

## B\_fit

The first Amazon  
Alexa-enabled health  
club opens, p64

## Jordy Kool & Marjolijn Meijer

Growing the Urban  
Gym Group brand, p78

# Sophie Lawler

*I feel really punchy about the future  
of the fitness industry* p36

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## Creative action

**This has always been a creative, driven sector, but the pressures of the pandemic have inspired a new outpouring of creativity, leading to the emergence of new models, partnerships and concepts**

**T**hey say necessity is the mother of invention and while one of the downsides of the pandemic has been extreme stress, there's also been an upside in the form of a huge outpouring of creativity.

When everything is on the line, the pure adrenaline of the situation can give clarity of vision, reveal new solutions and opportunities and embolden people to take risks and step outside their comfort zone.

The pandemic has also made many people question the rules by which business has always been done and look for better ways and the industry is now benefitting from this effect in spades, as existing operators, investors and entrepreneurs bring new concepts and partnerships to market at a rate we haven't seen since the sector first emerged in the 1980s.

Much of this change is being driven by operators who've realised that growth can be accelerated through new partnerships and business models and also by 'repacking' existing offerings for new audiences.

In this issue, we highlight a number of key examples, including a new deal struck between Xponential Fitness and Fitness International (page 30), which will see Xponential's nine franchise brands being set up in LA Fitness and City Sports Club locations across the US.

The deal is for 350 locations over five years, with the new club-in-club offerings being proposed as an upsell.

Owner-operated businesses have traditionally seen themselves as being in competition with franchises, but this deal turns that thinking on its head and opens up opportunities for collaboration across the sector.

It also plays to the need for traditional health club operations to find ways of upselling to avoid stagnation in growth, without incurring a huge increase in costs.

Also announcing an innovative collaboration this month is F45, which has partnered with OneSpaWorld – a spa operator on land and at sea which is led by Steiner Leisure and Elemis founder, Leonard Fluxman.

Under the multi-year agreement, F45 will deliver its branded workouts on-board cruise ships owned by Royal Caribbean subsidiary, Celebrity Cruises, with the first

PHOTO: XPONENTIAL



Xponential has signed a deal with Fitness International

**At the heart of this is creative thinking that seeks new partnerships and audiences and rewrites the rules**

to launch being on board *Celebrity Apex*. F45 says it's targeting the 30m people who take a cruise every year.

New gym models are also continuing to emerge, with 1Rebel's James Balfour revealing 1Rebel Labs Studio (page 34) and Until London (page 22) creating a chain of private members clubs for PTs.

Hussle has also been challenging the industry's received wisdom and partnering with McDonald's (page 72).

At the heart of all this is a creative way of thinking that targets fresh audiences, seeks new partnerships, and challenges and rewrites the rules about what is possible.

**Liz Terry, editor**  
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# HCM CONTENTS

## Uniting the world of fitness

ISSUE 10 2021 No 295



36 Sophie Lawler, CEO of Total Fitness, reveals plans and insights

PHOTO: FUTURE PRACTICE



18 Oli Patrick and Harry Jameson on the value of stress management

### 05 Editor's letter

Property deals, licencing and IP collaborations are opening up new opportunities across the sector and demanding our attention, says Liz Terry

### 12 HCM People Alan Leach

The CEO of West Wood Clubs and chair of a resurgent IHRSA discusses the organisation's plans and priorities

### 18 Oli Patrick and Harry Jameson

The co-founders of PT consultancy and training company, Future Practice, see an opportunity for fitness professionals to become stress management experts

### 22 Amin and Pellaw

The CEO and chief experience officer of Until explain their plans to develop the first chain of members' clubs with workspace for fitness professionals

### 28 HCM news

This month's key news stories, including: Les Mills Boutique launches, the latest numbers from The Leisure Database Company and Xponential's 'club-in-club' deal with LA Fitness

### 36 Interview Sophie Lawler

The CEO of Total Fitness talks about a tenure filled with dramatic growth, pandemic impact and a CVA

### 50 Everyone's talking about Sustainability

Climate change is causing devastation. HCM talks to innovators across the sector about inspiring solutions

### 56 New insights

A US study by ClubIntel for IHRSA and ABC Software highlights opportunities for operators to grow their businesses by engaging with key consumer groups

### 64 Smart club

Armah Sports has opened the first of the B\_fit chain of health clubs. Utilising AI, VR and the Internet of Things, it's the first club in the world to be Amazon Alexa-enabled





**78 Jordy Kool and Marjolijn Meijer** are building the Urban Gym Group



PHOTO: CORE HEALTH AND FITNESS

**90 We round up tips for making indoor cycling welcoming to newbies**



PHOTO: ARMA-HW SPORTS

**64 B\_fit – the first Amazon Alexa-enabled health club**

## 70 Fear of death

Researchers in Canada have found that fear of death is the greatest motivator to exercise

## 72 Debate Fast food tie-ups

Are collaborations with fast food brands a smart marketing opportunity or are they a risk to reputation?

## 78 Interview Jordy Kool & Marjolijn Meijer

The Amsterdam-based duo explain their plans for growing the Urban Gym Group using a counter-cyclical investment strategy and multiple brands

## 90 Get pedalling

Indoor cycling classes can be intimidating to the uninitiated. Suppliers share their tips on how to encourage beginners into the cycling studio

## 96 Product Innovations

HCM reveals new launches from Accessercise, Codelocks, Ecore and Blazepod

## 99 HCM directory

## 100 Research Change of direction

In the UK, NICE no longer recommends graded exercise therapy for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and ME

PHOTO: WEST WOOD CLUBS



**12 IHRSA chair, Alan Leach, CEO of West Wood Clubs**



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# HCM people



*IHRSA is now  
on a mission to  
bring the global  
industry together*

**Alan Leach**

**Chair of IHRSA and  
CEO, West Wood Clubs**

**You've been elected chair of the board  
of IHRSA – how does that feel?**

It's a real honour to chair a board with some incredible people, from all walks of the fitness industry.

I've been attending IHRSA events for 34 years, started speaking at the conference about 13 years ago, joined the board, then chaired the international committee. So to have been voted in as chair, is a great achievement for me.

I'm also the first IHRSA chair who's been unable to attend IHRSA events because of the travel restrictions!

**What are your priorities?**

My job is to carry forward the initiatives which have been put in place by the board, since the start of the pandemic. The plan is to act strategically and move towards advocacy.

We also want to open up the board to a lot more people in the fitness industry, bringing in people from studios, small gyms and boutiques and grow the footprint globally from all sectors in the fitness industry.

Diversity and inclusivity are also a focus – bringing more people from different areas onto the board and to the show, as speakers and such like. We want to unite the industry globally and also spearhead robust research which can hold up to any scientific peer review and inform our relationship with the World Health Organization. ▶







*Our business model is based on IHRSA guidelines, our sales and marketing teams are degree educated. All of this has stood us in good stead*

**IHRSA has been through some challenging times during the pandemic. How have things been going and what changes have been implemented to get the organisation back on track?**

IHRSA has had its challenges like everyone else, but to be told a few days before the trade show was due to go ahead, in March 2020, that it had to be cancelled was a big, big shock.

At that point, the board went from meeting three times a year, to meeting nearly every week. It led to us getting involved with all sorts of headline groups, and looking at diversity and the value of fitness. It also focused the mindset of the board on taking responsibility, thinking strategically and coming up with alliances with different organisations. IHRSA had to become an advocacy organisation to protect the interest of its members [private sector gym and health club operators].

IHRSA is now on a mission to bring the global industry together, having launched the National Health and Fitness Alliance in the US and the Global Health

West Wood Clubs is a full service operator with sport, health and fitness, spa and wellness offerings

and Fitness Alliance internationally to unite big industry partners and look into the global impact of the industry.

The change has been 100 per cent positive. I think IHRSA is stronger than ever, the ethos is stronger than ever, with the support of staff, vendors and the board.

### **Tell us about the GYMS ACT & PHIT legislation**

The Gyms Act has come about as a direct reaction to the pandemic, it's US-based legislation for financial relief for the industry to compensate for the closing of businesses and loss of revenue.

Advocacy is so important on these types of issues and IHRSA CEO Liz Clarke, along with Jim Worthington and IHRSA vice chair, Chris Craytor, have worked very hard on this.

The PHIT Act would enable members to claim tax relief on gym fees

PHOTO: WEST WOOD CLUBS - WESTMINSTER





PHOTO: WEST WOOD CLUBS, WESTMANSTOWN

The PHIT Act has been on the table for a while. It would allow a member who joins a health club to claim tax relief, in the same way as they can on medication or health services.

***IHRSA CEO, Liz Clark, has come from the sugar lobby and has been responsible for getting confectionery classed as 'essential'. As a poacher turned gamekeeper, what is IHRSA's brief to her?***

A huge amount of effort went into finding a new CEO who would be able to lead IHRSA over the next decade. We were looking for someone who can make things happen for the industry, who had extensive experience in leading an industry body, as well as experience in advocacy in Washington.

Liz is that person. She's in Washington meeting all the right people and big players, as well as reaching out to international players and finding out what people want from IHRSA. She's doing a fabulous job.

If you can get the sugar industry rated as essential during COVID then by God, you're good.

***How are things going in regards to your day job – West Wood Club in Ireland?***

We're very happy to be back. We won't get the income back that we lost, but our sales are up by 180 per cent and we're on 97.5 per cent of our pre-pandemic membership. Our more family-orientated suburban clubs are running at 100 per cent. The city centre clubs are a bit slower – about 80-90 per cent of what they were pre-COVID.



The COVID-driven outdoor studio at West Wood has been a hit and is here to stay

PHOTO: WEST WOOD CLUBS

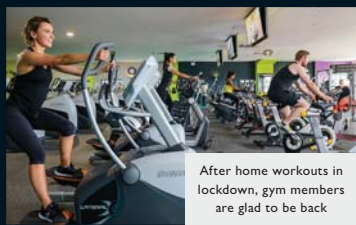
The members are happy to be back too – people are sick to death of working out at home. The gym gives access to classes and so much varied equipment which is difficult to replicate at home.

#### **You've launched an outdoor concept. How has this been received?**

Group fitness is a huge part of what we offer – we have 44,000 visits a month – so when we could open, but not run indoor classes, we made the decision to build a proper outdoor fitness studio, which we branded as 'Outfit'.

It's hugely popular. How did no one think of this before? To be out on a fine evening with instructors on the stage, disco lights and a great atmosphere, is a fantastic experience. We're still doing about 60 per cent of classes outside – we do our spinning and Les Mills classes out there. We even think it will be popular in the winter, when we can theme it for Halloween and Christmas.

PHOTO: WEST WOOD CLUBS



After home workouts in lockdown, gym members are glad to be back

#### **What have you learned during the pandemic?**

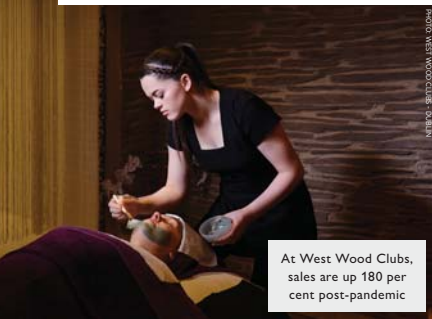
The 2008 recession – which lasted for six or seven years – taught us resilience which came in very useful during the pandemic. Even after seven months of being closed we were in a better position than we had been back then, because the banking crisis hit people's earnings straight away and they cancelled memberships.

I haven't seen any Irish fitness clubs go out of business yet, but I saw loads of the big players close during the 2008 recession. When that ended, we had a boom and I warned people to be careful.

In the recession at least there are no new competitors, but in the boom anyone can ask the bank for £1m to open a club.

During the lockdowns it all came down to relationships – with suppliers, bank managers and landlords. If you have good relationships and less financial commitments, you're in a much stronger position.

You also need to run the business professionally to cope with the threats and challenges which come along. West Wood is constantly at conventions learning and taking on board best practice, our business model is based on IHRSA guidelines, our sales and marketing teams are degree educated. All of this has stood us in good stead. ●



At West Wood Clubs, sales are up 180 per cent post-pandemic

PHOTO: WEST WOOD CLUBS - DOLLY



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Patrick (left) is a physiologist, while Jameson (right) is a performance coach



*There's still no 'stress resilience' profession. We believe fitness professionals can fill that gap*

## Harry Jameson and Oli Patrick

**Co-founders, Future Practice**

### **Tell us about your business**

**Oli:** Future Practice is a Clinical Wellbeing Academy, with the ultimate goal of creating a credible army of wellbeing professionals who are able to address the epidemic of lifestyle disease in the western world.

Stress was at epidemic levels even before COVID-19, yet there is still no 'stress resilience' profession and we believe fitness professionals can fill that gap.

### **How did it start?**

**Harry:** Future Practice is dedicated to providing education and training to deliver skills that allow fitness professionals to move into areas such as corporate wellbeing and lifestyle coaching. It gives them more tools in their toolbox to make them rounded practitioners.

### **What are your backgrounds?**

**Oli:** I've been a physiologist for 21 years, working in the grey space between medicine and fitness.

As the former head of physiology at Nuffield, I wrote the Level 7 Diploma in Health and Wellbeing Physiology, before co-founding a clinic offering advanced health assessments.

**Harry:** My primary role is as a performance and wellbeing coach with a preventative approach, encompassing smart training, nutrition, and recovery.

I've worked with brands such as Lululemon, Symprove, Technogym, Rosewood Hotels and Twitter, as well as high profile clients. I'm also wellness editor for *The Times* [London].



PHOTO: FUTURE PRACTICE

### **Why is it important for exercise professionals to be trained in stress resilience?**

**Oli:** If you don't understand the technicalities of stress and its impact on the behavioural and physiological patterns of your clients, you can't achieve optimal results.

A modern wellbeing coach needs to understand what stress is, how it moves from a thought to very real consequences in the body and be able to provide an exact framework to improve stress resilience in their clients.



## *A wellbeing coach needs to understand what stress is, how it moves from a thought to very real consequences in the body and be able to provide a framework to improve stress resilience in their clients*

**Harry:** When I did formal training on stress resilience it created a completely new dialogue for me, giving me a platform to launch a health retreats business and adding a new dimension to my corporate work.

A true understanding of heart rate variability and cortisol opened my understanding of technology and laboratory testing. You don't get to stand in front of the boards of international businesses and speak about wellbeing without having a clear handle on stress and how your clients can build resilience against its ill effects.

### ***You work with a number of high profile clients. What do they need from you?***

**Harry:** You don't get to work with these types of people if your view is fitness only. Even excellent nutrition coaching will only get you so far. It's important to have a total overview of what it takes to be well.

My ability to talk coherently and develop strategies for my clients on a number of topics and areas outside of the gym is what has led these clients to me.

### **Stress epidemic**

**Levels of stress in the general population have skyrocketed since the start of the pandemic**

- In 2011, CIPD reported that stress had overtaken traditional physical injuries, back pain mostly, as the number one cause of long term sickness absence from work.
- In 2019 'Burnout' was added to the international classification of diseases as an occupational condition.
- The insurer Cigna estimates stress-related ill health to cost the NHS over £11bn each year.
- 82 per cent of UK SME businesses have no current wellbeing strategy

### ***How do you use stress resilience techniques with your clients?***

**Harry:** I help them make appropriate life choices, to manage their thoughts and create a physiology which is robust and guards them against a high volume of stress. To be effective most of these actions take place when they're not with me, so it's important they completely buy in to why they're important.

Their understanding of why I'm asking them to make certain changes helps enormously with their compliance. In physical one-on-one sessions I factor in breathwork, 'thought re-framing' and the management of exercise intensity.

### ***How do you empower clients to change deeply ingrained behaviours?***

**Harry:** The first step is to reframe the debate. Too often people are told a habit or behaviour, such as alcohol intake, is 'bad' for them. But what does that mean? The reason given is something intangible and distant, like the impact on liver health or cardiovascular risk, issues that are completely foreign concepts to people who work in a non-clinical profession.

So I don't start with a client wanting to change a specific behaviour, I start with what the client wants to

PHOTO: EVENING STANDARD



**Boris Johnson hired Jameson after his spell in the ICU**





Breathwork and 'thought re-framing' are part of the stress training approach

PHOTO: FUTURE PRACTICE

improve. If they want more energy, which is extremely likely given the demands put on them [Harry is PT to Boris Johnson], then I might build an association between diet, poor sleep recovery and low energy. Even better, I would hope to measure their sleep response to things like alcohol and show them how this message directly relates to them. We can't keep expecting people to adopt difficult behaviours without understanding why they're directly related to them.

#### **Can you give an example?**

**Oli:** One great practical example of the impact of stress on the body was a client with stubborn weight gain and fatigue, who was on four different long-term medications for blood pressure, pre-diabetes, joint pain and mood stability.

Through taking some analytics of stress – questionnaires, heart rate variability and cortisol testing – we could see excess stress sat at the core of pretty much every symptom being presented.

So we amended exercise frequency, timing and intensity: swapping evening HIIT for morning yoga. We taught basic meditation and enforced a lunchtime walk. Simple actions, yet the client understood why they were appropriate and what we were seeking to achieve.

In a year, beyond weight loss and improved energy, there was also no need for any further medication. Unlocking stress had a life-changing effect. ●

***Footnote:** Future Practice is an approved training partner of CIMSPA and is launching an online course titled Mastering Stress Resilience.*

Vishal Amin (below),  
Alex Pellow (right)

PHOTO: UNTIL.LONDON



*It makes services and  
tech more accessible  
and affordable for  
wellness professionals*

## **Vishal Amin and Alex Pellow**

**Co-founders, Until**

### **What's the elevator pitch for Until London?**

The vision is for Until to become the first members club and workspace for health and wellness professionals – somewhere they can use as a base and where they can bring their clients to deliver their services.

It's been designed and created as a B2B space to make world-class, market-leading services and health tech more accessible and affordable for the professionals delivering these to consumers.

This first-of-a-kind offering will provide self-employed health and wellness professionals a perfectly curated space and environment from which to run their own businesses.

Until will welcome business owners across a multitude of professions (treat, train and coach) including personal trainers, strength and conditioning coaches, physiotherapists, chiropractors, osteopaths, nutritionists, naturopaths, business coaches, life coaches, acupuncturists, audiologists, reflexologists and psychotherapists.

### **Tell us the finer details**

Importantly, our customers get many of the benefits of being a full-time employee, such as health insurance, sick and injury pay and so forth, without the restrictions of being an employee.

Our first Until site in Soho has opened within the new Ilona Rose House near Tottenham Court Road Station. The 9,500 sq ft unit includes 3,000 sq ft of gym floor space, nine treatment



The first Until opened in London's Soho, offering 9,500sq ft of B2B space

## BIOS

### Vishal Amin and Alex Pellew – background briefings and insights

**Vishal (Founder and CEO):** I've spent my career to date unlocking business opportunities at every level, from early stage start-ups to global organisations. This has involved working across a variety of industries to build and exit a number of businesses across three continents.

The approach has always been to combine my hands-on experience in building ventures with the skills I learned at McKinsey, advising the leadership teams of some of the world's largest businesses on their purpose, future direction and culture.

While at McKinsey I supported a market changing acquisition and built new operating models for the NHS, for example, and in another role with innovation consultancy, ?What If! – now part of Accenture – I worked with clients such as Absolut Vodka, Danone and JLR as an inventor.

Outside these roles, I launched and scaled a US healthcare disruptor that served clients such as United Health, Wellpoint and McKesson – we built this up to have over 300 employees in under four years – and invested in and supported over a dozen start-ups in raising funding, accelerate growth and build winning cultures. These investments include Feedr, allplants, Lean Kitchen Network and Abacus Insights.

All the way through, one thing has remained consistent – I've been excited by challenging norms and driving change.

I spotted an opportunity to create a B2B fitness business two years ago and have been building a world-class team, raising a multi-million pre-seed round and launching Until London. I see it as a chance to use my experience to transform the way health and wellness professionals work around the world.

**Alex (Co-founder):** My dream was always to be a pro athlete, but blessed with two left feet, my next-best option was to work with athletes rather than be one!

I started my career in advertising where I led the European advertising account for Adidas, before moving to Nike to head-up football marketing. At Nike, I led the redesign of Niketown London and drove a series of hybrid digital and product experiences (most notably Nike+ and NikeiD).

Following this, I worked as president of Parkrun in the UK and internationally, spearheading their launch into the French market.

Along the way I've written a best-selling business book – The Idea In You – which has inspired thousands of would-be entrepreneurs to take the leap and start their own business.

I still mentor some of these startups, such as Pizza Pilgrims, while working as an advisor to businesses such as Disney, Google, Waitrose and Virgin Atlantic.



*Our members also get support growing their health and wellness businesses, from marketing to financial advice*

rooms, eight coaching rooms, luxurious changing rooms, a cutting-edge performance suite and a members' clubhouse for the professionals (not consumers), with a kitchen and lounge area providing fresh coffee, as well as healthy snacks for members which are provided by our partners.

It's the first members club and workspace for self-employed health and wellbeing professionals, giving them a state-of-the-art home for their business and a performance suite with the latest technology for assessing and tracking musculoskeletal performance and damage in their clients.

They also get support growing their business through a range of business services, from marketing through to financial advice, as well as a state-of-the-art podcast recording facility and video call booths for delivering online sessions.

We're offering a CPD programme delivered by members for members, while the 1500 sq ft Until clubhouse will be a base from which health and wellness members can run their businesses while connecting and collaborating with some of London's top health and wellbeing professionals.

First and foremost, Until is a community. Our goal is to create a highly aspirational, powerful and supportive community of London's very best health and wellbeing professionals, working across training, treatment and coaching.

This, above anything else, is where the true potential of the business sits. It's what will act as the springboard to help our customers realise their dreams for their businesses and themselves.

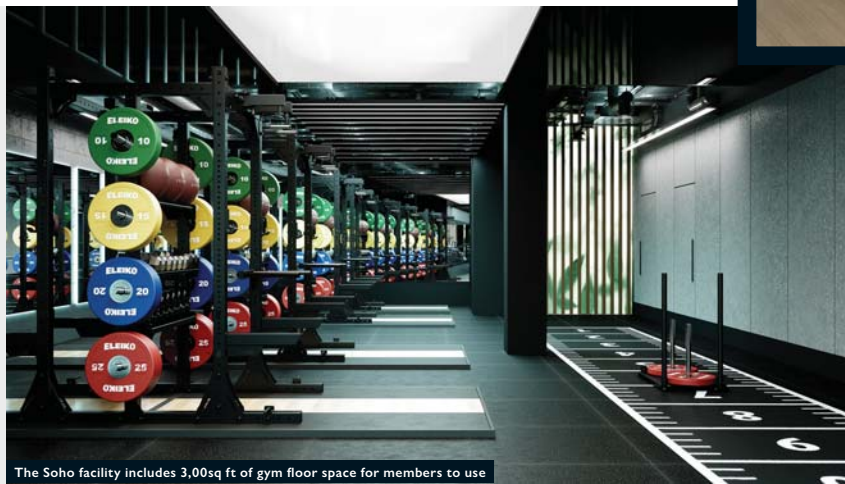
**What's the thinking behind the name?**

The word 'Until' is the fulcrum at the heart of every goal. For example, "I'll keep training until I can run a sub five hour marathon"; "I'll keep working on my mental health until the days feel lighter"; "I'll keep doing my treatment until I can walk pain-free again".

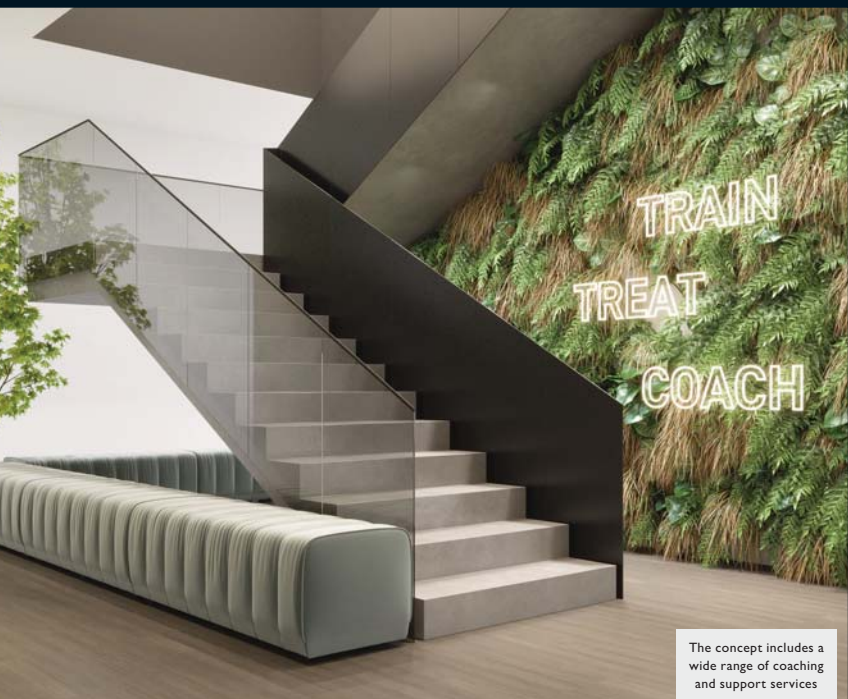
It effectively underwrites the promises we make to ourselves and that's exactly what we do for our members.

**How did you develop the concept?**

Until was shaped with and by professionals. We spent over 1,000 hours hanging out with some of the most



The Soho facility includes 3,00sq ft of gym floor space for members to use



amazing wellness professionals across all the lead professions we support – everyone from physios through to personal trainers and psychotherapists.

We saw that they were struggling with three problems. Firstly it's a lonely road being self employed and the professionals we spoke to were craving the chance to work alongside like-minded professionals and benefit from everything that comes with that community, such as support, development and business growth.

Secondly, going it alone in running your own business turns you from a professional to a business owner, along with all the associated new pressures, skills and tasks that come with that and many told us they'd value support with the business side.

Finally, getting access to cutting edge equipment and services in a flexible and affordable way is proving a challenge for some, as many gyms don't welcome outside personal trainers coming in with clients.

They need access to the latest health tech to help them enhance and diversify their product and service offers to their clients.

#### **Who did the design and architecture?**

Given the disruptive nature of our business we needed an equally disruptive partner with a big vision and an appetite to push the edges. From the start we partnered with Quaterback, who brought the latest thinking, technology and practices to the project to ensure we build a scalable and differentiated product and process to enhance the experience we offer for both our members and guests.

#### **Who's invested?**

The business was self-funded before we raised over US\$3m in equity to support the initial ramp up and roll out. That funding came from a variety of experienced and exciting angel investors with participation from Soho Estates.

#### **What's the customer journey for the clients of members?**

Our members' clients (guests) get a premium, seamless experience. They're greeted by our front of house

team on arrival and shown to the waiting area or changing rooms and then greeted by the professional and taken to their treatment room or the gym floor.

Water points, towels and luxury changing rooms are all provided for guests and our front of house team is always on hand to assist them with anything they might need. We also provide disabled access, toilets and changing facilities, should they be needed.

### **What's the customer journey for members?**

Our members seamlessly control their experience using our bespoke app, which enables them to check into the building where they're greeted by our front of house team.

They can then go to the member clubhouse, put their bag in their locker, catch up with other members, send some emails and maybe have a coffee from our barista machine.

They then deliver treatments in coaching rooms, on the gym floor or via a video booth, performance suite or podcast room. Rooms and suites are all booked and accessed using the app.

They can also have lunch at the clubhouse, attend training events in our training centre on a subject relevant to their profession or attend

online social media clinics to help them generate more new customers through social media.

### **Tell us about the deal with Soho Estates**

It's a straight 10-year lease – we're clear that when we choose a location we want to be there for the long-term and are very excited about the evolution of the Soho market.

Soho Estates is excited about the prospect of Until, what it will deliver for its members, and the impact and services it will provide for the local community.

Having been on a similar journey with Soho House they see similar potential and while they're our landlord in the first instance, they're definitely actively supporting us behind the scenes through network and capital.

### **Could wellness be the new anchor for the commercial property sector?**

Our experience is that the pandemic has created a sea change in landlords' attitudes to health and wellbeing.

Pre-pandemic it was seen as the responsibility of tenant companies to look after the wellbeing of the building occupants, not the landlord. Not anymore. Landlords know it has to be their focus

All members must supply proof of valid insurance to work in Until's spaces

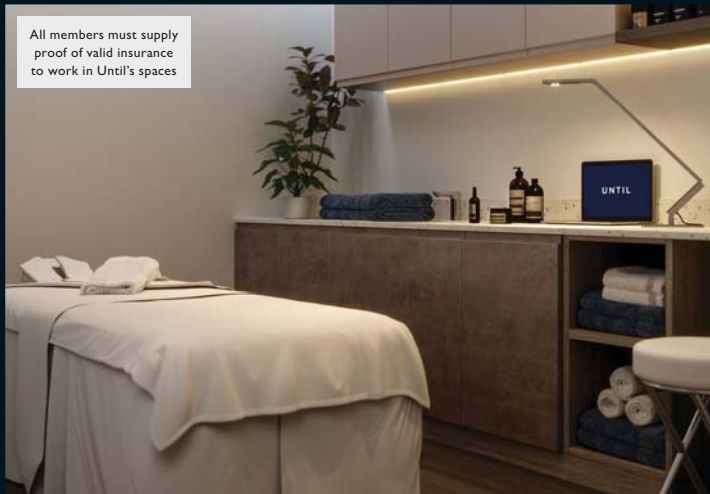


PHOTO: CHERIE - LOMA WISE





Until fees start at  
£149/m, plus credits to  
train, treat and coach

too to ensure that commercial workplaces are more appealing destinations for workers.

They're also starting to realise that premium health and wellbeing services are largely COVID-proof – as professions that can keep working during lockdowns and also as consistent footfall-driving destinations, in a way that offices no longer are.

#### ***Tell us about the location and catchment***

Soho is the ideal location for our first club, as it has a great existing health and wellbeing pedigree, as well as proximity to Harley Street and a strong roster of leading gym and wellbeing providers. It also has great transport links to north, south, east and west London.

Most of our members are professionals who are already working from central London but are looking for a better way of working than their current solution.

#### ***How far are people travelling to use Until?***

Our business is a destination business because we're working with leading wellness professionals. That means their clients are travelling to see them, as they have a strong 'pull'. That's one of the reasons quality is so important to us – we're working with seasoned professionals who are leaders in their fields.

To ensure this happens, we've got a rigorous verification process and all new members are approved by our membership committee, which is made of leading health and wellness professionals.

#### ***Is the fall off in commuting due to COVID impacting Until?***

Our feeling is that hybrid working will be the new normal – ie, people doing 2-4 days a week in the office and the rest from home.

This works well for our model, as consumers are prioritising making time to see their trainer, physio, psychotherapist when they're in the city.

All health and wellness practices are infinitely better and more effective when delivered in person. Again, this works in our favour in a post-lockdown world.

#### ***How many sites are you planning and where will you develop?***

The ambition for growth includes a target of 15 Until sites across Europe and the US within three years. Following the opening of Until Soho, we're planning to launch across London in Victoria, Liverpool Street and London Bridge / Waterloo in 2022. ●  
More: [www.until.co.uk](http://www.until.co.uk)

## Greg Oliver to chair GHFA Advisory Council

The Global Health & Fitness Alliance (GHFA) has revealed the makeup of its inaugural nine-member Advisory Council, which will oversee the alliance's activities.

GHFA is an initiative launched with the support of IHRSA to promote the health and fitness sector as an essential service and a key contributor within healthcare and public health.

The newly formed GHFA Advisory Council's main priority is producing the first-ever Global Economic Impact Report with Deloitte, which GHFA members worldwide are currently developing and funding to benefit the global fitness industry.

The report will analyse the industry's social and economic contributions and deliver a comprehensive overview of its direct and indirect value.

The nine council members are:

- Greg Oliver, CEO, Fitness and Lifestyle Group
- Brian Morris, founder, Aspria Group
- Richard Beddie, CEO of



FITNESS & LIFESTYLE GROUP

Oliver will oversee the creation of a Global Economic Impact report by Deloitte

- Exercise New Zealand
- Andrea Bell, co-founder, Inspire Brands Asia
- Anna Henwood, CMO, Les Mills International
- Raj Kumar, executive VP of international for Self Esteem Brands
- Justin Musgrove, CEO, Kun Real Estat
- Emmett Williams, partner at Myzone

- Anastasia Yusina, president, Strata Fitness Holding

The council will be chaired by Oliver.

Kilian Fisher, GHFA coordinator, said: "we have put together a solid group of industry veterans who bring with them decades of experience."

More: [http://lei.sr/p7W2y\\_H](http://lei.sr/p7W2y_H)

## 338 gyms opened in the UK since March 2019



SHUTTERSTOCK/ANAD CREATIVITY

Eight of the top 20 private operators have grown their estate

There have been 338 gym openings in the UK since 1 April 2019 – of which 83 per cent are in the private sector.

The figure comes from the *Fitness Industry Preview Report 2021*, published by The Leisure Database Company (TLDB), which gives an update on changes in the industry between March 2019 and mid-September 2021.

David Minton, founder of TLDB said: "There are more gyms open now than in March 2019 – we are moving from crisis to recovery mode."

Eight of the top 20 private health club operators in the UK have grown their estates since 2019 – in spite of the pandemic.

The report shows that the gap between the top operator (with 290 clubs) and the 20th



**We are moving from crisis to recovery mode**

David Minton

ranked operator (with 14 clubs) is wider now than at any time in the history of this league table.

The UK's largest private operators remain PureGym and The Gym Group, while in the public sector, GLL remains the largest operator, followed by Everyone Active.

More: [http://lei.sr/G9z8E\\_H](http://lei.sr/G9z8E_H)

## Sector gets Europe-wide certification scheme

EuropeActive has announced it will trial a new consumer health club certification scheme, to be known as FITcert.eu.

The certification has been developed within the European Standards Organisation CEN framework and prescribes standards for clubs covering operations, management, customer service, supervision and fitness trainer qualifications.

The standards are now being transformed into a scheme of certification overseen by the Netherlands' National Standards Organisation and independent certification bodies. The first two of the certification's five stages will be operated by EuropeActive.

The trial will see 500 clubs go through a test phase.



***This is one of the most important decisions ever taken by the European fitness sector***

*Cliff Collins*

EuropeActive director of programmes, Cliff Collins, said: "The new FITcert.eu scheme, one of the most important decisions ever taken by the European fitness sector, will help the industry to better define itself and to build confidence with users."

More: [http://lei.sr/V7n8a\\_H](http://lei.sr/V7n8a_H)



The trial will involve 500 clubs

## Les Mills Boutique launches as boxed solution

Les Mills has launched a new solution to help fitness operators transform space in their clubs into premium boutique studios.

Called Les Mills Boutique, the turnkey solution includes a bespoke studio fit-out plan, a studio operations guide, instructor training and access to a regularly refreshed programme of newly-launched Les Mills workouts.

Targeting younger audiences through an emphasis on experience and premium design, Les Mills Boutique is underpinned by three



Les Mills Boutique has been designed to appeal to Millennials and Gen-Z



***Our partners have been asking for this type of boxed solution for years***

*Keith Burnet*

workouts – functional training program Les Mills Ceremony; boxing concept Les Mills Conquer; and immersive cycling workout The Trip.

The concept has been piloted at Les Mills' flagship Auckland City club in New Zealand – as well as by a premium operator in Asia – and can be integrated into existing health clubs or installed on a standalone basis.

Keith Burnet, Les Mills' CEO of global markets, said: "Our partners have been asking for this type of 'boxed' solution for years now."

● In addition to creating the well-known exercise class formats, Les Mills is also a health club operator in New Zealand, with the clubs acting as a test bed.

More: [http://lei.sr/z6u9g\\_H](http://lei.sr/z6u9g_H)

## Planet Fitness hits 97% of pre-COVID numbers

Planet Fitness says a surge in people returning to gyms has helped it recover from the pandemic lockdowns.

The franchised operator, which has 2,193 clubs across five countries, has seen its membership level nearly return to its pre-pandemic peak, allowing the group to revise its top- and bottom-line key financial guidance metrics for 2021.

Announcing its Q3 results, Planet Fitness said it had ended the quarter with more than 15 million members



Planet Fitness ended Q3 with more than 15 million members



PLANET FITNESS

***We're emerging from the pandemic with our highest franchise segment revenue on record***

Chris Rondeau

— which is around 97 per cent of its pre-COVID-19 high of 15.5m.

Total revenue during the three months to 30 September was US\$154.3m — up 46.4 per cent on the same period in 2020.

Chris Rondeau, Planet Fitness CEO, said: "We're emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and the

third quarter, we returned to positive system-wide same-store [club] sales growth and achieved the highest sequential net member growth of any third quarter in company history, as well as our highest franchise segment revenue on record."

More: [http://lei.sr/k8t7a\\_H](http://lei.sr/k8t7a_H)

## Xponential signs club in club deal with LA Fitness



XPONENTIAL FITNESS

Xponential's portfolio of boutique brands includes Row House

Xponential Fitness has secured a deal that will see its branded boutique studios being set up at existing LA Fitness and City Sports Clubs locations across the US.

The franchise company has signed a partnership agreement with Fitness International — operator of LA Fitness and City Sports Clubs — which will result in a minimum development of 350 franchised locations over five years.

According to the agreement, Xponential can now invite existing franchisees, who own a studio with an LA Fitness or City Sports Club site within their territory, to open an Xponential brand studio inside of these locations.

Memberships at Xponential brand studio within the larger facilities will



XPONENTIAL FITNESS

***This agreement increases our total addressable market and provides expansion opportunities***

Anthony Geisler

then be made available to existing gym members for an additional cost.

Anthony Geisler, CEO of Xponential Fitness, said: "This agreement increases our total addressable market and provides expansion opportunities for our franchisees."

More: [http://lei.sr/D6e9m\\_H](http://lei.sr/D6e9m_H)

## Fitness First UK introduces flexible contracts

**F**itness First UK has changed its pricing structure and is now offering a flexible membership with no contract and no joining fee, giving members the option to access up to all of its 45 clubs.

Members opting for the new Fitness First FFX flexible memberships are signed up on a rolling contract which can be cancelled with a month's notice at any point.

Like other membership options, these "no commitment" memberships will offer unlimited access to the full facilities at the chosen club around the clock – as well as access to other Fitness First clubs.

For the multi-gym access element, Fitness First has divided its 45 UK clubs into seven pricing tiers. Those on Fitness First's FFX membership

will be able to use any club in their membership tier or lower.

The cost of the flexible, no contract membership for the highest tier – Tier 1, which includes four London clubs at Baker Street, Bishopsgate, Cottons and Tottenham Court Road and gives access to 35 gyms across London – has been dropped to £99 a month from £139, for example – almost a 30 per cent reduction. The cost of Fitness First's other membership options remain unchanged.

MD Lee Matthews said: "This is a really cool move, which allows people to get a gym membership which is as flexible as they are."

"We want to encourage fitness and not limit access to it in any way."

More: [http://lei.sr/Q9W8h\\_H](http://lei.sr/Q9W8h_H)



Members have access to up to 45 clubs

## F45 takes to the seas with OneSpaWorld

**F**45 Training will begin offering its functional fitness classes on board cruise ships, after securing a partnership with OneSpaWorld.

The franchised operator has signed a multi-year commercial deal to offer its 45-minute classes on Celebrity-branded cruise ships – a subsidiary of Royal Caribbean.

F45 formally kicked off the partnership with workouts on board the Celebrity Apex ship.

"We are thrilled to work with OneSpaWorld and Celebrity



F45 will be offering its popular, 45-minute HIIT concept on cruise ships



**We're committed to finding new ways to offer what we consider to be the world's best workout**

Adam Gilchrist

Cruises on this exciting new partnership, bringing F45's functional, effective, fun and community-driven workouts to guests," said Adam Gilchrist, CEO of F45.

"We're committed to finding new and innovative ways to offer what we consider to be the world's best workout to new and existing F45 members around the world.

"With this partnership, we are expanding the reach of F45's fitness offering as we begin to market to the 30 million passengers who travel on cruise ships each year."

F45 Training completed an IPO in July 2021, which valued the company at US\$1.4bn.

More: [http://lei.sr/u5j6b\\_H](http://lei.sr/u5j6b_H)



## Exercise supercharges kids' lockdown recovery

Children at UK schools which have adopted Active Recovery Curriculums feel fitter and stronger than their peers – both physically and mentally – and also do better academically.

Active Recovery Curriculums – which prioritise physical activity and time outdoors for schoolchildren – have been designed to supercharge recovery speed and outcomes following pandemic lockdowns..

A pilot initiative involving 10 schools has been led by The Youth Sport



Children recover faster from the effects of lockdowns if they exercise regularly



**We hope these findings inspire more schools to embrace the contribution exercise can make**

Ali Oliver

Trust. The results of the pilot are promising, with evidence of Active Recovery Curriculums positively impacting not only pupils' physical fitness, but also their academic progress and mental stamina.

74 per cent of pupils said being active helps them learn, while 71 per cent increased their physical activity levels.

Alison Oliver, CEO of the Youth Sport Trust, said: "We hope these findings inspire more schools to embrace the contribution exercise and activity can make in helping young people to reconnect, rebuild their confidence and learn."

More: [http://lei.sr/S9b8b\\_H](http://lei.sr/S9b8b_H)

## LGA calls for £875m to improve public provision



LGA wants to see 25 facilities being built or redeveloped each year

The Local Government Association (LGA) has called on the UK government to invest £875m in the nation's health and fitness and leisure facilities in order to help councils tackle obesity and other lifestyle diseases through physical activity.

According to the LGA, strategic investment is needed to help build or refurbish 25 new facilities each year over a three-year period and to create a network of hubs specifically designed to help people become more active in their everyday lives.

In addition, the investment should be targeted at those communities most in need of improved services.

Gerald Vernon-Jackson, chair of the LGA's Sport Board, said: "The provision of affordable public leisure



**The provision of affordable public leisure facilities is essential for levelling up an area**

Gerald Vernon-Jackson

facilities is essential for levelling up an area and councils want to work with communities to design the health and fitness facilities, leisure centres, sports pitches, parks and other infrastructure that will best enable them to build activity into their lives."

More: [http://lei.sr/H3r7m\\_H](http://lei.sr/H3r7m_H)



## Paceline launches health & wellness credit card

**A** new credit card – launched by wellness platform Paceline – links financial benefits to physical health.

The Paceline Card ties credit card rewards to workouts and activities which are tracked via Apple Watch.

Created in collaboration with Apple, the programme will see cardholders first being reimbursed for their purchase of Apple Watch, including the recently released Series 7.

New cardholders are eligible for a credit towards their purchase of the latest Apple Watch up to US\$429.

Paceline members who then achieve 150 minutes of physical activity each week can redeem a reward from over 500 health-focused lifestyle brands.

To qualify, cardholders who hit their weekly activity streak of 150 minutes

of physical activity will also need to make their minimum payment each statement cycle – and spend US\$500 each statement cycle for 24 months.

Upon completing their activity streak, cardholders unlock unlimited 3 per cent cashback on purchases from qualifying health and wellness merchants and 1 per cent total cashback on all other qualifying purchases.

Qualifying health and wellness merchant categories that are eligible for cashback rewards include gym memberships, fitness classes, fitness apps, spa treatments, workout apparel, and running stores. The Paceline Card is powered by banking-as-a-service platform Railsbank.

More: [http://lei.sr/E2q2t\\_H](http://lei.sr/E2q2t_H)



The card offers users wellness rewards

## What stops women and girls exercising?

**A** new guide has been published to give health clubs, gyms and leisure centres insights into how to attract more women and girls and to encourage them to get physically active.

Produced in partnership by Sport England's This Girl Can campaign and ukactive, the guide called, *How to improve your services for women and girls*, as told by the 51% – provides tangible solutions to bring down the barriers experienced by many women who want to be more active.



The guide highlights women's biggest concerns and reservations about exercising



**Reducing the barriers to participation is a fundamental challenge for our sector**

Huw Edwards

The guide highlights the biggest concerns and reservations which currently prevent women and girls from visiting health clubs and leisure centres. These include fear of judgement from both men and women; the cost of activities; worries about personal safety; knowledge about using equipment; and images used of women in marketing materials

that are unrelatable and make women feel negative about themselves.

Huw Edwards, CEO of ukactive, said: "Reducing the barriers to participation is a fundamental challenge, with our research showing clear demand from more women to be able to enjoy these facilities."

More: [http://lei.sr/6x8c4\\_H](http://lei.sr/6x8c4_H)

## 1Rebel reveals Labs Studio concept for PTs

Boutique operator 1Rebel has launched its first 1Rebel Labs Studio at its club in Holborn.

The new training studio concept will see 1Rebel instructors offer members one-to-one, personalised training in what the operator calls "a first in London's boutique gym scene".

Bespoke training plans and sessions will cater for all fitness needs, from perfecting technique and form, recovering from injury, or achieving personal bests.



**The Labs studio is a new brand move for 1Rebel**

James Balfour



The studio offers an extensive range of both strength and cardio equipment

The Labs Studio space has room for six personal trainers and their clients to train at any one time.

Equipment at the studio includes an extensive range of both strength and cardio equipment, ranging from a 6m Climbing Rope, an Air Bike and 24KG Kettlebells, to Soft Plyometric Boxes, Squat Racks and a Ski Erg.

James Balfour, 1Rebel co-founder, said: "The Labs studio in Holborn is a new brand move for 1Rebel, allowing us to offer a more personalised fitness experience while also helping Londoners smash their goals and excel in their fitness journeys."

More: [http://lei.sr/M6B9A\\_H](http://lei.sr/M6B9A_H)

## Lewis Hamilton's father launches fitness brand



FloatRower will target both the commercial and at-home markets

Anthony Hamilton, the father of F1 racing driver Lewis Hamilton, is launching a fitness equipment brand that will target both the commercial and at-home markets.

FloatRower, marketed as the world's first rowing machine to simulate the experience of rowing on water, will offer a resistance training workout and is designed to emulate the feel and movement of a floating rowing boat.

Set on a spring-loaded suspension monorail, the equipment creates a feeling of "floating and rolling", allowing the user to also work on controlling their balance, adding an extra element to the workout.

The company has secured a partnership trial with David Lloyd Clubs through the end of 2021 and into 2022.



**I had desires to create a more realistic rowing machine**

Anthony Hamilton

Speaking exclusively to HCM, Hamilton, who's founder and CEO, said, "I had desires to create a more realistic rowing machine given I was bored of the lack of engagement on the old-style 'back and forth' motion of existing rowing machines."

More: [http://lei.sr/7Z3c8\\_H](http://lei.sr/7Z3c8_H)



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*I feel really punchy  
about the future of the  
fitness industry, and  
really proud to serve it*

Lawler believes the  
highest ROI comes from  
investment in people



# SOPHIE LAWLER

**The CEO of Total Fitness has been in-post for just over three years – a true tale of two halves, with dramatic growth in the first half of her tenure, followed by a second half dominated by the pandemic and a CVA. She talks to Kate Cracknell**

## **What had been achieved at Total Fitness before COVID?**

When I talk about Total Fitness, I can only really talk about my tenure, and that means a period of three years and four months. And it's been a rollercoaster, with half of that time seeing the business return to growth followed by a second half spent in crisis.

But it's important to remember what we'd achieved, because in the 18 months prior to COVID-19, we'd had the most astonishing period of turnaround. We'd reached 97,000 members – a growth of nearly 15 per cent, which is sensational for a mature business such as ours – and we'd grown average yield too. It was really high-quality, revenue-driving growth. We'd doubled our EBITDA in the year to March 2019 and were on-track to double it again in the year to March 2020.

We were outperforming in every single one of our local marketplaces, and the astonishing thing was that we'd fuelled it by people power alone, not by capital investment. We'd focused heavily on culture and were living evidence that the highest ROI activity is always going to come from investment in your people.

By the time lockdown hit, our employee Net Promoter Score was up from -13 to +54 – a 67 per cent uplift. We also had a full complement of staff rather than loads of vacancies, and the majority of people had been in-post for at least a year. And when you do that, of course

– when you have stability and high engagement in your workforce – member NPS goes up too, in our case from 17 when I joined to around 65 by the time we were forced into lockdown.

So, we'd landed all of that, and we'd just acquired our incumbent PT provider so we could own our customer experience and create better career pathways for fitness professionals. We'd built our fitness philosophy and brand promise and had conceptualised a suite of 10–15 product signatures that brought our purpose and intent to life. We were prepared and ready to go for investment: literally the week before we closed, I was ready to pitch for investment. A week later we were in COVID closure discussions.

## **How did the company approach lockdown?**

I've heard some people say there's no strategy in survival, but I disagree. There is absolutely strategy in survival. Wherever there are decisions to be made, there has to be strategic alignment, because otherwise the cohesion of the business disappears, things stop making sense for your people and you can't come back from that. Every decision you make when you're surviving has to make sense to people, and has to be strategically aligned with what you did prior and what you intend to do in the future.

With that in mind, when many other operators focused on going digital to engage members, my main concern was retaining the engagement of



## The CVA was a strategic, responsible, sensible decision

our team members – the people who had been our fuel before when it was the only fuel we had.

This is where we ploughed our efforts, and I believe it was the right decision, because our team was always going to be vital to bringing our members back.

Of course we kept our members informed quickly, clearly and frequently. We also created a bit of digital content from our production studio – our in-house content and live streaming workshop which is used for fitness, conferencing and people engagement productions.

But it takes an awful lot of effort and capacity to compete digitally, and I wasn't going to waste time competing with a universe of exceptionally well qualified, slick content providers. I simply trusted that our destination facilities – which is what our huge clubs are, with their swimming pools and wide range of facilities that can't be replicated at home – would draw members back when the time came.

In the meantime, our production studio was primarily used to communicate with our team, with regular live streams from the couch where I'd chat to them about what was going on. There was also leadership training, coaching, mental health workshops and so on.

As a result, and in spite of everything – lockdown, reduced pay packets, lack of work – we actually drove our employee Net Promoter Score up by a further 4 per cent by June 2020.

### What was your personal response to the crisis?

It's actually tougher for me to reflect on it now than it was when we first had the rug pulled from under us.

It's in my nature to accept things very quickly and move on, which some people see as quite a cold characteristic, but it's not. I just have an ability to accept new realities fast. Moving



Total Fitness has added  
38,000 new members  
post-lockdown

forward and making decisions – that's a real driver for me, so it doesn't take me long to get my eyes back up and get going again.

That's not to say it was easy. I think everybody will relate to this, particularly those who live on their own: the lockdowns were lonely times, especially once I switched off my laptop after a busy day and was left with my own thoughts, concerns and anxieties. But still, at the time my immediate team and I just got up and got moving: we almost didn't have time to be shocked by the loss of everything.

I felt it very keenly for the team members in our clubs and our members, though, because they'd committed so wholeheartedly to our turnaround and growth – and it had taken a lot of effort. But really it's only now – when we're back in the game, foot to the floor, regaining and repeating what we achieved before, and arguably in even tougher circumstances than previously – that I mourn the loss.





PHOTO: TOTAL FITNESS GIFT CLASS

#### **Total Fitness went through a CVA. Why?**

We lost around 20 per cent of our members during lockdown, which is fairly typical when you look across the industry. I don't think we fared particularly badly during the crisis compared to other operators.

However, we're a smaller operation – just 15 clubs – and even the large-scale operators are facing restructuring challenges. So the fact it took three lockdowns and a full year of completely disrupted trading to get us to the point where we needed to do something different gives me some comfort.

The other thing to say on the CVA is this: it was a really strategic, responsible, sensible decision. We needed to restore the financial strength of the business on re-opening in a way that put it in the best possible position to recover well, quickly and sustainably, despite having fewer members.

While arrangements like ours can be viewed as 'rescues' – and there is an element of that, of

course – a CVA is also a strategic decision that's designed to protect an otherwise great business that's otherwise good and sustainable and that has earned its place. And for me, Total Fitness absolutely fitted that bill. We owed it to ourselves, our partners, our members and our stakeholders.

So, I'm not shy about it. It was the right thing to do and we're in a much better position as a result.

#### **How are you trading now?**

We've made a confident return. I've been overwhelmed by the pace of it: the most recent re-opening was more than three times better than after lockdown one.

We have a way to go before we're back to pre-COVID levels, but we've signed up 38,000 members since we re-opened and we're well on the way. We've had five consecutive months of record membership growth, and we're talking records in terms of sign-ups in Total Fitness history.

*There are failure points in the member journey in any club. We're looking to create a journey that addresses those points of vulnerability and difficulty*

We're aiming to recover our membership base to pre-COVID levels before March 2022 at the latest – like for like, as we closed one club as part of the CVA.

Our revenue growth will be at least in line with this, if not even better, as we've diversified: owning and growing our personal training product, our new signature products, our conferencing centre and retaining and growing the number of commercial tenants we have in the business.

**What's the secret of this recovery?**

The CVA restructuring gives us air cover to keep reinvesting, because our cost base has been re-gear'd with the support of people such as our landlords, suppliers and partners. We can continue to push the flywheel forward, including refurbishing some of our clubs.

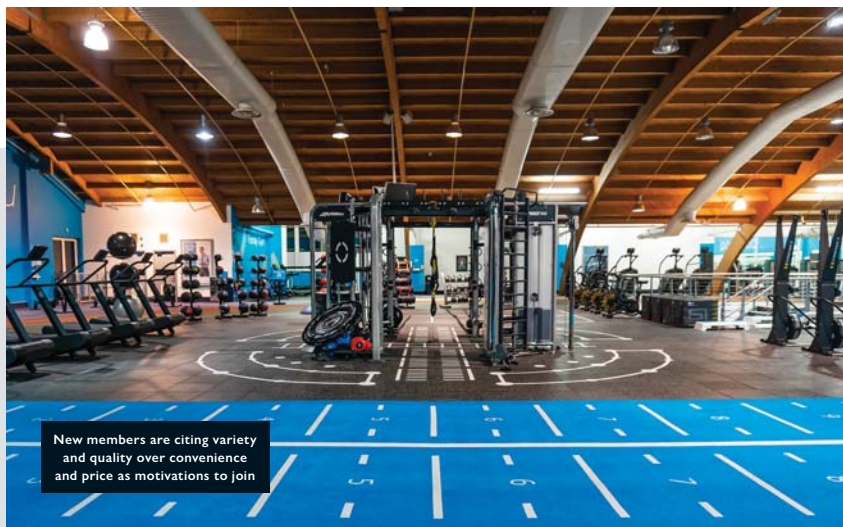
We also rebuilt our IT infrastructure during lockdown, to make it much easier to on-board the volume of members we knew we'd be getting.

And our members appear genuinely grateful to be back. They seem to appreciate a connected, physical, face-to-face product more than ever. Yes, plenty of them found new ways to exercise during lockdown, and a proportion of them have kept doing that – just as I have, just as everybody would – but it hasn't stopped them coming back to Total Fitness as well, which is awesome.

However, the thing that has stood us in the best stead when it comes to recovery is that the team has been on this kind of journey with me before, and we'd done it in the recent past when we were rebuilding the business before COVID.

When we were allowed to re-open, they just walked back out there knowing they could do it again. It filled me with sheer pride seeing the teams open the doors again with an attitude of: 'Yeah, we climbed a mountain before, but we'll just do it again. We know the route now.'

I feel exceptionally humbled by their commitment, and for that matter, the



New members are citing variety and quality over convenience and price as motivations to join



Under-34s have grown from 15-20% of membership to 37%

PHOTO: TOTAL FITNESS

commitment of our members. I'd already asked so much of my people, and they wholeheartedly committed to it and delivered something really difficult. Now I'm asking them to go the distance again and I'm so proud of their response.

#### **Who are your new members?**

Our new members are different from what we've seen before: 39 per cent were previously non-gym members, and 44 per cent are switchers. A significant number of these (48 per cent) have traded up from lower cost services, such as budget gyms.

Among those new to fitness, far more of them have come from lower income groups than has been the case at Total Fitness historically. And they're younger too: 37 per cent are aged under 34, where normally this age group accounts for 15-20 per cent of our joiners.

I've always been a massive advocate of the middle market – of a reasonably priced, full-service offering – and that seems to be coming through now.

New audiences are seemingly prepared to pay a middle market premium because they desire

variety and, importantly, space. In fact, we've been doing some research among new joiners and the key driver for joining – and I'm talking across the board – is variety and quality, where historically it's always been convenience and price. This is a monumental shift from what I've seen in the industry for the last 20 years and, if it proves to be permanent, is a real wake-up call.

#### **Tell us more about your research**

Never before has the industry signed up as many new members at any one time, so we took the opportunity to survey and talk to as many of them as possible.

We surveyed around 1,000 new joiners in May, just to understand a little more about their decision-making, their experience of the pandemic, how their exercise habits have changed. We got lots of really interesting insights, including some assumptions that were disproved.

For example, we assumed COVID-19 would have influenced the decision-making of the vast majority of our new members, particularly those new to exercise. But in fact, only

**Connection with other people has been a strong driver since lockdowns ended**

about 40 per cent of new joiners had been influenced by COVID-19; for the other 60 per cent, it was pent-up demand and the usual 'want to get fit' type of reasons for joining.

And even for the 40 per cent, when I say they were influenced by COVID-19, these were often very loosely connected reasons: things like 'I just want to see other people post-lockdown' or 'I felt lonely during the lockdowns and I want to exercise around others'. It was only a really small proportion who quoted reasons such as 'I had COVID-19 and realised I wanted to protect myself'.

The other thing we'd assumed was that older age groups would be most influenced by the pandemic, but they weren't. It was actually the younger age groups who were most influenced by COVID-19 to come and join.

#### **What are your growth plans?**

Growth and new product are the way forward for Total Fitness.

We have a really strong fitness philosophy and purpose, and brand promise, and our thought process at the moment is how we bring that to life in a new, conceptual model. We'll be nailing that down over the next 12 months and it will be the basis of our future clubs, which I can see us starting to open in a couple of years.

These won't be a replica of huge Total Fitness clubs – they will be smaller facilities and very different from what we have now

– but they will clearly be Total Fitness clubs thanks to the purpose, intent and fitness philosophy that will be integral to any new models we bring through. This is our conceptual challenge right now: how we make a very different club be authentically Total Fitness.

In terms of where those clubs might be, I'm a huge believer in northern markets, and a huge believer in the middle market, and there's a lot of white space here. But we'll also be looking to the south, because we're under-represented there and I believe we have a responsibility to serve that middle market segment.

#### **Can you give any insight into what your new clubs might look like?**

It's my view that the health club industry as a whole isn't great at product and brand strategy. It tends to lead with portfolio and product, which I get, because years and years of survey data have told us that location and price are the main drivers for consumers.

But what that means as an industry is that we tend to start with 'where is my new club location?' and then 'what facilities do I put in the club?' We don't start with the intent, the purpose, the philosophy of that particular fitness product and how to bring it to life.

Lawler says the new Total Fitness concept will be built around the customer journey rather than being property- and product-led

*We're working on bringing a new model to life. They'll be smaller than our current clubs, but will clearly be Total Fitness, thanks to the purpose, intent and fitness philosophy*

Neither are we sufficiently accessible or comfortable for people – and I count Total Fitness in this too, by the way. We also have a long way to go. But it's something I think we can solve.

For example, I always talk to my team about when I go for a swim – my problem isn't the size of the pool, the water clarity or the temperature. Those are basic expectations. My problem is that I feel like a fool when I walk onto the poolside in just my swimming costume, and I don't know how to get into a lane because they look busy, and I'm standing there feeling really vulnerable with basically no clothes on. That's my problem.

There are challenges like this – failure points in the member journey – throughout any club, and of course those failure points are often very personal and specific to the individual. So there are just so many ways you can get it wrong as an operator.

What we're trying to do is ask: what are the things members actually really need in

their experience, but perhaps don't even know they need? Once we've identified those, we'll be looking to create a journey that addresses those points of vulnerability and difficulty, removing the failure points that over time will stop people coming.

This is where we're going to start with our new club concept. Not with size, or how many studios, or what brand of treadmill, or what will the lighting be like. We're going to start with the thought points that a member might not even notice, but that will demonstrate to them that we care about their journey because we've already thought about every detail for them.

#### **Tell us about your new products**

The cool thing about all our engagement with new members is that we asked lots of them to be part of focus groups, so we've been able to do product development and testing



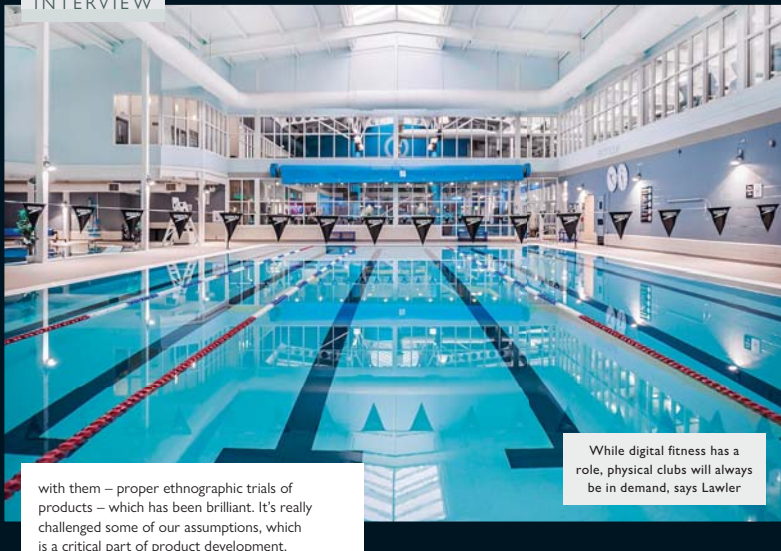


PHOTO: TOTAL FITNESS

with them – proper ethnographic trials of products – which has been brilliant. It's really challenged some of our assumptions, which is a critical part of product development.

We'll be launching our signature small group workout product by the end of this year, which we're calling Squad Sessions, or 'Squads' for short. We're working with our member focus groups to refine this product as we speak, and we're really proud of the work that's been done on the launch – it's perfect for those who crave social or connected workouts, with four people per session working out with one of our trainers.

Initially we'll be offering a mix of cardio and resistance to give a full body workout and we expect people to either book with their mates or join an open squad. The product will be developed over the next year or so and ultimately we may even experiment with variable pricing. It will be priced to ensure member value, with introductory prices under £10 per session.

Our ultimate goal, fitness aside: to make the product fit members' needs beyond purely looking at the equipment and the programming.

#### How do you see the future of fitness?

I'll always be confident in the bricks and mortar model. It will always be part of the mix. But ever since I started selling memberships in the year 2000, I've been clear in my view that health clubs are only a part of the mix. So, I don't feel concerned at all by people choosing

While digital fitness has a role, physical clubs will always be in demand, says Lawler

to be active elsewhere, because I think the growth in the addressable market for the fitness sector is going to be huge. You can see that in the way Millennials and Gen Zs choose to spend their disposable income.

For me, the addressable market for fitness is 100 per cent, because everybody needs our product in some way. So, there's room for everyone – we don't all have to fight over the same customers, and equally it's OK if your customers don't only train with you.

I also believe the health club industry has a responsibility not to dehumanise fitness. Yes, we talk about the new normal of fitness, with digital playing a part, and I completely get it. I consume digital fitness myself. But we have a real responsibility not to dehumanise the experience. I will forever strongly advocate connected, physical experiences, however they manifest.

And finishing on a personal note, why on earth would you want to be in any other sector right now? You're making people better every day, and there are more and more people who need us – and who acknowledge they need us. What more could you need to get you out of bed every morning? I feel really punchy about the future of the fitness industry, and really proud to serve it. ●



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# BIOCIRCUIT IT FITS YOU

**Technogym's Biocircuit offers a range of time-controlled and time-free circuits using the Biostrength line, with its Biodrive AI technology, delivering customised workouts**

**T**he Technogym Biocircuit range offers personalised workouts to help members achieve their fitness goals in a short amount of time. Guided programmes deliver engaging experiences that require no adjustments to equipment or wait time.

The circuits include everything members need for the best muscle activation imaginable. Quick and effective, their workout is always there for them and ready whenever they are.

Designed to deliver programmes for every type of member, the new Biocircuit range – based on the Biostrength line – offers members precision training to get the best results from their specific workout programme, which include pre-set exercises, workload transitions, pace setting and rest times.

## Biodrive – designed by NASA

The key to Biocircuit is Biodrive, a sophisticated intelligent drive that assures the best biomechanics and 'feel' ever integrated into fitness equipment.

Biodrive is based on revolutionary aerospace technology and is an exclusive patented technology that can only be found in Technogym's Biostrength line.

The motor-controlled system delivers tailored workouts to help members achieve the best results and requires only one login to be totally customised to users' needs.



**The Technogym Biodrive powers the Biocircuit**

## OPTION 1: The Biocircuit

### The time-controlled circuit

#### The customer journey

The setup starts at the Unity Self Kiosk, where members – assisted by a trainer – initially log in, are assigned a device and select their programme.

During the setup of cardio equipment, the trainer helps them select the appropriate effort level, making any necessary adjustments.

During the setup of the strength equipment, the seat adjustment and Range of Motion are selected and the member performs an isokinetic test to determine their ideal programme workout.

### Ongoing training

Once the initial setup has been done, members simply start exercising without logging in. The setup delivers a succession of workouts, each with a total work time of 3 minutes 15 seconds and comprised of 45 second durations with 30 second transition times between stations. The user is free to override their initial settings and change speed, incline or power if they choose.

### Always guided

At the end of each exercise, users are redirected to the next station in the circuit and at the end of two laps, the circuit ends. Members can then go and check their results on the Mywellness app.



Technogym Biocircuit comes in two ranges – one time-controlled and one with no time constraints

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM

## OPTION 2: **The Biocircuit Free**

**Personal training without a trainer  
The customer journey**

Biocircuit Free is a modular circuit with no time constraints that lets users choose whether to be guided completely or tailor their exercises in detail.

Guided by artificial intelligence, users only need to log in to each piece of equipment once, with Technogym Coach guiding them through setting up the workout. After this they simply continue with the same training experience.

### **Adaptive posture**

By continuing with the experience, the machine will adjust itself based on the information provided during the first session.

### **Precision training**

The console will show users their workout with the parameters set. With a simple click, they can start exercising.

**DISCOVER MORE** [www.technogym.com/hcm4](http://www.technogym.com/hcm4)

## **Key benefits of the Technogym Biodrive**

***Biodrive personalises workouts  
with huge benefits for members***

### **Start moving**

Increased muscle strength and improved posture enhance energy and mood

### **Lose Weight**

Raised metabolic rate can lead to a slimmer shape by burning more calories and increasing muscle strength

### **Get toned**

Improved muscle balance and harmony tone postural muscles and increase joint flexibility

### **Stay young**

Safe strength training programmes are beneficial to the body's energy and skeletal systems and mood, improving quality of life

### **Boost performance**

Competitive spirit is ignited with high-intensity training, increasing athletic performance and improving muscle power. Frequent users will experience a gradual increase in workload, reps and exercises over time

***Biocircuit has proven to be a brilliant way to meet the needs of people who need a structured and efficient gym workout***



Waterside Leisure chose Biocircuit to cater for its diverse membership base

## CASE STUDY ONE

### Biocircuit at Waterside Leisure

Independently run, Waterside is a very social leisure club that responds to member feedback quickly.

This is why they decided to add the Technogym Biocircuit – to offer exceptional fitness experiences for their diverse membership base.

“Biocircuit was the ideal solution for those members who need a little extra help with confidence and training technique, while the programming functionality provides benefits to our members who regularly strength train and look for an effective and time-efficient workout,” says leisure director Alice Hulley.

“Biocircuit has proven to be a brilliant way to meet the needs of people who need a structured and efficient gym workout and we’re suitably impressed with the feedback from members.

“We know continuing to enhance the fitness services and investment into the club keeps our members enthused and we’re always looking to offer something exceptional that’s also suitable for use by all.”

Waterside has signed up 120 new Biocircuit users in the two months since it launched the circuit and is looking to continue its partnership with Technogym, with plans for a second site in 2022.

## CASE STUDY TWO

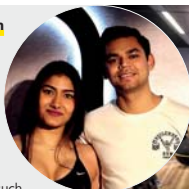
### Biocircuit Free at Retrofit London

This state-of-the-art fitness club, where hardcore athletes train alongside everyday gym-goers, is run by owners Mahrya Abdulla and Shahnaam Moosa and offers unique class experiences and exceptional service.

“We’re so excited to offer our members Biocircuit,” says Abdulla. “It’s such an innovative approach to training, turning the same piece of equipment into something different for everyone. Our nine-station Biocircuit set-up is our main strength section and is used for small group training, as well as individual training.”

“We were fascinated by the Biocircuit when we saw it at Technogym headquarters – it’s fantastic the way the equipment automatically adjusts to the member’s profile and provides a guided programme tailored to the individual.

“Everything from pace, workloads and rest-time is designed for the member’s programme, depending on their training needs. Biocircuit is unique and enhances the training experience, providing personalised programmes and really taking the club to the next level.”



Retrofit London chose Biocircuit after seeing it at Technogym headquarters

***Biocircuit is unique and enhances the training experience, providing personalised programmes and taking the club to the next level***

CLICK TO  
PLAY VIDEO



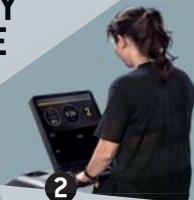
**TECHNOGYM**

## THE JOURNEY EXPERIENCE



**1**

ONE LOGIN



**2**

ONGOING TRAINING



**4**

ALWAYS GUIDED



**3**

ADAPTIVE POSTURE

## 30' CARDIO AND STRENGTH WORKOUT



Leisure centres and gyms are big energy consumers

PHOTO: MARK BRIDGEMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

## Everyone's talking about Sustainability

Climate change, like COVID-19, presents challenges that won't go away and demands both our immediate attention and collective efforts. Kath Hudson reports

As I write, Greenpeace activists have shut down Downing Street in London with an oil soaked statue of the British Prime Minister, following his support for climate-destroying oil field projects.

The recent oil price crisis has shown us how vulnerable our dependency on fossil fuels

makes us and this summer we saw the devastating reality of the climate crisis with forest fires and floods across Europe.

Experts have said there must be no new fossil fuel projects if we're going to stay below the global warming limit of 1.5 degrees.

While many of the world's governments failed to act in accordance with the Paris

Agreement and commitments made at COP25, the planet is moving past the tipping point and our ability to stay below two degrees – the absolute minimum required by the Paris Agreement to avoid natural catastrophe – is now in doubt. This really is everyone's problem.

So how is the UK health and fitness industry stepping up? We ask the experts.



## David Melhuish


### The Gym Group

**T**he most immediate and urgent challenge facing us all has to be the climate crisis caused by global warming. If we don't all address this challenge with the urgency it requires then the cost, both social and economic, will be unthinkable.

Time is not on our side and there's no environmental rabbit to be pulled out of the scientists' hat. I don't underestimate the difficulty of the world achieving net zero in a meaningful and substantive way within the economic system and competitive environment we all operate in, so it will take local and national leadership to step up and create the right environment for it to happen.

At The Gym Group we've been focused on reducing our carbon emissions for a number of years and are establishing our pathway to net zero based on the Science Based Targets Initiative ([www.sciencebasedtargets.org](http://www.sciencebasedtargets.org)). Any sustainability plan must be built on a solid understanding of how the business performs, so we've carried out a detailed carbon audit to inform our net zero strategy and build a pathway for the next 10-15 years.

We purchase all our electricity from renewable sources and publish official renewable energy certificates. With our power supplies being zero carbon at source, we only generate carbon emissions from the use of gas-fired boilers for heating water. Working closely with our supply partners, we've been testing and evaluating heat pump systems for a number of years and now have a standard solution for our smaller sites.



**“**  
We're establishing our pathway to net zero based on the Science Based Targets Initiative

With gas still being the cheapest energy utility available, we currently incur a cost for operating heat pumps but consider this worthwhile, as the environmental cost would be higher in the long term.

Our Beverley gym opened in December 2019 and was designed from the outset with energy efficiency and environmental impact in mind. Hot water is generated through a high efficiency heat pump system, so no gas is used in the gym, and with power supplied from renewable sources there's effectively zero carbon produced in gym operation. This doesn't mean we don't consider how much power we consume, however, and efficiency is achieved through careful design of the main power consuming services.

All lighting is LED and we have time controls and daylight linking to minimise its operation. The primary consumers of energy are the air

conditioning and ventilation systems, with weather and occupancy being the main drivers of consumption. The weather we can't control, and we like our gyms to be busy and exciting places, so we aim to run them as efficiently as possible. Operating 24/7 also comes with its challenges, so we control the space temperature depending on the presence of people in the specific areas of the gym: the air conditioning automatically adjusts the temperature up by a few degrees if there's no one in that particular area, reducing the energy required.

Our ventilation system is also super-efficient, with low energy fans providing the air circulation and heating or cooling energy being transferred from the outgoing air to the fresh incoming air by use of a heat exchanger.

Reducing water consumption is an ongoing objective. Alongside low water volume showers and self-closing taps we have a system that recovers condensate water from the air conditioning systems and uses it to flush the toilets.

For energy efficiency, it's invaluable to understand exactly what energy is being consumed and where.

● David Melhuish is chief development and sustainability officer at The Gym Group



Energy-generating gym equipment helps reduce the carbon footprint



PHOTO: MDL

## Tim Mayer

### MDL Fitness

**W**e aim to be the UK's most sustainable marina and fitness operator, developing a culture of environmental awareness and care among our customers and teams.

Our first gym – opened in September – uses the SportsArt Eco-Powr range of energy-generating gym equipment to offset energy consumption and reduce its carbon footprint. The flooring is made from recycled tyres, the ventilation system has heat recovery, making it more energy efficient and the gym furniture comes from a sustainable source.

We're also investing in green energy through the rollout of solar cells, looking at the management of waste streams and the separation of recyclables. We're currently researching and developing a range of solutions for habitat improvement and creation in disused or unusable

areas of our marinas, such as the installation of artificial reefs to prevent coastal erosion and improve biodiversity in the area.

MDL Fitness is paperless, which is a quick and easy process to adopt. It doesn't matter if you're running an independent or 200 plus locations, technology allows all businesses to go either completely paper free or to minimise its use. We're also replacing our existing petrol/diesel fleet with fully electric or hybrid vehicles and providing car charging facilities for our members.

I'd like to see all the big fitness operators start talking to the green brands, improving their carbon footprint and working with change makers, such as SportsArt. Each of us can begin to make that journey to zero carbon with forward thinking ideas that are flexible enough to be developed alongside changes in government policy and fitness related legislation.

● *Tim Mayer is sales and marketing director at MDL Fitness*



I'd like to see all the big fitness operators start talking to the green brands and working with change makers to improve their carbon footprint



A key role in being sustainable is the education of the members about the green strategies in place and how they can minimise their own impact

## Luca Fini

### SportsArt

Sustainability has been at the heart of the SportsArt business since inception. Our Eco-Powr cardio products convert the human energy produced during exercise into clean usable electricity products, and we're currently working on a strength line which will do the same.

Solar panels have been installed at our manufacturing facility to cover 50 per cent of the energy demand and an articulated rainwater collection system provides water for the manufacturing process. Specially tinted windows provide natural lighting throughout the factory, without letting in heat. Sixty to 70 per cent of post-consumer paper is used for cardboard packaging for equipment.

Although being sustainable isn't always easy, especially in the early stages of transition, our advice is to start by dividing your green path into categories to properly analyse where improvements could be made – for example, energy savings, flooring, furniture and mobility – and systematically work through them.

While adding efficient heating and cooling systems might be a long-

term project, there are quick wins to start upgrading every facility: providing secure bike storage and giving members travel incentives to reduce car use, offering water bottle refill stations and composting bins, switching to eco cleaning products and LED lights and using recycled materials for flooring and mats.

A key role in being sustainable is the education of the members about the green strategies in place and how they can minimise their own impact. To this end, offering concrete incentive programmes to encourage

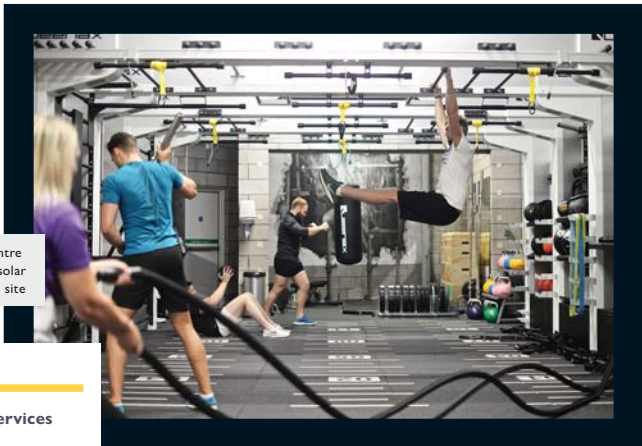
greener habits – for example discounts based on the energy generated during their workouts, or for travelling by public transport or bike – would be extremely beneficial. Sharing objectives with members and keeping them informed about the potential of their contribution to the green cause, can make a real difference. A conscious, motivated, interested and passionate customer will personally commit to making the sustainable project a success.

● *Luci Fini is EMEA marketing manager at SportsArt*



PHOTO: SPORTSART

Salt Ayre Leisure Centre will be powered by a solar farm built on a landfill site



## James Foley

### Alliance Leisure Services

Undoubtedly, more needs to be done at all levels to make the sector more sustainable, but change is happening and at pace.

We see it in our work every day – public sport and leisure providers want to play their part in tackling the climate emergency, they just need help to achieve their ambitions.

According to the new *Securing the Future of Public Sport and Leisure Services* report by the Local Government Association (LGA), the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA), public sport and leisure facilities currently account for up to 40 per cent of councils' carbon emission output ([www.HCMmag.com/securing](http://www.HCMmag.com/securing))

Ageing facilities are a huge energy drain, so investing in energy efficiency upgrades is critical to meeting net zero targets. To this end, our longstanding partner, Lancaster City Council, is building a solar farm on a disused landfill site to generate electricity for the adjacent Salt Ayre Leisure Centre.

Harrogate Borough Council has appointed Alliance Leisure to improve efficiencies and reduce carbon emissions with an ambitious targeted



PHOTO: ALLIANCE LEISURE

reduction of 50 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> produced each year. Repurposing Harrogate Hydro and replacing the tired Knaresborough Pool with a brand new facility are part of these works and a host of decarbonisation measures will contribute to the delivery of a BREEAM Excellent rating ([www.breeam.com](http://www.breeam.com)).

Hyndburn Borough Council is in the first phase of a consolidated investment strategy which will bring in a host of low/zero carbon technologies, including air source heat pumps, solar photovoltaics, pool air handling and pump motor upgrades to deliver a net change in greenhouse gas emissions of around 500 tonnes a year.

“

Public sport and leisure facilities currently account for up to 40% of councils' carbon emission output

In addition to encouraging robust environmental protection strategies at all levels of our supply chain, we're also implementing policies which promote energy efficiencies and reduce our carbon footprint in our own day to day business. For example, all company cars are energy efficient hybrid models and we've reduced electricity use and paper consumption. We're planting trees to offset the carbon emission we're unable to influence and are on the journey to becoming a carbon literate organisation, along with achieving our Investors in the Environment Silver accreditation ([www.iie.uk.com](http://www.iie.uk.com)).

● James Foley is commercial director at Alliance Leisure Services



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*Four out of the five most attractive workout options named by US consumers are featured in gyms and health clubs*

# New INSIGHTS

A US study investigating consumer attitudes to gyms, health clubs and studios reveals a new focus on wellness, as well as opportunities for operators to grow their businesses

**T**he IHRSA Foundation and ABC Fitness Solutions commissioned ClubIntel to conduct a research study examining the motivations and behaviours of US fitness consumers.

The resulting report, called *The Next Fitness Consumer*,

([www.HCMmag.com/ClubIntelABC](http://www.HCMmag.com/ClubIntelABC)), shows that post-lockdown exercise enthusiasts highly value the physical and mental health benefits of exercise.

Researchers found an active consumer preference for a 'total fitness experience' with highly personalised delivery, meaning operators are no longer advised to follow a one-size-fits-all approach.

"Consumers are looking for more choices when it comes to creating their fitness journey," says Bill Davis, CEO of ABC, "they want variety in equipment, programming, and facilities."



## What motivates consumers to exercise?

Active consumers value physical activity for benefits beyond appearance and weight loss. Nearly half (46 per cent) of consumers surveyed said being active is their number one goal, with mental wellbeing ranking second at 35 per cent and weight loss third at 32 per cent.

A previous IHRSA report, *The COVID era fitness consumer: Part 4* ([www.HCMmag.com/COVID4](http://www.HCMmag.com/COVID4)), showed that fitness consumers have been engaging in exercise during the pandemic as a means to manage their stress and mental wellbeing.

Recently, The World Health Organization ([www.HCMmag.com/WHOMentalhealth](http://www.HCMmag.com/WHOMentalhealth)) reported the impact of the pandemic on disrupting mental health services across the globe and although it's no cure for serious mental illness, independent studies have shown the vital role



ClubIntel asked consumers what would bring them back to the gym

PHOTO: LES MILLS

regular exercise plays in promoting mental health ([www.HCMmag.com/IHRSAmentalhealth](http://www.HCMmag.com/IHRSAmentalhealth)).

In pursuit of all these benefits, fitness professionals and clubs are uniquely positioned to provide the personalised guidance and resources consumers need to engage in consistent physical activity.

#### What activities are being added?

Consistent with the omnichannel approach that fitness professionals and clubs have been employing, a host of things such as home fitness equipment, digital content, outdoor exercise, and gym and studio usage are shaping the fitness universe of the active consumer.

When compared to pre-COVID levels, active consumers increased their usage

of free online workouts by 15 per cent, at-home fitness equipment by 13 per cent, other digital exercise programmes by 8 per cent and outdoor exercise by 7 per cent.

Since the start of the pandemic, nearly half of US consumers have invested in fitness equipment, with one in 10 having spent more than US\$1,000.

More than two in five active consumers engage in outdoor exercise (43 per cent), with this move to working out *al fresco* being a trend that grew by 7 per cent during pandemic lockdowns when health clubs were closed.

Walking, running, hiking, biking, wild swimming and other outdoor socially-distanced activities all grew in popularity.

Some fitness businesses were also quick to pivot in response to the growth in popularity



*Top choices for consumers are cardio equipment training, flexibility and stretching, free weight training, equipment-based exercise classes and health and nutrition wellness coaching*

of outdoor exercise, and operators of clubs and studios across the globe moved equipment, fitness programmes and team training outdoors.

*The Next Fitness Consumer* confirms that outdoor exercise is here to stay, with the trend being backed up by scientific research ([www.HCMmag.com/greenexercise](http://www.HCMmag.com/greenexercise)) which has shown that exercising in natural environments can boost self-esteem and mood, reduce stress, and help in the management of the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

#### **How will omnichannel develop?**

Since consumers returned to their gyms and studios, home and online fitness engagement has continued, as a proportion of consumers have found it convenient to follow a blended workout routine.

Some are using competing services such as Mirror and Peloton, but Davis believes the industry can no longer run in parallel with the home sector and expect the same results as those achieved during home fitness booms in the 70s, 80s and 90s.


"Health club operators must compete and adapt," he says, "and this is creating exciting opportunities for the industry, because operators now have the knowledge and technology to combine their existing expertise with their own omnichannel offerings to deliver blended experiences that include their brick and mortar offerings and exceed expectations."

#### **How are consumers feeling generally?**

"There was a significant shift in the active consumer's mindset from 'fitness' to 'wellness'", says ClubIntel's Mark Williamson. "There's



Health and nutrition wellness coaching is among the top five most valued services



Equipment-based exercise classes scored highly with consumers

PHOTO: LEE HILLS

an opportunity for operators to bring their wellness message forward more strongly – they need to understand that consumers have pivoted their thinking about an active lifestyle to encompass much more than just physicality and to include mental health as well.”

Regardless of how they choose to exercise, the research found that 75 per cent of active consumers feel on track to meet their fitness and wellness goals. This number increases to 84 per cent when considering active consumers that use a gym or studio, indicating that their membership provides them with better tools, structure, and accountability to reach personal goals.

In addition, 80 per cent of the fitness offerings deemed most relevant by active consumers are available at most health clubs and studios – they include cardio equipment training, flexibility and stretching, free weight

training, equipment-based exercise classes and health and nutrition wellness coaching.

With the increasing importance being placed by consumers on access to total fitness experiences, the research indicates that health and nutrition wellness coaching is positioned to grow as a popular offering for both health club operators and fitness professionals.

#### How about members who cancelled?

Nearly half of active consumers that previously belonged to a big-box gym, but cancelled their membership when the pandemic began, said they intend to return in the next 6-12 months (49 per cent).

This isn't surprising, given that most relevant fitness offerings among active consumers are accessible for an affordable monthly fee. The research also found that the range of



*Nearly a third of Americans from the lowest income group in the study do not work out, but are interested in taking part in regular activity*

equipment and variety of workouts trigger former members to return to their clubs.

The number one reason cited as an ongoing concern was the fact that the pandemic is not yet under control, with 44 per cent of former members selecting this reason.

As many industry insiders predict, a successful and speedy vaccine rollout is intertwined with industry recovery. Although challenges remain, with COVID-19 cases rumbling on due to variants, *The Next Fitness Consumer* shows that active members intend to resume their membership once they feel safe to do so and this makes engaging with this cohort a priority for health club operators.

#### What are the other priorities?

ClubIntel found the next biggest opportunity for operators lies in developing programmes and products to attract people who are not currently active.

A significant 25 per cent of the sample surveyed (representing 25 per cent of the US population) reported that they are not exercising or staying active but that they have an interest in getting active and are essentially waiting for someone to help them – a significant opportunity for operators.

“This is an opportunity for the industry to address consumers’ ‘wellness’ needs to help them feel comfortable and confident with adopting workout programmes,” said Williamson.

The low-waged are also a group asking for support – historically, the industry has been known for attracting affluent, able-bodied professionals in the US and the report shows that Americans with household incomes of at least US\$150,000 a year are more likely to

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / FIZINES



be active than those from households with an income of less than US\$50,000 (78 per cent vs 59 per cent). However, it also found that nearly a third (31 per cent) of Americans from the lowest income group in the study do not generally exercise but are interested in taking part in regular activity, indicating there may be room in the market for more budget offerings.

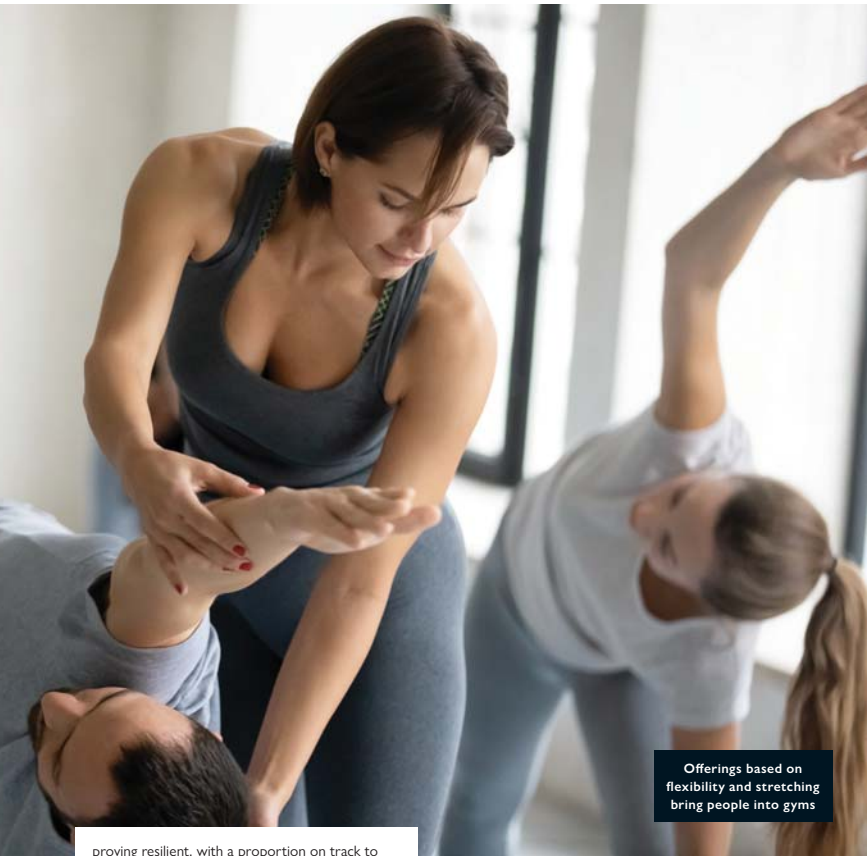
Researchers also surveyed unemployed and disabled workers, finding they’re a small part of the market, with the percentages who are ‘active’ standing at 7 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively.

Among people with disabilities, 40 per cent (of the 4 per cent) who do not exercise are interested in getting active and although the number of people in this cohort is smaller than many other consumer groups, there is still an opportunity for fitness businesses to build inclusive programmes and offerings for them.

#### What do consumers need?

Fundamentally, the research underscores the increasing importance of physical wellness among active people and shows that operators are





Offerings based on flexibility and stretching bring people into gyms

proving resilient, with a proportion on track to surpass their 2019 numbers by nearly 10 per cent.

"As fitness clubs redefine who they are and the value they provide to members, it's becoming clear that programming and technology can bring together the disparate elements of member fitness journeys," says Davis.

"Operators must prioritise and meet a wide variety of member needs, from goal tracking to personalisation to accomplish this.

"While this will look different depending on the club, every operator can craft and deliver customised fitness experiences for its members."

● The Next Fitness Consumer is available free of charge at [www.HCMmag.com/ClubIntelABC](http://www.HCMmag.com/ClubIntelABC)

Cardio equipment workouts are among the most valued

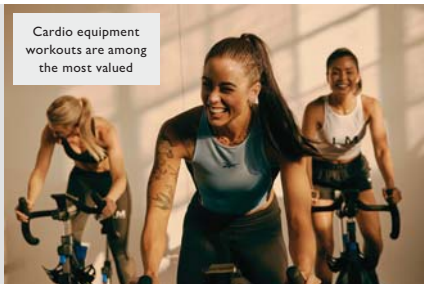


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

# Hammer Strength just got stronger

**Life Fitness is introducing a new range of Hammer Strength anaerobic equipment to complement its legendary strength training range**

For over 30 years, Hammer Strength has been defining the standard in performance strength training; pushing the boundaries in equipment design and durability to not only build elite athletes, but also those determined to train like one.

Now the brand is adding to its portfolio of industry-leading machines with the launch of its new anaerobic training line, HD Performance Trainers.

Comprising the HD Tread, HD Air Bike, and HD SPARC, each piece has been designed to enable the toughest of standalone workouts or combine with other Hammer Strength performance equipment.

"At Hammer Strength, we're known for defining the performance experience for athletes and the same knowledge and passion that's applied to our traditional products has driven the design and capabilities of the new HD Performance Trainers," says JP Stockton, Hammer Strength product director.

## The new line

The HD Tread is a self-powered treadmill with a curved design, which encourages mid to forefoot strike for fast acceleration and maximum speed sprints. The self-powered functionality puts the

The new range comprises the HD Air Bike, HD Tread and HD SPARC

athlete in complete control of sprint mechanics and belt speed, eliminating equipment interference to ensure the focus is solely on the athlete.

The HD Air Bike is an anaerobic endurance machine, designed to quickly raise or maintain the exerciser's heart rate. Developed with the user in mind, its unique adjustable AirGuard redirects air in a preferred direction and the multi-grip handlebar ensures ergonomic hand placement.

Completing the series is the HD SPARC, the ultimate performance trainer for explosiveness and power. Its unique high-knee position engages the glutes and muscles to create a downward-driving force, which translates into acceleration, speed, and maximum training efficiency.

Each piece includes a console that records critical measurements, including time, speed, calories burned, wattage and heart rate to provide a summary of the athlete's performance. These measurements can then be used to isolate training variables and focus on specific metrics.

"Each Performance Trainer has its own unique training application to increase speed, strength, and endurance," says Stockton,





*The response from customers in relation to these three new products has been extremely exciting*

JP Stockton

"we take inspiration and input from coaches, athletes, and organisations around the world to create training tools that will allow them to reach their performance objectives. So far, the response from customers in relation to the performance and durability of these three new products has been extremely exciting."

This new range brings elite-level performance training equipment to facilities around the world; from individual HIIT workouts to small group training settings. Clubs can gain an edge over the competition and engage new and existing members, while inspiring them to push to a higher standard.

● More: [www.HCMmag.com/hammer](http://www.HCMmag.com/hammer)

NEW OPENING



PHOTO: BIFT ARMAL SPORTS



CLICK TO  
PLAY VIDEO



The club is committed to LEED  
sustainability accreditation



*Our mission is to  
make Saudi a hub  
for innovation in  
the fitness industry*

*Fahad Alhagbani,  
CEO, Armah Sports*

# SMART CLUB

Armah Sports has revealed the first B\_fit health club – a smart club concept that's gearing up for the Metaverse with AI, VR, Amazon Alexa and the Internet of Things, as Tom Walker reports

Saudi-based Armah Sports has launched B\_fit, the first of its three new health club concepts for the Middle East market, which will be rolled out across the region and beyond. The other brands – high-end offering Optimo and budget brand Lift will follow on in 2022.

The first B\_fit club is in Jeddah and will operate as a full-service 'smart club', featuring a wide range of innovative tech solutions which integrate with a high-end gym offering.

CEO, Fahad Alhagbani tells *HCM* the company has placed tech at the heart of the B-fit model, saying: "Today we're half tech company and half fitness company and with the Metaverse on the horizon, there are no limits to the experiences we will be able to create for our members."







Access is via touchless facial recognition

- “We built the best technology infrastructure before we started opening our new clubs,” he says. “Our main focus has been selecting the best solutions in each area – such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and CRM software, access control, mobile apps, voice communication and so on, and then integrating them together.”

#### Facilities and tech integration

Facilities at the 3,750sq m club include a gym floor with kit by Technogym and Life Fitness (among others), as well as cardio and ‘performance cardio’ zones, personal training hubs, an athlete factory area and six studios, catering for functional training, spinning, yoga, pilates, HIIT, and boxing.

There’s also a 25m pool, an indoor track, a large co-working space, an innovation lab which will regularly be refreshed, a smoothie bar and a retail area.

The interior design and lighting have been recognised by the lighting industry for excellence and Alhagbani says the fit-out represents the “evolution of fitness in the industry in the region” and something that has been achieved by “working with some of the best interior designers and lighting consultants in the world.”

When it comes to tech, B\_fit offers members an array of solutions, starting with access to the club, which is implemented through touchless facial recognition.



PHOTO: BFT ARABIAN SPORTS

B\_fit is also the first health club in the world to utilise Amazon Alexa technology in its operations, with members being able to book classes and check trainers’ bios and schedules by talking to Alexa.

Other smart tech solutions include the use of VR and AR which – according to Alhagbani – creates “an integrated and seamless digital member experience” for members.

“Virtual reality experiences are there for members and visitors to try in our Innovation Lab, where we demonstrate the future trends to educate our young Saudi generation about the future and gamification,” he shared with HCM. “We’re adopting VR, AR and the Internet of Things as we grow.”

Members’ wristbands are designed to be a lifestyle accessory and enable them to access the club, buy a smoothie or an item from the shop, control their locker, enquire about their locker number – if forgotten – through a locker control panel and get access to classes through check-in portals located next to studio entrances.



VR, AR and gamification play a key role in the new club



*B\_fit is the first health club in  
the world to utilise Amazon Alexa  
technology in its operations*

NEW OPENING



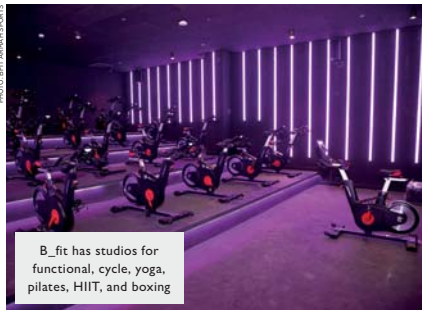
B\_fit has an indoor running track and six studios

PHOTO: BITT ARMAN SPORTS



Equipment featured  
in the Innovation Lab  
will change regularly

PHOTO: BITT ARMAN SPORTS



B\_fit has studios for functional, cycle, yoga, pilates, HIIT, and boxing

PHOTO: BFT ARMHA SPORTS



Equipment suppliers include Technogym and Life Fitness



The brand partnered with leading interior designers for the fit-out

PHOTO: BFT ARMHA SPORTS

Tech integration extends to the overall building: "We've created a smart building which runs under the control of a Building Management System through a smart tablet controlled by our club manager," says Alhagbani, "this controls the lighting, the aircon and many other elements with just one touch."

"We're in the final stages of having our LEED Certificate issued to confirm our green building rating and we're running a paperless and single-use plastic-free environment, with all communications happening digitally through the smart platform."

"When we launched Armha Sports Company in 2019 we saw the rapid growth of technology in our lives and embraced it as an essential element of our business model," says Alhagbani, "we noticed a dramatic shift in the industry as a result of the pandemic, but we didn't change our strategy, because our concept was already tech-enabled and digitally-enabled and resilient to change."

*With the Metaverse on the horizon, there are no limits to the experiences we can create for our members*

#### Positive feedback

"We're proud to present our B\_fit model as a smart club to the world, a place that represents our knowledge, creativity, passion, dreams, research, ambition and teamwork," he tells HCM. "Our mission is to make Saudi a hub for innovation in the region for the fitness industry – we believe the days of the traditional fitness club are gone, it's time for the new generation of fitness clubs – the clubs of the future."

Alhagbani said the company plans to open 11 B\_fit smart clubs and three Optimo clubs in the next 18 months, with the first Optimo opening early in 2022.

Optimo will have a hotel vibe, sharing much of the same tech infrastructure as B\_FIT, but with interior, facilities and equipment "at another level". ●

● Armha Sports has also signed a deal to roll out 1 Rebel clubs in the Middle East, with the first two locations open in Sahafa and Rabi [www.1rebel.com/sa](http://www.1rebel.com/sa)

To read HCM's exclusive interview with Fahad Alhagbani on Armha Sports' plans, go to: [www.HCMmag.com/alhagbani](http://www.HCMmag.com/alhagbani)

# Fear of death

## is greatest motivator to exercise

Which messaging is most effective at inspiring people to get active and why? Researchers at the University of Waterloo in Canada set out to find out, as Tom Walker reports

**F**itness apps that emphasise death-related messaging are more effective in getting people physically active, according to new research. The finding comes from a study that looked at five types of messaging used to get people to exercise at home.

In order to uncover the effectiveness of the messaging, participants were asked to indicate how persuasive each was in terms of motivating them to work out. Researchers also examined the connection between the messaging and social-cognitive beliefs such as self-regulation (goal setting), self-efficacy and outcome expectation. They also investigated the role played by gender.

Results showed that apps and platforms which highlighted the dangers of inactivity to health – including early death – were much more effective motivators when compared to those that focused on social stigma, obesity, or financial cost.

### Unexpected results

The results were unexpected, as previous studies on the effectiveness of messaging that aims to change human behaviour – especially on smoking cessation and risky sexual behaviour – actually found the opposite: that messages related to mortality could actually be a barrier to acknowledging health risks.

The study, authored by Kiemute Oyibo from the School of Public Health Sciences at University of Waterloo, Canada – found this to be entirely different for fitness.

"I didn't expect only illness- and death-related messages to be so significant and motivational," Oyibo said.

"And not only were illness- and death-related messages motivational, they also had a significant relationship with self-regulatory belief and outcome expectation, and there was also no significant difference between the sexes."

### Conceptual leap

Oyibo said he had expected obesity-related messages – such as "one-in-four Canadians has clinical obesity" – to be motivational and have a significant relationship with self-regulatory belief, given that obesity is one of the leading causes of mortality globally, but people studied were not able to make the conceptual leap between obesity being a cause of mortality and their own death and needed to have this pointed out to them in more direct terms.

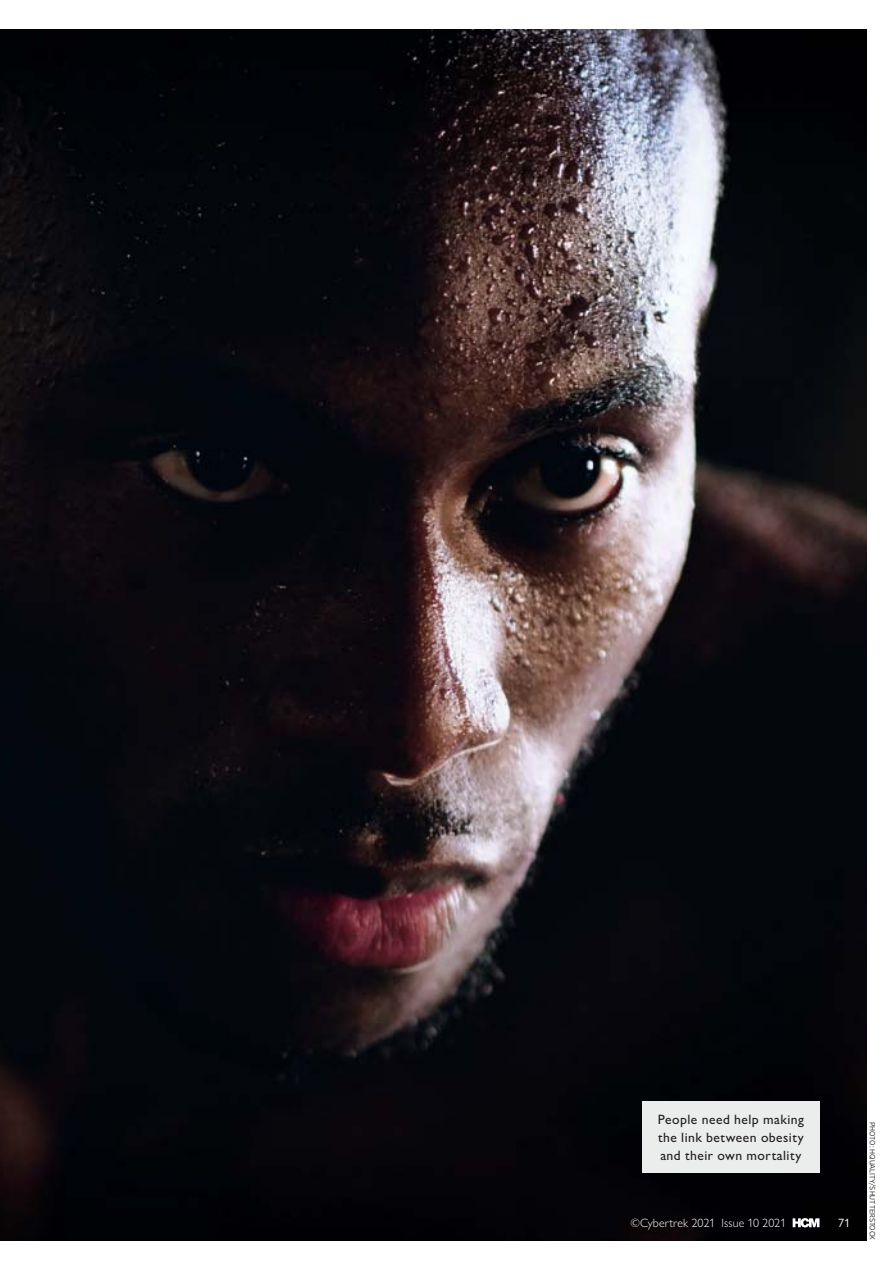
"This study is important because it helps fitness professionals – and especially designers of health apps – understand the types of messages that individuals, regardless of gender, are likely to be motivated by in persuasive health communication and that are likely to influence individuals' social-cognitive beliefs about exercise," Oyibo said.

He said future studies should consider other demographic characteristics besides gender, such as age, culture, race and education, to uncover the role they play in persuasive health communication.

The study, called *The Relationship between Perceived Health Message Motivation and Social Cognitive Beliefs in Persuasive Health Communication* was published in the journal *MDPI*.

● To read the study in full, go to [www.HCMmag.com/messagemotivation](http://www.HCMmag.com/messagemotivation)





People need help making  
the link between obesity  
and their own mortality

PHOTO: DEAN PROBOT/SHUTTERSTOCK



# FAST FOOD TIE-UPS

## Smart marketing or risk to reputation?

Can partnerships and affiliations with less obvious companies, such as fast food brands, help the industry tap into a new demographic, or is the potential for them to compromise our reputation too big a risk to take? asks Wendy Gollgedge

It's one of the industry's eternal struggles – how do we get beyond the UK's gym membership penetration level of 15 per cent and reach out to the 85 per cent of the population who currently don't have a membership of a fitness facility?

The needle has been stuck for longer than most of us care to remember and, try as it might, so far the sector has failed to shift the numbers.

One solution, which various operators and organisations – including ukactive – have tested in the past is collaborating with what some might say are more risky partners, such as Coca Cola and Danone, rather than obvious sports brands

and health insurance companies, who many feel only reach those who are already active.

Most recently, fitness marketplace, Huddle, partnered with fast food giant McDonald's for its annual Monopoly giveaway, as the company was keen to establish whether collaborations like these could enable fitness operators to access new customer bases.

We asked leading industry figures whether they believe it's 'worth it'. Can this tactic convert a whole new demographic to exercise? And does avoiding a direct association by using third party agents to broker the deal make it an effective strategy, smoothing the way for new user groups while maintaining the sector's reputation?

*I wouldn't be worried  
about damaging  
our reputation with  
collaborations such as  
these because we're on  
the right side of creating  
a healthier world*

**Liz Clark** CEO, IHRSA

**I**n my previous role within the confectionary industry, I helped candy become classified as an 'essential item' during the COVID-19 crisis, a classification the UK fitness sector didn't manage to achieve.

Why do I believe this was possible? You can't make friends in a time of crisis. The fitness industry needed to have longstanding relationships with lawmakers and government officials so that, when the crisis came, it knew who to call and they knew to answer the phone.

In the US, confectionary manufacturing is part of the nation's food system, which was obviously considered essential, so we made the argument that it would be more burdensome for the government to determine what types of foods should be on that essential list.

Some lawmakers suggested the confectionary sector take a voluntary pause in manufacturing – when that started to happen, we shifted our argument to say the nation was struggling, people in this industry needed their jobs as much as any other, and the products we sold brought a little joy and happiness to individuals who'd lost so much. We also partnered with the US government to provide PPE to front line workers, which earned some goodwill.

At IHRSA, we've now formed the Global Health and Fitness Alliance (GHFA) to bring industry leaders together to create policies and initiatives for the global fitness market and, ultimately, confirm our essential status. The GHFA aims to position fitness as a key contributor in the preventive healthcare continuum, promote our vital contributions to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of societies, plus facilitate credible third-party evidence-based research on the health benefits and economic contributions of this sector.

I'm happy to report that IHRSA and GHFA have secured funding for a landmark research project on the global fitness sector with Deloitte that is currently underway and will be released early next year.

Part of the reason gyms weren't allowed to stay open is the perception that it's about vanity; sometimes you have to connect the dots for people. When it became clear that obesity makes people more susceptible to COVID-19, we needed to step up and push harder than ever to open.

Collaborations with fast food suppliers is an interesting concept. Even fast food and candy suppliers should believe in a healthy balanced lifestyle and I certainly believe in engaging with any new partners that could help us reach new audiences. I wouldn't be worried about damaging our reputation with collaborations such as these because we're on the right side of creating a healthier world. It would likely be more concerning for other industries to partner with us because they would be admitting their products are not helping people. ▶





PHOTO: HUSSLE

**Jamie Owens** Director of fitness partnerships, Hussle

**M**cDonald's isn't just any old partner. As arguably the world's leading fast-food chain, people have strong opinions on the merit of a fitness brand collaboration. You only have to think back to Cristiano Ronaldo and his interaction with a bottle of Coca Cola at the Euros to get an idea of the polarised views people have. When deciding to work with McDonald's, we had to take all of this into consideration; it wasn't a decision we took lightly.

Our conclusion was that, ultimately, we support ukactive's goal to get more people, more active, more often and it's in the spirit of this mission that we feel a partnership with McDonald's has such merit. To truly reach more people we, as a sector, must be willing to try new things and test new channels. If we continue to present broadly the same message through the same channels, we will only ever reach the same people.

McDonald's Monopoly is one of the largest consumer marketing campaigns in the UK, reaching up to 3.5 million people a day. It therefore presents a unique opportunity for our industry to reach a lot of people quickly. People we may not reach otherwise.

Hussle wasn't the only fitness brand to think this way. As part of a highly competitive tender process, we had to prove the national reach of our gym partners was a more compelling offer than a single gym chain collaboration. Our argument was that each time a McDonald's customer won the opportunity to visit a gym, it was crucially important there was a viable gym

*We feel the McDonald's campaign has been democratised for the benefit of thousands of fitness operators rather than one single chain*

nearby. Without this, the offer may go unused and the opportunity to increase activity would be missed. We feel the campaign has been democratised for the benefit of thousands of operators rather than one single chain, and therefore positively impacts more gyms and health clubs.

McDonald's Monopoly is played by more than seven million people. It's a win/win scenario. Our brand partners can provide McDonald's customers with genuinely national reach and variety, whilst participating gyms benefit from the new customers McDonalds could bring.

The open question remains whether any lasting changes in activity levels will be achieved. It's too early to say and also not a question Hussle can answer alone as, ultimately, we rely on the service provided by the gym partners that McDonald's customers go on to visit. But with ukactive Chair Tanni Grey-Thompson calling for the UK to become the most active nation in the world by 2030, partnerships with mainstream brands such as McDonald's have an ever more important place in the sector.

## Mike Parker Director of progress, Health Partnerships

As director of a public health consultancy with 25 years' experience working in public health for the NHS, local authorities and the third sector, I have a special interest in physical activity and health. For years we've seen a move by fast food giants to deflect the contribution of unhealthy diets on obesity, type-2 diabetes and high blood pressure – which continue to increase at an alarming rate.

Poor diet is the primary driver of this; over the last 20 years or so physical activity levels have not changed. Yet studies have found poor diet is linked to 11 million deaths worldwide and generates more disease than physical inactivity, alcohol and smoking combined.

Under pressure from governments, the food industry continues to deflect the focus away from its highly-processed, high-calorie and nutritionally-deprived foods and shift responsibility onto physical inactivity. In much the same way as big tobacco companies in years gone by, they have been successful in convincing us that inactivity, rather than the promotion and consumption of calorie-rich products, is the prime cause of obesity.

Through high profile sponsorship of large-scale sporting activities and funding initiatives that promote physical activity, the fast food industry has successfully

**Health clubs and gyms  
are morally obliged to  
set an example to the  
public by disassociating  
themselves from the  
fast-food industry**



stalled government obesity policies and rebuffed legislation relating to restriction of their products, such as the introduction of sugar taxes. In effect, the efforts of the fast food lobby to deflect blame has been a successfully deployed tactic in increasing their commercial profit at the cost of population health.

In my opinion, health clubs and gyms should be morally obliged to set an example to the public by disassociating themselves from the fast-food industry. Forming partnerships is effectively saying to members: 'it's OK to eat crap as long as you work out in our gym' – going against the body of evidence to the contrary. Such partnerships undermine the fitness industry's position as 'centres for health and fitness' and simply become a stick that will be used by fast food to beat the drum of the fast-food lobbyists.

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ANASTAS

*The people choosing to go to a McDonald's might be a hard gang to convince, but if we don't try we won't know*

**Dave Stalker** President, EuropeActive

It's an interesting and divisive topic. If you go back a long time ago to when I was CEO of ukactive, we received similar questions and criticism around a partnership with Coca Cola, despite the fact they also own enormous water brands and undoubtedly opened doors at high Government Health department levels. I believe anything that drives people to our doors and brings attention to exercise must be seriously considered.

Some may say it's partnering with 'the enemy' but are they really the enemy? McDonald's don't just sell burgers, they're one of the world's biggest sellers of water and apples and salads, too. They've recently looked at portion sizes and calories.

Like it or not McDonald's is the choice of a vast percentage of the population. We should be twisting it round – if McDonald's are keen to work with our industry, we should be grateful. After all, 69 million potential customers are buying their products worldwide every day.

We're not going to members and saying you must eat McDonalds! They are simply offering their customers the opportunity of a free gym trial. That's an opportunity



not to be turned down by our industry. If people win a free day pass and come to us it's a chance to convert them we may never otherwise have had.

I think it is absolutely daft for us to always take a view against these companies – we may as well pretend they don't exist. But they do. And they're hugely successful. And they dwarf our industry. This is an enormous opportunity.

What will be interesting will be if people take it up. The people choosing to go to a McDonald's might be a hard gang to convince, but if we don't try we won't know – surely if a few wander in after having a burger, so much the better for us? Anything that brings more focus and attention to exercise can't be wrong.





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INTERVIEW


Kool (left) has been a fitness fanatic since age 13; Meijer has been in the industry since 1998

A portrait of Jordy Kool, a bald man with a light beard, wearing a dark jacket over a grey turtleneck. He is looking slightly to his left with a slight smile. His right hand is resting on a wooden surface.

# Jordy Kool

A portrait of Marjolijn Meijer, a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing a white turtleneck under a dark jacket. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

# & Marjolijn Meijer



# We're investing anti-cyclically during the pandemic and accelerating our growth. It puts you ahead of the curve

**Urban Gym Group sees health, fitness and wellness converging and is ready to seize these opportunities. Its co-CEOs tell to Kate Cracknell, 'if we can't build it, we'll buy it'**

## **What's the story of Urban Gym Group?**

**Meijer:** We have to rewind to my first business, Clubsportive, which launched in 1998, with a second club opening in Amsterdam in 2000. We loved the energy of the city – the clubbing, the music, the dancing – and brought that into the look and feel and experience of the club.

Things started going fast and by 2002 we had five gyms. But in 2008, budget clubs arrived and with our price tag – €50 or €60 a month – we were losing members to brand new gyms, with brand new equipment, where you could train for €15 or €16.

They didn't have the atmosphere of Clubsportive, so we survived the crisis, but it was a turning point.

By 2011, when Fit4Free acquired four of our Amsterdam clubs, we realised it was time to reinvent what we did. Setting out to make a healthy fitness lifestyle more affordable, we created a new brand called TrainMore, where your membership cost less the more often you trained – right down to getting it for free.

Starting in 2012, we converted all but one of our Clubsportives into TrainMore clubs;

the remaining Clubsportive – in Amsterdam's financial district – still exists today.

TrainMore grew fast, but we hit a ceiling at nine clubs and could never seem to get beyond that number. We knew we needed to find someone to help us grow.

At the same time, Jordy happened to be looking for a small company to invest in and by chance we met and got on. This was the end of 2015 and a year later, we'd come together as business partners.

It was a new beginning for TrainMore. We'd been doing what we did for so many years we'd developed blind spots; Jordy showed us new ways of doing business and made investment available to fund our growth plans.

My former business partner and I also owned Clubsportive and were part-owners of High Studios – a HIIT studio brand founded by Barbara den Bak ([www.HCMmag.com/denbak](http://www.HCMmag.com/denbak)). With all these brands on the table, by mid-2018 Jordy was asking the question: "What if we bring everything together into one group and go to the bank for further growth funding?" And Urban Gym Group was born. ►



### What's your background Jordy?

**Kool:** I'm 46 and have been a fitness fanatic since I was 13 – from being a gym member, to competing nationally in jiu-jitsu and judo and being an assistant manager of a gym while I was studying.

Then came a corporate career in IT, telecoms and media, before setting out on my own and starting a few small companies as an entrepreneur. That wasn't for me though – I was too used to being a director of big corporates.

In 2009, I had an opportunity to buy myself into an IT reseller called Infoteek – a company we grew from €55m to €1bn. I sold it three times: in 2014, in 2016 and then in 2021, selling half the business for half a billion Euros.

With the funds raised from the 2014 and 2016 sales, I gradually started setting up my own investment firm and currently have 16 investments – a lot of them in sports, health and wellness, which is what makes my heart tick. I'm an investor and advisor with expertise in marketing, sales, business development, expanding businesses abroad, finance funding and helping others scale their businesses.

### What brands form the Urban Gym Group?

**Meijer:** There's Clubsportive: the very big, high-end club with lots of personal training. It also has lounge spaces, boutique studios

We have a simplified business model, with membership starting at €35–40 a month and €1 deducted each time you visit

inside the club, as well as a 25m swimming pool and a range of wellness offerings.

Then there are 17 TrainMore clubs. Wherever possible, we take on historic, characterful, beautiful buildings in the centre of the big cities and we bring them alive. Music is key to this: we have our own radio channel, with DJs curating the latest sounds for our gyms, and booths in some clubs where local DJs can come in and do their sets. The clubs have Technogym equipment.

We now have a simplified business model, though, with membership starting at €35–40 a month and €1 deducted each time you visit. The problem with our original model – train three



Clubsportive is the Urban Gym Group's big, high-end fitness brand

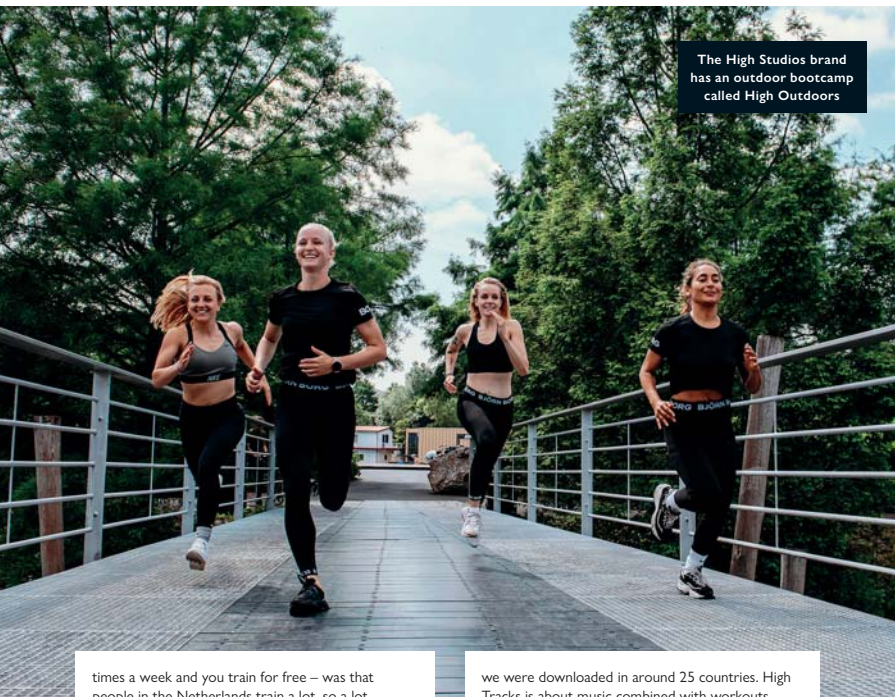


PHOTO: LISBETH GYM GROUP

times a week and you train for free – was that people in the Netherlands train a lot, so a lot of members were getting membership for free. They brought their own drinks, too. Looking back on it now, it definitely wasn't sustainable!

**Kool:** We've moved to an all-inclusive concept at TrainMore rather than trying to sell add-ons which – whatever sector you're in – is always a challenge. And we've introduced our own personal training service. We've always offered PT, but we now have our own PTs on our payroll. We decided it was better to take control of that offering to standardise the quality.

**Meijer:** The next brand is High Studios: the HIIT boutique, currently with four locations, that we're developing further, as well as growing. We've just launched a new location that has three concepts under one roof: High Run, which is the original boutique bootcamp-style class; High Ride, a new SoulCycle-esque cycling class; and High Flow, which is hip-hop-style power yoga. We also have an outdoor bootcamp concept, High Outdoors and High Tracks, a HIIT audio workout.

**Kool:** Outdoor was big in lockdown and we know it's here to stay. High Tracks really began to take off during lockdowns. It's still at a very early stage, but

we were downloaded in around 25 countries. High Tracks is about music combined with workouts and coaching. If someone wants to learn to run, for example, they can buy a programme to do that. We're still experimenting with it though: we don't make a lot of revenue or profit on it yet.

**Meijer:** Then there's BTY CLB, which as the name suggests is all about glutes. The founder June Mirit has created such a nice concept, but she's never had her own studio before, running sessions on rooftops and in nightclubs. It's a real show with music, lights and dancers. I've never seen anything like it – it's honestly as though you're out clubbing for an hour. We'll be opening her first boutique studio in Amsterdam soon.

**Kool:** And then finally – for now – we've acquired the master franchise rights for TRIB3 in Benelux. We're always looking for new concepts, though. (see HCM Feb 21, p28, for an interview with TRIB3's Kevin Yates [www.HCMmag.com/KevinYates](http://www.HCMmag.com/KevinYates))

#### **What were the benefits of creating a group?**

**Kool:** First of all, it allows us to build a bigger business to get more funding from the bank. A group approach also works for our strategy –

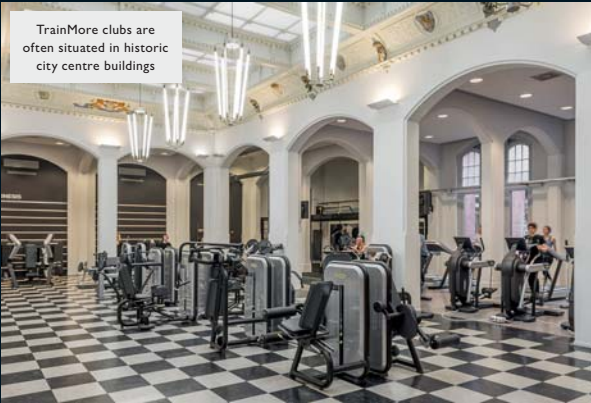


Health, wellness and fitness are converging and just as everything in the IT world moved into bundled services, so the same will happen in fitness and wellbeing




The TrainMore clubs are upbeat, with their own DJ and radio channel





TrainMore clubs are often situated in historic city centre buildings

PHOTO: URBAN GYM GROUP



focusing on one big city and conquering it with various brands that give our 16–45-year-old target audience all sorts of different workout options.

If you have a simple, 'one size fits all' gym model, it's easy to roll out anywhere in Europe. But we're not doing that, we're offering high quality and high service across multiple brands, and with that approach it's easier to understand one city than 20. You can also better leverage your marketing and your overheads. Geographical focus makes you stronger.

**Meijer:** Being a Group that spans various brands also gives our employees a far more diverse career path, more opportunities to learn and develop and do new things. It's one of the many reasons why people love working for us.

#### How focused are you on Amsterdam?

**Kool:** We're growing in a few cities – The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Groningen – and have some legacy clubs in other cities. What I would say, though, is that if you give me two options – Amsterdam or somewhere else – I will go for Amsterdam.

As much as anything, it's crucial to have a very firm position in a market where the aggregators are so influential. It allows you to stay in control of your yield. We work with the aggregators – we work well with them – but our strong position in Amsterdam means they want to work with us. We're in control of our pricing.

We might sell the legacy clubs at some point, or we might not. We don't need to sell them for now. They exist in a sister entity called My Local Gym Group which can accommodate any sites that come to us via acquisition and that are not in large cities. We don't want too many outliers in the Urban Gym



## Our values sit at the heart of everything - we absolutely live and breathe them. We care, we challenge and we energise

Group, but if they make money and we can learn from them, they're OK where they are for now.

The second reason we created My Local Gym Group was that we've run across some very interesting concepts along the way we think we can learn from, but that for now at least, are small enough to be a distraction to the main business.

If some of these projects get big enough to justify pushing them into the Urban Gym Group, we will – but then we might need to rebrand the Group in the longer term anyway, because 'Urban' really is focused on the city and may be limiting. That point is still a way away at this point though.

The third reason was very simple. During lockdowns, the banking industry basically pulled the plug: our banks weren't happy with

us acquiring companies unless we financed it ourselves. That wasn't an issue, I was happy to fund them, but I'm not stupid – I wasn't going to put those acquisitions into the main Group.


### What are your growth plans?

**Meijer:** We want to grow fast. With TRIB3, for example, we aim to open 15–20 sites over the next three to five years. With TrainMore we hope to get to 40. We'll have more 'three-discipline' High Studios as well – Ride, Run and Flow – plus a few BTY CLB studios and maybe one more Clubsportive. We're closing contracts for a number of new sites at the moment.

**Kool:** Our first focus, however, is getting to 50 sites. That was in our plan a year ago, and if



BTY CLB is a nightclub-type concept complete with lights, dancers and music



"If you do what you love, you're going to get a great return"

"We're looking for people who live their brands and who really want to grow"

The Urban Gym Group loves to work with passionate entrepreneur founders

PHOTO: URBAN GYM GROUP

you count the six clubs in My Local Gym Group, we've already added 30. Factor in the acquisitions we're working on and we'll quickly get to 35, maybe more, so 50 is a goal to aim for within a year or two – and then we'll make the next plan!

I never work on five- or three-year plans. I have a view on where I'd like to be, of course, but I've also learned that almost every year you have to adapt your plans. Hopefully when we adapt ours, it will be to put bigger numbers on it – but you just never know, because at a certain point in time we might just think: 'This is it, this is the right size.'

We certainly don't want to get into an overly-crowded market where everyone's competing on price and nobody benefits. When there are too many gyms, too many boutiques – which I'd say is already the case in some cities – it drives the price down. When that happens, the profit goes down too, so the costs have to go down, and the quality goes with it. And that isn't something the consumer wants.

The end point as I see it is having 'x' number of clubs or studios in Amsterdam, combined with outdoor and online offerings to dominate the city for our target group, with

a range of offerings that enable us to stay in control of our own price and yields.

We're actively looking at expanding abroad and researching opportunities in Spain. Again, we'd want to find one city – could be Barcelona, could be Madrid – where we'll roll out as many of our concepts as possible. The city would need to have some resemblance to Amsterdam – the same vibe, the same needs and interests among the consumers – but if we do it, and it's still an 'if' at this stage, it will happen in 2022.

It could even be that we acquire a small chain or small boutique operation in the city, and that will be the start of the roll-out of our other concepts there.

#### Will you bring new brands into the group?

**Kool:** We'll look at most things, especially if we don't think we can create them ourselves. That's our approach really; if we can't build it, we'll buy it. As an example, Barbara den Bak created High Flow, which as a power yoga workout is a style that resonates with her. More traditional, meditative yoga isn't her thing, though, so we're now actively looking to buy into a yoga chain to help it roll out.

**We're all about executing, even if we make mistakes. I'd rather get on and do than talk for ages. I'd rather try things and fail than miss out on a super idea**

PHOTO: URBAN GYM GROUP

High Studios is the group's boutique HIIT studio brand, currently in four locations

We're also looking to move into the broader wellness category. At the moment, Urban Gym Group is really about fitness concepts and HIIT workouts. However, we believe health, wellness and fitness are converging, just as everything in the IT world moved into bundled services, so the same will happen in fitness and wellbeing.

With this in mind, we're working on another new brand and will hopefully open a new concept club towards the end of this year.

We're also experimenting with physiotherapy in one of our gyms – once again, under its own brand and with its own entrepreneur in charge – and it's going very well. In fact, it's a good example of a brand that started out in My Local Gym Group and which, as we now look to introduce it at all our clubs, we'll bring into the Urban Gym Group.

#### **What do you look for in your investments and acquisitions?**

**Meijer:** It has to be a great concept, of course, as well as there being good energy between us. But we're also looking for people who live their brands and who really want to grow – they just don't know how. BTY CLB founder June is a good example. I met with her yesterday and her eyes were twinkling at what we can now do together. She knows she isn't battling on her own any more.

**Kool:** We prefer to buy a small chain – someone who's already proven they can go from one to two to three to four to five sites. Then we figure

out why they've hit the wall so we can help them fix it. It could be financing, it could – like June – be a lack of sparring partner to challenge them, it could be difficulties in finding locations.

In every case, though, we're buying into the entrepreneur or manager. We want them on-board – they become a part-owner of the Group. We categorically aren't buying institutions where we replace the manager or entrepreneur with someone else.

But it's very important they're willing to be challenged. If I sense someone just wants our money and isn't open to being challenged – if I feel their ego is going to get in the way, I'm not interested.

Anyone can supply money. We add value, but to do that, there will sometimes be tough conversations to get the best out of the opportunity and the people involved.

**Meijer:** Our values sit at the heart of everything – we absolutely live and breathe them. We care, we challenge and we energise.

#### **What makes Urban Gym Group special?**

**Kool:** One of our trademarks is that we prefer to let founders be in the limelight. Obviously we're in the background, but they run their businesses independently and shine with their brand. Unless we reach a point where they want a change and we find them another role in which they can shine – as we've done with Barbara, who's now Urban Gym Group's chief marketing and innovation officer.



Then we're about executing, even if we make mistakes. I'd rather get on and do than talk about something for ages; rather try things and fail than miss out on a super idea. This comes back to our core value of 'we do'.

We're honest about our mistakes with our employees, too. We might acquire the wrong company, might integrate it incorrectly, might make a mistake in the launch. We tell our team if that happens.

**Meijer:** This is because we don't want anybody in the company to be afraid. They need to know they really can say what they think needs to happen to make the business better.

A lot of companies really don't know what kind of talent they have, because they don't ask and don't give people an opportunity to show their potential. We ask and we give opportunities. For example, we have strategy calls where our employees are divided into teams, each focusing on a different area of the business. One presentation was on our IT strategy, and on that team was a

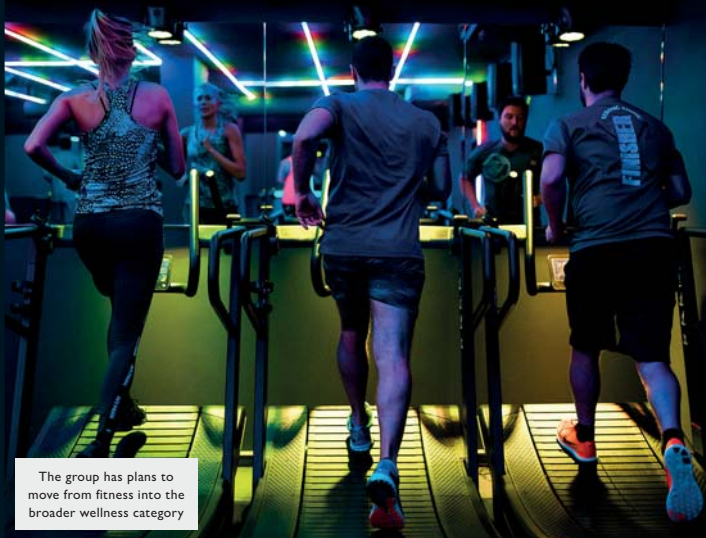
girl who was just doing nine hours a week of host work at ClubSportive while studying at university. She was always so quiet, but on this call she was amazing – talking about a topic she was passionate about – and she now has a job in our IT team.

**Kool:** Ultimately, neither Marjolijn nor I are in the target group any more. We might want to be, we might feel like we are, but our target group is younger than us. If we don't talk to staff who are in that target group, if we don't listen to our customers, we're going to have a problem. This isn't a 'one size fits all' gym chain. We need to know how to engage our customers.

### **What was the impact of COVID-19 on your business?**

**Kool:** I think there are three things to say about COVID-19. Firstly, our members were super-loyal, which says something about our group. Employees too: even when we had to let them go, they were the first to raise their hands to come back when we started hiring again.





The group has plans to move from fitness into the broader wellness category

PHOTO: URBANGYM GROUP

Secondly, the pandemic has shown that we invest anti-cyclically, which is something I've done in other businesses too. We actually accelerated our growth, made acquisitions, invested in new equipment almost everywhere, did some rebuilding and invested in new concepts.

Some investors might have found that very scary, but I've had this experience twice before and it's always turned out well, as it puts you ahead of the curve.

Thirdly, it says something about us as individuals, because we got fired up by it. It sounds awkward maybe, because it was a tough time for everyone, but we became even more energised.

### **What's the dynamic between you, as co-CEOs?**

**Meijer:** We're buddies, a team and we trust each other. We're different characters and challenge each other, but we appreciate each other and have the same passion and goals. Ultimately, we want to be the best. We strive to be front-runners in

everything we do. But we also want to have fun. Life's too short. I'm passionate about health and I'm not finished yet. I'm an entrepreneur at heart and I still have so many ideas of things we can do to help people and build energised, active communities.

**Kool:** I love working with someone who's so eager to learn and in everything we do, thinks about the company, its members and staff first.

What gets me out of bed is my desire to learn and develop myself, as well as to share my knowledge and experience to help others develop. If I don't add value, even if it's going to make me a lot of money, I don't want to be in.

It's not about being number one in the market for me, though. We can be number two or number three, as long as we did everything we could and we aspired to be number one. If we then make 10 per cent, 5 per cent or 7 per cent, it doesn't really matter. If you do what you love, you're going to get a great return.

**More:** [www.urbangymgroup.com](http://www.urbangymgroup.com)





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# Get pedalling



Team-based challenges are ideal for newbies, as their results need not show

With their dark vibe, pumping music and kit that needs adjusting, indoor cycling classes can be intimidating to the uninitiated. Steph Eaves asks suppliers for their tips on how to encourage beginners into the cycling studio – and keep them coming back

## *Asking riders to focus on one metric at a time can reduce cognitive overload*

**Lou Atkinson**

**Lead master instructor  
Core Health  
and Fitness**

**T**echnology, data, leaderboards and gamification can vastly elevate the indoor cycling experience. However, these can also be hugely intimidating, either because the numbers, colours and graphics are unfamiliar, or because these tools are being used to create a competitive environment, where a newbie rider immediately knows they will 'lose' to more experienced riders.

Coaches need the necessary education and skills to make metrics meaningful to their riders, both experienced and beginner. Generally, asking riders to focus on one metric at a time can reduce cognitive overload. For example, having one stage focused on cadence – RPM) – then the next stage focused on power – Watts – simplifies the workout, and gives the coach time to explain that particular metric and how it can help individuals to get more from their workout.

Where leaderboards and challenges are included in class, making these team-based is ideal for newbies, as they feel connected to the group and able to contribute to their team's performance, without the pressure of their individual performance being visible. Similarly, having challenges based on metrics other than simply who can hit the highest number can unite the class and give everyone a sense of competence – something that is key to intrinsic motivation for any activity.

Individualised metrics such as relative power (watts/kg) and percentage of maximum heart rate (%HRmax) prevent lighter and older riders from being unfairly disadvantaged, while challenges based on consistency of RPMs or maintaining a sub-maximal intensity give people of all experience levels the chance to make it to the winners' podium.



PHOTO: CORE HEALTH AND FITNESS





PHOTO: MATRIX FITNESS

*I remind members that they can make the class as easy or as hard as they want to*

### Katy Sullivan

**Master trainer  
Matrix Fitness**

It's understandable that group exercise classes can be extremely intimidating for many people, especially those relatively new to the gym or indoor cycling studio. Walking into a class where everybody seems to know what they're doing can be very scary for some.

Having taught group cycling classes for over 17 years, I regularly have members saying how nervous they are about it. I instantly put them at ease and remind them that they can make the class as easy or as hard as they want to. It's their workout, and I am just their guide.

I always make sure I'm early to every class and that I'm always the first person in the studio to greet everyone as they show up and reassure those participating for the first time. I'm also approached by many new members at the end of class to ask how they can make their seat more comfortable, and this is the perfect time to talk about padded cycling shorts, cycling shoes and generally anything that will make the ride more comfortable so that they will be more inclined to come back.

PHOTO: MATRIX FITNESS

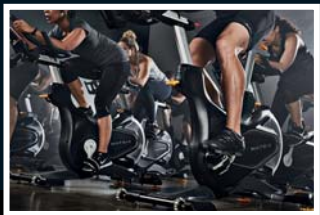
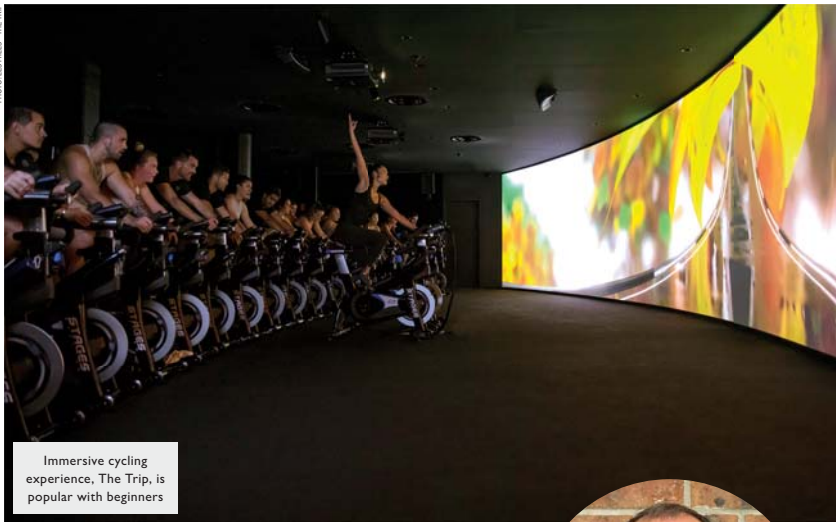


PHOTO: MATRIX FITNESS

Coaching members on the right kit and settings can improve retention





Immersive cycling experience, The Trip, is popular with beginners

*Virtual is also a great opportunity to educate beginners in a safe, non-threatening environment*

## Martin Franklin

### CEO

Les Mills Europe



PHOTO: LES MILLS

For our recent Global Fitness Report, market research company Qualtrics spoke to over 12,000 people from across the globe about their exercise habits, with 69 per cent stating their level of fitness was somewhere between a complete beginner to intermediate.

Of those surveyed, only 7 per cent said they actually take part in indoor cycling classes currently and 12 per cent said they would consider taking part in an indoor cycling class in the future. Clearly there's work still to be done in encouraging people to take part in indoor cycling classes.

For operators, virtual classes represent a key opportunity for breaking down barriers, and many of our operator partners have cited their success using this

model. Virtual on-demand classes can be a relatively easy solution for operators, with beginner classes enabling new clients to take sessions in their own time and at their own pace. Research shows that 12 per cent of those who take part in virtual classes then go on to take part in live classes.

Virtual is also a great opportunity to educate beginners in a safe, non-threatening environment. Experience-led classes, with their exciting visuals, can reduce levels of perceived exertion and provide audio visual distraction. This can lead to greater enjoyment, higher retention, better results, and less intimidation factor for newcomers. Our immersive cycle experience, The Trip, has proven hugely successful with operators in attracting and retaining first timers.



## *When members know what to expect, they find new experiences much less intimidating*

**Richard Sheen**

**Commercial sales director  
Pulse Fitness**

On the surface, indoor cycling classes might seem intimidating; the dark room, the disco lights and close proximity to others. Some people put all group exercise classes into the same pot, seeing them all as difficult and something they don't know anything about. In reality, indoor cycling classes are much easier to get to grips with than other group exercise classes, as you don't

need to be able to move to the beat, and once you're set up and on the bike, all you need to do is pedal!

Offer a short drop-in before the class for newbies to get help setting up their bike, and receive a quick run through of what to expect. Consider creating video content for your social media channels, or even to play on a screen outside the studio. When members know what to expect, they find new experiences much less intimidating.



PHOTO: PULSE FITNESS

## *Create customised workout experiences in a group indoor cycling setting*

**Marvin Burton**

**Training and experience specialist  
Life Fitness**

It's important for each rider to be able to personalise their experience and their ride relative to their own ability and fitness level.

We also work with our partners to consider the exercise environment, room design, sound, and use of workout data, to educate participants. We refer to this as our 'ICG ecosystem', which helps to build fitness communities and to attract and retain members.

We're able to create customised workout experiences in a group indoor cycling setting on the ICG bikes through a training system called Coach-By-Color.

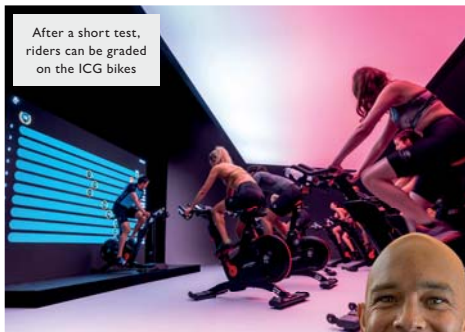


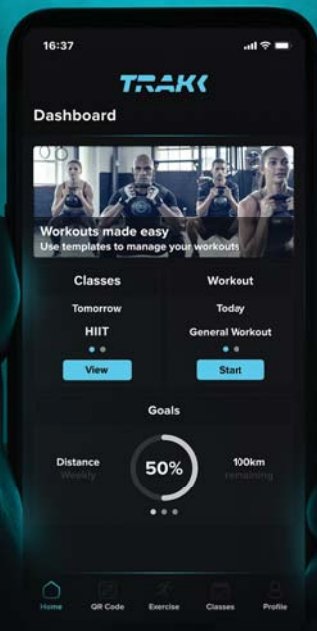
PHOTO: LIFE FITNESS CYCLING

This calculates the workout level based on a short test and we recommend this is test completed prior to an exerciser's first class – although it can be estimated and modified during the workout at any time.

What this means is that users are riding at a percentage of ability that's relative to them – so you can have an elite athlete next to a complete novice, both participating in the same workout, and at a level of exertion aligned to their specific fitness levels.

PHOTO: LIFE FITNESS CYCLING





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# Product innovation



Steph Eaves rounds up the latest launches in health and fitness

Accessercise is aiming to transform access to exercise for those with disabilities, says **Ali Jawad**

Paralympian Ali Jawad has launched Accessercise, an app designed to support people with disabilities to begin to exercise or increase their level of participation.

The app features content from specifically designed exercises, demonstrated by people representing 15 categories of disability.

Initially launching in the UK, Jawad plans to expand into the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.



PHOTO: ACCESSERISE

● Accessercise features exercises tailored to 15 disabilities

Accessercise also provides a directory of accessible gyms and enables users to identify and rate accessibility to sports and fitness facilities. With the app, Jawad aims to support local fitness services that promote their accessibility credentials. He said: "Up to 15 per cent

of the world's population identify themselves as disabled, yet many face barriers when it comes to identifying accessible and welcoming places to exercise. "With the launch of Accessercise, we aim to revolutionise access to sports and fitness facilities

*We aim to connect people with disabilities with the fitness community as never before*

Ali Jawad

via an inclusive, one-stop-shop for people with disabilities that aims to connect them with the fitness community as never before and continue to grow the equality of exercise."

**fitness-kit.net KEYWORD**  
Accessercise

Codelocks' new range is perfect for hybrid working environments, says **Colin Campbell**



PHOTO: CODELOCKS

Codelocks has expanded its KitLock range with a new keyless access control solution for storage cabinets and lockers.

The KL1000 G3 comes with all the features of the KL1000 Classic Plus including private and public functions, 24hr auto-unlock countdown timer in public function and up to 20 user codes in private function. As the KL1000 G3 shares the same fittings and fixings, existing KL1000 installations can be easily upgraded and retrofitted.

The new KitLock, has a key override function, allows key



PHOTO: CODELOCKS

*With homeworking, we're seeing a greater demand for controlled storage access solutions*

Colin Campbell

holders to access the locker in the event of a forgotten code or emergency, increasing flexibility for managers, staff and guests, while the company has

simplified the process of changing the batteries.

Like the KL1000 Classic and Classic Plus, the KL1000 G3 has been designed so on-door battery changes can easily be made. The battery compartment can be accessed via the front of the lock to reduce the time and disruption of changing the batteries.

Colin Campbell, MD, said: "The KL1000 G3 is perfect for locations where lockers are allocated on both short- and long-term basis."

**fitness-kit.net KEYWORD**  
Codelocks

● Codelocks set-up makes it cheaper to change batteries



● Trakk integrates with leisure management systems and can be white labelled



*"Our ground-breaking activity tracking app will transform the way both operators and gym-goers are able to track and log workouts"*

Chris Johnson, MD,  
Pulse Fitness

## A new app called Trakk, from Pulse Fitness, promises triple benefits to operators, says **Chris Johnson**

Pulse Fitness has launched Trakk, a new app it says will transform the way gym operators and members track their journeys and keep members engaged for longer.

Trakk offers three major benefits to operators by providing member fitness tracking and programming; easy integration into existing software; and enhanced member retention.

### 1. Fitness tracking & programming

Billed as 'the ultimate personal training tool', Trakk enables trainers to set personalised goals and workout plans for members, as well as monitoring their performance.

Trakk is available in three different versions – Trakk Essential, Trakk Professional Lite and Trakk Professional Plus.

Members can set their own fitness goals, devise workout plans and track their progress, both in and outside the gym.

With Trakk Professional Lite and Trakk Professional Plus, members are able to view and book classes through the app.

### 2. Seamless integration

Providing ultimate integration, Trakk integrates with operators' existing front of house systems from Exerp, Gladstone, Legend and XN.

Trakk is designed to work seamlessly with Pulse Fitness equipment and also be integrated with non-Pulse Fitness products with the use of QR codes.

### 3. Enhanced member retention

Operators can improve interaction on the gym floor, thanks to Trakk's simple colour-coded system that identifies at-risk members and provides a summary of previous contact.

Through Trakk, operators can also send personal or automated messages to keep members engaged.

"Our ground-breaking activity app will transform the way both operators and gym-goers are able to track and log workouts," says Chris Johnson, MD of Pulse Fitness. "Gyms are not the only place for fitness. As an industry, we need to ensure we're staying connected with members regardless of where they are, throughout their lives. Trakk does this better than any other system."

[fitness-kit.net/keyword](https://fitness-kit.net/keyword)

Pulse Fitness

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PHOTO: ECORE

**Ecore's new turf options provide an ideal fitness, functional training, and competitive experience for athletes of all levels**

Bo Barber



PHOTO: ECORE

● The new surfaces have been designed for gyms and health clubs

## Ecore's new turf options will provide an ideal experience for all levels, says **Bo Barber**

Ecore has refreshed its lineup of turf products to include seven new offerings for a variety of indoor and outdoor applications.

All Ecore turf products are resistant to slips, feature a vulcanised composition rubber shockpad and are designed to provide safety, acoustic, and ergonomic benefits to the user.

"Flooring is one of the most important elements when it comes to fitness and athletic facilities," says Ecore's Bo Barber. "From the weight room, to footwork drills and the training field, Ecore's new options are designed to provide an ideal fitness, functional training, and competitive experience for athletes of all levels."

The new turf products include: RageTurf Motivate and Rally, for footwork drills and sled work; RageTurf UltraTile for indoor and outdoor applications; RageTurf dBTile for use in areas where durability and sound and shock absorption are required.

Also in the refreshed range are FlexTurf Motivate,

designed to reduce stress and strain when indoor training; FlexTurf Monster, an ergonomic training surface for indoor or outdoor use; and FierceTurf Monster, which offers extreme shock absorption for indoor and outdoor field training.

[fitness-kit.net/keyword/Ecore](https://fitness-kit.net/keyword/Ecore)

## BlazePod US office is ready to transform the training world, says **Yaniv Shneiderman**

BlazePod is expanding its US operations with the opening of an office in San Diego.

Founded in 2017 by Yaniv Shneiderman, BlazePod is the creator of the Flash Reflex training programme, which combines cognitive intelligence with physical exercises to enable athletes and fitness enthusiasts of all levels to improve reaction time and performance.

The interactive training aid develops speed and strength using visual cues provided by touch sensor pods controlled by a mobile app.



PHOTO: BLAZEPOD

**My mission in creating BlazePod was to motivate, educate and inspire the world to think and perform better**

Yaniv Shneiderman

The lighting pods create visual cues and prompts to enhance workouts, challenge speed, agility, reaction times and other fitness elements.

BlazePod's US office opening – and expansion in the North American market – comes after



PHOTO: BLAZEPOD

● BlazePod reaction training is designed for all abilities

the company secured an US\$8.5m Series A funding round, led by AP Partners.

Shneiderman said: "My mission in creating BlazePod was to motivate, educate, and inspire the world to think quicker and perform better by

offering a revolutionary training experience.

"Our US team is ready to transform the training world and help individuals of all ages achieve true excellence."

[fitness-kit.net/keyword/Blazepod](https://fitness-kit.net/keyword/Blazepod)

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PHOTO: PINESSHAUTERSTOCK

The prescription of exercise therapy was found to be damaging in some cases

## Change of direction

NICE has done a U-turn on its controversial guidelines for treating Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, saying that physical activity or therapy should not now be routinely prescribed for patients

In a controversial U-turn, the UK's National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has gone back on its previous recommendation of prescribing exercise therapy for people suffering from ME or chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS).

The change in policy was revealed in the UK health watchdog's long-awaited, final update to guidance on treatment for CFS.

The guideline identifies the symptoms of ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis) as debilitating fatigue that is worsened by activity, post-exertional malaise, unrefreshing sleep or sleep disturbance, and cognitive difficulties.

### Graded Exercise Therapy

In its updated guidelines NICE makes it clear that any programme based on fixed incremental increases in physical activity or exercise – such as Graded Exercise Therapy – should “not be offered for the treatment of ME/CFS”.

The guidance also highlights the importance of ensuring that people “remain within their energy limits when undertaking activity of any kind”.

“Any physical activity or exercise programmes should only be considered for people with ME/CFS in specific circumstances and should begin by establishing the person's physical activity capability at a level that does not worsen their symptoms,” the new guidance states.

“A physical activity or exercise programme should only be offered on the basis that it is delivered

*The new guideline emphasises the importance of a personalised management plan for areas such as energy management – including the importance of rest and staying within the individual's energy limits*

or overseen by a physiotherapist in an ME/CFS specialist team and is regularly reviewed.”

### Support for people with ME/CFS

Peter Barry, consultant clinical advisor for NICE and chair of the guideline committee, said: “This guideline will provide clear support for people living with ME/CFS, their families and carers, and for clinicians. It recognises that ME/CFS is a complex, chronic medical condition that can have a significant effect on people's quality of life.

“We know that people with ME/CFS have had difficulty in getting their illness acknowledged, and the guideline provides guidance for suspecting and diagnosing the condition, recognising that there is no specific test for it.

“The guideline emphasises the importance of a personalised management plan for areas such as energy management – including the importance of rest and staying within the individual's energy limits – the treatment of specific symptoms, and guidance on managing flares and exacerbations.” ●

More: [www.HCMmag.com/niceCFS](http://www.HCMmag.com/niceCFS)



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