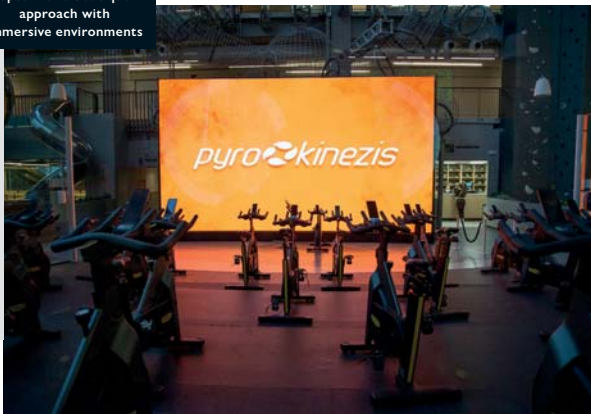
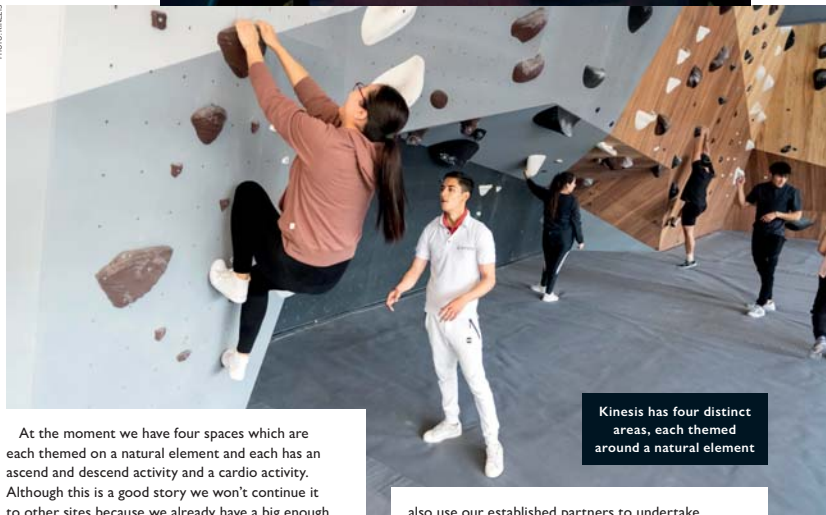


PHOTO KINEZIS

PHOTO KINEZIS



Kinezis has four distinct areas, each themed around a natural element

At the moment we have four spaces which are each themed on a natural element and each has an ascend and descend activity and a cardio activity. Although this is a good story we won't continue it to other sites because we already have a big enough concept to sell with the Kinezis theme alone.

We've also decided it would be more social to have all the climbing walls in one area.

What will expansion look like?

It took us 25 years to get Kidzania to 22 countries, but we think we'll be able to get the same growth for Kinezis in five years. In Mexico, South America and the US we'll open and run the sites, but we'll

also use our established partners to undertake developments in other parts of the world.

We have established partnerships all over the world: the UK, Japan, Korea, India, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Russia, Portugal, Chile, Brazil, Costa Rica, US.

We're also opening Kidzania's this year in South Africa and Vietnam, followed by Hong Kong and Taiwan. ●





PHOTO: KIDZANIA

About KidZania

The operator has built a global network of role-play attractions where children can enjoy scaled down, 'real-world' experiences

KidZania is a privately held international chain of indoor family entertainment centres operating in 30 locations worldwide, allowing children to role play adult jobs and earn currency. It receives around nine million visitors a year.

Every KidZania is themed as a child-sized replica of a real city, including buildings, shops and theatres, as well as vehicles and pedestrians moving along its streets.

In this city, children aged from 4- to 14-years-of-age, engage in branded activities from working in a Crest-sponsored dentist office, working at a McDonald's restaurant, painting with Corporação Industrial

do Norte, washing hands with P&G's Safeguard soap, and using airline tickets from American Airlines.

Children earn KidZos (KidZania's currency) while performing the tasks and the money is kept in the KidZania bank for children to spend at the gift shop and on KidZania's activities.

Children wear electronic bracelets that allow parents to keep track of them remotely.

KidZania was created and developed by Xavier López Ancona, with the first KidZania opening in September 1999 in Mexico City. Corporate sponsors funded 55 per cent of the initial investment.

KidZania's mascots are called RightZKeepers. They represent the



PHOTO: KINNEZS

Xavier López Ancona

rights that all KidZania customers have – the right to know, to care, to play, to create, to share and to be.

Examples are Urbano (Right to Know): A nine-year-old, green-haired 'kid' who's interested in inventions and conducting experiments; Vita (Right to Care): Urbano's younger sister, a kind and thoughtful blue-haired girl who loves all living things and; Beebop (Right to Create): Urbano's 10-year-old best friend. He is a huge fan of music and is very artistic. He has orange hair, and wears a yellow shirt and headphones. ●

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A man with a beard and extensive black and grey tattoos on his arms and neck is looking upwards with his right hand raised. He is wearing a light grey t-shirt. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor space with large windows and other people's hands raised in the air.

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Everyone's talking about Staff shortages

The pandemic has led to staff shortages, particularly in the UK which is also grappling with Brexit. Kath Hudson asks our experts how they're responding to the challenge

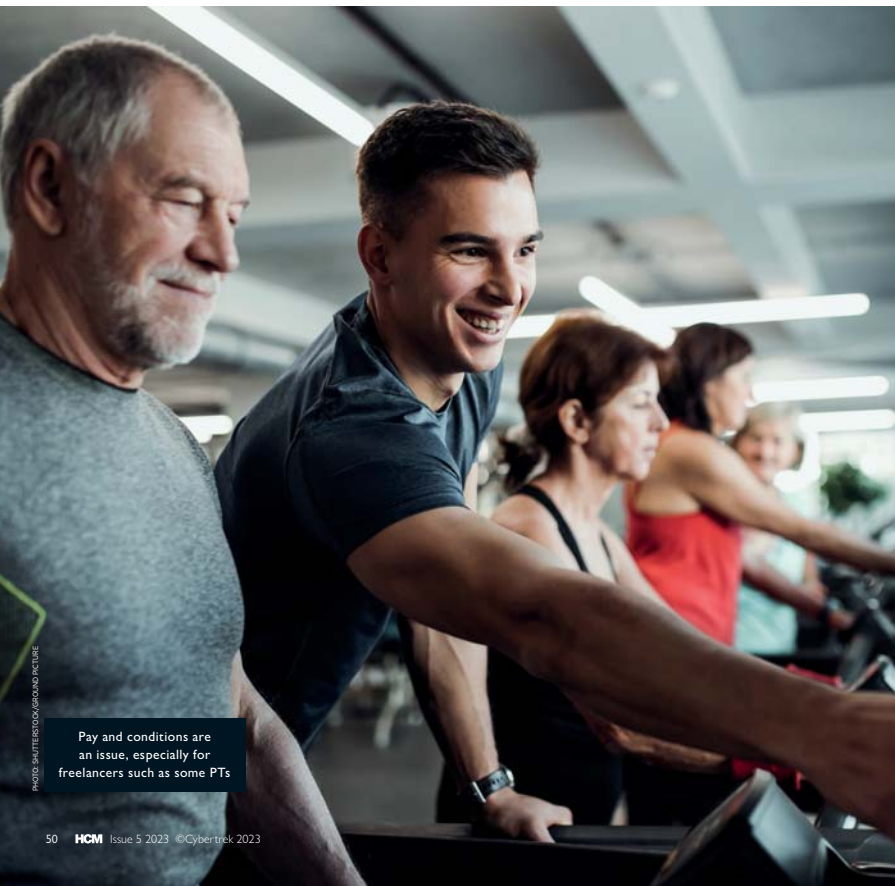


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/GROUND PICTURE

Pay and conditions are an issue, especially for freelancers such as some PTs

Lindsey Simpson

Communications, engagement and wellbeing specialist

The 2023 *Workforce State of Mind* Survey provides some clues as to why so many health club operators are struggling to find enough qualified

staff. The survey suggests working conditions vary greatly in the sector.

Broadly speaking, the closer to the front line you go, the harder it is for people in terms of how their work is organised and the level of support (including communication) they get in order to do their jobs well. The further from the boardroom you go, the more mental distress is reported and the lower the rating of belonging.

Pay and conditions are also an issue, particularly for group exercise and freelance workers, many of whom report they haven't had a pay rise in 10 years. These factors create a landscape which can be less appealing to workers who are comparing what's on offer in other sectors.

A stronger focus on mental health support could help this, but it needs to be a strategic approach focused

on prevention and protection, not just supporting people when things have gone wrong. Employers should aim to provide 'good work' which is well-organised, fair, safe and allows for a good work-life balance.

As employers have a legal duty of care to employees' mental health in the same way they do their physical health, this includes embedding psychosocial risk-management in their systems. Doing so brings commercial and human benefits, as well as helping to make sure employers are legally compliant.

We make three recommendations in the *The 2023 Workforce State of Mind* report. Firstly, taking a strategic approach to understanding and managing workplace mental health and safety, emphasising prevention and protection.

One of the characteristics we see in our data is that people are mistaking providing support such as Employee Assistance Programmes

and counselling, believing these will tackle workplace mental health, when they're only part of the picture.

Solely providing Mental Health First Aiders – a relatively popular route – is also inadequate as a response, and doesn't shield employers from their legal duty of care to their workforce.

Secondly, until senior leaders understand the situation and take action, the required change won't happen. The *Good Work Pledge*, which we launched in response to our inaugural findings, is a great place for employers to start.

Finally, we also need to consider the many freelancers, such as some PTs, who have no employer. In the last year, we've been encouraged to see EMD UK engage with its members on this topic to understand what matters to this group and how better to support them.

● Join the *Good Work Pledge* at www.workplacementalwealth.com ►



Pay and conditions are an issue,
particularly for group exercise and
freelance workers, many of whom report
they haven't had a pay rise in ten years



Juliett Cattermole

People director,
David Lloyd Clubs

The fallout from the pandemic and Brexit have made recruitment in many UK business sectors challenging in recent years, meaning the health and fitness industry has not been alone in experiencing a squeeze.

Many workers re-valuated their future during lockdown, using furlough time to develop their skills or retrain for a new career, while a chunk of the skilled workforce also left the UK following Brexit. These factors combined led to a shortage of qualified applicants in the workforce.

In the last six months there have been signs of improvement in the volume of applicants, but it remains a challenging marketplace, as recruiting for specific areas has become harder.

Broadly DLL is still attracting a large volume of applications for all roles. However, some areas continue to be more challenging. Recruiting for the F&B team, particularly chefs, can be a challenge. David Lloyd is well-known as a health and wellness business, but less so as an F&B operator, despite running more than 100 restaurants in the UK

and offering an attractive working environment for chefs, with perks including limited or no split shifts.

Kids club and poolside roles can also be a challenge, particularly as we offer a very busy 'Summer at the Club' product, requiring volumes of qualified team members for shorter seasonal periods.

With a shortage of skills in the market, we're recruiting more for behaviours and transferable skills these days and then investing in people to secure them the necessary qualifications.

Apprenticeships
secure a pipeline
of skilled people

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALBERNA



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALBERNA

We've invested heavily in our people and the results are paying off, as we're proud to have been named in *The Sunday Times* Top 10 Best Places to Work 2023

Apprenticeships are one of the best ways to ensure we have a pipeline of skilled people trained in our company values. We run these across a range of disciplines, such as PT, F&B, sports coaching, nursery nursing, operations and customer service. We also run management development courses, including our successful Step up to GM programme, which clearly defines a career pathway, so new recruits can see the development opportunities available.

Offering a competitive package – salary and a range of lifestyle and financial benefits including free access to our facilities – is only one part of attracting talent. Our greatest advocates are our existing team, so keeping them engaged is our number one priority. High levels of team engagement, developed through having a positive company culture, not only reduces team and member turnover, but it also boosts our reputation as being an employer of choice in our close-knit industry.





Young people are now generally more interested in what we can do for them as an employer than what they can do for us, but that's okay!

Sondre Gravir

CEO, SATS

Finding staff is challenging, as unemployment is low in the Nordics. With the uncertainty over lockdown and the clubs being closed on and off for two to three years, we saw many PTs move into other industries. Although we were afraid key people in our business would leave, fortunately we didn't see that.

We expect all of our staff to be passionate about fitness and to excel at motivating our members and from the gym floor to the digital development team, this can make it harder to recruit, but we are still seeing interest.

Although it was difficult to find PTs right after lockdown and this impacted our profitability in limited areas, the situation is easing now. As we employ our PTs, rather than

expecting them to be self employed this helps. Many PTs are at an age where they're looking to establish themselves, so need financial security.

In our recruitment campaigns, we focus on our brand strength: emphasising the purpose of the company, what we do for society, our approach to sustainability and our values in relation to diversity. We're also carefully targeting where we recruit – for example, advertising on TikTok.

Young people are now generally more interested in what we can

do for them as an employer than what they can do for us, but that's okay! Fortunately our industry is appealing to young people because it does good, not just because it makes profits.

Another staffing trend for us is the move away from working from home. We're encouraging people to work in the office as much as possible. Our staff have to be in the office three days a week, with flexibility on the other two, but increasingly we're seeing them choose to work from the office full-time. ▶

Sophie Lawler

Total Fitness, CEO

Undoubtedly businesses in the consumer-facing space have and continue to face difficulties in many aspects of people and culture.

The gym industry isn't an easy one when it comes to this – median sector pay reflects that while there are really attractive senior roles available, the majority are more junior entry-level posts.

This can also be an industry which overpromises when it comes to the employee value proposition and – while I love the sector, the reality is that many frontline roles can be less rewarding and less exciting than imagined. Being honest about this is important in any recruitment effort and redoubling efforts to add employee value in other areas even

more so. It's all about what you promise your team members, which isn't a list of employee benefits and discounts, it's much richer than that.

An employee promise is about the way in which organisational culture feels to the team member and that's very much about the immediate team dynamic – the level of trust and commitment to each other. Beyond that it's about feeling seen, heard and invested in. And even beyond that it's about feeling connected to a bigger picture through shared values and behaviour and an understanding of the contribution you make to a future in which you can be confident.



We have world class levels of employee engagement, time to hire and vacancy levels... Most importantly we have fun

People will leave jobs, but they're less likely to leave a team and a big picture to which they feel deeply connected.

Growing and retaining a great pool of engaged team members by making and committing to a promise like this is hard work and time consuming (taking years).

I'm not sure it's a choice available to leaders across many industries any more, but it's exceptionally rewarding for all involved and is the highest ROI strategy you can develop.

At Total Fitness we don't have the best or most shiny, exciting product. We don't do things the easy way and we don't get it right all of the time. What we do promise is that more is possible with us, whatever that looks like for each team member. We have world class levels of employee engagement and most importantly, we have fun.

In 2022, five of our six annual cohort of 'Elevators' were given GM positions, which had an immediate impact on team engagement. Our career pathway was also recently recognised at the UK Company Culture awards, where we won the Next Generation award for our development of department heads to GMs. We're now finalists in the British Training Awards and await recognition in the European Employer Brand Management awards. ●

Be honest about what you can promise team members, says Lawler

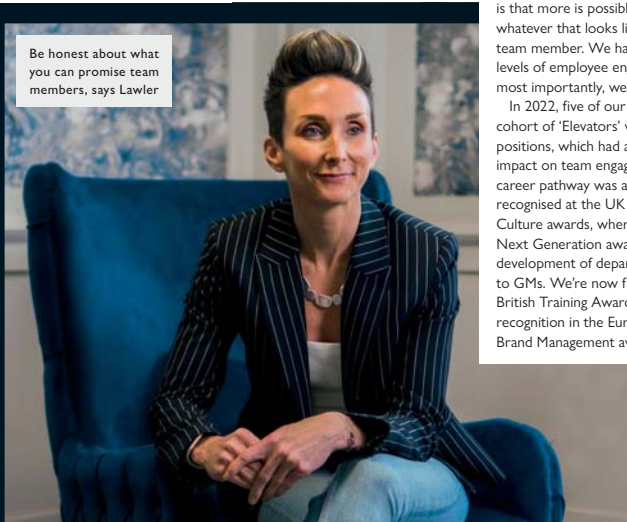


PHOTO: TOTAL FITNESS

Acoustic Solutions in Gyms

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Life Lessons



PHOTO: BILL TRISLOW



At times I've felt like the underdog

Chris Rondeau

CEO, Planet Fitness

My overarching life lesson has been learning the value of hard work. I dropped out of college at 20 and took the school of hard knocks route. I didn't go to an Ivy League school or graduate with a big degree and I didn't read my first book until I was 42-years-old.

I started at the front desk of the gym and worked my way up through the ranks. It has felt like a 30-year college degree and I'm still learning now.

At times I've felt like the underdog and I've had to play catch up. My business partners and I were not the

most sophisticated bunch, but we had great passion and we believed in the model. When we got to 500 locations we were like "this is a big company, we can't just run it like three gym guys anymore." So in November 2012 we brought in private equity. That was a big step forward and I learned a lot from them.

Then one of the partners retired and I was elevated from COO to CEO and all of a sudden we were doing budgets and I'd never done those before. Three years later we went public, which was another learning curve.

Around 2016, a year or two after the IPO this started to change. I was meeting with well educated, super





Planet Fitness has grown to 2,400 clubs and 17 million members



- smart people – all the investors and analysts who ask good (and tough) questions and I realised there wasn't a question I couldn't answer off the tip of my tongue. No matter how smart and well educated they were, no one knew the business better than I did. That's when my confidence level rose and any doubts stopped.

Building strengths

It's a strength that I've worked in all parts of the club. I've worked the front desk, been a trainer, a manager, a regional manager, COO and CEO. I understand the trials and tribulations of staff and how to engage members, as well as how to do all the day-to-day stuff, such as checking members in and billing. I love working in the gyms.

Pre-COVID I used to work the front desk once a quarter because I'd learn things about making the jobs easier for our staff, or the experience better for members.

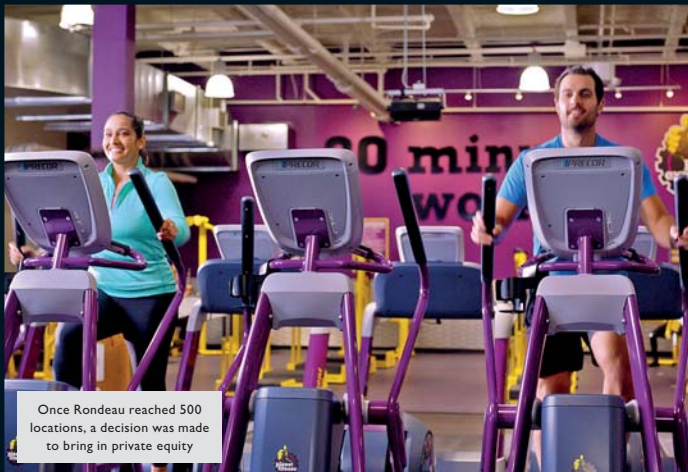
If I could go back and change things, I don't think I would. It's been very tough, but we now have more than 2,400 locations in six countries and 17 million members and are still driving membership growth. The drive and underdog mentality made me work



For the first decade we worked every day, lived pay cheque to pay cheque while we tried to figure out the business

that much harder. If I'd taken another route I might not be where I am now: we could have been a few years later in developing our model and someone else might have got the opportunity before us.

Although I wasn't much for education when I was growing up, if I could give my younger self some advice, I'd say pay attention at school – especially in business class – and read more books. The learning curve throughout my career has definitely been a struggle at times. For the first decade we worked every day, lived pay cheque to pay cheque and had credit card debt while we tried to figure out the business. Luckily, with passion and hard work it all worked out! ●



Once Rondeau reached 500 locations, a decision was made to bring in private equity

JOIN W3FIT in 2023

Premier hosted buyer event connecting owners and operators from Europe's top health, fitness, and leisure clubs and hotels with executives from global supplier companies innovating the fitness industry through pre-scheduled one-on-one meetings, education, and networking.



W3Fit EMEA

**10–13 October 2023 •
Le Méridien Lav Split, Croatia**

Le Méridien Lav, Split a stylish, modern, luxurious resort perfectly located to explore the Croatian coast. Situated 8 km south of Split in Podstrana on the Dalmatian Coast, Le Méridien Lav, Split, enjoys a beautiful beachfront setting with fantastic sea views across to the city and surrounding islands. Its elegant guestrooms, wide choice of restaurants, spacious meeting space and, a world-class spa make this five-star resort the perfect choice for W3Fit.



Well organised and hosted event that will undoubtedly become a showpiece networking event for the fitness industry going forward. Excellent breadth of suppliers which will likely lead to exciting new partnerships for us.

Buyer: Adam Watson, Nuffield Health



As a supplier, getting quality time with industry buyers is key, and W3FIT certainly provided that. Three days packed full of meetings and networking opportunities with new and existing customers has left me with lots to follow up on. Would highly recommend it.

Supplier: Luke Januszek, Escape Fitness



: CONTACT US

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Crucially, Technogym's understanding of trends was invaluable in helping us create a future-proofed space for students

Barry Squires, head of sport, University of Brighton



PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

Sport Brighton is inspiring the community with a new gym.

Barry Squires, head of sport, explains how the vision was brought to life

The University of Brighton has chosen Technogym to create a cutting-edge gym and fitness space at its Moulsecoomb campus.

Delivering the university's 2025 strategy – popularly known as the Big Build Project – involves relocating several schools across

its campuses, including the School of Sport and Health Sciences, which is moving to Falmer in 2024.

It's a critical time for Sport Brighton and the School of Sport and Health Sciences as they collaborate to improve the student experience.

"With Moulsecoomb set to be a key site, with over 6,500 students, we needed to improve provision as soon as possible", says Squires. "This new gym and fitness facility are part of the Big Build masterplan

which will transform the local area, bringing together services for a more efficient student experience and creating a new gateway into the city."

Creating a destination facility

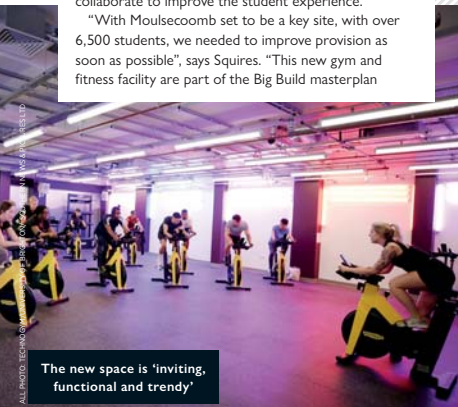
Sport Brighton wanted to deliver a space that's responsive to current and future student fitness trends and the fit-out brief drew on elements from boutique gyms, functional aesthetics and the culture of Brighton. This has resulted in a space with unique touches, such as feature walls by graffiti artist Arocart.

The gym is divided into distinct zones – resistance strength training, free weights, power, functional and cardio. It also has a turf track and a large studio which opens onto the gym floor via bifold doors.

"We've created an inviting, functional, trendy space," says Squires. "I believe you can create a unique, inspiring space on any budget if you plan carefully and have the support of expert partners who understand what you want to achieve."

Technogym supported all aspects

Sport Brighton worked with Technogym to design and equip the new space, choosing equipment and digital features appropriate for student university sports, elite sports, social interaction and general gym participation, as well as international students, staff and local community users.



The new space is 'inviting, functional and trendy'

Technogym Mywellness allows members to book classes, track activity and engage with Technogym training content

The student space will be responsive to current and future needs

"We have a longstanding relationship with Technogym," said Squires. "Its equipment and digital offering are the best on the market and the company delivers great service support and sector advice. Crucially, its understanding of trends was invaluable in helping us create a future-proofed space for students."

Equipment to maximise space and create flow

The Moulsecoomb Gym was kitted out with state-of-the-art cardio equipment, including Excite Live which allows for tailored training inspiring students – and members of the community – to personalise their cardio workouts, embrace exercise and make it part of their daily life. Skill line was implemented across the gym providing performance workouts and enabling members to train in all areas.

The studio space features Technogym Group Cycle Connect, an advanced digital solution that offers the option of virtual classes, as well as live, instructor-led sessions. This has helped Sport Brighton operate a low staffing model with long opening hours, maximising studio use during traditionally quieter times.

"We knew from feedback in our other facilities that the studio space had to be multifunctional," said



Squires. "Lots of members take kit into the studio space and we're now considering splitting the studio in two so we can have a class running while retaining space for those who want to train in there."

Digital solutions support member wellness

Sport Brighton opted to use Technogym Mywellness to allow members to book classes, track their activity and engage with Technogym training content. Mywellness also helps Squires and his team monitor gym use across different demographics and engage with users to boost retention.

Sport Brighton Moulsecoomb Gym and Fitness has exceeded targets for membership uptake across all demographics, while Squires and his team have had positive feedback from prospective students and parents on open days and community members have noted how different it is to local gyms.

"We're proud of our student-centric experience, offering the best equipment in a motivating environment," said Squires. "The facility is helping more people get fit and active whatever their journey, which is a key aim for Sport Brighton." ●

● More: www.technogym.com/HCM6

RAPID RESPONSE

Are your teams trained to deal with cardiac incidents?
Dr Dane Vishnubala tells HCM how preparation can
make the difference between life and death

In January this year, Damar Hamlin, a 24-year-old NFL player for the Buffalo Bills had a cardiac arrest after making a tackle. In a packed stadium, thousands watched as medical workers performed CPR and used a defibrillator to restore his heartbeat. Luckily, Damar was saved in hospital, but many others like him are not so lucky.

In the UK there are over 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests (OHCA) a year where emergency medical services attempt to resuscitate the victim. However, according to the British Heart Foundation, survival rate is low – just one in 10 people in the UK survive an OHCA. In the US, the number is 356,000 and the survival rate is the same at 10 per cent.

Although regular exercise helps strengthen the heart and lowers the risk of cardiovascular problems long-term, it's true that in some people, strenuous exercise can increase the immediate risk of heart attack and sudden cardiac arrest.

Common advice for improving heart health is to get more exercise but what kind and how much? Amid a regular stream of news coverage such as Hamlin's cardiac arrest, it can be difficult for the average person to feel reassured.

The scared sedentary

Dr Dane Vishnubala, chief medical officer at Active IQ says cardiac statistics shouldn't scare people into



PHOTO: PETER BYRNE

Dr Dane Vishnubala

being sedentary. Inaccurate myths about exercise and the heart have circulated for years, sometimes having a negative impact on people's health.

Given fitness professionals are trusted with our health and wellbeing – especially in a gym environment – a common question Vishnubala encounters is around the responsibility of UK fitness operators to help prevent cardiac issues in gyms.

Are PTs equipped to train people with heart conditions and would the fitness team at a gym be able to react quickly enough in the event of a cardiac arrest to influence the outcome?

What's important, says Vishnubala, is ensuring operators and fitness professionals are qualified to train people safely in the benefits of exercise – as even for people with coronary artery disease or peripheral vascular disease, the benefits of exercise far outweigh the risks.

Training and Practice

In professional sports, athletes are given regular electrocardiograms (ECG) to determine their risk of sudden death from a heart problem. An ECG records electrical signals in the heart and is a common and painless test used to quickly detect heart problems and monitor the heart's health.

For professional athletes, this is an important part of their preparation and training, but for the average gym-goer, this level of assessment when they sign up for a membership is not practical and while new members

CPR is hard work, so it's important to practice scenarios as a team

*Quick decisions
and reactions can
mean the difference
between life and death*

may fill out a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q), any answers that indicate a possible heart condition will simply have them signposted back to a GP.

"For fitness professionals, it's difficult to predict if a member will have a cardiac event in your facility," says Vishnubala. "The best thing health club operators can do is ensure their team members are appropriately qualified and prepared to react in the event of an emergency."

The exact numbers and training will look different for every facility, but Vishnubala recommends having as many staff members first-aid trained as possible. High-quality qualifications, such as Emergency First Aid at Work from organisations such as Active IQ, YMCA Fit

and the Red Cross, are examples of training that provides people with the skills they need to respond to first aid situations and administer first aid in the workplace.

"If you're a PT and something happens where you need to find a trained first aider to come and help, you're losing time. For every minute's delay in starting CPR, the success rate drops quickly. What if the first-aid trained staff member is tied up or unavailable, what would you do? If you're a self-employed PT, this is even more challenging, as you're on your own," says Vishnubala.

"Of course, it may not be possible to have every single staff member trained, but it's about looking for ways to mitigate risks in the event of an emergency." ▶

► Simulating Emergencies in Real-Life

Reacting quickly in an emergency is critical and even if staff members hold the highest qualifications, skills are undeniably lost without regular practice. To keep skills sharp, Vishnubala recommends gyms conduct regular training sessions that simulate real-life emergencies to ensure staff members know how to react quickly if the worst were to happen.

"Most first-aid qualifications require renewal after three years," Vishnubala explains. "If you haven't practiced those skills since the day you received your qualification, you'll forget them. It's important for gyms to consider more regular internal training. This could be held monthly by getting together and running real-life scenarios. Imagine someone drops while running on a treadmill. What do you do? Who calls for help? Do your team members know where the defibrillator is and how to use it? Practise these drills so things run smoothly and roles and responsibilities are clear within the team. Quick decisions and reactions can mean the difference between life and death."

Vishnubala says it's important to mix up the scenarios and while learning the basics of CPR on a dummy is important, real life rarely happens exactly like that, so running through a variety of emergencies can help staff feel empowered and prepared.

"Many people don't realise that CPR, when performed correctly, is hard work. After one or two sets of 30 compressions, you'll be tired, so

“

Members who are feeling unwell should avoid strenuous exercise, as the heart takes the strain



you'll need someone else to step in to continue to ensure high-quality compressions until an ambulance arrives. It's therefore important to practise these scenarios as a team."

Can heart rate monitors help?

Technology has made data experts of many of us, especially when it comes to exercise. Many group exercise classes now encourage the use of heart rate monitors while working out and these can tell a user a lot about their exertion levels, recovery and in some cases, their general health.

However, according to Vishnubala, most wearables can't identify the likelihood of the wearer having a cardiac event while exercising.

"Regrettably, if you have a heart condition that will be exacerbated by strenuous exercise, a heart rate monitor won't provide any reliable warning signs," says Vishnubala. Heart rate monitors are useful but using something such as rate of perceived exertion (RPE) can be just as useful in ascertaining approximate intensities.

Instead, Vishnubala encourages people to know the warning signs. Dizziness, fainting, chest pain, palpitations, significant breathlessness as well as a family history are all relevant. Should someone have any of these symptoms they should seek medical advice immediately. If they have a family history of heart problems or known underlying health conditions, they can talk to their doctor, as they may be able to refer

Further reading:

- Intensive exercise following heart attack
www.hcmmag.com/heartresearch
- Intensive exercise following aortic tear
www.hcmmag.com/Aortictear

**NFL player Damar
Hamlin was brought back
from a cardiac arrest**

In brief

- * The survival rate after a heart attack is 10 per cent, with 90 per cent losing their lives.
- * Health club operators should train their teams so they know what to do in the event of a cardiac event.
- * After initial training, staff should undergo regular simulations to keep skills up-to-date and ensure a coordinated response.
- * CPR is hard work, so teams must work together to deliver high quality interventions.
- * Heart rate monitors don't typically predict heart attacks, although some wearables that track Strain, such as Whoop, can give an indication that not all is well.
- * Everyone needs to be on the lookout for warning signs - dizziness, fainting, chest pain, palpitations and significant breathlessness.
- * Family history can also indicate potential for issues.
- * A return to exercise after a heart attack can help recovery.

them for further tests. If not, they need to be aware of how they're feeling. If they have a temperature or you feel unwell, it's wise to avoid strenuous exercise, as the heart will take the most strain. If they've recently recovered from illness – especially COVID – they could be at risk for myocarditis, a condition that causes inflammation of the heart. This is especially true of young men who have had the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine (www.hcmmag.com/vaccineheart).

"The notion of coming to the gym when you're feeling unwell to 'sweat it out' is potentially dangerous," says Vishnubala.

Exercise keeps your heart healthy

Stories of sudden cardiac arrests in young and seemingly healthy people can stir up fear, but the fact is, exercise helps keep your heart healthy. In fact, if you've suffered a cardiac event, exercise is often recommended as a way to recover. While it can be difficult to predict a cardiac event, the best course of action is for fitness operators to ensure they are properly trained and well-practised, should an emergency happen. ●

Building a better future

Health is a national asset that drives prosperity at an individual and collective level. Alliance Leisure CEO, Sarah Watts, explains how the organisation is supporting communities through the reimagining of public sector leisure



PHOTO ALLIANCE LEISURE

Sarah Watts

Working through the UK Leisure Framework, we're partnering with local authorities across the UK to design and build place-based active environments that engage and inspire whole communities.

Since 1999, Alliance Leisure – the UK's leading leisure development specialist – has delivered numerous regeneration projects, often involving transformation across entire leisure portfolios. Projects completed and in progress include the delivery of 12 new-build leisure venues from concept through to completion.

"Alliance Leisure was instrumental in making this project happen. Not only did it bring together the right team of experts, but they were also there to solve problems along the way and work in partnership with us to create the fantastic White Oak Leisure Centre. I'd recommend anyone looking at a new facility to talk to Alliance Leisure and involve them in the process as early as possible."

Duncan Cogger, regional contract manager, Everyone Active



PHOTO EVERYONE ACTIVE

Creating brand new facilities

White Oak Leisure Centre, owned by Sevenoaks District Council and managed by Everyone Active, is a prime example of the value a modern-day, place-based activity and wellness hub can deliver.

In addition to offering a diverse range of physical activity options for all ages and abilities, the centre also incorporates a number of community health services, from GP referral programmes to free access and support for those living with Parkinson's disease.

The centre is also helping to level up disparities by offering free access to those who might otherwise struggle to engage – including children in care and Ukrainian refugees – while also running campaigns such as This Girl Can and forming strong community links with primary schools to encourage more activity from targeted groups.

Completed in 2022, the centre has become the heartbeat of the community, with 440,000 visits recorded in the 12 months post-opening. This included 180,000 swims, 31,000 swimming lessons and 53,000 visits to the soft play area and the TAGActive Arena.

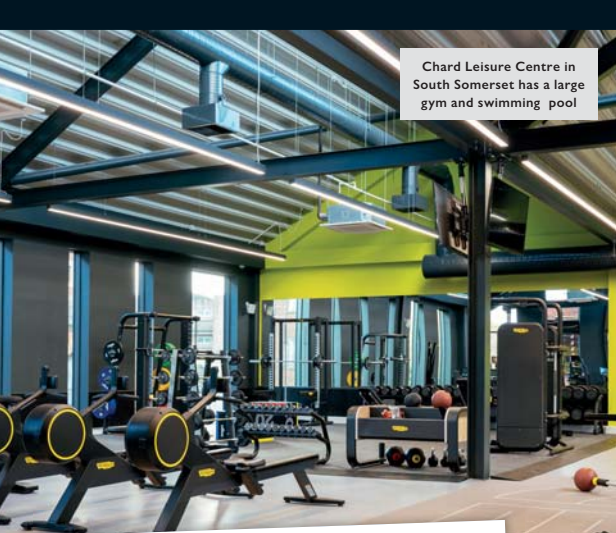
The art of the possible

All Alliance Leisure developments are built on the foundation of community needs.

Facilities are designed to tackle inequalities, creating inclusive environments that answer the needs of everyone – old and young, able and disabled, fit and unfit, healthy and unwell.

Through a mix of technological innovation, proven project experience and more than 600 years of





Chard Leisure Centre in South Somerset has a large gym and swimming pool

Recent Alliance Leisure new-build developments

OPEN

- 2019** SC2 Rhyl, Denbighshire
- 2021** Chard Leisure Centre, South Somerset
- 2022** Duncan Edwards Leisure Centre, Dudley
- 2022** White Oak Leisure Centre, Sevenoaks

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- 2024** Sharley Park Leisure Centre, North-East Derbyshire
- 2024** Warsop Health Hub, Mansfield
- 2023** The Hydro, Harrogate
- 2023** Knaresborough Leisure and Wellness Centre, Harrogate
- 2024** Parsloes Park Sports Hub, Barking and Dagenham
- 2024** Derby Racecourse Football Hub, Derby
- 2024** Ormskirk Leisure Centre, West Lancashire
- 2024** Skelmersdale Leisure Centre, West Lancashire
- 2024** Mablethorpe Leisure and Learning Hub, Lincolnshire



Mablethorpe Leisure and Learning Hub in Lincolnshire

combined leisure knowledge, Alliance Leisure is reimagining public sector leisure, creating environments that bring communities together while also instilling a sense of civic pride.

From sensory stimulating splash pads and digital, gamification adventure play zones to immersive cycle studios, aspirational training spaces and power-assisted wellbeing suites, Alliance Leisure is creating a new standard in leisure provision.

Why choose Alliance Leisure?

With over 20 years of leisure development experience and more than 220 projects under its belt, Alliance Leisure has worked with local authorities to deliver more than £300m of investment in public sector leisure.

In addition to independent projects the company is also the lead leisure developer on the UK Leisure



Everyone Active's White Oak Leisure Centre

Framework, which is managed by Denbighshire Leisure. Through this – the UK's only dedicated leisure framework – Alliance Leisure continues to provide local authorities with efficiencies and leisure-specific expertise at all levels of the supply chain, mitigating investment risk and optimising every penny spent, making the company the leisure developer of choice for the sector. ●

More: www.allianceleisure.co.uk

Well at work

The pandemic gave us all the chance to take stock, with many people deciding they didn't want to return to their previous job, or that it was the time to unleash their inner entrepreneur, retrain for a different profession, or write that book.

Many who did return to their jobs, or had carried on doing them, still found they wanted more – either greater flexibility, such as being able to work from home, or health support – with all this leading to growth in corporate wellbeing programmes.

More companies are investing in corporate wellness to recruit and retain. Kath Hudson reports on the opportunity this represents for the health and fitness sector

A sound investment

It's well known that investing in employee wellbeing can lead to increased resilience, better engagement, reduced absence and higher performance and productivity. With mental health taking a battering during the past two plus years – the World Health Organization has pointed out we're living a parallel pandemic in mental health with rates of depression trebling – it's become apparent that companies need to invest more in their workforce for the good of both the employees and the business.

In late 2021, a Harris Poll in the US found 40 per cent of employees were considering leaving their position due to chronic stress, largely because employers had not prioritised or supported their mental wellbeing. Many of those questioned said their employer had not followed through on commitments of support for mental health, or had recommended they practise self care, but had not supported them to do so.

However, 52 per cent said that more mental health support would likely make them stay in their job. Even if many companies haven't quite realised it yet, their employees do not just want a return to business as usual. This presents an opportunity for health and fitness operators to craft meaningful corporate wellness programmes to sell to businesses.

■ Meditation app, **Headspace**, now offers Headspace for Work: a science-backed meditation and mindfulness programme. Its corporate package includes free Headspace access for employees, member support, engagement reporting and a dedicated success manager. It claims just four sessions can lead to a 14 per cent reduction in burnout; 32 per cent less stress after 30 days and 14 per cent greater focus after four weeks.



Headspace at Work is designed to reduce burnout



■ Since launching Whoop Unite for business, connected wearable company, **Whoop**, now has 200 corporate customers, including the NHS and US National Forest Service. Allowing individuals to measure their sleep, stress levels and recovery, Whoop Unite acts like a digital coach for employees which the company says results in a more prepared and resilient workforce and will reduce burnout.

PHOTO: WHOOP



On a large scale, COVID-19 forced us to re-assess our priorities and health is now ranking higher than ever

Employee wellbeing is linked to less absence, more engagement and better productivity

"As is well known, when employees are happy, and feel taken care of, their productivity increases and the business flourishes," says Professor Gerard Bodeker, chair of Global Wellness Initiative's mental wellness initiative. "Nurturing is the best means of counteracting the Great Resignation."

Culture change

Wellness expert Mia Kyricos, president of Kyricos & Associates, says change has to be twofold: it's not enough for companies to provide gyms, yoga classes and a nap room if a stressful, 24/7 work culture endures, but she believes change is starting to happen.

"Prior to the pandemic, organisations were predominantly interested in offering wellness-driven programmes, products and services as part of a company's benefit package," she says. "Today, pioneers are daring to look at the concept more in terms of company culture and from a leadership point of view."

Kyricos says the pandemic has accelerated this. "From the Great Resignation to labour shortages in industries, such as spa and wellness, health and fitness and hospitality, to increasing demand for hybrid working and the fact that people have been reminded to live life more meaningfully and with purpose, the entire concept of wellbeing is being reconsidered," ▶



It seems that now is a fertile time to craft wellness programmes and services which can be taken into corporate settings

► she says. “While many companies are still trying to offer best-in-class programmes and resources – almost like toolkits for self-care by handfuls of colleagues both interested and willing – other companies are starting to consider what has made them unwell in the first place and that’s exciting.”

Ahmed Elbarkouki, CEO of Echeon Health, which provides preventative healthcare to the likes of online supermarket, Ocado, agrees the pandemic caused a shift in mindset which is being reflected in the workplace: “On a large scale, COVID-19 forced us to re-assess our priorities and health is now ranking higher than ever.

“There are benefits to making health assessments available to employees,” he continues. “Not only do they feel they’re being cared for, which positively impacts morale and increases employee retention rate, but it also makes sense financially. Providing bespoke preventative health assessments significantly reduces the risk of the occurrence of

debilitating diseases which can cause disruption, instability and stress among the team.”

Opportunities for the sector

Elbarkouki says this trend is creating growth opportunities for the health and fitness sector, including offering preventative healthcare, opening new gym spaces within office buildings or delivering mental health support.

A good proportion of health club operators are now offering corporate deals, either through direct marketing and pricing, or through aggregators such as Gympass, which works with Nuffield Health, Bannatyne, Anytime Fitness, Everlast and Snap Fitness, among others.

Gympass, which raised US\$220m via a funding round in 2021 – valuing it at US\$2.2bn – has recently also struck a partnership with Les Mills – a neat fit, given Gympass research, released at the end of 2022, found Gen Zers are 20 per cent more

■ **Technogym** has launched a connected ecosystem for corporate wellness called Technogym Corporate Club, the service is driven by the Technogym App Plus that uses AI to deliver services including hybrid workouts and guidance on nutrition and meditation.

The move is delivering new services to a sector where the company is already working with the likes of Goldman Sachs, Ferrari, Apple and Google.

Companies have a dashboard that analyses

user activity in real-time, while also enabling them to communicate with their staff directly via an app integration.

Companies can also schedule gaming elements and if they don’t have room for a gym, Technogym Corporate Club recommends small-footprint solutions that can be placed in coffee corners, meeting rooms and common areas.

In addition to offering the Corporate Club, Technogym also builds and manages corporate wellness programmes.

Technogym has launched a corporate club for businesses

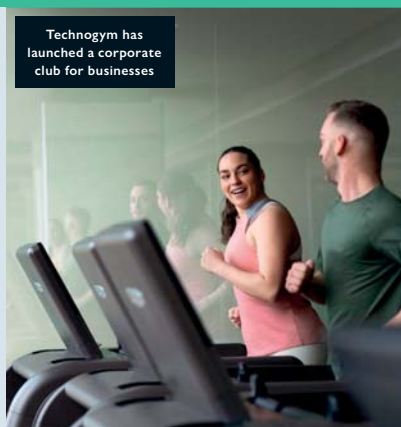



PHOTO: TECHNOGYM



■ Google, IBM and Pullman Hotels are among the businesses using **Les Mills Wellbeing in the Workplace** programmes, such as access to 1,500+ on-demand workouts, mindfulness sessions, challenges, guides and support.

The Les Mills Wellbeing in the Workplace programme is being used by Google and IBM

likely to use employee wellness packages, as this demographic is among Les Mills' key target audiences.

Elsewhere, boutique operator, Gymbox, is working directly with office space providers, having signed a partnership with WeWork giving workers access to both in-person and on-demand fitness classes, as well as access to Gymbox studios and pop-up wellness and workout events in WeWork offices.

On the equipment supplier side, Technogym has launched a new corporate wellness offering, while Gymlib, which has a network of 4,000 clubs, in 2022.

For creative operators and suppliers, it seems that now is a fertile time to craft wellness programmes and services which can be taken into corporate settings. ●

■ **Exos**, headed by founder Mark Verstegen, is leading the charge in corporate wellness, working with companies such as Adidas and Pfizer. Its offering includes fitness centre design, development and management. The programming offers a range of support and solutions for mindset, nutrition, movement and recovery, as well as creating shared experiences which improve team building and connection to the company.



Mark Verstegen

PHOTO: EXOS

■ **Microsoft's** recently opened R&D campus in Israel was designed to re-define office working with a large health club playing a major role.

The brief to architects, Vered Gindi Architects and GSArch was to lessen the long-term impact on the environment and offer a flexible, inclusive workspace which can be endlessly customised to meet employees' needs.

A 46,000sq m leisure space includes a 1,000sq m health club with cardio and strength equipment by Technogym, a circuit training system and a large yoga and exercise room. There's also a café with baristas and a band practice room.

"This was a once-in-a-lifetime project," says Vered Gindi. "We aimed to create a space which would be relevant for decades; no matter what comes next."



PHOTO: MICROSOFT

POSITIVE MOOD

People around the world are increasingly investing time in strengthening their mental health. Myzone CEO of EMEA, David Stalker, looks at how operators can support members to improve this aspect of their wellbeing

Physical activity is often associated with the benefits it brings to our physical health, such as weight management, improved cardiovascular function and increased strength and flexibility. However, the benefits of activity extend far beyond just the physical.

Research shows regular physical activity can have a profound impact on mental and social wellbeing as well. For example, it can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, improve cognitive function and boost self-esteem.

When considering holistic wellbeing, there are the benefits to social health, too. It provides opportunities for social interaction, promotes teamwork and communication and fosters a sense of community.

By providing guidance, motivation and resources to support every individual in their journey towards a more active lifestyle, the fitness industry is helping them achieve their personal fitness goals and contributing to their overall wellbeing and quality of life.

In addition to that, by creating a supportive and inclusive fitness community, as fitness professionals, we can help individuals feel empowered and motivated to continue making positive changes in their lives, leading to a healthier, happier and more connected society.

Does exercise really give a post-workout buzz?

During physical activity, endorphins are released, which promote feelings of pleasure and wellbeing and other feel-good chemicals in the brain. This is why



David Stalker

you often experience the classic post-workout high and see it in members.

Different types of physical activity can affect endorphin release and improve mood immediately post-activity. Aerobic exercise has been shown to enhance the release of these chemicals, and while strength training can also occasion similar release levels, the brain benefits are slightly more delayed. Likewise,

yoga and less intensive exercises can also impact positively, particularly when it comes to mindfulness.

This means that by getting members moving in any heart rate zone, regardless of their preferred method, you can impact their mood positively. So, don't solely go for the higher exertions, be confident in delivering a thought-out mix of intensities in your training.

The secret to stress reduction and relaxation

Regular physical activity has also been shown to reduce stress and stress-related symptoms, such as headaches and muscle tension. However, activity triggers the body's fight or flight response, which causes an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, and adrenaline levels.

Regular exercise can help to reduce the intensity of this response over time, making individuals more resilient to stress. During and immediately after exercise, there's increased blood flow to the brain, which can help to regulate the stress response and promote relaxation.

Nonetheless, too much exercise can increase stress if appropriate recovery is not given. Again, confirming the importance of monitoring your members' effort levels



Physical activity can have a profound impact on mental and social wellbeing, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, improving cognitive function and boosting self-esteem

Healthy competition increases your club's sense of community

and educating them on why lower-intensity exercise is as beneficial as high intensity when programmed well.

Create a sense of connectedness and support

Physical activity such as team training or exercise classes often involves socialising with others. This social interaction can foster a sense of community and belonging, which as humans we instinctively crave, and results in greater feelings of happiness.

This emphasises the benefit of creating a community within your club where your members feel comfortable and supported. A simple way to do this is through engaging with members in a personalised way, such as knowing their names or when they were last active. This data can be made easier to access through working with the right technology partner.

Challenges and a healthy sense of competition also expand that network effect when it comes to bringing people together, so long as they're inclusive in their competitive nature. Movement is always fun when more people are involved.

It's important to note that this aspect of community and the positive social impacts can be created by ▶



Too much exercise increases stress if appropriate recovery isn't given, confirming the importance of monitoring your members' effort levels

- ▶ all staff interacting with members. From sales to support and from the front desk, to trainers.

Why we all need goal setting for improved wellness

Setting members' fitness goals can be a great way to support their wellness; by increasing their sense of accomplishment, reducing stress and anxiety and increasing motivation and focus, it gives them a sense of control over their health and wellbeing.

It's not just a one-and-done, though. These goals for members and clients require a personalised approach, as factors such as age, lifestyle, preferences and motivations should be considered to create achievable goals with the above benefits.

The goal should be achievable, but tough to ensure they achieve the gained confidence and accomplishment. It should be something that can be easily measured pre-, during and post-achievement, such as a baseline fitness test or recovery after an exercise bout. This can be tricky to deliver at scale and may require a technology partner, but the results are tangible.

Build and nurture your ultimate inclusive community

In summary, physical activity not only benefits our physical health but also our mental and social wellbeing. Engaging in any physical activity can release feel-good chemicals in the brain, reduce stress and stress-related symptoms and foster a sense of community and belonging.

As fitness professionals, we can create a supportive and inclusive fitness community by providing guidance, motivation and resources to help individuals achieve their personal fitness goals.

Additionally, technology partners can make data access and measurement easier, but all staff should strive to create a sense of connectedness and support within the community. ●

More: www.myzone.org





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66

The majority of the adult population has some kind of long-term health condition and if health club operators want to expand their business, this is where they need to be

DR LOU ATKINSON

If operators want to grow their business, they need to support those with long-term health conditions, says Exi's head of research. She tells Kate Cracknell how this can be achieved

Tell us about Exi

It's a platform that supports professionals to prescribe and refer patients to exercise, as well as enabling people with long-term health conditions to safely increase their physical activity levels.

We're an SaMD business (Software as a Medical Device) and part of the emerging field of digital therapeutics which is changing the way people access wellness expertise and interventions.

Exi is designed to support 23 comorbid physical and mental health conditions, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, asthma, COPD, depression, anxiety, stress and so on.

What's the set-up?

There are two main parts to the platform: a smartphone app for end users and a secure data portal for professionals – doctors, for example, or fitness professionals running an exercise referral programme or PT business.

The smartphone app works with or without a wearable, although we recommend using one if possible. Users input their personal information – including demographics, current physical activity level and any medical conditions – and the app uses this to create a safe, personalised physical activity prescription that incorporates the latest clinical evidence, as well as activity guidelines from the WHO, NICE and ACSM Exercise is Medicine (www.exerciseismedicine.org).

What makes it effective?

Crucially, Exi also incorporates behaviour change support, making it fun, engaging and interesting for users to keep going with their activity prescription. That includes extrinsic motivation with rewards, which can be financial should our partners wish and also intrinsic motivation. The key is keeping people engaged with the programme for long enough to feel the benefits, because that's the basis for sustainable, health-enhancing behaviour change.

All the data in both the UK and US models of healthcare show that the ROI is there for these types of interventions in terms of reduced hospital admissions and reduced cost of medication.

Underpinning all of this is a huge amount of science and experience within our team gained from working with these populations, on top of which we continually explore the evolutions in digital technology to make our UX and UI more meaningful and motivating for end users and clinicians.

How does it connect exercise with the medical profession?

Our secure practitioner data portal is what really makes us a 'healthcare' system. This enables professionals overseeing programmes to track participants' progress in real-time.

In turn, support can be tailored and resources maximised: a light touch of reinforcement and encouragement can be given to those



- ▶ who are progressing well, for example, with face-to-face appointments and phone calls reserved for those who need more support. This approach also helps ensure the right people get the right support at the right time.

It also encourages healthcare professionals – many of whom don't feel confident in their own knowledge of physical activity – to bring the exercise conversation higher up the priority list.

With Exi, they know the exercise prescription will be done safely and will benefit their patients and with access to the data portal, they also know they can have informed conversations about it.

When they begin to see the results – more active patients also benefiting health-wise – it really helps reinforce the message that exercise is medicine.

How do the exercise prescriptions work?

Once users have input their personal information, Exi tells them how often and for how long they need to be active, as well as the intensity they need to achieve.

It then offers a choice of activities that will allow them to achieve that: it's important to give people autonomy and choice as this drives adherence to the programmes. There are video and audio activities in the app that users can enjoy, but equally it might be a case of them going for a walk with a friend – it's about them finding something they enjoy and want to do.



Time and again, evidence shows that the right social support is the biggest driver of long-term behaviour change

How do the programmes support progression?

We gradually progress each individual to get them to – or as close as possible to – the National Physical Activity Guidelines for healthy adults, meaning 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week or 75 minutes of vigorous activity. At the moment that happens over the first 12 weeks, but we're moving away from this set timeframe because some people need longer.

The prescription is specifically tailored to the health needs and starting point of each individual, making it safe and achievable and even once they've reached the national guidelines – or their personal goal, if national guidelines aren't achievable due to their health conditions – Exi motivates them to keep going while the new habits embed.

It can also be a tool for ongoing monitoring. For example, if a user's diabetes is under

Exercise prescription is done with reference to medical conditions

PHOTO: ARTISTONPHOTOGRAPHY / GETTY IMAGES



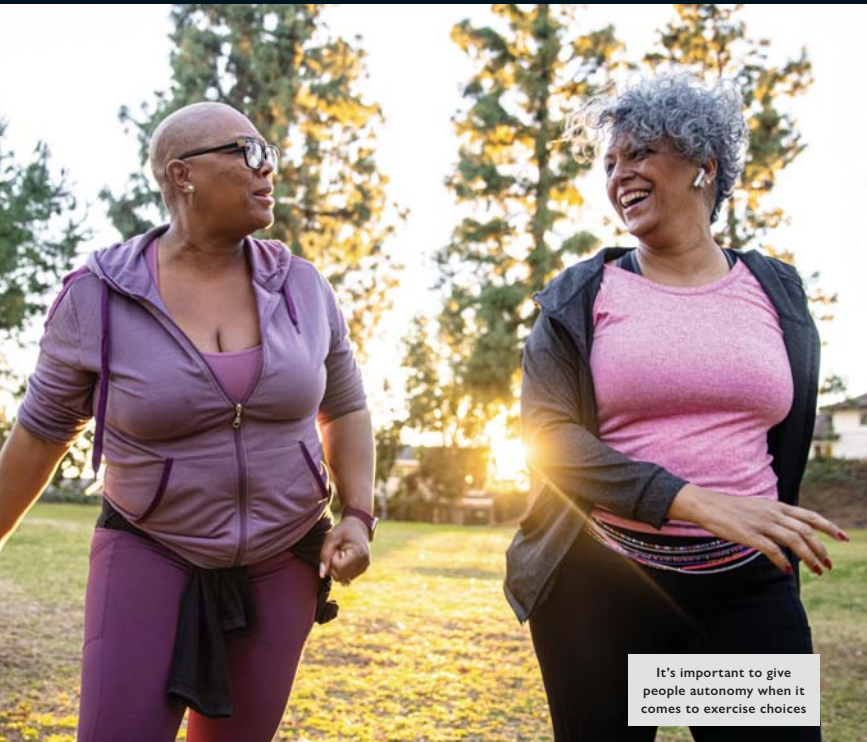


PHOTO: ALMAHAZ / GETTY IMAGES

It's important to give people autonomy when it comes to exercise choices

control, they might only meet with the nurse twice a year to monitor their condition and the app allows for tracking and information exchange between appointments.

We're about to start a two-year programme for Type 2 diabetics in collaboration with Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, which will be really interesting and we continually review and integrate all new physical activity research such as this into Exi, but for the most part new evidence simply serves to reinforce the argument that physical activity is a good thing – that for all these conditions, the benefits outweigh the risks. We rarely receive new guidance that changes the way we prescribe.

Why do you recommend using a wearable?

If someone just has Exi's smartphone app, it will track their steps, keep them posted on how well they're doing against their prescription and encourage them to do a weekly six-minute walk test to measure

improvements in their fitness. They can also use the app to record relevant health data: blood glucose, blood pressure, mood, pain score and so on.

However, adding a wearable to the set-up gives heart rate data, which validates exercise intensity. That matters for user confidence – people know they're exercising safely – and for results, ensuring the activity is challenging enough to benefit health. It also matters if rewards are being offered based on activity targets achieved.

How medically credible is Exi?

In the UK, Europe and US, Exi is recognised as a Class One medical device, with a long-term goal of being recognised as Class Two. That's a very stringent certification process and there's a backlog of applications at the moment, but we're gathering the necessary evidence and are confident we'll be certified. Longer-term, we're also looking to get Exi data integrated into digital medical records. ▶



We took some great learnings from a project we ran with Everyone Active, extending its exercise referral programme to vulnerable patients

► We're on the ORCHA-approved list for NHS use in the UK (www.orchahealth.com), meet ISO and CA quality assurance requirements and are FDA-compliant in the US. We've already worked with a number of NHS trusts and medical bodies across programmes for obesity and cardiac rehab.

Meanwhile, behind the platform sits a multi-disciplinary team of scientific and medical experts experienced in healthcare, physical activity and behaviour change, such as Sir Muir Gray. You can see our full team on our website (www.exi.life).

The other thing to mention is that we're the global med-tech partner for the ACSM's Exercise is Medicine programme (www.exerciseismedicine.org). Anyone who wants to use digital technology to deliver this programme – either standalone or in a hybrid physical/digital pathway – is directed to us.

What do you bring to the health club sector?

Just look at some of the most prevalent non-communicable diseases: obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and pre-diabetes. There's a huge opportunity here, as the NHS is under-

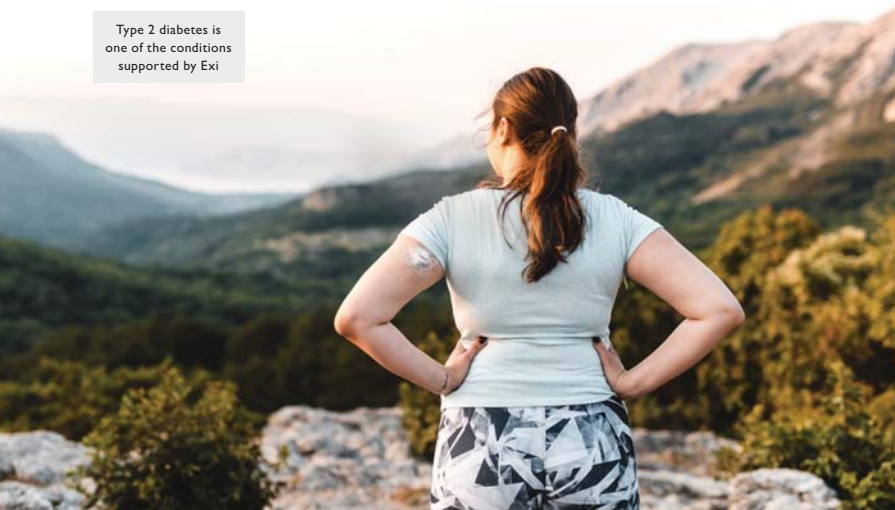
resourced, but the fitness sector needs to build its credibility with the healthcare sector.

Of course, within the fitness sector are some fantastic and highly-qualified fitness professionals who've done specialist qualifications and can prescribe for cardiac rehab, GP referral and so on, but they're few and far between. Exi allows support to be scaled, enhancing the business opportunities for highly qualified professionals and empowering those with less specialist qualifications to more confidently work with these populations.

Many individuals with health conditions don't see health clubs as a place for them and in this scenario Exi can be the bridge. As a digital platform, it allows programmes to be delivered remotely – at least until the individual feels ready to become part of an in-person physical activity community.

For those who are brave enough to come through the door, in spite of having some health conditions, being able to offer them Exi reassures them that it's a facility that takes their health seriously. A place where if they start being active, it's going to be safe and achievable for them.

Type 2 diabetes is one of the conditions supported by Exi



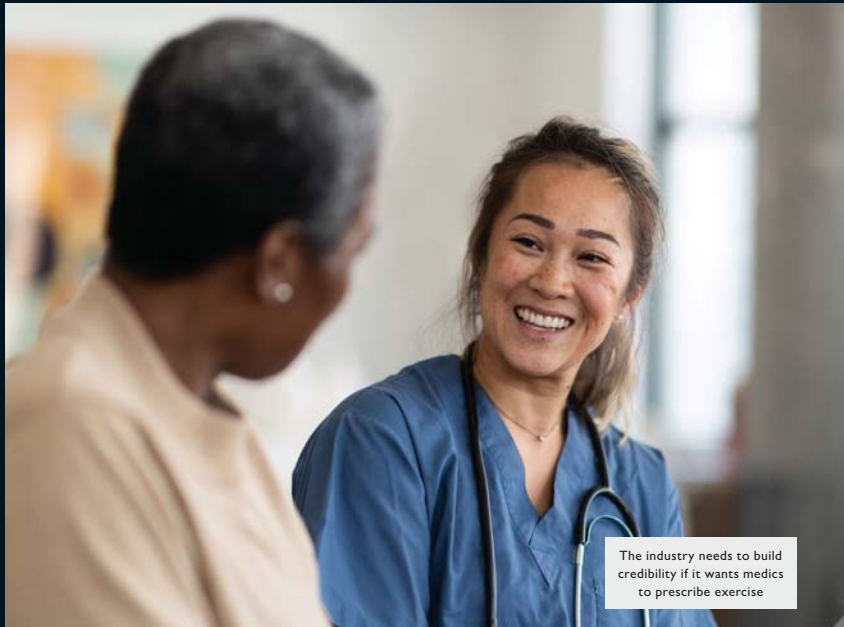


PHOTO: FACAMBA / GETTY IMAGES

The industry needs to build credibility if it wants medics to prescribe exercise

Best practice would see individuals onboard themselves into Exi to get their safe, personalised activity prescription, then coming into a club to be welcomed by an instructor who shows them all the different things they can do to achieve that prescription.

Rather than focusing on the exercise – the prescription itself – the instructor can focus on what they do best: building relationships and rapport, making the individual feel valued and comfortable, getting to know their needs and preferences to recommend the right activities, from a quiet time to swim to a class they might enjoy.

In short, Exi lets operators open up their facilities to people with health conditions, without every instructor in the facility being qualified to a super-high level.

Any examples to bring this to life?

We took some great learnings from a project we ran with Everyone Active, extending its exercise referral programme to vulnerable patients who weren't ready to come back into the gym after the lockdowns.

In fact, all of its instructors were GP referral-qualified, meaning the exercise prescription skillset was there. But of course, those instructors were

in high demand: participants only met with them three times in 12 weeks. And as I say, not everyone was ready to return to in-person contact.

Exi's behaviour change tools were able to support these individuals, as well as other participants in between appointments, keeping them motivated and on-track to achieve their goals. We're really proud that over 2,350 people used our service as part of Everyone Active's GP referral scheme.

We've refined our fitness sector offering off the back of these learnings. For example, participants can now be allocated to specific instructors, who can go into the portal to view and track participants. We're also adding a messaging facility for interaction between instructor and participant and have enhanced our training for instructors to make it easy for them to get people up and running on Exi. That's key to keeping people engaged.

We now have a strong product to offer the fitness sector and with our API and SDK we can integrate with other tech. It all adds up to a streamlined approach as businesses embrace these opportunities.

We've also proven digital interventions have a place for operators, allowing them to reach and impact a greater number of people, because there isn't a one-size-fits-all when it comes to fitness. ▶

- Some prefer digital, some prefer in-person, others want a blend and the more operators can flex to individual needs, the more likely they are to succeed.

That means tailoring to their health conditions, activity levels and preferences, so more people can find the one that works best – this is important given the high levels of physical inactivity.

What's your call to action for health clubs?

We need to build credibility with the healthcare sector. There's still no legal requirement for fitness professionals to do CPD or continually demonstrate competence, which is why healthcare turns to physiotherapists to deliver physical activity.

If we want referrals to come to the fitness sector instead, we need to do more to formalise and demonstrate our competencies.

We also need to keep progressing the culture in our sector, because as a rule gyms only appeal to a small section of the population. Changing this starts with the way we recruit and train, bringing in people from non-sporting backgrounds who relate to the needs of those with health conditions and incorporating psychology and behaviour change.

We need to get to a point where we can say: 'Everyone you encounter on the gym floor has had this level of training and has this level of competence in working with people with health conditions, in creating a safe space where these individuals feel welcome and looked after.'

From there, these populations will begin to join and in time people will be able to go into a gym

and see others like them. This is absolutely key. Time and again, evidence shows that the right social support is the biggest driver of long-term behaviour change. It's a human thing: we want to be socially connected and part of something.

It's important to remember that the majority of the adult population in this country has some kind of long-term health condition, whether mental – stress, anxiety, depression – or physical, such as hypertension, or Type 2 diabetes. If operators want to expand their business, this is where they need to be, investing in a workforce that can support these individuals. For me, that's less about the physiology – there are tools such as Exi to help with that – and more about the psychology and creating a welcoming culture and environment. ● ►



The app helps with monitoring of medical interventions between appointments



We now have a really strong product to offer the health club sector and with our API and SDK we can integrate and be embedded with other technologies



BIO:

Lou Atkinson

Expertise in both healthcare and fitness has given Atkinson valuable insights into exercise as medicine

An undergraduate degree in psychology and management led me into the corporate world. However, I soon realised I wanted to do something more meaningful.

I loved how positive and energised exercise made me feel, so qualified as a fitness professional and quit my corporate job.

Within a few months it became clear that to help people achieve their goals, we needed to work on their minds, not just their bodies, so I did an MSc in health psychology to really understand the drivers of people's behaviour.

This quickly emerged as a passion, leading to a full-time research post at Coventry University and for the next nine years, I worked as an applied researcher with public health teams, primary care workers and charities to understand the drivers of behaviour, the barriers to making healthy lifestyle choices and how these challenges can be overcome using health psychology and behavioural science.



PHOTO: EDWARD MOSES



I loved how positive and energised exercise made me feel, so qualified as a fitness professional and quit my corporate job

I also completed a PhD in weight management behaviours and engagement among pregnant and postnatal women, then moved to Aston University to work as a lecturer and researcher in health psychology. All the while, I also consulted and worked in the fitness industry, including becoming lead master trainer for Core Health and Fitness in Europe.

Then came the opportunity to join Exi. As a medical device company, having scientific evidence to support the product is vital and CEO, Grace McNamara, wanted someone within the organisation who was dedicated to that. I joined in September 2022 as head of research, alongside which I still freelance in healthcare research and the fitness sector. I feel as though I have a foot in both camps now and this is the first opportunity I've had to bring the two sides of my expertise together. ●



Changing behaviour requires insight into human psychology

HELIX

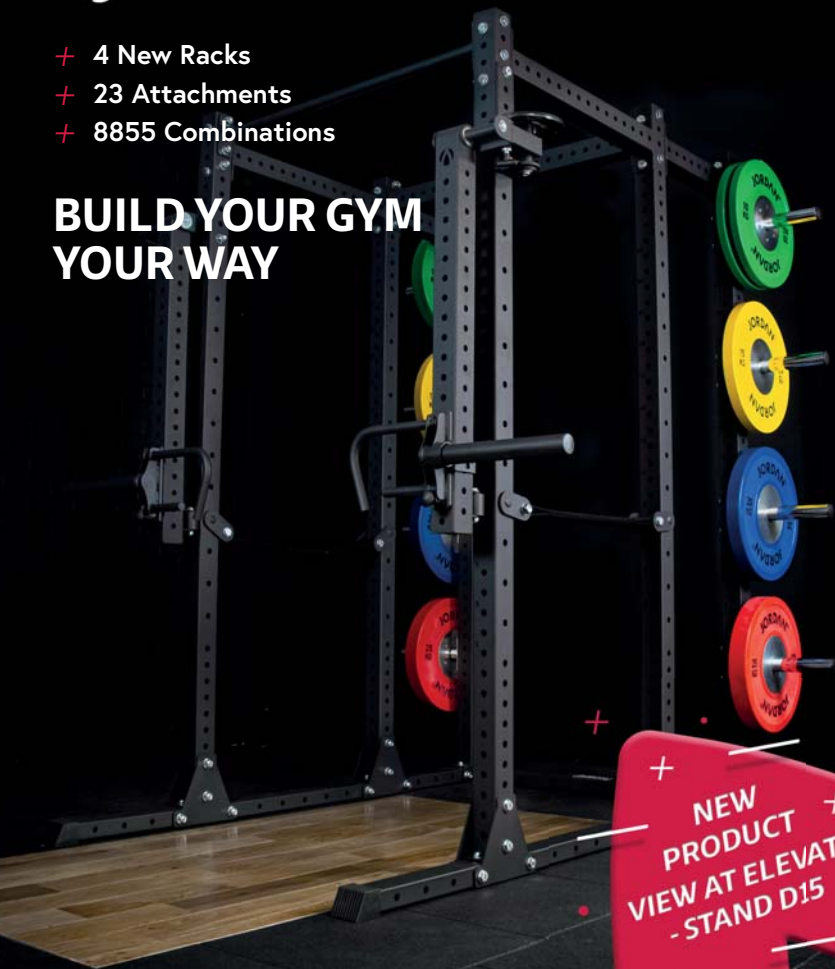
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The Safe Space Installation in Reigate has set the template for future sites



ALL PHOTOS: SAFE SPACE LOCKERS



Train your way

Hybrid Fitness used Safe Space Lockers to deliver changing rooms that are fundamental to the brand rollout

When Antony Townsley, business development director of Hybrid Fitness, realised the town of Reigate, Surrey, was lacking in full-service gyms, he knew Hybrid Fitness was exactly what the area needed and set out to

provide what local residents were looking for, right on the High Street

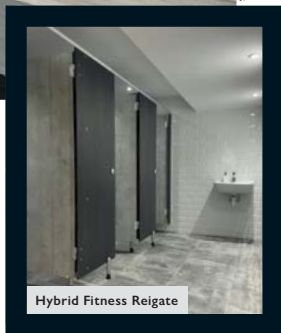
"It was clear that the local area was in need of a facility that was inclusive, and could meet the needs of a broad range of users and Hybrid ticked all those boxes," he explains.

"The aim was to provide the community with a commercial gym, where members can train independently, that also offers high-end classes with expert programming.

A complete workout

"One of our 'straplines' for Hybrid Fitness is 'Train your Way,'" he says. "We offer a complete workout under one roof where people can come to a great-looking environment – from the reception to the gym and changing rooms – and feel at home, feel comfortable and then naturally investigate the various ways to train."

Townsley knew getting the changing rooms right was crucial to creating the desired environment, so enlisted changing room experts Safe Space Lockers.



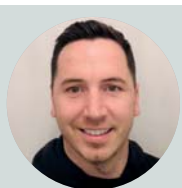
Hybrid Fitness Reigate

From the outset, he was impressed by the Safe Space team's creative input and suggestions, as they helped Hybrid design the brief and make the right choices for the space and brand – even supplying branded padlocks. The collaboration also future-proofed the plans, allowing for easy expansion as membership grows.

The changing rooms have proven so popular with members that Townsley is planning to use their specification as standard across all Hybrid sites:

"It's testament to the work that was put in, that we're taking what we've done with Safe Space as our standard specification. Moving forwards, what we've done in Reigate with locker choice, colours, and layout, is what we're looking to achieve in future sites," he says. ●

● www.safespacelockers.co.uk



We're taking what we've done with Safe Space in Reigate as our standard specification

Antony Townsley,
director of business development,
Hybrid Fitness



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New kid on the block

Block Gym has partnered with Matrix Fitness to launch a new workout experience at Royal William Yard

Block Gym has opened as part of a wider workspace offer within Plymouth's iconic Royal William Yard – once a Royal Navy virtualing yard and now an award-winning waterside destination.

The gym has taken the space following the renovation of the 200-year old, historic Grade I-listed naval buildings which have undergone a 12-year regeneration programme.

This retained the original fabric of the buildings while fusing it with a contemporary aesthetic to create a place to live, work, stay, play and relax.

The new 60-station gym, installed with cutting-edge equipment from Matrix Fitness, features a top-of-the-range cardiovascular suite, free weights area and functional training zone, all equipped with the latest workout tracking technology.

Premium 24/7 offering for residents

Commenting on the development, gym manager, Nathan Sarahs, says: "Block is passionate about pioneering when it comes to work-life balance, providing a premium gym offering to our workspace tenants 24/7.



We knew we had to work with the best when exploring fitness equipment and Matrix Fitness was the perfect fit in terms of its range and technology

Nathan Sarahs, gym manager,
Block Gym

"We knew we had to work with the best when exploring fitness equipment and Matrix Fitness was the perfect fit in terms of its range and technology" he said.

"We opted for a full cardio suite featuring the Touch XL consoles, as well as the latest range of Matrix Ultra strength equipment, with the addition of Smart Strength Intelligent Training Console, so members can autonomously track their workouts

and follow personalised training programmes," he continues.

"Developing such a historic site comes with complications," Sarahs explains. "We had many curve balls thrown at us, but our Matrix Fitness account manager, Alex Nardell, provided expert advice and support. He helped create countless floorplan options so we could maintain the building's aesthetics without disturbing the original structure.

"With experience working with the majority of equipment suppliers in the UK over the past decade, I can't recommend Matrix Fitness highly enough, due to its outstanding customer care – even with our challenging build, Alex remained focused on delivering exactly what we set out to achieve."

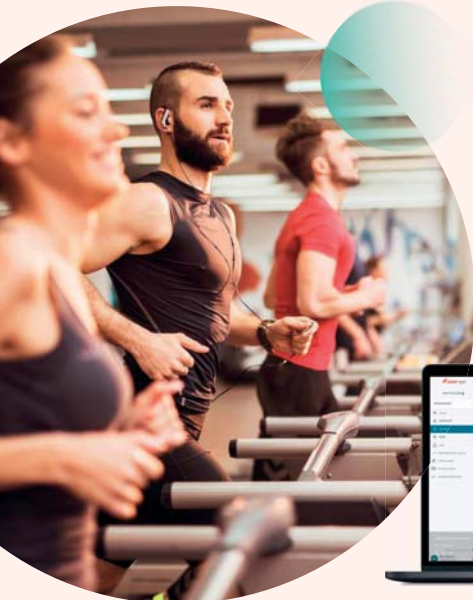
Nardell said: "This project was not without its challenges and required us to work closely with the Block team. The gym is one of the most impressive, exclusive fitness facilities in Plymouth and we look forward to continuing to support its future success." ●

● More: www.matrixfitness.co.uk



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"I appreciate how simple and effective Xplor Gym is – It's easy to learn, new staff members have completed the basic training in 10 minutes on their first shift. I'd recommend Xplor Gym to other gym operators because of how simple it is. It has everything you need without unnecessary complication."

Luke Tyler, Head of Health and Wellbeing Services, YMCA Black Country Group

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Xplor's fitness software
is now fully operational
across 18 QHotels gyms



Stepping up the service

QHotels chooses Xplor Gym's management software to cut admin time and better serve its gym members

With 18 health clubs across the UK, The QHotels Collection partnered with Xplor Gym to take advantage of best-in-class technology that's supported by an experienced, trusted team.

The hotel operator can focus more on its members and less on time-consuming admin work which is now automated.

The QHotels Collection is a selection of 20 four-star hotels and resorts located across the UK, including 18 health clubs, 17 spas and seven golf resorts.

Held back by admin-heavy tech

The QHotels Collection set out on a search to find a superior health and fitness club management system, as staff had been struggling to focus on serving and engaging members in the way they wanted, because they'd

been using software that created more admin work than it took away.

Basic tasks were complex and confusing, member engagement and retention tools were missing and even basic communications and operational tasks were time-consuming and complicated.

A customisable system

After a thorough review of the available software options, The QHotels Collection chose to partner with Xplor Gym. With best-in-class, highly customisable health and fitness club management software, Xplor Gym meets and exceeds the operator's needs.

The software was firstly rolled out to a pilot site, where it was trialled and fine-tuned, before being rolled out across all sites.

The QHotels Collection team was reassured by the approach



PHOTO: KEITH PICKARD

We needed a best-in-class health club management software solution

Keith Pickard, golf, health club and spa director, The QHotels Collection

and expertise of Xplor Gym as a partner and the multi-site hotel operator is now live with Xplor Gym across a total of 18 sites.

The Xplor Gym system has:

- Automated tedious tasks, freeing teams to focus on engaging members.
- Created a better digital experience for members with easy self-service.
- Introduced a superior software solution, with the flexibility needed to thrive.

● www.xplorgym.co.uk

GETTING CONNECTED

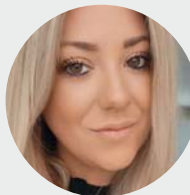
The growth of digital options and integrations is opening up new functionality for health clubs, as Frances Marcellin discovers

Tanya Hall /// EGym UK

www.egym.com.uk

How can we digitise the customer experience?

Digital integration within gyms allows data capture on members' fitness levels, goals and requirements, so they can have access to personalised training programmes and content designed specifically for them. Members can measure progress and set realistic goals.



Our smart gym equipment provides individual workout analysis and can adjust training in real time. In conjunction with smart machines in gyms, members can also unlock personalisation features through apps and wearables that allow them to book classes online, have access to on-demand online training and be part of online fitness communities – allowing gyms to support their members on individual journeys by providing educational materials.

Gamification is another motivational feature accessible through our solution that helps customers stay motivated and understand the positive effect their training has on their health.

Which kit best offers this functionality?

It has to be EGym Smart Strength machines, which provide a personalised, interactive and motivating strength workout to members, offering beginners maximum support for every set and repetition, while motivating advanced exercisers to perform at their best by setting completely new workouts.

The EGym Fitness Hub enables individual member care, quick onboarding and continuous motivation with intuitive body analysis, flexibility texts and training progress visualisations. The Open Mode helps more experienced users design their own workouts.



EGym Smart Strength machines can be customised

Gamification helps customers understand the positive effect their training has on their health



Members can
share triumphs
and cheer
each other on



Rob Knox /// Matrix Fitness UK

www.matrixfitness.com/uk/eng

What digital features are most useful for customisation?

It's important to keep members enthused, excited and eager for more by harnessing the power of tech to create communities and keep people connected through exercise experiences that keep things fresh.

We focus the technology of our connected solutions on providing workout tracking, fostering personal relationships and keeping members entertained while they sweat.

Our approach is centred around an open platform – a digital ecosystem that enhances the way you manage your facility, retain and engage members and promote your brand. Using digital features to provide a more personalised approach is key, it's about using connected solutions to connect as people.

Digital features should create a virtual fitness community that's always active with fresh ways for members to stay



fit, share their triumphs and cheer each other on, all while consolidating member workout data under your brand.

Which products would you propose to drive personalisation?

Our Engage 360 technology helps trainers connect with members in exciting new ways that get results and build lasting loyalty. Staff can access the ever-growing training library, create workouts, assign exercises to individuals and groups, track and monitor progress and ensure members are staying on track.

Our Community 360 app brings all member fitness data together in a single customisable interface so you can offer daily workouts, challenges, motivational push notifications, reward programmes and referral incentives to keep members engaged and interested.

It doesn't just bring data together, it brings people together, creating connections and building a community.



PHOTO: MATRIX FITNESS UK

Our Community 360 app doesn't just bring data together, it brings people together, creating connections and building a supportive community

Members' fitness data can come together in a single interface

If members can consume personalised content from their gym, they'll naturally form a stronger affinity with the brand

Anthony Radak /// Life Fitness www.lifefitness.com

How can digital personalise training?

One of the most impactful ways to do this comes from the operator's ability to deliver video training content and brand messaging, featuring the trainers and support staff that engage with members on a daily basis.

There's a host of relevant video content that health and fitness operators can produce for their members to provide value – from instructor-led workouts to facility onboarding.

We believe our commercial customers should have the power to personalise the equipment with their brand, their way. If members can consume personalised content from their gym, they'll naturally form a stronger affinity with the brand and be more likely to consume additional goods and services.



Operators will be able to upload custom videos to Life Fitness On Demand+

How does that work in practice?

Coming soon on Life Fitness premium touch-screen cardio products – including the new 24" SE4 console – will be the ability for operators to stream custom content for their members to consume while they work out.

Via the Halo Fitness Cloud, operators can upload custom videos to our platform and push them to any compatible cardio product alongside the 500+ complimentary on-demand fitness experiences via Life Fitness On Demand+. Halo Fitness Cloud and Life Fitness On Demand+ are available free with the purchase of Life Fitness equipment.

Hugo Braam /// Virtuagym

www.business.virtuagym.com

How is tech impacting the gym floor?

We believe the future of physical fitness is a connected and personalised one, driven by technology and automation.

Technology can be used to advise a member on what to do and when, depending on their personal variables, such as health goals, available time, exercise preferences and diet. The member can then track their training progress, body composition and nutrition, and that data can be analysed

PHOTO: VIRTUAGYM



to provide an updated training experience, thus creating a continuous feedback loop.

Virtuagym enables various sensory sources to feed back into our coaching platform and mobile apps, including wearables, body composition monitors and connected gym equipment. After cardio integrations with Matrix Fitness and Life Fitness, we launched our first strength integration with Matrix Fitness, linking their strength machines to the Virtuagym platform. This contributes to a more meaningful fitness experience, motivating people to reach their personal goals.

What's the best strategy?

Rather than it being about a particular product or piece of equipment, the key to unlocking a truly personalised hybrid fitness experience starts with a strong mobile app strategy, preferably through an open platform, which enables operators to work with multiple hardware providers, without being locked in.

Braam recommends an app-first approach

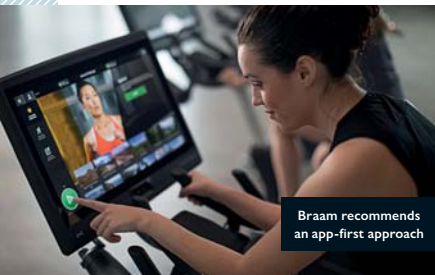


PHOTO: VIRTUAGYM

PHOTO: LIFE FITNESS

Whether a user is in a cinema or a gym, the need for frictionless experiences is a must

Technogym's Ecosystem connects all its platforms

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM

Martin Perry /// Technogym UK

www.technogym.com

What digital features personalise training experiences?

Personalisation goes beyond features and in today's environment consumers are demanding 'accessible experience transfers' to support their training experience.

At the very core of this is the digital customer journey, and regardless of whether the user is in a cinema or a gym, the execution of tasks such as booking, or making payments don't change – the need for frictionless experiences is a must.

For several years Technogym has invested heavily in precisely this – the customer journey – with an obsession about the user's training experience. For example, operators using the Mywellness CRM have a platform that helps them personalise every individual user training experience inside and outside the facility: from the initial assessment to the personalisation of a programme, the follow-up and ongoing review, and the sale of additional services – both within the gym environment and at home.

From a training experience perspective, Mywellness CRM further helps operators personalise individual user training experiences, thanks to a machine learning AI-based system that optimises, progresses and adapts the

training experience based on the individual needs, habits and passions in order to boost engagement and maximise results.

Which systems can be used to deliver personalised experiences?

Nearly all our product lines are digitally connected and can be used to deliver personalised training experiences and challenges, engaging group exercise and motivation, regardless of location.

Connecting product and software is the Technogym Ecosystem, an open platform that can be easily integrated with applications such as membership software, marketing and payment platforms and body analysis and assessment devices that are already in use at the facility. They also integrate with consumer apps and wearables.

The ecosystem can now also be integrated with fitness equipment from any manufacturer using the Bluetooth Fitness Machine Protocol. Additionally, Mywellness, the Wellness lifestyle CRM of the Technogym Ecosystem, helps facilities and businesses accelerate their digital strategy and transformation, improving users' experiences and increasing ROI, thanks to the surge in attraction, retention, upselling and secondary spend. ●

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM

Product innovation

Steph Eaves rounds up the latest health and fitness kit



You can get class cover in less than 30 seconds, says Emma Barry

A new app offers on-demand group exercise class cover, enabling health club managers to source the best freelance exercise instructors in less than 30 seconds.

CoverMe Fitness works by matching inspirational, qualified, insured and vetted freelance instructors with gyms and studios

to minimise timetable disruption and keep the member experience high.

Created as a prototype in 2018, the technology has attracted the attention of industry heavyweights including The Gym Group founder John Trehanne and Emma Barry, global fitness authority and co-founder of recruitment agency Good Soul Hunting, who have joined CoverMe as non-executive directors.

Barry says: "The advancement of technology puts everything at our fingertips 24/7: food, fashion, and fast cars. Now the same is true for group exercise instructors – CoverMe is the 'Uber' of class subbing."



CoverMe is the 'Uber' of class subbing

Emma Barry

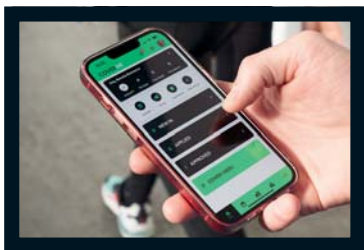


PHOTO: COVERME

● CoverMe gives fast access to class cover

The app's algorithms and analytics identify the most suitable freelance instructors, factoring in skills, proximity and availability – in real time – so managers can source and book class cover in three steps.

On joining the app, all instructors' qualifications and insurance certificates are verified, so managers can be assured their group exercise cover is certified and insured.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
CoverMe

A new solution drives the growth of power-assisted exercise, says Laura Childs

Innerva has launched an off-the-shelf solution to help operators deliver power-assisted exercise studios and unlock the potential to support the UK's ageing population.

Known as Active Wellbeing, the consumer-

facing brand is available to operators and businesses with Innerva's power assisted exercise equipment.

The solution gives operators an identity for their Innerva studios, ensuring consistent branding and communications both

internally and externally with partners and importantly customers.

Innerva's Laura Childs says: "This brand-in-a-box solution will allow operators to get up and running with an Active Wellbeing suite." Lensed to operators for free, it provides all the assets needed for set up, including signage, wall graphics, marketing campaigns, and advice on suite design, decor and soft furnishings.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD
Innerva



PHOTO: INNERRA

This brand-in-a-box solution will allow operators to get up and running with an Active Wellbeing suite

Laura Childs

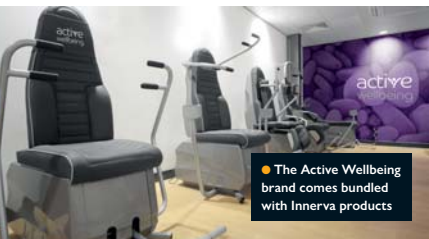


PHOTO: INNERRA

● The Active Wellbeing brand comes bundled with Innerva products

Nikki Miller unveils Kohler's Sprig shower aromatherapy infusion system

Normal showers can be turned into sensory experiences using a plumbing system and collection of aroma pods just revealed by Kohler Co.

The pods slot into a patented device that can be attached to existing shower

heads, or come ready installed in Kohler-branded equipment. They infuse the water stream with different blend of aromatherapy oils – Breathe, Focus, Recharge, Shield, Relax and Sleep – and also feature skincare ingredients (such as hyaluronic acid).

The launch marks the arrival of Sprig, a new consumer-facing line from Kohler that's designed to elevate daily routines into self-care rituals and bring a wellness experience into the home, spa or health club.

Nikki Miller, director of Kohler Waters, says: "Sprig stimulates four out of the five senses – scent, sight, sound and touch – while



PHOTO KOHLER CO

● The pods also feature dispense skincare ingredients

helping to create an immersive environment. It's perfect for both in-home and commercial use."

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORDS**
Kohler



PHOTO KOHLER CO



The patented device can be attached to existing shower heads

Nikki Miller

Body Bike Smart+ Forest Green is our latest sustainable bike – but not the last, says Uffe A Olesen

Launched at FIBO 2023, Body Bike Smart+ Forest Green is the new, sustainably manufactured offering from Body Bike.

Hand-made in Denmark using 25 per cent recycled ABS plastic, the bike comes in the deep green of classic cars and promises zero compromise in the ride experience, product quality and durability.

"Plastic, and more specifically society's excessive use of it, is putting our planet under huge pressure," says Uffe A Olesen, CEO at Body Bike. "We believe that if we all do our small part, we can begin to redress the balance.



PHOTO BODY BIKE

We challenged ourselves to expand our sustainable range

Uffe A Olesen

"In 2019, we launched Body Bike Smart+ OceanIX: the first piece of commercial gym equipment to be manufactured using recycled plastic fishing nets", he explains.

"It's proven very popular and now accounts for 20 per cent of our production, so we challenged ourselves to expand our sustainable range and turned our attention to land-based waste.

"The hunt began for recycled ABS – the strong, stable, highly resistant plastic we already use in the manufacture of our bike covers. The result is Body Bike Smart+ Forest Green.

"Within the next two years, our goal is to bring all existing bikes in line with



PHOTO BODY BIKE

these new sustainability standards, incorporating a minimum of 25 per cent recycled ABS in every model and every case colour."

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD**
Body Bike

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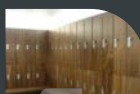
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The optimal time to exercise is 'between 8.00am and 11.00am'

Time to move

Timing of exercise 'more important' than type or length in order to ensure health benefits, according to research led by Gali Albalak at the Leiden University Medical Center

To fully benefit from exercise, timing sessions to optimally match the body's circadian rhythms is more important than the type or duration of the exercise, according to a report.

A study published in the *European Journal of Preventative Cardiology* found that when it comes to getting the best benefit from exercise – in terms of preventing heart disease and stroke – the optimal time of day to move is between 8am and 11am.

For the study, researchers – led by Gali Albalak at the Leiden University Medical Center – monitored 86,657 participants aged 42-76 over a period of six years, using wearable trackers to chart heart-rate data.

During follow-up, 2,911 participants developed coronary artery disease (CAD), and 796 participants developed a stroke.

Risk patterns for CAD, stroke and ischaemic stroke were identified by investigating their associations with when they had been exercising.

Pattern of activity

For the risk of CAD, stroke, and ischaemic stroke, the researchers found a clear pattern in which high relative physical activity during the hours of 12noon – 6pm was associated with higher risks.

We observed that participants with the highest daily physical activity performed during the late morning, had a 17 per cent decreased risk of stroke

A high relative physical activity during morning hours (8.00am to 11.00am) was associated with lower risks. Crucially, the data showed the same results, irrespective of personal chronobiology – in lay terms, whether the participants were 'night owls' or 'morning larks'.

"The study adds to the previous evidence that timing of physical activity is an additional independent contributing factor to cardiovascular risk and therefore adds a novel dimension to cardiovascular risk prevention," the researchers write in their final report.

"Most notably, we observed that participants with the highest daily physical activity performed during the late morning, had a 16 per cent decreased risk of CAD and a 17 per cent decreased risk of stroke, compared with participants who best represented the average (midday) pattern of acceleration of the UK-Biobank population."

● More: www.hcmmag.com/timing



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