



health club manager

AUGUST 2010

mixing it up

Introducing fusion pilates



INTERVIEW

ROBIN COPE

The founder of BMF on
inspiring staff and members

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT...

MEMBERSHIP PACKAGES

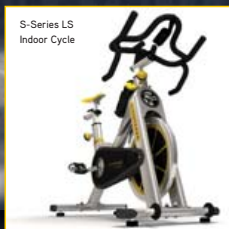
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new measures

Traditionally, if you wanted to find out what your customers thought about your operation, you asked them directly; many health club operators routinely undertake customer feedback research and score performance against a range of industry benchmarks to achieve this set of useful KPIs.

Now, with the growth of social media, some of your customers aren't waiting to be asked – they're telling you on a minute-by-minute basis what they think of your service, and are sharing their experiences with each other. This presents a great opportunity to monitor customer attitudes, but it also brings challenges, because there aren't yet any straightforward ways of measuring and analysing what's going on out there.

Really getting to grips with the impact social media is having on your operation may not seem like a priority, but experts are already advocating both listening in to the conversations that are happening online and engaging with key contributors to relevant discussions with the aim of creating brand champions. One thing's for sure: with around 200 sites already up and running and more on the way,

a growing number of your customers will be using some form of social media.

Many of these, by their nature, encourage users to make judgements, turning people into critics or advocates, so you'll find some of your customers are championing your brand, while others may be damaging it.

The libel laws which protected many businesses from criticism in print, TV and radio are yet to be thoroughly tested in the social media environment, making it the wild west of today's world and meaning it may be more fruitful to engage and seek to influence rather than getting huffy and calling your lawyer. Until

Libel laws which apply in print, TV and radio are yet to be thoroughly tested in the social media environment and it may be more fruitful to engage and influence than call your lawyer

our ability to monitor and analyse these channels catches up, this may be the best we can do.

Starting to think of customers as either critics or champions could be an interesting direction to take in any case, as it chimes well with the social media world. With this in mind, a customer loyalty metric which was originally introduced in 2003 – The Net Promoter Score – seems to be coming into its own, because its focus is on engaging with influential advocates while reshaping the views of critics.

Developed by Fred Reichheld, Bain & Company, and Satmetrix, Net Promoter was introduced to the industry this month as a new service by Leisure-net Solutions. It asks only one question – on a 0 to 10 rating scale: "How likely is it that you would recommend our company to a friend or colleague?" Based on their response, people are categorised as either promoters (9-10 rating), passives (7-8 rating) or detractors (0-6 rating). Subtracting the detractors from the promoters gives a Net Promoter score, with 75 per cent or above considered high. Leisure-net says early reports show the health and fitness industry score running at a 34 per cent average.

Net Promoter claims to be comparable across industries and businesses, making it very worthy of consideration as a new KPI which is in tune with the way management thinking is likely to be heading. It's also structured to empower managers to address problems raised by detractors, with the aim of converting them into promoters through improvements in service delivery.

Liz Terry, editor

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buyers' guide

For suppliers of products and services in the health club and spa markets, turn to p78



write to reply



Do you have a strong opinion or disagree with somebody else's views on the industry? If so, we'd love to hear from you – email: healthclub@leisuremedia.com



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Are hardworking freelancers being adequately rewarded for their efforts?

freelance instructors: need to recognise differing standards

I was interested to read your recent feature about managing external instructors (*HCM* June, p24). As a freelance instructor for the last 16 years, I find our treatment in the workplace can be very disheartening.

I never phone in sick, I take one week's holiday every six months and I organise my own cover – even down to paying them myself, both to avoid over-payment and to guarantee the instructor is looked after, as this means my customers will also be looked after and able to continue with their class. I'm a member of REPs, I always work bank holidays and I try to cover other classes I can teach whenever asked. I believe in loyalty, professionalism, CPD training, presentation, and keeping things safe and fun, and my classes are packed week in, week out.

But do centres appreciate or reward this sort of positive approach? No. All instructors are treated the same – even those who take lots of time off, cancel at the last minute and never bother to arrange cover. I don't want to be seen to be patting myself on the back, but I do believe a good personal attitude is vital, and I'd like to see this recognised and rewarded. Yet as a freelancer, you're not even seen as part of the team – not so much as a parking permit!

I'd also like to see more recognition of the role of group exercise instructors in general. The focus is always on PT and the revenue this can bring in, but if you have full classes, you build loyalty among 30 customers an hour, paying £40 a month.

We need more credit and appreciation.

angela

freelance instructor

leaders needed for workplace activity initiatives

We read with interest the article about corporate outreach (*HCM* July 10, p68). The issue of employee health and wellbeing isn't just important to the individuals concerned; it also makes sound business sense. For every £1 spent on corporate wellbeing programmes, the return to businesses is estimated to be £3 due to improved productivity and reduced absenteeism.

However, as the article highlights, it can be difficult for exercise professionals to engage company employees in activity and then sustain their interest. Finding the right people to do this is half the battle.

With this in mind, Central YMCA has launched an unprecedented workplace health initiative, initially working with 17 small to medium-sized companies across London. The project works by training a small number of company employees to become Workplace Activators, responsible for motivating, supporting and coaching their less active colleagues to get fitter – evidence from the YMCA Activate England project suggests it is peers, not professionals, who are more likely to support colleagues in changing their behaviour. Each activator receives training in skills such as communications, building rapport and empathy.

This 12-month scheme, being evaluated by the University of Westminster, can provide a relatively low-cost, sustainable model to smaller businesses.

robin gargave

director of innovation & development,
central ymca

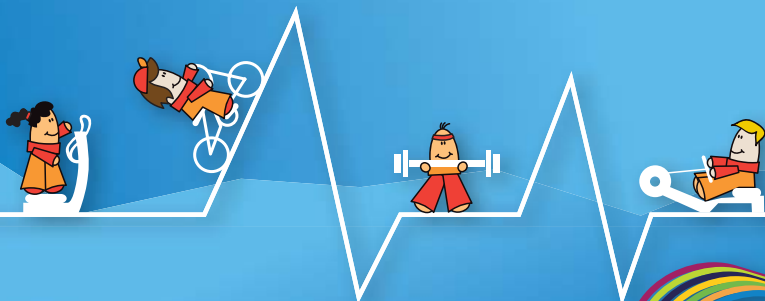


Central YMCA: New workplace health initiative launched in London

exhibit at



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in brief...

cancer charity backs sunbed ban in north-west

The North West Cancer Research Fund (NWCRCF) is backing a bid to ban sunbeds in gyms and spas across the region.

The charity is offering its support to a regional campaign which aims to encourage all gyms and spas to introduce a ban on sunbeds.

Anne Jackson, chief executive of NWCRCF, says: "Our goal is to remind fitness clubs and spas in the region that they are in the health business, and that offering the use of sunbeds is a complete contradiction in terms.

"We are encouraging operators across the north-west to sign up to our campaign and join the battle against skin cancer."

new study uncovers staff health 'failings'

New research has revealed that two thirds of UK small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the leisure industry have no schemes in place encourage staff to exercise or eat healthily.

Finance provider GE Capital found that more than half – 54 per cent – of SME owners or managers believe the provision of free health checks could make a difference in promoting healthy workplaces.

However, fewer than one in 10 businesses encourage workers to take a lunch break, while only 25 per cent have implemented schemes designed to encourage healthy eating and exercise.

djanogly leisure centre opens

The £6.4m Djanogly Community Leisure Centre, in the centre of Nottingham, has opened to the public.

Facilities at the centre, designed by Archial Architects and built by ISG Regions, include a six-lane, 25m swimming pool with a moveable floor, a changing village, a 50-station fitness suite supplied by Technogym, sauna and steamrooms and a dance/activity studio.

The new building has been designed to sit within the site, without imposing on the residential properties backing onto it. Justin Ashworth, senior associate at Archial, adds: "As Djanogly Community Leisure Centre is situated within the grounds of the Norman Foster Associates-designed Djanogly City Academy, certain aspects of its design – such as the overhanging eaves and the colonnade – take their cue from the Academy in order to complement the existing architecture."

Djanogly Community Leisure Centre is part of Nottingham City Council's £32m wider Leisure Centre Transformation Programme to improve the city's sports provision.



The centre includes a 50-station fitness suite supplied by Technogym

work starts on bilston centre

When complete, the £15m centre will include a 25m swimming pool

York-based contractor Shepherd Construction has started excavation work at the site of Wolverhampton City Council's (WCC) new £15m leisure centre in Bilston, West Midlands.

The firm is moving around 10,000 cubic metres of soil from the site ahead of the main build phase of the development, with 6,000 cubic metres being donated to the WCC's Bowmans Harbour project to create attenuation ponds.

When complete, the new 5,600sq m (60,278sq ft) Bilston Leisure Centre will incorporate an eight-lane, 25m swimming pool, a learner pool, a health and fitness suite, four squash courts and a sports hall.

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Controversial report claims that exercise has no effect on kids' obesity levels

exercise 'no answer' to obesity

Lack of exercise is not a major cause of childhood obesity, according to an 11-year study into child health.

The research, conducted among more than 200 children in Plymouth, did find that obese children are inactive – but claims that the inactivity is the result of the weight problems, not a cause. The study, by the Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry, looked into whether physical activity among children precedes changes in fatness over time, or whether the fatness of children precedes changes in physical activity over time.

In its conclusion, the report states: "It is well known that less active children are fatter, but that does not mean – as

most people assume it does – that inactivity leads to fatness. Physical activity had no impact on weight change, but weight clearly led to less activity.

"The implications are profound for public health policy, because the physical activity of children (crucial to their fitness and wellbeing) may never improve unless the burgeoning levels of childhood obesity are first checked.

"If this cannot be achieved through physical activity, the focus therefore has to be on what – and how much – children consume."

The findings were published in the *Archives of Diseases in Childhood* journal in June of this year.

FUSION LIFESTYLE TO OPERATE ENFIELD FACILITIES

Four leisure centres in Enfield, north London, are set to benefit from nearly £9m-worth of improvements over the next three years after Fusion Lifestyle was appointed to run the local council-owned facilities.

A total of seven sites will be operated by Fusion on behalf of Enfield Council, with the four venues earmarked for improvement being Albany Leisure Centre, Southbury Leisure Centre, Southgate Leisure Centre and Edmonton Leisure Centre.

Fusion will also take over responsibility for Arnos Pool, Aspire Sports and Fitness Centre and Bramley Bowls Centre after securing an agreement with the local authority. The deal extends the trust's London and south-east portfolio to 45 sites.

Enfield Council cabinet member for young people, leisure, culture and the Olympics, Bambos Charalambous, says: "Fusion demonstrated its ability to provide an excellent service that improves facilities but reduces costs."

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in brief...

exclusively ladies gym chain liquidated

Exclusively Ladies gyms in Barnett, Tring and Henley have closed after the company went into liquidation.

However, leisure management company Nexus has taken over the lease for the Henley site.

A spokesperson for Nexus told *Health Club Management*: "Further to Exclusively Ladies being wound up, Nexus Community has taken over the lease of the site in Henley, which is owned by Henley Town Council.

"While the ladies-only gym has stopped trading, the existing hairdressing salon, beauty therapists and personal training company continue to trade successfully.

"Nexus is now in discussions with a number of parties who are interested in space at the facility, which will be a hub for small businesses in the health, beauty and wellbeing industry."

leeds met revamps gyms

New fitness suites have opened at two Leeds Metropolitan University campuses as part of a £400,000 refurbishment programme.

Precor has helped the university to remodel the gyms at both the Headingley site and the City Campus, as well as providing new equipment.

The Headingley Campus has been installed with a 52-station gym, while the City Campus facility in Leeds city centre has a 60-station gym.

All CV stations, including seven Adaptive Motion Trainers, have personal viewing screens.



New club will offer exercise classes

fitness4less adds welsh site

Budget health and fitness operator Fitness4Less has bought the Fitness First gym in Newport, south Wales, for an undisclosed sum.

The gym is set to undergo a full refurbishment programme before re-opening in the autumn. It will be the company's fifth site and the group's first operation in Wales.

Fitness4Less is now planning to open a number of new facilities across the UK and is looking for suitable locations. With several sites already under negotiation, target towns and cities include the likes of Brighton, Cambridge, Oxford, Gloucester and Swansea. Second clubs for Birmingham and Bristol are also in the pipeline, together with specific locations within London and the home counties.

The Newport acquisition was organised through property agents Christie + Co. Fitness4Less has now tasked Christie + Co with finding suitable locations on medium-term leases to meet its growth targets.

fitness first commits to ifi

Fitness First has had the first batch of its clubs accredited through the Inclusive Fitness Initiative's (IFI) National Sports Foundation Programme.

The chain has become one of the first major operators in the commercial sector to commit to the programme. So far, a total of 24 Fitness First clubs have been accredited in the scheme.

As part of the accreditation process, personal trainers have been offered training at Levels 2 and 3 of the IFI training programme, giving them the skills to train disabled members.

Fitness First has also worked closely with its equipment suppliers to ensure its sites also offer a selection of machines that are IFI-accredited.

John Gamble, managing director of Fitness First, says: "We're committed to making the world a fitter place with no exclusions, and we are pleased to be making these changes with immediate effect. It is a landmark step forward for the fitness industry."



Paralympian Russell Docker (left) and medical advisor Dr Hilary Jones

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The 160-year-old baths have re-opened after being closed for over 10 years

iconic london baths re-opened

Marshall Street Baths in Soho, London, re-opened its doors to the public last month following the completion of a £25m renovation led by Westminster City Council (WCC).

The historic 160-year-old baths, which have been shut for more than 10 years, have undergone work to restore the original Sicilian marble-lined pool and green Swedish marble walls.

A new purpose-built leisure centre has also been created at the site, with the new facilities on offer including a 102-station gym, a sauna and health suite and dance studios. WCC development partner Marshall

Street Regeneration – a consortium comprising Resolution Property and local business The Vinyl Factory – has carried out the work at the Grade II-listed building, which has also involved the development of 52 new homes.

ISG Interior Exterior was construction manager for the project, which will now see the venue taken off English Heritage's 'Buildings at Risk' register. Nuffield Health has been appointed to operate the baths.

WCC cabinet member for community services Steve Summers says: "This redevelopment demonstrates our continued commitment to our residents."

'the pods' are taking shape

A new leisure complex being built in Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire, is starting to take shape as work continues on the construction of its domed grid shell.

The Pods has been designed by London-based Andrew Wright, with S&P Architects appointed as 'delivery' architects. Buro Happold and Bowmer and Kirkland are leading the build element. Due to be completed in May 2011, the venue will include a 390sq m (4,198sq ft) fitness studio, as well as a 25m swimming pool and training pool.

mayor sets dance target

London mayor Boris Johnson has unveiled his ambition to see three million people participating in dance by 2012, after helping to launch this year's T-Mobile Big Dance.

Johnson says: "London is one of the world's greatest centres for dance, with enormous creative talent to be found here. But it's also about getting more active, or simply having fun – and it's a brilliant way to bring people together."

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better body shop on the move

Jason Crow's Better Body Shop has expanded and moved to new, larger premises in Sevenoaks, Kent.

The move means that the facility has become one of the UK's largest independent centres for physical excellence and personal training.

The new 883sq m (9,500 sq ft) centre offers a range of dynamic strength and conditioning training, weight loss programmes, personal training and group training activities, as well as specialising in sports training.

Founder Jason Crow says: "The opening of this new site is tremendously exciting. We would like to thank the council for their support and belief in what we're offering, and for helping make our vision a reality."

"All of our trainers are degree-educated in sports sciences, and that ensures a level of understanding of



Better Body Shop specialises in sports training and conditioning

physiology and fitness that can't be found in many gyms, which often have just an intensive two-month course as their entry criteria for personal trainers."

cadbury house introduces teenager scheme

Cadbury House's health club, theclub, has launched a new initiative that's encouraging more 12- to 15-year-olds to take regular exercise.

Called 'The Teen Fit Academy', the scheme has already been a big success, with more than 50 children signing up to take part. The scheme allows the teenagers to use the gym at specified times, once they have completed an induction; unsupervised use of the gym is restricted to those aged 16 and over.



The scheme aims to encourage teenagers to become active

iou sessions for liw revealed



Dave Wright, one of the driving forces behind this year's IOU event

Details of the four sessions that will make up this year's Independent Operators Unite (IOU) event at Leisure Industry Week (LIW) have been revealed. There will be two sessions before lunch: one on marketing and another on member retention.

The first post-lunch session will look at increasing secondary spend, while the closing session will offer the chance for independent operators to share their experiences from operating centres.

Organiser Dave Wright, Creative Fitness Marketing CEO, says: "These will be among the best-attended sessions in the industry, with up to 800 club owners."

supplier news



Acquisition will see Star Trac become part of the Bruno group of companies

michael bruno acquires star trac

Fitness equipment supplier Star Trac has been acquired by fitness entrepreneur and investor Michael Bruno, founder and owner of Land America, which also recently bought Schwinn and StairMaster from Nautilus. Bruno and Star Trac have signed an agreement whereby Bruno will purchase the controlling interest in Star Trac's parent company. The financial details have not been disclosed.

According to Star Trac, the deal was agreed as part of efforts to strengthen the company's ability to provide

product innovation, quality, reliability and customer service.

Bruno's re-organisation plan for Star Trac focuses on company continuity and aggressive streamlining. He says: "Our activities will create the foundation for the company to experience strong growth and profitability... [It] provides the resources for a strong balance sheet and positions Star Trac for long-term success."

Star Trac COO Mike Leveque adds: "Being a part of Bruno's growing family is a tremendous opportunity for us."

in brief...

ezfacility acquires sda solutions

US-based fitness software provider EZFacility has acquired SDA Solutions, the provider of web-based membership, booking and management systems for the leisure and fitness sectors.

EZFacility, a division of Jonas Software, will take over all SDA operations as part of the deal.

Adam Zeitsiff, chief executive officer of EZFacility, says: "We welcome SDA's employees and customers to the EZFacility family."

new uk distributor for vibrogym

Dan Fivley has been named as the new UK distributor for Vibrogym.

Fivley, a former master trainer for Vibrogym Australia, is looking to increase the popularity of vibration training by educating facilities in the benefits of the method.

He says: "One of my main aims as distributor will be to make sure the equipment will be used properly, so that people exercising on the machines will gain the full benefit."

Fivley is also in discussions with training providers, with a view to getting them to incorporate a whole-body vibration module into their core programmes.

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in brief...

new clubs for crunch

US health club operator Crunch has launched two new clubs – just a year after filing for bankruptcy and changing ownership.

In June, Crunch added two clubs to its portfolio, both former Gold's Gym sites in the San Francisco Bay area, bringing its total to 21 sites. The chain now has eight clubs in San Francisco, with the remainder in New York, Los Angeles and Miami – it exited the Chicago and Atlanta markets during its bankruptcy and sale proceedings last year.

Crunch has also announced a new location in a suburb of Portland, Oregon, as part of its new venture into franchising. This club will open in September, offering lower membership rates – from US\$9.95 (£6.60) to US\$19.95 (£13) a month.

healthcity buys basicfit

HealthCity International and BasicFit have announced that an agreement has been reached concerning HealthCity's takeover of all 32 BasicFit centres: 31 in the Netherlands and one in Belgium.

This deal consolidates HealthCity's leading position in the Dutch fitness market, giving the operator a foothold in the budget club segment. The BasicFit sites will continue to be run as budget clubs, complementing HealthCity's existing full service facilities.

HealthCity aims to have a fitness centre in every large and medium-sized city in the Netherlands.

shokk no.11 in denmark

SHOKK is due to open its 11th youth gym in Denmark this month thanks to a franchise deal with gym chain Fitness4you.

Fitness4you has recently opened its fourth facility – located in Denmark's third largest city, Odense – which is where the new SHOKK youth gym will launch.

The facility already offers a large training area, two studios, a wellness area and a kids' games room. It is the first of Fitness4you's sites to offer a SHOKK youth gym.

running school enters ireland

The Running School® has opened its first franchise in Ireland, at the Sports Injuries Sports Medicine Clinic in Castlebar, County Mayo.

Founded by Mike Antoniadis, The Running School is a franchise-based concept designed to teach anyone –

from children to elite athletes – how to run faster and more efficiently in the space of six hours.

The Sports Injuries Sports Medicine Centre – which offers a physio clinic, rehab room and performance centre (gym) – has an existing client base comprising both recreational and elite athletes. The Running School concept has been introduced not only to help improve performance and speed, but also to ensure that clients in the final stages of rehab are running efficiently before ramping up their training. It will operate as a full franchise operation on-site, with staff being trained in all of the methodologies and protocols.

The Running School now hopes to roll out further franchises in Ireland, as well as expanding operations in the UK.



The Running School was founded by Mike Antoniadis (foreground)

vivafit: indian master franchise

Vivafit, the women-only fitness chain, has signed its first master franchise deal to expand the brand into India.

The master franchisee, Manisha Ahlawat, will open the first Indian Vivafit in Delhi in October 2010. The aim is to reach 25 new centres in 2011, and to open more than 1,000 Vivafit gyms across India over the next 10 years.

"We want to focus on expanding into the BRIC high-growth countries: Brazil, Russia, India and China," says Pedro Ruiz, CEO of Vivafit. "Latin America is also a priority area for us."

In the European marketplace, the brand plans to extend its presence to countries such as Italy and Germany.



Vivafit aims to open more than 1,000 gyms in India over the next 10 years

us army opens its largest fitness facility

The US Army has created its largest ever fitness facility, at the Fort Bliss army base in El Paso, Texas.

The 8,920sq m (96,000sq ft) Joshua W Soto Physical Fitness Facility has been named after a soldier who died in combat in Iraq last year. It offers a 930sq m (10,000sq ft) weights room, a 210-station CV area, and a group cycling studio with space for 60 bikes.

There's also an indoor running track, a combat room, two basketball courts and a fitness assessment room, plus

conference facilities and a 186sq m (2,000sq ft) recreation space with pool tables, gaming equipment and computers for soldiers to use.

The new facility is just one of a number of projects undertaken at Fort Bliss to accommodate increased troop levels, which have more than doubled over the last five years; the army is reported to have spent about US\$1bn (£666m) on construction there last year alone. Base Realignment and Closure also provided US\$2m (£1.3m) in funding.



© STOCKPHOTO.COM DONBATELY

Evo Fitness is located just a few minutes from Table Mountain National Park

evo fitness opens in cape town

Evo Fitness Personal Training – an independent, personal training-only facility in Cape Town, South Africa – is scheduled to open this month.

Located at the Westlake Lifestyle Centre in the affluent Tokai area of the city, the 340sq m club is designed to cater for 20–30 members only.

The equipment is custom-made and is designed to be portable, so clients can be taken to the nearby beach or forest for a change of workout scenery: there's little in the way of traditional machines. Kit includes power racks, weight plates, barbells, dumbbells, kettlebells, TRX suspension systems, strength resistance bands, grappling ropes, weighted chain

and vests, tyres, rubberised sledge hammers, plyometric boxes, speed chutes, agility hurdles, boxing bags, group cycling bikes and rowing machines. There's also a resident running specialist.

Evo Fitness has aligned itself with adidas with an eye to joint involvement in projects going forward. It has also linked up with Westlake Physiotherapy to create a referral structure: the club encompasses a biokinetics office for prehab/rehab work.

"We're offering something completely different," says co-founder David Cross. "Our gym is for people who want to be more than a number, people who want to get the results they've paid for. What we're offering is accountability."

anytime fitness europe & japan

US-based franchise Anytime Fitness has announced a number of deals that will see the chain expand into Benelux and Japan, as well as into the UK and Ireland as previously reported in HCM.

A master franchise agreement has been signed with Petro Hamelers of the Netherlands, involving plans for 150 clubs in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg over the next 10 years.

Hamelers – already a club owner as well as a physical therapist, and with more than 15 years' experience in the fitness industry – says his first

Anytime Fitness club could open as early as January 2011.

Meanwhile projections are for 300 new clubs to open in Japan over the next 10 years, where a consortium led by Toru Yamazaki – former CEO of Megalos, the fifth largest health club chain in Japan (and a subsidiary of Japanese corporate giant Nomura Real Estate Group) – has taken on the master franchise. The company, Fast Fitness Japan, will now do business as Anytime Fitness Japan.

Anytime Fitness expects to open its 2,000th club by the end of next year.



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from the board



group exercise

andy jackson •
business development
director • fitpro

Budget fitness on the 'pay as you go' model has been a predictable outcome of the economic downturn. The Gym Group, Pure Gym and nuyuu are among those who have thrown a (no-frills) cap into the ring recently, with no contract, cheap-as-chips pricing, typically gym-only memberships and a bare minimum of staff contact. So should we all be slashing our group exercise offering to stay competitive and keep costs down?

I say no. The smart money has been on giving customers more for their money rather than less, which is why there are yet lessons to be learned from old-fashioned customer service and from that stalwart of health club membership: group exercise.

An example of the impact a good group exercise offering, combined with excellent customer service, can have was witnessed at Stockport Leisure Trust's 16 clubs. In December 2007, they were £120,000 in the red – but 18 months after introducing some innovative programmes, they were 7,000 members up and £400,000 in the clear, while retention went from 27 to 74 per cent.

The lesson? Even when things get tough, investment in the right staff and the right programmes is always the right thing to do.

let's hear it then....

In partnership with the FIA, PPL – the music licensing company which represents performers and record companies – has launched a consultation exercise to determine a fair and equitable tariff for the use of recorded music within fitness facilities.

The PPL is responsible for collecting fees due in connection with the playing of sound recordings in public places. The FIA has secured a commitment from PPL to set an equitable rate, which reflects the actual use of music in the industry, rather than a tariff set by comparison with perceived peer industries.

The current tariff has remained unchanged for over 20 years, and securing this consultation is a major bonus for the industry.

The FIA Working Group, which also comprised senior executives from operating companies, has secured an undertaking from PPL that, in order to protect operators' interests, market-sensitive information will be collected and collated by the FIA and that only aggregated data will be submitted to PPL for assessment.

The consultation process has started and requires input from operators and instructors. Confidential questionnaires will be despatched shortly: these should be completed and returned to the FIA, or alternatively emailed to musiclicensing@fia.org.uk

"This consultation demonstrates our commitment to meeting our legal requirements and still paying a fair and equitable rate," says David Stalker, FIA executive director.

"The more responses we receive, the greater the likelihood of securing an equitable tariff, so I urge everyone who receives a questionnaire to please complete and return it."

PPL's tariff development executive, Mark Steel, says: "PPL is pleased to be working with the FIA to create a structure that's both fair to our members and easy to administer for all."



© ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

PPL collects fees due in connection with playing music in public places, including in-club audio systems

best practice from the club company

The decision by The Club Company to become FIA Code of Practice-compliant reinforces the growing popularity of the recently developed symbol of quality for the sector.

The Club Company, which has applied the Code throughout its national network of golf and luxury health and fitness clubs, is the latest in a growing line of operators to secure the Code of Practice endorsement.

The FIA Code of Practice seeks to raise standards throughout all FIA member facilities to ensure customers are provided with a safe environment in which to get active. Members interested in becoming compliant with the Code of Practice need only complete an application

form: a dedicated Code of Practice account manager will then arrange to visit the site, to provide additional guidance and support to enhance their submission.

Commenting for the FIA, executive director David Stalker says: "It's great to see a prestigious organisation like The Club Company seek to enhance its offering by successfully fulfilling quality assessment protocols."

Thierry Delsol, chief executive of The Club Company, adds: "The Code of Practice is very important in helping us maintain the quality standards of our facilities and operation. Customers will start to look for this as part of their decision-making process before joining a club."

2010 flame award winners

Winners of the FIA FLAME Awards were announced at the Ball of Fire, held in Cheltenham on 14 July before an audience of more than 700 people.

"Attracting a record number of entries, the 2010 FLAME Awards were hotly contested by organisations determined to win one of the most coveted awards in the industry, as well as to earn the endorsement of the industry's leading employer representative. In some cases, the difference between winner and runner-up was a fraction of a percentage point" says David Stalker, executive director of the FIA.

This year's FLAME Award winners were as follows:

CLUB OF THE YEAR (UNDER 1,000 MEMBERS)

WINNER: THE VALLEY HEALTH AND FITNESS, EIS SHEFFIELD

Judges' verdict: "The winner's superb community work, as well as its innovative member communications programme, placed it comfortably at the front of a very impressive pack."

CLUB OF THE YEAR (1,000-4,000 MEMBERS)

WINNER: SPIRIT HEALTH CLUB, HAYDOCK

Judges' verdict: "The Spirit Haydock club is a superbly run club, but it stood out because of its interaction and fundraising with the local community."

CLUB OF THE YEAR (OVER 4,000 MEMBERS)

WINNER: WARWICKSHIRE GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB, WARWICKSHIRE

Judges' verdict: "The most compelling reason to single this club out from its competitors was the phenomenal team ethic the organisation displayed in the pursuit of excellence."

CENTRE OF THE YEAR

WINNER: CONCORD SPORTS CENTRE, SHEFFIELD

Judges' verdict: "The transformational improvements over the past year, which were combined with a truly impressive dedication from everyone who works at the organisation, makes



The Warwickshire team with Fred Turok (left) and Roger Eldergill of Matrix

Concord Sports Centre a worthy role model for all its peers."

CORPORATE CLUB OF THE YEAR

WINNER: RBS NUFFIELD HEALTH AND FITNESS CLUB, SCOTLAND

Judges' verdict: "The most remarkable aspect of this corporate club is how the team has embraced every aspect of corporate wellness."

EDUCATIONAL CLUB OF THE YEAR

WINNER: ABBS CROSS HEALTH AND FITNESS, HORNCURCH

Judges' verdict: "If children are the future, then educating them and providing them with a safe place to exercise is key. This was evident throughout this club."

SPIRIT OF FLAME

WINNER: THE PEEPUL CENTRE

The only award exclusively awarded by

the FLAME assessors, this Leicester-based club was handpicked by the assessors in recognition of its unique pricing structure and community interaction.

FUTURE OF FLAME

WINNER: ANNIE REDELINGHUYTS

On a night when the collective strengths of clubs/centres were consistently praised, the industry voted for one individual who best represents our future: Redelinghuys, franchise owner of Curves Gravesend, was recognised for her commitment to consumers and the fitness industry.

HEALTH CLUB OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

WINNER: THE CLUB COMPANY

LEISURE CENTRE OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

WINNER: SPORTS & LEISURE MANAGEMENT

the scores on the doors

Steven Ward,
the FIA's director
of public affairs
and policy, reports
on developments
under the new
government



Since the election on 6 May 2010, we have seen some fairly significant developments. Here is my scorecard for where we currently stand.

Despite a mixed reaction to its introduction, I've yet to talk to anyone who is not disappointed by the removal of central funding for Free Swimming. Unfortunately, from the moment it appeared in the Labour manifesto, its political affiliation and contrast to the locally-driven approach preferred by the new government made it £40m waiting to be cut. The FIA is working very closely with the Amateur Swimming Association, and we expect this partnership to be formally strengthened in the near future, but we would be wrong to hide our disappointment at the decision.

change4life

Change4Life has been saved but not as we know it. We should not forget that the UK government was the biggest advertiser in the country last year. However Andrew Lansley, the Secretary of State for Health, has decided that, in a time of austerity, paid-for TV advertising is not something in which the government should be investing.

But the campaign pushes on with its partnership-based activity: there will continue to be extensive press and media partnerships, with ITV and the Mirror Group lined up in support of the sub-brand Walk4Life this autumn. Meanwhile, local partnerships are set to be incentivised with the creation of a Community Challenge Fund, providing central support for anyone able to leverage additional funding from other sources, including major commercial partners. Change4Life is down but not out.



PICTURE: WWW.ISTOCK.COM

Central funding has already been removed from the Free Swimming initiative

An interesting dynamic is emerging in the debate around the legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games. Hugh Robertson, the newly-appointed Sports Minister, has introduced a concept whereby the delivery of legacy would take place through "community-based facilities" as well as through sports national governing bodies. Our industry should be well positioned to respond to this challenge.

healthcare reform

Andrew Lansley is following through on his pledge to reform the way the Department of Health "does" public health. So far, we've been able to establish that there will be a new responsibility deal between government and business built on shared social responsibility and not state regulation, with a board on which the FIA chair will sit. There will be a new ringfenced public health budget, controlled locally by a board of partners, on which we would also like to see the FIA represented by local members. So much of this is open for shaping and development, which will

provide an interesting six months or so for my team at the FIA.

However, as exciting as the reforms to public health policy could be, it will be some time before the Secretary of State turns his full attention to this agenda. He has the immediate priority of reforming the way the NHS commissions services. Government is to devolve power and responsibility for this to the healthcare professionals closest to patients: GPs (and practice nurses) will work in consortia, and will start taking on financial duties by 2012/13. Consequently, both Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities will be abolished.

So the role of the GP is about to be transformed, and the work of the FIA's Chief Medical Officer to build relationships with the Royal College of General Practitioners and other key medical bodies seems like a prescient move. With professionals on the front line being trusted to improve outcomes, it will be crucial that they value and respect the contribution that our industry can make to the health of the nation.

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Charles Winstanley takes position

new chair for edinburgh

Charles Winstanley, chair of NHS Lothian, has been appointed as the new chair of Edinburgh Leisure.

Winstanley will take over the position immediately and has been appointed following the departure, in June this year, of the former chair, Robert Yates.

He is currently a non-executive director at the Ministry of Defence, a member of the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal, and was previously panel chair of the General Medical Council.

Commenting his appointment, Winstanley says: "The value of exercise in improving general health is well known, and there may well be growing opportunities for Edinburgh Leisure to work with the NHS."

in brief...

thurrock appoints farrant

Thurrock Council has announced that it is to appoint Graham Farrant as its new chief executive.

Farrant was unanimously selected by the members' appointment panel and his appointment was approved by a full council meeting on 30 June.

He took over from the interim chief executive Bob Coomber on 2 August.

Farrant joins the council from management consultancy pmogenesis, which went into administration in July. Prior to that role, he was chief executive officer at Leisure Connection from 2004 to 2008.

norman basson retires

Norman Basson, founder of Premier Training International, has announced his retirement after a long and successful career working within the health and fitness industry.

Basson founded the training provider in 1992 and confirmed his decision to retire after unveiling the company's new £550,000 flagship academy, which opened in Finsbury Park, London, earlier this month. Formerly a physical educationalist, sports coach and physiotherapist in the Army Physical Training Corps, Basson has also run his own physiotherapy practice, health and fitness club and training centre.

Premier Training International chief executive Debra Stuart says: "Norman's passion has always been about delivering on quality and making people feel special. Norman has built Premier into one of the UK's leading health and



Basson announces his retirement

fitness training providers and it is fitting that his legacy is realised in the new London Academy, which will not just deliver in sports science excellence but [excellence] for our people too."

moylan hired to train nuyuu pts

nuyuu fitness, the gym chain launched by Ben Silcox and entrepreneur James Caan, has appointed Ric Moylan to develop its personal training offer.

Moylan will oversee the whole of the personal training side of the business, working with existing employees to create an "unrivalled offer".

Moylan says: "My role is to create the same high quality of personal trainers at each and every nuyuu. The emphasis will be on customer service and giving our members what they need."

"I will manage, train and mentor all the company's personal trainers, as well as overseeing development of the products we deliver."

nuyuu MD Ben Silcox adds: "We want to offer the best PT product and service in the sector and ensure it is the same progressive and innovative offer in all our gyms as we continue to grow."

nuyuu was launched in October 2009 and currently has a chain of five gyms. It is looking to expand into double figures by the end of the year.

new board member for tag

Transforming a Generation (TAG) – the charity that specialises in training 18- to 24-year-old people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs), and then placing them in employment within the fitness sector – has appointed Murray Butcher to the charity's board of trustees.

Butcher, who is a former director of assessment and quality at City & Guilds, also sits on the board of the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People.

Butcher will be tasked with helping to develop the TAG programme.

grapes joins octane fitness

Former Norwich City and Cardiff City midfielder Steve Grapes has joined the sales team at Octane Fitness UK.

Grapes has been tasked with overseeing sales in Wales and the South West of England. He joins Octane from Pulse Fitness, where he held the post of regional manager.

Prior to Pulse, Grapes spent 11 years at Life Fitness, where he was regional sales manager for Wales and Southern England. Neil Campbell, Octane's GM who was also formerly at Life Fitness, says: "I am delighted to be working with Steve again."

PEOPLE PROFILE



brad wendes

Gymnast, acrobat and a practitioner of 'Le Parkour', Wendes is also a founding member of the British Parkour Coaching Association and the National Trainer for SHOKK Parkour

How many years have you worked in the health and fitness industry?

I've always been involved in fitness – my parents owned and ran an independent gym and my first real job, when I was 16 years old, was at Fitness First. I stayed at Fitness first until I was 19 and have since worked for Esporta and Virgin Active. I'm now 27 and run my own business.

Why parkour and acrobatics?

I attended Chelmer Valley High School and got in their Blue Falcons Gymnastic Display Team, so gymnastics dominated much of my teenage years. One summer, I was skateboarding at my local park and saw some lads were doing flips and handstands. Ever the show-off, I ran over, did some flips and somersaults and ran off. One of the lads came over to me and we got talking about Parkour. He seemed like a nice lad, so I offered to take him to the gymnastic centre I trained at. In return, he took me to London that week to meet some Free Runners. It was an amazing day, back in 2004, meeting people and finding out about this new thing. I had found my passion again.

How has your career progressed?

A Channel 4 documentary, called *Jump Britain*, aired in January 2005. By that time I'd made a bit of a name for myself in the UK Parkour community, so I was

in a great position to take advantage of the interest and exposure. Soon enough, I started performing professionally, with shows for Volvo, Renault and Red Bull. I travelled all over the UK to coach Parkour and Free Running and was involved in films, TV adverts, music videos and live performances around the world. I even reached the semi-final stage of Britain's Got Talent in 2007 with Team Kinetix.

What do your current roles entail?

I teach 12 weekly classes across three counties in term-time, and 10 classes a week – including workshops and tasters – in school holidays. We have many requests from schools and councils to deliver workshops and classes, and we can't train staff quick enough to meet the demand. I still perform as a gymnast and acrobat at events and functions, but teaching is the big thing right now. Every day is different.

How important is the emergence of new ways of keeping fit, such as parkour, in getting kids active?

The fitness sector should really place a bigger focus on providing activities for young people who aren't interested in traditional sports. Matters aren't helped, though, by the fact that community police officers and security guards stop kids jumping around – even when they're doing it safely – while parents are afraid of letting young people outside alone in some areas. The popularity of computer games doesn't help matters either.

What's the number one weakness of the fitness sector?

The pursuit of financial reward. Sadly, money comes before the health and happiness of clients and members.

What's your favourite life motto?

It'll be OK in the end. If it's not OK, it's not the end.



Parkour's popularity is on the rise

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AUGUST

28 august – 2 september | World Leisure Congress

Venue Kangwon National University, South Korea

Summary

The theme of this year's conference is exploring how leisure activities can help in finding our identity.

Web www.worldleisure2010.org

SEPTEMBER

6–8 | BASES Annual Conference

Venue University of Glasgow, UK

Summary

This year's BASES conference programme will feature presentations of relevance to anyone with an interest in sport and exercise sciences.

Web www.bases.org.uk/BASES-Annual-Conference

7 | LPF Late Summer Party 2010

Venue LG LLP offices, London

Summary

Invite-only event for members of the Leisure Property Forum.

Tel +44 (0)1462 471932

Web www.leisurepropertyforum.org

12–15 | SPATEC FALL North America

Venue Pasadena, California, US

Summary

This event is a three-day forum of one-to-one meetings.

Tel +1 603 529 0077



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Inner IDEA: Inspiring wellness



The Health+Fitness Business Expo & Conference will take place in Las Vegas

14 | Running 2010

Venue Kettering Conference Centre, Kettering, Northamptonshire

Summary

A UK conference for healthcare and sports professionals interested in finding out about running-related injuries and running performance.

Web www.professionalevents.co.uk

21 | LPF Seminar

Venue DKA Associates offices, London

Summary

This seminar will review the opportunities and prospects for co-operation between the healthcare sector and the health and fitness industry. It will particularly concentrate on government health policies, medical treatment and social attitudes.

Tel +44 (0)1462 471932

Web www.leisurepropertyforum.org

21–23 | Leisure Industry Week

Venue NEC, Birmingham, UK

Summary

LIW is the UK's largest leisure event, attracting thousands of leisure professionals and more than 350 industry suppliers. The show is now sub-divided into seven sectors: Health & Fitness, Pool & Spa, Attractions Expo, Licensed Business Show, Eat & Drink, Leisure Facilities and The Sport Show.

Tel +44 (0)20 7955 3969

Web www.liw.co.uk

22–23 | Health+Fitness Business Expo & Conference

Venue Sands Convention Center, Las Vegas, US

Summary

Manufacturers, suppliers, retailers, buyers, press and professionals come together to shape the future of the fitness industry at this trade expo and conference.

Tel +1 949 226 5712

Web www.healthandfitnessbiz.com

23–26 | Inner IDEA Conference

Venue Palm Springs, California, US

Summary

Inner IDEA's mission is to "inspire the world to wellness through body, mind and spirit". The Inner IDEA Conference offers demonstrations with a strong focus on education.

Tel +1 858 535 8979

Web www.inneridea.com

23–26 | SIBEC North America

Venue Braselton, Atlanta, US

Summary

SIBEC North America is a meeting and networking forum for leading club owners and operators in the US – CEOs and COOs of health, recreation, sports and fitness organisations – to meet one-to-one with key domestic and international suppliers.

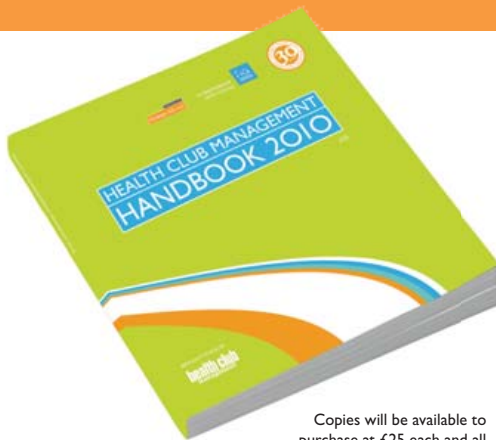
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competitive edge

30 OCTOBER 10

yogathon

Part of the Yoga Show, held at London's Olympia, Yogathon sees some of the world's leading yoga teachers take 300 people through a series of yoga poses over the course of two hours. The 12 teachers will each lead nine sun salutations – a special sequence of yoga moves. Entry is free and the minimum sponsorship is £108. Money goes towards four charities including London's Special Yoga Centre, which provides yoga therapy for special needs children, and the Prison Phoenix Trust, which encourages prisoners to develop their spiritual welfare.

Details: www.yogathonlondon.co.uk



Participants will be led through two hours of yoga poses



Funds go to The Stroke Association

SEPTEMBER 10

tree top challenge

Climb trees, slide across high wires, crawl through tunnels, cross rope bridges, walk the plank, zip to the ground and raise money for UK charity The Stroke Association. There are three events taking place in September: one in Cheshire and one in Suffolk, both on 5 September, and one in Bolton on 12 September. Registration costs £10 and minimum sponsorship is £85. Certain discounts are available for teams of four or more. Details: www.stroke.org.uk

The French Alps host the event



27-31 JANUARY 11

ms trust monster ski & snowboard challenge

Now in its fourth year, the MS Monster Ski challenge 2010 will take place in Tignes, part of the Espace Killy region in the French Alps. The charity – which provides information on, and funds research into, multiple sclerosis – is looking for confident skiers or snowboarders to take on red runs and ski the height of Mount Everest over three days. Registration costs £150 and sponsorship is set at £1,700. Details: www.msstrust.org.uk

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6-14 NOVEMBER 10

trek for tiny lives – the great wall of china

Spend five days trekking along the Great Wall of China, visiting over 27 watchtowers, passing historic battlement stations and taking in some of the most remote sections of the wall. Along the way there will also be the chance to help rebuild part of the wall. Registration for this event costs £249 and the minimum sponsorship you need to raise is £2,750. Money will go to Action Medical Research's Touching Tiny Lives Appeal and will fund research into premature births and complications that occur during birth.

Details: www.trekfortinylives.co.uk



Trek along the Great Wall of China

WHICH FLOOR FOR YOUR HEALTH & FITNESS CLUB?

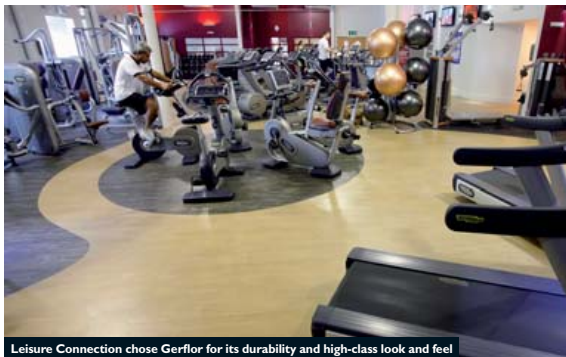
Careful consideration should be given to choosing the right floor surfaces for your health and fitness facility. There is a process to specifying a floor, and the finish can vastly affect brand perception among your customers

We have witnessed a dynamic change in the consumer profile of health and fitness members over the last 25 years or so. Now encompassing an ageing population, and with over 52 per cent of UK members now female, we have seen fitness machines and exercise classes evolve to satisfy the needs of these customers by offering 'softer' activities. But what other considerations can be given to our customers?

Where do your customers shop? What cars do they drive? What are their aspirations? Which other brands do they engage with? This information will give us the opportunity to ensure better brand communications and brand retention within our designs.

The Gym Group offers budget fitness with a minimalist design, yet a lot of thought is put in to the floor finishes: the floor has to be able to deal with traffic from a potential 8,000 members, and has to be cleaned quickly and easily. The company wanted a design element that was modern and contemporary. Not only that but, with many of the clubs located above other businesses or near residential developments, there was also an acoustic requirement.

John Trehan, CEO of The Gym Group, opted for a 2mm-thick commercial vinyl. He says: "The Taralay Premium range from Gerflor has the design options that reflect The Gym Group brand. Having an acoustic choice and a PUR surface treatment that reduces maintenance and ensures that

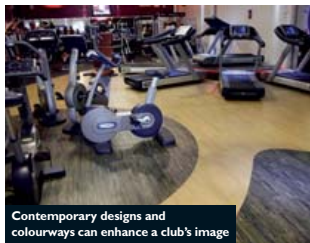


Leisure Connection chose Gerflor for its durability and high-class look and feel

'just installed' look, the floor choice ticked all the boxes for us and our members are delighted."

Meanwhile, Leisure Connection began updating its fitness offer in early 2009. Kevin Yates, head of commercial development, was committed to offering his customers a five-star public sector offering. The flooring was given a lot of thought: Yates didn't want carpet tiles and the budget would not extend to oak floors. 'Creation Luxury Vinyl Tile' (LVT) was the perfect option. "The floor offered the look and feel of expensive timber and assured Leisure Connection of the durability expected for our busy and vibrant clubs up and down the country," explains Yates. "Muir Oak and a darker wood were installed in a two-tone design to great effect, helping to communicate a high-end offer to our members."

Gerflor is positioned to deliver a complete flooring solution to the modern health and fitness facility, ensuring consistency and brand retention as well as fulfilling the creativity of designers and operators. Offering flooring ranges that both look



Contemporary designs and colourways can enhance a club's image

good and need minimum maintenance, and with a green agenda at the heart of our research and development, we can help deliver the success of the health and fitness operator.

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Gerflor
the flooring group



everyone's talking about . . .

member packages

Is less actually more when it comes to structuring memberships? Are prospects fazed by a complicated set of options, or does more choice mean they get what they ideally want?

Structuring membership packages is key to the success of a club. Getting it right can lead to high numbers of people joining, and remaining as members, because they feel they're getting good value for money. Getting it wrong can be a barrier to people signing up and can lead to member dissatisfaction.

Offering many and varied memberships was once popular, but now the trend is moving towards simplifying them – definitions of families and couples, and even peak and off-peak, can be hard to pin down, and many clubs say too much choice is confusing.

This drive towards simplification may have been influenced by the advent of budget clubs, which have an enviously simple business model of one flat rate for all. There's no barrier to joining – many don't even enforce a contract – and, since they're so affordable, members feel confident they will be able to keep up their memberships even if their circumstances change.

But is this satisfaction just down to affordability, or does it also have something to do with the transparency? Harlands director Kevin Scott says he's amazed at how frequently clubs hide their fees, not listing them on the website and not even wanting to give

them out over the phone. People like to do their own research, he says, and this cloak and dagger approach can only act as a barrier to joining.

Claiming that too much choice can be confusing is also patronising to prospects: surely it depends on whether they're given the chance to mull over the choices while conducting their research, or if they're bombarded with information at the end of a tour?

So, while the trend might be towards less choice, is this best for the customer or the club? How should facilities best juggle their need to remain profitable with the need to keep members happy? We ask the experts...

WHAT'S THE BEST MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

daniel lizio-katzen

spabooker • managing director



"We have the luxury of observing how thousands of businesses structure their membership programmes, and have noted some of the best practices related to increasing average revenue per member.

One model that works well and that's easy to administer is to have two membership levels: one at a standard price

and another that costs 'x' per cent more, but that offers an added benefit such as two personal training sessions a month, or two premium classes. From the members' point of view, these benefits become much less expensive than if purchased separately. From the club's standpoint, even if the benefits aren't always used, this approach increases the average 'per member' fee.

Another benefit clubs can give to members is to offer them a discount for referrals. This is very effective and I'm amazed more clubs don't utilise it. Equinox, a premium chain in the US, gives each member who refers a new customer one free month of membership. As people can enroll online there's no sales commission, and it provides the existing member with a notable benefit. For the club, the cost per acquisition is significantly lower than through traditional channels."

phil rumbelow

jubilee hall trust • chief executive



"When I first joined Jubilee Hall Trust 13 years ago, there were too many membership options, which stopped people joining because it was far too confusing. So we simplified it to annual or monthly rates, although there are still some discounts for corporates and we also offer a concessionary rate.

Introducing direct debit (DD) some 10 years ago was a big decision for the trust, since this type of membership is generally associated with private health clubs and our ethos is to be inclusive and accessible. We do offer a 'pay and play' option, or members can pay cash monthly – although this costs more – but DD allows for the most profitable operation.

We've also recently experimented with the budget gym model, in partnership with GLL, with the launch of the Colombo Centre in Southwark (see *HCM* May 10, p34). We cut the previous membership price by half and there's just one membership option, with no concessions. In four months, we've almost trebled our members. Our research also shows that a third of them are from the MOSAIC K group, the least affluent group, and the majority have not been gym members before, so it has really broadened the market."



Should clubs keep it simple, rather than offering a potentially confusing assortment of membership packages?

kevin scott

harlands • director



"I've noticed a trend towards creating fewer membership options to make it simple for the prospect. I'm not of the opinion that this is always the way forward: we live in a sophisticated society and people's needs vary, so membership packages must reflect this. I'm not suggesting we over-complicate our fees, but I recently bought Sky and

was able to select an option that suited my lifestyle. To be profitable, clubs need to offer solutions that suit the customer and that members feel offer them a good return on investment.

Membership prices also need to be based on reality, not wishful thinking, and should be suited to the demographic and location. Clubs need to know how many members the business can sustain based on square footage, number of stations and secondary usage opportunities. I think, in many cases, facilities make uneducated estimates of how many members they expect at a given price, then use gut feeling, or personal choice, to decide on a joining fee or a contract. Membership retention must ultimately be all about return on investment, so you have to make sure the price is right and, apart from the budget clubs, that there are options to suit everyone's needs."

john treharne

the gym group • ceo



"Our membership at The Gym [the budget health club chain] is 100 per cent online, and the key to the membership structure is its simplicity. People can join quickly, whether at the gym or elsewhere. As all our memberships are the same, members don't face any complications and aren't

bombarded with choice. Operators might understand complicated membership systems, but I believe the general public – 80 per cent of whom don't join health clubs – are confused by most health club systems.

The price is the reason our members stay: the affordability of our offering means they don't feel any weighty financial obligation each month, and they're therefore less likely to leave when their finances are stretched. With up to 40 per cent of our members being first-time gym users, this is absolutely vital.

We offer a pre-sale offer of £9.99 a month for each club in the run-up to opening; for those joining after this, a monthly fee of £14.99 applies. But that's the only variation within our membership structure. Dissatisfaction isn't an issue, as this is essentially a case of rewarding our founder members: if you commit early, you can save the most money."

ROBIN COPE

Kate Cracknell talks to the founder and MD of British Military Fitness (BMF), at the company's convivial head office in Fulham, he's just come in from a morning workout, leading by example and clearly a passionate believer in the power and value of physical activity. But then passion is evidently a determining force throughout his life, both on a business and a personal level. Although formerly a major in the British Army, and clearly still in possession of all the mental and physical strength that entails, Cope is also quite introspective, driven by a deep enthusiasm for what he does – whether that's promoting physical activity, developing his staff, building a company with an ethos of which he be proud, or travelling through South America in his few moments of spare time.



When I meet Robin Cope, founder and MD of British Military Fitness (BMF), at the company's convivial head office in Fulham, he's just come in from a morning workout, leading by example and clearly a passionate believer in the power and value of physical activity. But then passion is evidently a determining force throughout his life, both on a business and a personal level. Although formerly a major in the British Army, and clearly still in possession of all the mental and physical strength that entails, Cope is also quite introspective, driven by a deep enthusiasm for what he does – whether that's promoting physical activity, developing his staff, building a company with an ethos of which he be proud, or travelling through South America in his few moments of spare time.

the birth of bmf

After leaving the army in 1992, Cope spent some time working in security and humanitarian projects in Zaire and the former Yugoslavia. This was followed by a stint as a military advisor, putting actors through their paces on films such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *Gladiator*. And then, in late 1998, he came up with the idea for BMF.

"I'm really unco-ordinated and I used to get annoyed with the fact that classes at gyms always started off with 15 minutes of aerobics," says Cope. "I just couldn't do it – in the end I'd just be running up and down on the spot – and I get so annoyed when I can't do something well.

"Not only that, but there was nothing fun about that circuit training class – not one thing that I or anyone else seemed to enjoy about it. And they didn't motivate you, didn't push you – in fact,

I think they were slightly wary about making you work too hard.

"And I suddenly had an idea of running outdoor fitness classes. I had a vision that we would have thousands of people doing it at some point – that it would work because people need motivation and fun. The whole idea was to get people outside, get them exercising, get them enjoying it.

"My mum had just died and left me a bit of money, so I approached Harry Sowerby – a mate of mine who's a PTI in the army – and we set up the business from my spare room in Bermondsey. The idea came to me in October 1998 and we ran our first class in April 1999 – I'd placed an advert in the *Evening Standard*, but still only three people turned up! But in June of that year, we

Instructors must strike a balance between making members work hard and ensuring they have fun



After a warm-up, a typical session includes intervals of running, paced according to the different fitness levels...



... as well as exercises around the park, mostly using bodyweight only, including exercises with a partner

got an article in the *Evening Standard* and that set the pace. By the winter we had 300 or 400 members across two London parks, Hyde Park and Battersea, and it gained momentum over time."

recipe for success

BMF now has more than 100 venues across the UK, running about 1,500 groups a week for around 20,000 members. It also has three locations in South Africa, with an eye on expansion into markets such as Australia, Scandinavia, France and Germany. "There has to be a fitness culture in the market of course, but you also have to look at the country's relationship with its military. It has to be seen positively," says Cope.

A free trial session is available to all new prospects; 75 per cent go on to sign up for membership. Members generally pay by monthly direct debit (standard membership ranges from £20–£46, depending on the location), although blocks of sessions are also



available. "But from the word go, we gave concessionary rates to public workers – nurses, firemen, policemen, teachers and so on," adds Cope. There's also no contract – members are asked to do a minimum of three months to start off with, but after that they can stop and start at their convenience. "Of course everyone would love to have 12 months-worth of someone's money," says Cope. "But

actually I don't want their money if they're not coming. Simple as that."

So what is it that draws people to BMF? "People come in the first place for fitness, but once they get into it a whole new set of reasons emerges: the outdoor environment, the instructors and the social aspect," explains Cope.

"We put a lot of effort into making things as good as we possibly can, every single session. People have to

Members are split into ability groups: blue for beginners, red for intermediate, green for advanced

► feel they've achieved something, so the instructor must strike a balance between making it fun – fun is a large part of what we do – and ensuring people have been made to work.

"Motivation is also key. We only have about 15 people in each class, so they get almost one-on-one attention. If I had a gym, I wouldn't allow people to come unless they did classes – with the right instructors, that gives you all the motivation you need. I don't think you even have to pay for PT. But without that sort of motivation, you get bored.

"There's also no judgement at BMF. Everyone's given a bib with a number on it, and during the class you're referred to by that number. It avoids the cliqueness you get in some fitness environments, with all the fabulous people who know the instructor and everyone else left out on the sidelines. But after the class it's back to names, with a lot of socialising among both members and staff.

"I think people imagine we're some sort of military boot camp where instructors will scream at them and humiliate them, but it's not like that. We cater for all abilities – we have three 72-year-old ladies who do BMF in Aberdeen, for example. You don't have to be fit to do our sessions. You come to us to get fit, so you can get more from your life.

"We already split people into ability groups, but we may also bring on new products in the future – walking-based

sessions, for example – to encourage even more people to give it a go.

"I wish people would understand the benefits of how they'll feel. Once they start with us, their dress size becomes irrelevant because they suddenly realise how much better they're feeling.

"Even though we have the winter to contend with, our average is about 13.5 months of active membership, coming 2.1 times a week."

competition or partnership?

Cope continues: "The big difference between us and a gym is that the gym is a facility provider, whereas we're a fitness company: you come to us to get fit; if you go to a gym, you may not.

"There are of course things a gym offers that we don't, and vice versa. Gyms have comfortable facilities, which might appeal to new exercisers; with us, you're sometimes going to get wet, cold and muddy. And of course they're open all the time, which we're

not. But if you look at Change4Life for example, the website talks about going swimming, cycling or running – all in a gym near you. I'd have to disagree with that. Go run in a park, go cycle in Richmond, go swimming in a lake.

"We're not out to poach members from gyms, though, because I believe we can run in tandem – most people who come to us have been a gym member at some point, and a number still have both gym and BMF memberships.

"There might even be the potential for a joint membership package in the future: someone could pay £x to become a member of both BMF and a health club at the same time. I don't know if any of the chains would be willing to do something like that, but I think it would be a great way forward.

"Ultimately, the industry needs to find ways to get more people involved, because at the moment we're in trouble, and that will only get worse as obesity continues to grow. I think the



Groups tend to be no more than 15 people, ensuring a personalised level of attention



government might actually have to start forcing people to join a gym or take exercise. Either that or we just have to accept that people must pay more – that healthcare won't be free and that, if your lifestyle is such that you're becoming a drain on the NHS, you should then pay more for it. If you want to sit and eat hamburgers all day long, fine. But if at the age of 35 you need a heart bypass, you'll have to pay more towards it. Don't expect it to be free. Realistically, though, which government is going to turn round and say that to people?"

staff focus

Staff motivation is a key focus for Cope. "I split my time broadly across three main areas. One third of my time is spent looking at ways of making the business more efficient, to ensure its continued success and sustainability. Another third is spent looking at maintaining the quality of what we're putting out there for our members. And the final third is dedicated to thinking of ways to incentivise our staff and improve their lot.

"I want everyone who works here to really, really enjoy it, to feel a big sense of loyalty. I don't believe in running a company by fear. I believe in bringing people along with you, making sure they're enjoying themselves along the way.

"We also have share incentive schemes, pensions and career progression routes. And we pay a minimum of about £30 an hour by the time you include loyalty bonuses, training bonuses and so on – the more classes instructors run, and the more training courses they do, the better paid they are. There are often back-to-back classes at popular locations too – 6pm, 7pm, 8pm – so they can earn around £100 in an evening. We give them as much work as we can.

"To me it's critical that we put as much effort as we can into training,

monitoring, motivating and incentivising our 600 instructors, having an infrastructure in place to ensure that every time they go out, it's as good as it possibly can be. We employ an external company to mystery shop our sessions, we do a huge amount of staff training, and we're constantly devising new programmes. Instructors aren't given a choreographed class though – they have to use their own initiative, as well as the training and the tools we give them."

So, aside from all being ex-army, what are the characteristics of a BMF instructor? "The typical BMF instructor has to look fit and be fit, he has to be charismatic, he has to be able to communicate. He has to build up a relationship very quickly with a group of people, being attentive to their needs but also with leadership skills to stamp his authority on that group. But most importantly he has to make you laugh. I say 'he' – probably about 90–95 per cent of our instructors are men, which is a similar ratio to the army.

"People like the professionalism and reliability of our instructors: even in the winter, they get to every session. There were examples last winter of instructors who backpacked to the meeting point because they couldn't get there by road, so they were there for the three people who turned up for the class. And maybe they built a snowman and threw snowballs, but they were there. Every single class. I think that says a lot about our guys.

"We move instructors around though, so it's not the same person every time. We never want it to be about them. It's utterly about the people who are doing the class."

community links

There's also a strong altruistic element to BMF, which is perhaps one of the organisation's lesser-known qualities.

"We do a lot of community projects wherever we can: classes for drug addicts, overweight kids, disadvantaged kids, homeless people," explains Cope. "I'm a recovering alcoholic – I haven't had a drink for 16 years – and it's great to help other people change their lives.

"We've had a drug programme running in Hyde Park for two years, for example, and have seen numerous people not only off drugs but in houses and jobs, just by taking a few one-hour fitness classes. And our instructors love doing it. We can't expect them to do it for free though, so we've put aside a six-figure sum this year to fund these projects.

"And then there are the parks, which we feel privileged to be able to use. We pay fees to do so of course, but we also re-invest in them – we put £1m back into them every year, through tree-planting schemes and so on. We'd also like to start building outdoor fitness trails in the future.

"We want our members to know it's a good thing they're part of too. We get them involved in our projects – in Clapham Common recently, we asked members to bring along sports kit they didn't use any more for a homeless charity, and people can also add to our own investment in tree planting by donating online. We're also thinking of starting a charity scheme for beginners to encourage attendance: for your first 10 sessions we'll donate £10 to a charity of your choice. Or perhaps it could be a tree-planting initiative, where we plant trees in the park on their behalf.

"Ultimately BMF is a profit-making company – turnover this year will be around £10m – but we could make more of a profit than we do. Much more. But we like the way we work."



kate cracknell
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ON THE EDGE

Rebecca Douglas reviews The Edge, the new fitness facility at the University of Leeds

Leeds is a lively city, rich in culture and heritage. More than 750,000 people live within the city boundaries and over 100,000 people venture into the centre to work and play every day. Many thousands more tourists and visitors come to shop, eat out or enjoy the range of attractions Leeds has on offer, and thousands more come to study at the University of Leeds.

Established in 1904, the University of Leeds has grown to become an internationally respected higher education institution steeped in tradition and history. It welcomes more than 32,000 students from over 130 different countries, leading to a rich cultural diversity and interesting environment in which to live and study. Centred on a campus just a stone's throw away from the vibrant and cosmopolitan city, the university offers a range of opportunities to broaden the experience of students, staff and alumni alike.

MEETING EXPECTATIONS

Sport has always been high on the agenda for students, with the previous facility housing two sports halls, a dance studio, a table tennis room and a small strength and conditioning room. However the facilities, though adequate, didn't measure up against the competition in the broader marketplace.

Says Stewart Ross, director of sport at the University of Leeds: "The need for a swimming pool is something that came up time and time again in our student surveys, going as far back as the early 1980s. Four years ago, this aspiration became a reality when the university approved plans to deliver a brand new swimming pool and fitness complex.

"The old centre didn't reflect the direction the university was heading in. We were able to secure £12.2m to transform our offer and create a world-class training centre for those who had Olympic dreams, as well as those who just wanted to get in shape."

The resulting facility, named The Edge, was officially opened on 4 May 2010 to a fanfare and a flurry of

students, staff, alumni and members of the public all vying to sign up; interest in the new centre had been built up via social media, competitions and open days. As part of a pre-sale push, students were also offered a three-month membership for £45, while direct debit customers could save £30 for signing up early.

PROJECT EDGE

Sign-off on the design stage took approximately 12 months, with another 14 months for the build. Sue Pimblett, sales and marketing manager for sport and physical activity at the University of Leeds, takes up the story: "That 14 months was counting from the day the contractors arrived on-site to the day they left – quite an achievement when you consider the size of the build.

"As the building came together piece by piece, there was much speculation and interest around it – especially surrounding the name. In a bid to build momentum and engage our audience more fully, we launched a competition across the campus to come up with a name. After hundreds of suggestions, the senior team chose The Edge, which was my favourite too."

The Edge is now one of the largest sports centres at any UK university. Featuring a 25m, eight-lane pool and a 200-station gym, it's the centrepiece of the university's fantastic new look, which also includes the £27.1m Storm Jameson Court, the new campus accommodation for conference delegates.

A light, airy atrium is a key element of the design at The Edge. From this atrium, users can view all areas of activity, including dance classes, squash, climbing and the pool. It also offers a Starbucks concession for anyone wanting to relax with a cuppa after their workout.

BIGGER, BETTER, EDGIER

The new 900sq m (9,670sq ft) fitness suite incorporates 200 stations of Technogym equipment, including CV and resistance machines, a warm-up/stretch area including Technogym's stretching equipment range FLEXability, a dedicated induction zone, and specialist pieces of functional equipment such as Radiant and Kinesis One, both from Technogym, and Power Plate.

The gym has been designed to offer something for everyone, at all levels, from those who are interested



simply in improving their health and wellbeing through to the more serious performance athlete. Pimblett adds: "We've received a great deal of interest from Olympic training teams ahead of the 2012 Games – including the Chinese, Turkish, Serbian and Botswana teams. We also have world triathlon champion and Olympic hopeful – and University of Leeds graduate – Alistair Brownlee training here.

"We have more than 100 CV machines, ranging from old favourites to new and exciting machines such as Technogym's Vario and CardioWave. The equipment incorporates the Wellness System, with the key controlling access to the fitness suite, as well as acting as a workout card. We've had a great deal of positive feedback regarding the personal workout data that can be downloaded from the key – number of workouts completed, workout duration, calories accumulated and how much weight you've lifted."

Each CV machine incorporates Active Wellness TV on 19" monitors, with the equipment also compatible with iPods and MP3 players. Meanwhile Technogym's digital platform, Visio, provides not only entertainment but also communication and guidance for users, taking them through the workout and monitoring the results.

(from left to right) The name 'The Edge' was chosen via a competition; Leeds University; and the new 25m, eight-lane swimming pool

The resistance training section of the gym incorporates Selection Line machines, Pure Strength plate-loaded stations and free weights. With a choice of more than 50 exercise stations, whatever the goal, there's something to suit all needs and abilities.

The Edge also has three group exercise studios, delivering 125 classes a week including group cycling, Body Pump and Body Attack. Other facilities include a 9m-high climbing wall – incorporating chimneys, roofs, slabs and a high-level abseil platform – with more than 20 climbing routes at a variety of grades. In addition, there's a sauna/steam area and changing rooms with under-floor heating.

And, of course, there's the new pool. Pimblett continues: "We've invested a great deal to ensure our pool is world-class. It has a partially moveable floor to create depths of up to 2m, providing a facility for casual swimmers, aqua aerobics and water-based sports such as water polo, canoe polo and sub-aqua. It also has a



The fitness suite offers more than 200 pieces of Technogym kit



- ▶ state-of-the-art UV system that means we can use just half the normal amount of chemicals to create a fantastic pool environment.

"We've programmed more than 100 hours of lane swimming each week, which will support the performance of our clubs but also provide plenty of pool time for our members."

The existing sports centre also has benefited from a complete refurbishment and upgrade to reflect the new look at The Edge, and to ensure a seamless journey from the old building to the new – and vice versa. This refurb was not part of the £12.2m project, but instead relied on an investment from across the campus to ensure the entire facility was updated and renovated. The existing sports centre is now fully integrated as part of The Edge and houses the sports halls and other rooms that can be hired out.

BROAD REACH

Says Pimblett: "The Edge was built on time and on budget. Our stakeholders have fed back only positive

The Edge opened on 4 May, with significant levels of interest already generated via social networking sites, competitions and open days

comments and the response from the local community has been amazing. We've built strong connections with the Leeds General Infirmary (LGI), for example, and are now working to develop exclusive membership deals for the staff there, which we believe will be a win-win situation."

From 'pay as you go' to monthly and annual memberships, The Edge has a range of payment options. Staff memberships cost from £25 a month, students from £17.50, alumni from £30 and the public from £35. 'Pay as you go' ranges from £2.75 for an off-peak swim to £7.50 for general public admittance.

But it's not just students, university teaching staff and members of the public who can take advantage of The Edge. The university has a substantial conferencing and events base and The Edge is a feather in its cap. "We've had a great deal of interest from people booking conferences and The Edge is certainly an important factor in influencing their decisions," says Richard Handscombe, head of sales and marketing for the university's conferencing and events facilities.

The team is now confident about what the future holds for The Edge, with plans to expand both public access and corporate reach.

In the meantime, its appeal is already established among students and general public alike. As Rachel Husband, alumni of the University of Leeds, says: "As a keen swimmer and keep fit enthusiast, I didn't think the previous facilities reflected the university's reputation. However, I've recently had a tour of The Edge and I'm stunned – the quality surpasses anything else in the area."



The new changing facilities at The Edge offer under-floor heating



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Growing interest Cyclists are spending more on their bikes and accessories

pedal POWER

Karen Maxwell asks a top cycling coach about the best training methods, both on and off the bike, to help riders get the most out of their sport

Cycling – whether for sport, recreation or a convenient form of transport – has certainly grown in popularity in the UK over the past decade. TeamGB's medal success at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, and British Cycling's domination of the UCI World Track Championships and the Tour de France cycling events,

have raised the sport's national profile. Meanwhile the government's Bike 2 Work tax incentive, and its recently launched 'Ride it Away' nought per cent interest finance scheme on bike sales, is also promoting extended use.

According to Mark Walmsley at ActSmart – which partners the Association of Cycle Traders – after the mountain bike boom in the 1980s, the subsequent decline in sales is gradually being filled by a rising number of sincere cyclists who cycle for health and fitness, green concerns or commuting reasons. And the biggest positive, he says, is that those who do cycle are doing it more often. "Once turned on to the activity, cyclists are more committed. Hence we're seeing an upgrade in the level or price of bicycles, as well as the parts and

accessories that go with serious cycling," he says. "For example, the 'Ride It Away' scheme is growing at more than 20 per cent year-on-year, with an average sale of £1,060 and a market that's now worth over £20m a year."

go getters get cycling

Gareth Cole, head of education at The Third Space health and fitness club in London's Piccadilly, has also noticed a huge surge of interest in the sport, with members looking to go that extra mile in fitness programmes that are specifically targeted towards cycling goals.

"Ten years ago, some of our competitive corporate clients would talk about which mountain they'd climbed. Nowadays, many more of them are talking about beating their times in ▶



► triathlon events – events in which cycling plays a very important part,” he explains.

According to Cole, the club’s large customer base includes 200-plus members working specifically towards peak performance events, such as triathletes, endurance athletes and Olympians. Strength and conditioning exercises are an important part of their training programmes, he says.

Where needs demand, gym members are encouraged to train in the club’s hypoxic chamber, which offers the equivalent training conditions to those experienced at an altitude of 8,000ft. “If the body is forced to work when starved of oxygen, it creates massive fitness rewards – a boost to the CV system when back at sea level,” Cole explains (see also *HCM* July 08, p36).

“To complement this chamber, we also use Turbo Trainers [metal frames to which bikes can be clamped, allowing you to pedal without moving] to measure speed, distance and time – data we need to start gearing members’ personal fitness programmes towards endurance events.”

peak performance

When Eric Dunmore, CEO of The Third Space, decided to take part in the 540km London to Paris bike race earlier this year, he approached Cole 18 months before the event to help him achieve his fitness goal.

Cole explains that personal trainers need to treat each client as an individual when working towards a fixed date

event, by working out a needs analysis of the event and what has to be achieved in order to plan ahead. “In other words,” he says, “you end up working up to the event by working backwards, so you can tick all the boxes required along the way.”

Once the event needs have been assessed, Cole says the focus then turns toward the athlete. “I put Eric through some VO2Max testing and analysed his posture for muscular imbalances – both on and off the bike. I also checked his cycling style, from an economical point of view, so I could build a picture of him and what he needed to achieve by racing day.

“The London to Paris bike race requires the body to cycle over a long period of time, as well as having to wake up and do the same thing again the next day, so it was important to build a really big aerobic base to enable Eric’s heart and lungs to produce energy efficiently. This was achieved by gradually increasing his mileage on the bike while perfecting his technique.”

Cole adds that other key areas of preparation were a carefully worked out nutrition plan, for on and off the bike, and setting good sleep patterns so Dunmore could get the most from his training.

As the race date approached, Cole then mimicked what Dunmore would be expecting his body to do during the race itself. “He would be expecting to cycle about 160km a day, so we made sure he could manage a 160km cycle on any given day and then started to double up the days,” he explains.

strength and conditioning

Within the gym environment, Cole’s objective was to develop Dunmore into an endurance athlete, requiring slow twitch fibre strength and endurance-based exercises.

There were also a lot of pelvic spine strengthening and stabilisation exercises, as well as strengthening the gluteus maximus, quadriceps and hamstrings – the large muscle groups that would be taking the strain on the bike. However, Cole says that by far the best way to increase Dunmore’s riding ability was to get him on the bike. “There’s no secret really – you just have to put the hours in and be on the seat for long periods of time,” he adds.

“Eric’s target was to train between nine and 12 hours a week, which equates to about three to four sessions in the gym and a long ride on the weekend. I was also able to keep in touch with his speed, distance, time and heart rate via downloads from his Garmin GPS tracker device and Suunto watch-based heart rate monitor, which allowed me to track his progress while he was one the road,” Cole explains.

As part of his training regime within the gym, Dunmore was able to attach his own bike to the spinning flywheel on the Turbo Trainer, which allowed Cole to coach him while he was in the saddle. “We try to take into account outside elements such as the wind in the face, traffic issues and stopping and starting, but the Turbo Trainer is a good training tool to transfer immediately onto the road,” Cole says.



Peak performance Gareth Cole (above), head of education at The Third Space in London, trains members in the club's hypoxic chamber (left)

The Third Space is also looking to acquire some Wattbikes in the near future. Cole explains that these bikes can measure the amount of pressure applied on the pedals, as well as any muscular imbalances during the ride. Recommended and partly developed by British Cycling – the governing body for cycling – every pedal turn is analysed across 39 parameters, 100 times a second, so that the rider's power output can be monitored accurately for a greater training effect.

preparing body and mind

Cole is keen to stress the importance of recovery and re-conditioning sessions as an integral part of an athlete's training programme. In Dunmore's case, these were used to supplement the exercise sessions to help improve his time when on the bike. "The sessions helped increase Eric's range of movement and mobility both on and off the bike, helping to ease the glutes, quads and lower back to get the maximum potential out of his body," Cole says.

Regarding nutrition, Cole says there are equations that must be done regarding the body weight of the athlete. "You need to work out the amount of glycogen uptake the individual athlete needs, as well as carbohydrates, fluids and electrolytes. You also need to work out what that particular person can easily consume. Some athletes can have a huge meal before a race, while others need to allow four hours for digestion," he says.

"On race day, ideally the rider should mimic the training diet, rather than grab something from the roadside that they haven't tried before, which might result in an upset stomach.

"Eric and I worked out what he could and couldn't digest during his training. Before the race, he took in a large amount of glycogen and made sure he was properly hydrated. During the race, the varying amounts of water, salt and electrolytes he took in depended on the terrain and the intensity of the ride.

"The standard mantra during a race is: eat when you're not hungry and drink when you're not thirsty, so the body doesn't lack the fuel to maintain form and technical ability. In reality, no athlete can replenish completely, because it burns off more calories than it consumes, but you can try to delay the process," Cole says.

Probably the only part of Dunmore's preparation Cole didn't get involved in was mental attitude, although he places a huge importance on sports psychology. "When the athlete can't train any more and is as fit and as competent as the rider next to them, then mental strength is a huge advantage. I always advise clients to see a sports psychologist to help them prepare their own mantras and visualisations, which help them recognise that they're more than ready for the challenge."



karen maxwell
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bike launches at LIW

precor unveils 815s upright and recumbent bikes

The recumbent bike will feature a new seat specifically contoured to offer maximum comfort and a unique ventilation design. The upright bike focuses on flexibility and performance, with three handlebar positions, all of which offer a clear view of the console. Both bikes ensure the correct cycling posture by positioning the knee over the pedal spindle to offer a more realistic cycling experience.

fitness-kit keyword: precor

LIW STAND:

HF8



LIW STAND:

HF5

trixter introduces the xbi and the trixter xdream mark 3

Exclusively partnering with Sony, Trixter will showcase the new XBi bike, which is compatible with any PlayStation game. The new Xdream mark 3, meanwhile, includes a Ghost Racing mode, which allows users to race against themselves. Other enhancements include a more responsive steering system and competitor collisions when in multiplayer mode.

fitness-kit keyword: trixter



LIW STAND:

HF6

zigzag launches the expresso s3y upright youth bike

This bike, which allows children to pedal through a range of virtual worlds, is smaller than others in the ZigZag range and is power-assisted to make the range of virtual courses easier to negotiate. It's been ergonomically designed for children from nine to 15 years of age and has internet connectivity to enable riders to tap into an online community and compete in real time with their friends.

fitness-kit keyword: zigzag

pulse celebrates 30 years with a new cardio range

The new range will include two new bikes, the Upright Cycle and Recumbent Cycle. Features include the latest audiovisual technology, 'Smart Centre' software and IFI Stage 2 accreditation. Pulse also claims the new line to be one of the most advanced and environmentally responsible CV ranges on the market.

fitness-kit keyword: pulse

LIW STAND:

EZ10



LIW STAND:

FF7

matrix introduces the s-series ls indoor cycle

This new model includes a variety of high performance features, such as road-inspired adjustable LX7 handlebars and an onboard computer providing heart rate, cadence, distance, time and calories, as well as a premium aluminium adjustment system that allows riders to replicate their road bike posture.

fitness-kit keyword: matrix



LIW STAND:

H165

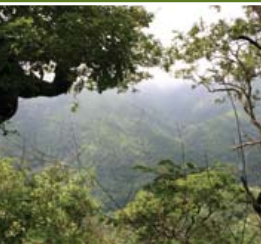
the new monark 928e

This cycle ergometer offers users a direct computer connection to store and measure heart rate and physiological response data, helping sports coaches and PTs to control the exact work load of the user.

fitness-kit keyword: idass

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mixing it up

Can clubs broaden their appeal by combining pilates with other fitness disciplines? Neena Dhillon considers the arguments

Pilates is one of the great growth stories of the UK fitness industry in recent years. But how can clubs continue to attract newcomers while retaining the loyalty of existing enthusiasts at the same time?

As with many holistic fitness methods, it's worth turning to the US to identify how the practice is diversifying. IDEA Health & Fitness Association's mind-body exercise spokesperson Shirley Archer comments: "Pilates participation has increased almost 500 per cent in

America over the past 10 years, but this is slowing as the novelty wears off. While clubs have flourished during the recent pilates boom, they must evolve to maintain interest."

One of the areas they're moving into is the fusion of pilates with other fitness disciplines: "Fusion programmes are fuelling interest in pilates and bringing in a wider range of participants," says Archer.

defining fusion

So what does 'fusion pilates' encompass, and how does it work? While it isn't

unusual to see small gym props, such as Swiss balls, being incorporated into mat-based classes, fusion goes one step further, embracing other fitness equipment or principles that are not typically part of a pilates workout.

In San Diego, CoreAlign master instructor Portia Page, who also serves on the Balanced Body University Faculty, runs fusion classes in several locations, including at the 24Hour Fitness chain. She has adopted a circuit-type approach, mixing cardiovascular work on a treadmill or bike with exercises on a mat or reformer, or merging mat-based pilates with combinations of gym kit including a Bosu, foam roller, hand weights and Togu ball.

Typically with mat fusion, participants move in a circuit every two minutes from one station to another, all of which are equipped differently, to complete a variety of pilates exercises.

"Fusion gives members the chance to try other types of workout and to diversify the conditioning they can achieve in a limited time," says Page. "I've seen this format attract a more diverse community than traditional pilates, especially men who are enticed by the idea of a treadmill or weights component."

New York-based club Crunch features an array of fusion classes, including: a mat-based session that incorporates the Bosu for added resistance; 'Burn & Firm', which combines pilates-inspired standing moves with hand weights and body bars to target the large muscle groups; and 'Shred Pilates', comprising 20 minutes of group cycling followed by a move to the pilates or group fitness studio for 40 minutes on a reformer or mat.

Explaining why the chain introduced fusion, national pilates director Michele Bastos says: "Our members can now cover all aspects of their workout routine in one location at Crunch, unlike a pilates studio. They've come to realise that our pilates instructors are as knowledgeable as those in a specialist pilates studio and they appreciate that mat-based classes are free with their membership."

Indeed, as more Crunch members have become exposed to the multiple



At Crunch, fusion sessions help maintain interest in 'pure' reformer classes

"Fusion gives members the chance to diversify their conditioning in a limited time"

“Pilates participation has increased almost 500 per cent in America over the past 10 years”



benefits of pilates, through both fusion and traditional classes, demand has increased by 60 per cent over the past five years, according to Bastos. Club retention has also improved and there's strong loyalty to the pilates reformer programme, which generates extra revenue since an additional fee is charged per session.

At Fusion Pilates Studio in Asheville, North Carolina, director Jennifer Gianni incorporates elements of yoga, dance, aerobics and weight training into her private pilates sessions and mat classes. This can involve, as an example, the inclusion of resistance bands, tubing, foam rollers, stability balls and the balance board in one class, thereby drawing on influences from physical therapy, traditional gym and functional fitness environments.

"I was trained in classical pilates, but I felt my clients needed different ways of moving and staying engaged," says Gianni. "For instance, some have Parkinson's disease, so their programmes need changing each session to challenge their neuromuscular

Shirley Archer of IDEA Health & Fitness Association says pilates offerings must evolve to maintain interest

connections. While I always come back to the foundation principles, I see no reason to confine myself or my clients to classical restraints."

Qualified as a group cycling and pilates instructor, Philadelphia-based David Curry believes that clubs could reap rewards by implementing a carefully devised fusion programme. He's a particular advocate of merging group cycling and pilates, which he says share clear synergies when it comes to mind/body connection, core stability, breathing and alignment. "By bringing these disciplines together in one 45-minute session, participants enjoy a hardcore cardio workout, offset by strengthening and lengthening to counteract the adverse effects of cycling," he explains. "While the pilates portion can be designed for mat or reformer depending on the club's existing facilities, it's essential that the right exercises are selected to

complement the ride." Curry adds that fusion can help to differentiate a club, as well as enhancing retention and acting as a strong marketing tool.

coming to the uk

It's not only US-based facilities that have responded to the trend. At mbodies Studio in Witney, Oxfordshire, manager and STOTT PILATES instructor Kelly Vanderboom has launched fusion classes of late, including one that incorporates kettlebells for enhanced conditioning and another combining body weight exercises with pilates and fitness equipment, ranging from a Spring Wall to a GoFit Gravity Bar. She says the classes have a consistent attendance record, positive retention and referral, and generate a good profit.

"Some clients appreciate the core pilates benefits but also desire the 'burn' of a workout," she explains. "This is a time-effective option for those who want to experience cardio, strengthening and toning in one class." The studio has seen an increase in male participants, athletes and sports

The Heartcore method fuses aspects of classical pilates with circuit training

► enthusiasts, with fusion helping to eliminate the stereotypical view of pilates as a rehabilitation method for a mature population. Vanderboom believes fusion has the power to keep pilates enthusiasts hooked by challenging beginners, providing intermediates with a change, and allowing the advanced to augment their skills.

In London, meanwhile, Heartcore managing director Jess Schuring has developed a workout that fuses aspects of classical pilates such as posture, breathing and core alignment with the intensity of circuit training on custom-designed reformers. Imported from the US, they have a stronger resistance than traditional pilates reformers and are wider and longer, making them equally comfortable for men and women. 'Spincore' classes, integrating time on the bike with a session on the reformer, are also available, and plans are in place to introduce 'Kettlecore' this month, fusing pilates with kettlebells.

Having established her first studio in Kensington three years ago, Schuring has responded to demand by opening another three locations, all of which incorporate high-end design with a limited number of up to six machines. "Our approach caters to a diverse demographic and results in long-term commitment because it's fun and energetic," says Schuring. "I fully support classical pilates exponents, though, and am careful to point out that Heartcore is a fitness programme that simply draws on pilates principles."

considerations

Contemplating the potential benefits of fusion classes for clubs, Nora St John, director of education at Balanced Body, states: "For members it's a good way to be introduced to pilates principles. As they get hooked on this portion of the class, many tend to gravitate towards more specific pilates-based classes."

But for Leigh Robinson, group managing director of Body Control Pilates UK, the advantages of fusing disciplines are not so clear. "While we believe pilates itself should be adapted for people of all fitness levels, body types and age, we don't think it should be compromised by combining it with other, often unrelated, regimes. We can see the benefits of adding cardio

work to an exercise routine, but it should be kept separate," he says.

Robinson understands that pilates is relevant to other disciplines, but argues that its inherent versatility means that a qualified teacher should know "how to continually challenge clients on the mat or reformer and up the tempo where necessary". Furthermore, he rates the growth of group equipment classes over the past couple of years as the big pilates trend of note.

So what are the other considerations? Chris Onslow, managing director of Pilates Solutions, the training and distribution arm of STOTT PILATES, comments: "It's a natural progression to embrace kettlebells, body weight suspension and other contemporary fitness methods, but the key is that sessions are led by a qualified instructor who sticks to the core principles in the teaching of the fused class."

Vanderboom adds that it's important to find instructors who are "capable of finding the right balance of the two genres so that the session does not become just another aerobics or body pump class". Gianni mirrors these concerns when she says that teachers should have a background in whatever discipline they're adding, so that the pilates component is not lost and the session does not fall out of balance.

St John provides the following advice: "Often fusion classes are not well thought out and end up being a random assortment of exercises and props without logic. Any fusion programme should follow pilates principles of breathing and control, as

well as key movement principles of core engagement, flow and stabilisation." She adds that pilates instructors should also have a fitness background if cardio activity is involved.

Another important consideration is the club's existing timetable. Curry, for example, says it's essential that fitness facilities run separate core pilates and group cycling classes before they attempt a fusion, while Vanderboom recommends her clients prepare by participating in introductory mat- or pilates-based classes.

In terms of space, fusion classes do not require any additional room compared to traditional mat- or equipment-based classes; an existing studio space or even the centre of a gym floor can be utilised for fusion mat classes, with equipment or circuit-type stations placed around the edge.

Clearly, when it comes to the fusion versions of equipment classes, a dedicated pilates studio is a minimal requirement.

So can clubs afford to ignore the trend? Vanderboom concludes: "If we take notice of the US and Canada, more speciality studios are opening and presenting pilates and reformer classes in nicely-designed settings. By introducing fusion, clubs can compete and potentially widen their market to include a broader demographic: young and old, de-conditioned to fit, sports enthusiasts to athletes, plus male and female clients."



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BACK TO THE FOLD

**Kath Hudson asks
the experts for
their advice on
getting lapsed
members
to return**

CONTRIBUTORS

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ALISTER ROLLINS: CEO, The Retention People

KEVIN YATES: Head of commercial development, Leisure Connection



**Use exit surveys to understand
why members are leaving**

What should a club do if a member cancels their monthly payment – accept the fact they've left and focus on the remaining members, and on winning fresh ones, or try to win them back? Should clubs be making better use of technology to recognise the members whose enthusiasm is starting to wane, so can they step in and motivate them before it gets to the point of them cancelling their membership? How many lapsed memberships could be saved if disenchanted members were noticed and given a boost with a new programme, or even a free personal training session? We ask the experts.

identify those in danger of lapsing

Automated systems, which can track visits and see which members are coming less, can be used to predict who is likely to leave. Customer surveys can also be used to predict those who are thinking of cancelling their memberships. It's best to find out who is likely to lapse and, if possible, address their issues, rather than try and get them back once they've left.

DR PAUL BEDFORD

We use The Retention People software to help staff manage member traffic through the gym – firstly by access control, and secondly by flagging up members who haven't visited the gym within a critical time period. Instructors then interact with these

high-risk members on the gym floor, booking them into a workshop, a class, a review or a one-to-one training session for their next visit.

NEIL KING

keep in touch

Lapsed members are contacted after one month, three months and 12 months. If they had lapsed within the previous three years, we would also contact them again after a gym refresh or refurbishment.

STEVE PHILPOTT

Do your homework before putting together an intervention strategy for lapsed members. How long did each of the members stay with the club? What was their average visit frequency? What is their history of previous contact with the club? What's their demographic profile?

After this analysis, operators should be able to categorise lapsed members into priority target groups based on the expected yield from each group. For example, one might have stayed for three months, and another for 30. Clearly, targeting the high yield former members will be the most beneficial.

Once operators have these details, the campaign to win back members needs to be highly targeted and must match their specific needs.

ALISTER ROLLINS

SLM uses a member communication programme, executing targeted, relevant and personalised communications to members. These thank and reward

Free PT sessions can help get re-joiners back in the exercise habit

existing members, as well as encouraging, educating and incentivising those members who are lapsing from activity. We're also launching a members' area on the website, with a reward programme to encourage more customers to stay active.

NEIL KING

Communication is key to retaining members, and social media offers an excellent environment to converse with potential, current and past members. Managing these information portals in the correct way can bring exceptional results. Each of our facilities is working with Twitter and Facebook to encourage local engagement.

KEVIN YATES

make it easy to come back

All re-joiners have the full Kinetika Journey [the DC Leisure induction programme] offered to them again: five 30-minute one-to-one sessions. A re-joiner will also have a new Personal Needs Analysis completed, as their goals may have changed. This information is then used in a motivational phone call somewhere between day seven and day 14 of them re-joining.

STEVE PHILPOTT

If you want to make former members feel more comfortable when they return, you need to be able to identify them in the first place. This can be done using IT to flag up the fact that they're a returning member and alert your team.

We also recommend a face-to-face session with an instructor to understand their reasons for leaving last time and to discuss how they plan to overcome them this time. It's worth asking what level of motivation they would like to receive from the club. Try and gain permission to speak to them in-club, as well as by phone or SMS if their visit

Asking the member to commit to a realistic visit frequency goal can motivate them

frequency drops. It helps if you get them to sign this 'commitment and motivation' contract – asking the member to commit to a realistic visit frequency goal can help them to aim higher and motivate them not to drop out entirely if they have a bad week.

ALISTER ROLLINS

When members come back to us, they get the opportunity to try Harpers Experience – one of our most popular programmes comprising five one-to-one sessions with a member of the fitness team. This is offered to all new members as well as to returning members.

KEVIN YATES

don't make the same mistake twice

We interview every lapsed member with an exit survey. This gives our site team the chance to re-engage with the member and find the opportunity to

re-motivate them, or perhaps to offer them a different usage option such as a swimming-only membership or 'pay as you go' deal.

STEVE PHILPOTT

An FIA report, *Winning the Retention Battle* (2002), showed that members who quit for a negative reason and came back were likely to quit twice as fast as before, as their focus would immediately be on the reason they quit in the first place. If members leave while still satisfied with the club, they're more likely to stay if they rejoin.

A word of caution: in my opinion, those members who quit for negative reasons are best left alone. You don't want negative people in your clubs, as they can be a disruptive influence.

DR PAUL BEDFORD

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going strong

From a mobile gym in a converted lorry trailer to innovative new equipment and group resistance classes, Sarah Owen looks at gyms that are challenging the norms of strength training



Esporta Royal Berkshire has been using the StarTrac HumanSport range for more than a year, and has created popular HumanSport circuit classes (see p50)

client louise smith, mobile gym project manager, fenland district council, cambridgeshire supplier precor experience strength line

"Fenland has a lot of health inequalities which we, as a council, are making a priority to target and tackle. After exploring lots of different options, we decided a mobile gym would be the perfect solution, so we bought a lorry trailer and had it converted into a modern gym. "Because the mobile gym is going out to those who are least likely to exercise, we were really keen to ensure it had as good a variety of equipment as possible – not only CV but also strength – so that, even with the very limited space



available, it allowed for a varied workout targeting every major muscle group.

"Pecor advised us on where the equipment would best sit – bearing in mind that the floor of the gym has to move when the trailer doors close – and suggested its S-line range

of resistance machines. In the end we were able to fit in six pieces of strength kit plus free weights, as well as a Power Plate machine, two treadmills, two bikes and a cross-trainer.

"The response so far has been brilliant: we only launched in June but are already exceeding our targets. Gyms with limited floorspace, such

as small hotel gyms, often focus on CV equipment. However I'm sure that, by providing such a good variety of equipment – including a range of resistance machines – we're appealing to as many users as possible."



**“THE SAME WORKOUT CAN BE PERFORMED BY MEN AND WOMEN,
AT THE SAME TIME, AND USING THE SAME EQUIPMENT”**

client **garth millings**, director,
alternative fitness, hampshire
supplier **york fitness equipment**
& the crossfit programme

“We use the CrossFit programme because we feel it makes exercises that are usually the domain of elite athletes – such as power movements, bodyweight training and so on – available to everyone. Although it's used by many military units including the US Navy Seals, it also gives excellent training for the movements used in everyday life.



“Through it we can offer high quality coaching and programming that aims to improve all the 10 major physical skills: speed, stamina, strength, power, agility, balance, co-ordination, cardiovascular endurance, muscular endurance and flexibility. All these elements are included in our Workout of the Day (WOD) – a circuit class that we change on a daily basis, and that attracts between 10 and 40 members a day. “Our WODs are made up of weightlifting, cardio and body weight exercises in as many combinations and variations as possible, including Olympic lifting, basic gymnastics skills such as handstands, exercises such as muscle-ups – a pull-up on a gymnastic ring – and squats, as well as heavy lifts (back squat, deadlift and shoulder press). This means that the same workout can be performed by men and women, at the same time, using the same equipment but just changing the weight.

“Our relationship with York was born out of a need for quality equipment at a reasonable price. We needed robust, strong equipment that could take constant use. We decided on two power cages, two Olympic lifting platforms, two squat stands, two adjustable benches, two sets of bumper plates and two Olympic training bars. Thus far, we have been very impressed with how well the equipment has responded to the rigors of CrossFit.”

client **richard macklin**,
general manager,
nirvana spa, berkshire
supplier **gym80 cable art range**

“We've recently had 90 pieces of gym80 kit put in at our gym, including the six-piece Cable Art range. We've now started to run free supervised group training sessions on this range, with up to six people taking part at a time. The 15-minute classes are held on the hour throughout the day.



“Each user performs an exercise for one minute, with a 15-second rest while moving on to the next machine.

“Every machine is fitted with two sets of handles, giving users two complete workout options; each circuit is performed twice to make the most of this potential.

“Since introducing the classes, there's been a noticeable increase in the usage of Cable Art, with members feeling more confident and inspired to try advanced and functional exercises.”



Nirvana Spa installed 90 pieces of gym80 equipment in its fitness suite and has seen an increase in usage of the Cable Art machine

client **justin simpson**, exercise and lifestyle coach/pt, esports royal berkshire
supplier **star trac humansport range**

“At the Esports Royal Berkshire, we have a large group exercise following. One of the classes in highest demand, with up to nine sessions a week, is the HumanSport Circuits class. Each class has a maximum capacity of 20 participants and provides people with all their functional training needs – it's



an hour-long class, including 30–40 minutes on the equipment, one minute per station, starting with the big muscle groups. Sometimes we also have floor stations – ViPR, kettlebells, TRX, Rebounder and Gliding – between the HumanSport stations.

“We've been using HumanSport for just under a year now and the outstanding aspect of these machines is the sheer versatility they offer. Whether you're looking to apply them in a group exercise, strength and conditioning, or even rehabilitation environment, these machines can deliver whatever you throw at them.

“HumanSport has been designed to reflect the mechanics of the human body. It's so simple, so intuitive and so natural that it feels as though it's been designed for each and every user.”



Staff at Pendle Leisure Centre value the way Hoist Roc-It's design ensures correct technique and posture among users

client adam carty, gm,
roko health club,
portsmouth
supplier life fitness
signature strength series

client john rawcliffe, health
and fitness manager, pendle
leisure centre
supplier hoist roc-it, from
physique (part of the pte group)

“We've fitted 30 pieces of Life Fitness Signature Strength series equipment to create a circuit that works all of the major muscle groups. We wanted to deliver a complete 'journey' of strength machines, intelligently laid out to create a varied set of experiences for exercisers of all fitness levels.



“We now have a designated consultation area for new members, which houses a chest press, leg press and seated row. This gives them the opportunity to be guided through each piece of equipment with a trainer and get used to using strength equipment.

“For intermediates, we offer a total body workout zone that consists of three strength sub zones (upper body, lower body, and ladies' only) designed to give the customer a tailor-made workout choice. You can complete one zone in 20–30 minutes, or combine two or three for a longer workout.

Finally, for advanced members, there's a PT area that offers Peripheral Heart Actions circuits. In these circuits, upper and lower body resistance exercises are alternated and then interspersed with short bursts of CV activity. This keeps the heart rate elevated throughout the session, which conditions the heart while simultaneously toning and strengthening the body.”

“Pendle Leisure Trust invested in a 10-station circuit of Hoist Roc-It at the end of last year.



“We introduced the range because it was different and we felt it would benefit all our customers: it's an innovative line of ride-orientated resistance equipment that adjusts to the movement of the user to simulate a free weights workout.

“Members find they have to reduce the weight they use on the machines, indicating that the weight they added in the past on normal resistance equipment was inappropriate. For instance, on a normal chest press, people tend to add too much weight and use a small amount of power from their feet and legs to compensate. However, with the Roc-It equipment, this is impossible because the feet and legs are part of the exercise movement – moving upwards while the user pushes the weight forward.

“The fitness staff who regularly use the Roc-It circuit say they love how it ensures correct posture throughout a full repetition, restricts poor technique and provides adequate support for common muscle problems, such as back-associated issues, setting it apart from normal resistance equipment.”

 **sarah owen**
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

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changing TIMES

With over 300 local authority operators and suppliers gathered in one place for SIBEC 2010, it was little wonder that the hot topic of conversation was the new government and how its spending review would affect leisure provision across the UK. The event took place at the Forest of Arden Marriott hotel in Birmingham on 12 May, the day after the coalition government had been announced. We asked some of the SIBEC delegates how they feel things will change, and the impact these cuts might have.

funding issues

Sarah Watts, managing director of Alliance Leisure – which provides a one-stop solution for leisure redevelopment – comments: “Public sector operators

Harriet Ewing reports on discussions from the recent SIBEC UK event

are being forced to review their facilities and the opportunities available to them and consider affordable redevelopment; the alternatives are closure of sites or scaled-down operations. There’s talk that development is likely to be reliant on Lottery funding, rather than on direct government funding. This may well mean that some sites will require an additional source of funding, with a commitment to working with alternative third party or private sectors.”

This is a message that’s underpinned by specialist leisure development company Createability. MD Ian Cotgrave says:

“The new regime of spending cuts means that operators will need to re-examine their offering. Doing nothing is not an option – if facilities are left to become tired, usage and revenue decrease. By providing facilities that meet local demand, they will generate additional income, which can enable them to access private sector investment – a ‘spend and save’ strategy.”

opportunity in adversity

Damian Lo Cascio of Corequest has noticed that people have been holding off from starting any new initiatives, waiting to see the extent of the cuts. He believes that operators will need to work harder and smarter in the challenging financial times ahead. Staff productivity will need to improve and there will be an increase in leisure being

In these challenging times of funding cuts, clubs will need to increase their focus on retention, says Guy Griffiths

Over 300 local authority delegates and suppliers gathered at SIBEC UK 2010, which was held in Birmingham



event feedback

SIBEC UK brings together suppliers and buyers from the local authority, trust and education sectors, with a combination of face-to-face meetings, forums and networking opportunities. Feedback from this year's event includes:

"For me, this was the most beneficial SIBEC I've attended. I'm fairly confident we'll choose

our supplier from those I met at the event, despite other companies being on the market." Neil Barker, manager, Valley Leisure

"I've been attending SIBEC UK since its inception and believe it to be the most effective business event for our industry. It's second to none in serving education, networking and business needs, and I would recommend it to colleagues

in the public and trust sector." Martin Guyton, leisure contracts manager, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

"What a great way to gain new business – we secured appointments within weeks of the event finishing. SIBEC UK is the most effective and efficient way to present our company to the decision makers and grow our business." David Lattimer, Redro

© PHOTO.COM/ANASTASIA FELKH

'taken out to the community' rather than centres waiting for 'walk-in' members.

Guy Griffiths of GGFit adds:

"We're seeing more clubs directing their attention towards retention programmes, both as a way to generate additional income from existing members and, in some cases, to access more funding for alternative schemes or staff training initiatives, by providing evidence of success. These cuts will help us to focus on results and to improve staff and member retention rates."

And general manager of Octane Fitness UK, Neil Campbell, feels that while there may be fewer 'big budget' projects available, any smaller budgetary spends will be much more selective and targeted. He says: "The smart operators recognise that it's still possible to create a 'wow' factor, even with a limited

amount of money. At Octane, we have an offering that's giving centres a point of difference over their competitors."

Nevertheless, the impact of the cuts are already being felt at Worthing Leisure, as leisure facilities general manager Duncan Anderson explains: "We knew cuts were going to be made regardless of who got into Number 10, but I've been surprised at the extent of them and the speed with which they've been introduced. A local college has reduced its bookings with us by almost 50 per cent from September and, as two of the biggest users of our conference site are the PCT and County Council – who have to find £70m of savings in the next four years – we're anticipating further difficulties with booking and income targets."

Another operator in charge of several local authority facilities, who preferred

to remain anonymous, agrees: "We've seen a significant increase in visits, particularly family usage, as a result of the free swimming initiative. Stopping this scheme early will deter people from participating. This then has longer-term implications for health issues, such as increasing childhood obesity levels. I'm also expecting grants from the PCT to be cut, which will affect the GP referral and cardiac rehab programmes we offer."

"I feel that the leisure industry is still not taken seriously enough by the health sector as a means of preventing illness or aiding recovery, and there should be a better co-ordinated, partnership approach to fitness across the country from central government."



harriet ewing
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research round-up

Training older people in martial arts could reduce injuries from falls, researchers from the Netherlands have found

fall training

About 650,000 people aged 60 and over visit A&E departments every year due to falls. Those most at risk of injury are sufferers of osteoporosis – a disease that causes a decline in bone density, leaving bones weaker and more vulnerable to breaking.

Osteoporosis affects around three million people in Britain, particularly older people. It's the cause of around 230,000 fractures annually and, according to Arthritis Research UK, 70,000 of these are hip fractures – an area of particular concern for the elderly.

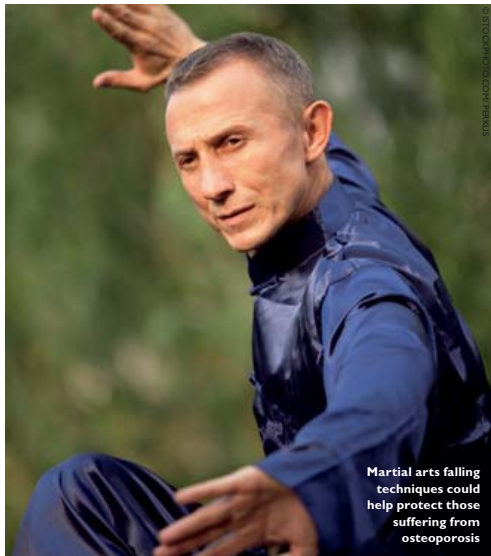
To help reduce injury from falls among older adults, health club operators might consider introducing martial arts training. Researchers from the Netherlands¹ have now shown the discipline to be safe for people with osteoporosis and, indeed, that its focus on how to fall 'properly' – including how to lessen the impact on the joints and protect parts of the body such as the hips – could cut their chances of suffering fractures or broken bones when they fall for real.

data collection

The scientists from Sint Maartenskliniek hospital in Nijmegen based their study on six healthy adults aged between 23 and 44 years old. "For obvious safety reasons, this could not be directly assessed using people with osteoporosis," says study lead Brenda E Groen.

None of the participants had any experience of martial arts and they received fall training for around two hours. This involved three important techniques – all possible for older people to learn – namely turning a fall into a rolling movement by bending and twisting the trunk and neck, using a neck flexion to protect the head, and using an arm to stop the rolling movement.

The participants began practising falling sideways and forwards from a sitting position and then progressed to



Martial arts falling techniques could help protect those suffering from osteoporosis

kneeling and standing heights. The fall exercises were performed on a 4cm judo mat or a 25cm-thick gym mattress.

Each type of fall was performed for at least eight trials and the force of the impact was measured by a plate embedded in the mat or mattress. The force of each fall was compared to known information about the amount of impact a patient with osteoporosis can withstand.

the results

The results of the study, published in the open access journal *BMC Research Notes*, showed that impact levels resulting from sideways falls from a standing position were safe if performed on the judo

mattress. Front falls from a standing position were not safe at all, but were safe if performed from a kneeling position on a judo mattress.

Based on the study's findings, Groen says: "Since martial arts techniques which reduce hip impact forces can be learned by older people, martial arts fall training may prevent hip fractures among people with osteoporosis.

"Based on our results, however, we believe that fall training would be safe for people with osteoporosis only if they wear hip protectors during the training, perform fall exercises on a thick mattress, and avoid forward fall exercises from a standing position."

¹ Groen BE et al. *Could martial arts fall training be safe for persons with osteoporosis?: a feasibility study.* *BioMed Central* 2010, 3:111



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Star Trac Coach™ unveiled by Star Trac®

Star Trac Coach™ has been created to elevate the traditional treadmill experience by introducing a personal training element. With more than one million workout possibilities and led by on-screen coach, PT Kimberley Shah, the application is suitable for all Star Trac® embedded-screen treadmills and offers a workout tailored to the specific needs of each user to help better motivate and support them.

fitness-kit.net keywords
star trac



Power Plate's pro6™ machine debuts

Power Plate International has unveiled its new pro6™ machine. Incorporating the manufacturer's proMOTION technology – an upper-body cable resistance training system – the pro6 uses Vectran® cables to help transfer vibrations to the whole body at a high frequency. The pro6™ offers clubs a single product with a range of dynamic training options.

fitness-kit.net keywords
power plate

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For more information, or to contact any of these companies, log on to www.fitness-kit.net and type the company name under 'keyword search'

Precor replaces Experience bike range

Precor has launched two new bikes, known as the 815s, to replace its current Experience range. Precor's designers took inspiration from furniture manufacturers to increase the comfort levels of the new bikes, with a ventilated seat contoured for maximum comfort on the recumbent cycle. The upright bike's design focuses on flexibility and performance, with handlebars offering three positions (upright, cruising and racing) all of which offer a clear view of the console. Both bikes draw on the biomechanical 'knee over the



fitness-kit.net keyword
precor

pedal spindle' principle to maintain a good cycling posture, ensuring even resistance throughout a full revolution of the pedal-circle.



Jacobs Ladder for a full cardio workout

The Jacobs Ladder machine is a patented commercial piece of kit that fitness enthusiasts and professionals alike can use. Placing the user at a 40° angle, taking stress away from the lower back, Jacobs Ladder is self-paced and self-powered, without the need for an electrical outlet. Offering a rounded cardiovascular workout, users can also opt for high intensity interval training, but without high impact on joints. To make the equipment to stop, users simply slow down.

fitness-kit.net keywords
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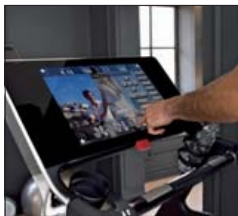
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Peak Pilates® MVe®+ from Mad Dogg Athletics

From the Mad Dogg Athletics family of brands comes the Peak Pilates® MVe®+ Tower. This foundation equipment combines a reformer, a tower and a mat system to maximise exercise possibilities in a condensed space. Suitable for both studios and fitness facilities, it features a powder-coated aluminium frame to minimise scratches and corrosion.

fitness-kit.net keywords
mad dogg



Technogym's VISIOweb

Technogym has unveiled its latest fitness technology. Called VISIOweb, the fully-integrated touchscreen technology gives the user access to the internet, television and their iPod. It will ultimately be available across the entire Technogym Excite range. Other features of the VISIOweb 19" touchscreen include an Online Personal Trainer with interactive exercise guidance and games to keep members motivated.

fitness-kit.net keyword
technogym

Row and scull with Oartec's new simulator



The new Oartec Rowing Simulator replicates the dynamics of a boat and the full range of exact movements made when rowing and sculling. Designed to encourage correct technique, users row with an oar in each hand, differing from more traditional pulley-based systems. The simulator can be used for a range of functions, including technical training and cardiovascular work. Available

on a commercial basis only, the kit was originally designed with rowing clubs and national rowing federations in mind, and is versatile, mobile and easily stored when not in use. Manufacturer WaterRower is committed to designing innovative rowing solutions. Other products include the Oartec Slider dynamic rowing machine.

fitness-kit.net keyword
waterrower

Achieve inner balance with Zero Gravity chairs

A complete line of Zero Gravity massage chairs have been unveiled by Johnson Health Tech under its Inner Balance Wellness brand. Combining proven relaxation techniques with functionality and comfort, the chairs include the ZG-750 Fresh Air, which has three airbag massage functions to deliver a comfortable, rolling massage. Meanwhile the ZG-550 Soothing Vibrations features multi-point vibrating massage areas. Both are available with memory foam cushioning and have a one-touch operation to recline into zero gravity position – feet higher



than head – to reduce back stress. In addition, the ZG-530, with its multi-point manual recline, is said to ease pressure on spinal muscles and ligaments.

fitness-kit.net keywords
johnson health tech

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With Leisure Industry Week fast approaching, we take a look at some of the exhibitors' innovations that can help transform the gym floor

The gym floor has changed dramatically over recent years. Competition from virtual workouts and outdoor boot camps means that equipment suppliers have had to adapt their equipment and match the requirements of the new technology-savvy member. Classes are no longer kept in studios, equipment is inclusive and functional, and it's now all about usability and innovation.

evolving offering

Matrix Fitness Systems has risen to the challenge of the changing gym floor by developing products that meet the needs of not only the user but the gym too. Its G7 Strength Range is compact and has a uniformly low weight stack height, creating a more consistent and

less intimidating line of sight across the gym floor. The range also takes up less room, thereby increasing floor space and creating a more open, appealing feel.

Commenting on the evolution of the gym floor, Jon Johnston, MD of Matrix Fitness Systems, says: "In recent times we've seen a marked increase in competition for gym membership sales, as prices fall in response to the economic downturn. Add to this the increased demand for inclusive fitness equipment, limited space for new kit, and the popularity of non-gym-based activities and virtual workouts, and it's clear that fitness equipment suppliers need to adapt their provision to address market needs."

functional fitness

There's also been a growing demand for more functional equipment. Star Trac responded to this by developing its HumanSport range, which includes several different exercises options on each machine, allowing for a full workout within a relatively small floorspace. Matt Pengelly, MD of Star Trac Europe, says:

"More and more clubs are looking at alternatives to standard weight machines, wanting equipment that offers a wider range of workout varieties. Clubs we've been working with have found that the HumanSport range of cable-based equipment has helped to bring this to the gym floor by offering pieces of equipment that provide unlimited training options."

This type of equipment has been used to create functional training zones – something that's being witnessed with increasing regularity across the board in UK gyms, from Virgin Active to DW Sports Fitness. David Lloyd Leisure (DLL), meanwhile, has increasingly been running classes on the gym floor, so the need for compact exercise machines and multi-use cable equipment is high.

DLL has also seen an increase in group training areas within its clubs, with new offerings from equipment suppliers assisting in the creation of motivating new zones: kettlebells and suspension training systems such as the TRX are prominent within its health clubs. DLL says members want to work out with innovative products that get them results quickly and more efficiently, but with the fun factor of working out in groups and with the benefits of having a trainer present to tell them how to achieve their desired results.

Commenting on the changes at DLL, health and fitness manager Rob Beale says: "We're now holding more classes on the gym floor, including ViPR and Power Plate sessions, because we've found that groups of members working with a trainer creates a buzz within the gym. It also helps build the sort of member-to-member relationships that we usually only see in the studio."

"The floor sessions are also great for encouraging more men to attend classes, as they often have a wrongly negative impression of studio classes."

maximising space

Space appears to be an ever-increasing issue on the gym floor, especially when exercise is frequently being taken out of studios. The Life Fitness Journey was



The LIVESTRONG cycle is endorsed by champion cyclist Lance Armstrong



The Life Fitness Journey (above and right) uses zones to simplify the gym floor and make workouts as easy to follow as possible

created so that people exercise in methodical zones, providing a whole body workout and utilising all muscle groups. This eliminates the need for other gym equipment, as members will have received a full workout within their 'Journey', saving space as well as creating a cohesive look in the gym.

Jonny Sullens, portfolio director of Leisure Industry Week (LIW), says: "We know that a lot of operators will be visiting LIW in September to look at ways to turn empty space into a profitable area. A functional training zone may be the answer, and at LIW this year we will have a number of exhibitors in the PTontheNet Small Group Training Zone, who will be on-hand to offer advice on the latest equipment."

technological trends

Advances in technology and users' expectations have also played a big part in the changing face of the gym floor in recent years. Pengelly explains: "In years gone by, you would find rows of cardio equipment facing a bank of TVs, but with the advent of new technology, members can choose to immerse themselves in personal entertainment offered on equipment – personal TVs and iPod control, for example."

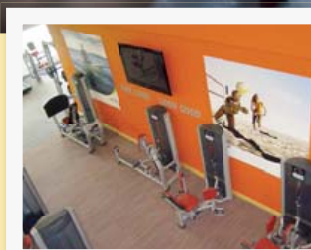
Equipment with iPod docking and personal TV screens are now commonplace in gyms, and members

have come to expect these features. But now, interactive options are taking entertainment a step further and helping clubs to compete with the outdoor exercise market.

Matrix Fitness Systems will soon launch the latest version of MyRide – a bike with accompanying software that allows users to feel the benefits and emotions of outdoor cycling, but within the gym, via a screen on which your avatar cycles through various terrains in response to your efforts. The new technology has been developed in conjunction with the LIVESTRONG cycle, endorsed by Lance Armstrong, and has been designed to create a neat interactive workout pod.

However, as technology has developed, it has become increasingly hard to encourage young people to put down their games consoles and take part in physical exercise. Suppliers such as SHOKK and ZigZag have tried to combat this problem by putting equipment such as dance mats into gyms, with contemporary music and fun moves designed to make exercising fun.

Kieran Murphy, marketing director at SHOKK, says: "We recognise that using the most up-to-date technology plays a vital role in the battle to get more young people into physical activity. Ten years ago, gyms were very adult-orientated places, but our concept offers young people the perfect outlet to exercise



and challenge themselves. Our branding is vibrant and fresh and we create an environment that isn't just about exercising but also about having fun."

meeting needs

It's clear that design and technology have been key areas of focus among fitness equipment suppliers in recent years. The gym floor has become more streamlined, more inclusive and more about the needs and comfort of the user.

Leisure Industry Week (LIW), which takes place at Birmingham's NEC on 21–23 September 2010, will host hundreds of suppliers showcasing their new product launches. For more information, please visit www.liw.co.uk

bannatyne group unveils investment plans

Duncan Bannatyne, chair of the Bannatyne Group, has announced £5m of investments to grow the company's hotel and spa operations across the UK. This represents the first phase of a £15m investment programme for 2010/11.

The investment programme includes the recent acquisition of the Charlton House Spa Hotel, a 26-bedroom boutique hotel in the West Country, which went into administration in 2009. There are already plans to extend the venue to increase the number of spa treatment rooms and introduce a large fitness area.

The company will also begin the development of two new spas in Banbury and Broadstairs, taking the UK portfolio of Bannatyne Spas to 30. A third new spa location has been identified in Shrewsbury, as yet still in the early stages of planning. Emulating the format used by the group across



Bannatyne: Acquired Charlton House

the country, the single-storey spa developments will be created as extensions to established Bannatyne's Health Clubs in the three locations.

Alongside the growth of its spa chain, the Bannatyne Group is also investing in its existing portfolio, including a programme of refurbishments and redesigns. Most

recently, the company invested in excess of £300,000 in its spas in Inverness, Scotland, and Chafford Hundred in Essex (see *HCM* May 10, p62).

Bannatyne says: "The performances of all our businesses have remained strong during the recession, as people are not compromising on their health and wellbeing or denying themselves UK hotel breaks. We're now in a position to grow the business organically and through acquisition if the opportunities are a good fit for the group."

"The spa business has been an area of real growth. We've identified a number of our health clubs that will benefit from the addition of a spa, beginning with Banbury and Broadstairs, which will drive the trend for wellbeing as people focus their healthy lifestyles around a strong blend of exercise, relaxation and rejuvenation."

CALCOT MANOR: UK'S BEST SPA FOR GYM-GOERS

Zest magazine has revealed the "best UK spas for gym bunnies".

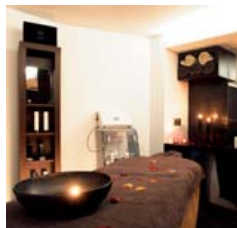
The inaugural Zest Spa Awards covered a number of categories. Results were based on a combination of 4,000 reader votes and the verdict of an expert panel, which included the likes of celebrity personal trainer Matt Roberts.

Calcot Manor & Spa in Gloucestershire was voted the UK's top spa for those who want to combine relaxation with fitness, thanks to its state of the art gym, wide range of exercise classes and Running Clinic for advice on training shoes. Malvern Spa Hotel in Worcestershire, with its 80-station gym and 30 group exercise classes a week, came second, while Champneys in Tring, Hertfordshire, came third.



Calcot Manor & Spa won the 'gym bunnies' spa award

new treatment for zensations spas



The new treatment has been introduced in all 17 Zensations spas

The Holmes Place Iberia in-house spa brand, Zensations, has launched a new slimming and wellbeing treatment.

Launched in June and designed to combat cellulite, the new offering "combines slimming with a relaxing ritual", helping to reshape the body while the client relaxes, and is designed to be taken as a course of treatments.

The treatment, which can be used on all parts of the body, uses a combination of techniques. The first session focuses on removing cellulite via ultrasound and acupressure, a therapeutic technique used in physiotherapy and cosmetic medicine to break down and disperse

fat deposits. The next session includes a lipomassage, a new technique that addresses localised fat, cellulite and contours. It reduces the appearance of 'orange peel' skin and is used in combination with cellulite-busting mesotherapy, as well as massage using algae that have been specially formulated for their slimming qualities.

The treatment has been launched in all Zensations sites – a total of 17 spas across Spain and Portugal.

The Holmes Place Iberia chain, which includes the Holmes Place and Europolis brands, currently caters for more than 100,000 members across 28 clubs.



Saunas and steamrooms are the mainstays of any thermal area, but could health clubs be doing more to pep up their offering? Kath Hudson reports

going hot and cold

With the growth of the spa industry, there's no shortage of inspiration when it comes to new products and trends – but how many of the latest innovations translate to the health club market?

While the spa areas of health clubs have traditionally played second

fiddle to the gym, many facilities will include a heat experiences offering – sauna, steamroom, perhaps even feature showers. Putting a little more thought into these areas could raise the game of the club and also present the opportunity to grow revenues by offering a premium tier membership, or by selling spa days to non-members.

This is also in keeping with the move towards illness prevention. Even without providing a full spa serviced by therapists, health clubs could offer more relaxation services and appeal to people with health problems who might otherwise never join a gym. It could also change the mindset of those members who rush in and out as quickly as possible, encouraging them to wind down at the end of a workout.

We take a look at some of the heat experience options that health clubs might like to consider.

for the hardcore

Putting ice onto sprains and aching muscles is common practice, and many a sports person would argue in favour of the benefits of an ice bath – a not altogether pleasant way of breaking down lactic acid, stopping the body from seizing up and improving recovery time.

There's a rehab element here as well, since spending a short period of time in an extremely cold room (minus 80°C) is said to help a range of illnesses, including arthritis, osteoporosis, rheumatism and even multiple sclerosis. There is, however, scant clinical scientific evidence to prove this.

All the same, there's enough evidence to suggest that some kind of ice feature in a wet area would be beneficial for people to use after training. There are a number of options. Ice rooms – chilled down to 10 or 12°C using chilled air, or by having cold liquid running through the walls – offer an invigorating full stop after a workout, closing the pores and forcing out toxins. Breathing the air is also said to be extremely beneficial.

Snow rooms go one step further, blasting tiny particles of ice into the rooms to form a frost. These are, however, extremely expensive to install and costly to operate.

Gerard McCarthy, sales director at Dalesauna, says a practical and cost-

And relax Putting some thought into your spa offer can expand your membership and appeal to people who otherwise wouldn't join a gym





Ice ice baby Ice treatments will already be familiar to fitness fanatics, but there are a range of cooling features available to complement sauna use

effective option is to have a small ice room – around 1.5sq m – with an ice dispenser in it for people to rub on their limbs after training. Stays in ice rooms are short, and people don't tend to sit down, so they don't need to be huge.

Design for Leisure has also come up with a concept that meets this criterion. New to the market, The Chill is about the size of a shower and uses cool misting sprays, working with the air con to create a cooling experience. "The Chill is the temperature of the air conditioned air, so around 16 degrees," says Design for Leisure managing director Don Genders. "The wind chill factor we create by using fans to blow the air and cool the mist onto the bather's body is what gives the truly cooling experience." The advantage of this over an ice room or an ice fountain is that it can be operated by the customer, so doesn't have to be switched on all the time.

gentler experiences

Saunas and steamrooms are perennial favourites, but there are a few twists available to freshen up the experience and introduce more health benefits.



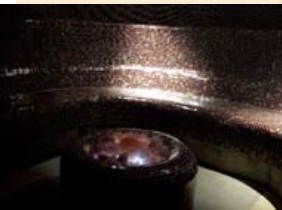
Heinz Schletterer, CEO and owner of Schletterer International Group, says inhaling fragrances in saunas, such as salt solutions and magnesium, is effective for cleaning out the lungs, which is especially beneficial for those who have just quit smoking. These systems can be retrofitted to existing saunas.

Meanwhile, while many of these experiences – especially those that use extreme temperatures – offer health benefits, they often require a fairly robust constitution. In contrast, the KLAFS Sanarium is a gentle sauna, with mild temperatures, so is suitable for children, elderly people and pregnant women, and has proven benefits for high blood pressure patients. The Sanarium with SaunaPur offers a range of experiences – tropical bath, warm air

bath, soft steam bath or aroma bath – which are selected by pushing a button.

And sanariums do have proven health benefits. A two-year study by the Charité university clinic in Berlin observed cardiovascular behaviour in more than 40 high blood pressure patients who made regular use of the sanarium and were not using medication. In 38 per cent of the patients, blood pressure levels returned to normal quicker and pulse/blood pressure at rest was often significantly reduced by the treatment.

Another product that gives off a gentle heat is the infra-red sauna. Whereas conventional saunas work by warming the air to heat the body from the outside in, these work by warming the body from the inside out. The user sits in front of an infra-red light which



Spice it up Steam and sauna (above) are the mainstay of many spa areas but, with a little imagination, clubs could enhance this offering

► warms the spine; ideally there would be another light in front of them too. The blood vessels are warmed and the warmed blood travels around the body, raising the core temperature in the same way that exercise does. It causes the body to perspire, release toxins and raises the metabolic rate.

Operating costs of an infra-red sauna are comparable with a fan heater, and they cost around the same as a sauna to install: around £6,000 to £7,000. But McCarthy says that, in spite of being introduced to the UK around 10 years ago, the benefits of these saunas have not yet been fully appreciated by the industry.

in the spa direction

Elmar Nagele, CEO of Thermarium, says saunas and steamrooms are a tried and tested formula for health clubs, but adds that the quality of the finish could be improved to make more of the spa area.

"Health clubs often put these facilities in a corner, with a plastic steamroom and a basic sauna," he says, pointing out that "a more luxurious feel could easily be created with better materials and particularly with the addition of a relaxation room".

One product that's new to the market, and that could add a definite wow factor to the spa area, is Haslauer's Salve-in-terra. Guests apply mineral mud, either to themselves or to each other, and then lie back for 20 minutes, inhaling herbal-infused steam. They can choose to finish off the experience with a shower – either a warm tropical rain or a cool Arctic rain shower, the latter with tiny ice flakes.

"The Salve-in-terra is the perfect end to a workout: it's a wonderful, relaxing steam experience, which can help detox the body," says Regina Fuernmann from Haslauer. "Steam experiences help to rid the body of waste, cleanse the skin, increase the blood flow and strengthen the immune system, as well as helping to relax muscle tension."

TWEAKING YOUR OFFER

Swimming pool, wellness and spa supplier Nola 7 offers its top tips for enhancing an existing thermal area:

- Use evocative names, such as herbal sauna and marine steam
- Upgrade from plastic saunas and steamrooms to better quality tiles
- Use fragrances in the sauna and steamroom – the systems can be retrofitted. There's a range of fragrances on offer, including rose, lemongrass and sage, as well as traditional fragrances like eucalyptus

- Add an infra-red panel to an existing sauna
- If space permits, add a heated hammam bench to the steamroom, where members can get a massage
- Improve the lighting: LEDs are energy-saving and introduce colour and atmosphere. Fibre-optics are also energy-saving and can withstand high temperatures
- Add an ice fountain
- Add an experience shower with a range of functions, including cooling mists or monsoon rain

Salve-in-terra is supplied as a 3m-diameter cabin that's set up on-site. However, costing a minimum of €30,000, or up to €76,000 for a more high-end version, plus shipping and installation costs, a few more memberships might need to be sold to make this a viable option for many health clubs.

Hammams are currently enjoying a resurgence in popularity, although to recreate the experience is costly and space-consuming, since they require a number of rooms – gradually getting hotter – plus a means of cooling off and a therapist. McCarthy has, however, come up with a formula that could offer a workable solution for health clubs. "Combining a hammam slab with an ice room and an infra-red sauna could have the same effect of gradually raising the temperature and giving the feeling of a cold plunge," he says. "A five- or 10-minute massage on a hammam slab could be the perfect way to finish off a workout. For higher-end clubs, it'd be a good USP for enhanced membership."

other trends

So what other trends are emerging in the market? Sustainability is something KLAFS has been working on with its

Green Sauna package, which can be integrated into all traditional KLAFS sauna models. The design keeps the heat in the cabin for much longer, allowing for the same heat but for significantly less energy input. Also, energy-consuming devices such as the light only operate when the cabin is occupied, reducing energy consumption by 40 per cent.

The creation of private areas is another trend being witnessed in the spa industry, and health clubs might follow in the not too distant future. For example, KLAFS' integrated sauna and steam cabins tick the privacy box by providing a compact, self-contained and personal environment.

Another compact product, also new to the market, is Tylo's Impression, which combines sauna and steam in one unit that neatly fits into 2.8sq m. It's split into two sections, one for the steam shower and one for the sauna/steam sauna, separated by a sealed sliding door.

With such a wide range of options, not all requiring vast amounts of space or investment, the added value of a heat experiences area would seem to be at least worthy of clubs' consideration.



kath hudson
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

Gosh...it's nearly as hot as a Dalesauna!




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vital vitality



Kate Cracknell pays a visit to the International Wellness Centre in Latvia, where the approach is all about holistic wellness

Clockwise from top left: The Amber Spa hotel entrance, the spa, a hydrotherapy treatment, and general manager Alla Sokolova

The structure of the International Wellness Centre business might seem a little confusing to those who haven't experienced it for themselves: a collection of apparently disjointed brands. Alongside the Amber Spa Boutique Hotel sits the Balans Club, which comprises a wellness spa and beauty salon, a Russian 'banya' (baths), a swimming pool and a fitness facility. In addition, you have the in-house MyLife restaurant and the Klubs One bowling alley and sport bar.

Once you're there, however, it becomes clear how the various parts of the offering dovetail together under the over-arching 'Balans International Wellness Centre' brand – with the obvious exception of the bowling alley. Alla Sokolova, general manager

across the whole business, laughs: "The bowling alley was already here when we bought the business. It isn't a natural fit with what we're doing, but this is a quiet town with few activities for the local children. The bowling alley was really popular, so we decided to keep it."

creating unity

Located in the beachside town of Jurmala, a short drive from the Latvian capital city of Riga, the family-owned operation has been fully open for business for just over a year following the launch of the hotel on 2 June 2009.

Rewinding a few years, in 1998 Alla's father Vadim Sokolov acquired an existing property which encompassed a gym and café, a public bathhouse dating back to the 1960s and, of course, the bowling alley.

The first phase of the redevelopment was a revamp of the bathhouse. Carried out in 2001, and with training provided by the famous Sanduvskije Banya in Moscow, the result was a Russian-style banya – a tradition deeply established as a weekly ritual in the Russian psyche, with single-sex areas offering a hot room and plunge pool supervised by a specialist 'steam maker', treatments such as body wraps and detox massages, and relaxation areas where food and drink can be ordered.

Then, in 2005, Sokolov acquired the gym/café and bowling alley businesses – which until then still operated independently – and Alla joined the company to help establish the Balans International Wellness Centre concept and brand, which would later also include a hotel, spa

The spa menu includes treatments with a local flavour, including an amber stone massage

hand-picked products

“We didn’t want to work with just any big, international brand,” explains Amber Spa GM Alla Sokolova. “We spent a long time researching products that, although absolutely top-end in terms of luxury and exclusivity, fitted in with our ethos and used the sort of natural ingredients you’d find in traditional treatments here in Jurmala.”

The result was the introduction in June 2010 of two brands, themselves only launched 18 months ago, for both treatments and retail:

- **Elier (Elier Unique):** Created in Switzerland and packaged by Helena Rubinstein, the products are nevertheless produced in Latvia, using mud and other ingredients sourced locally. Amber Spa now plans to create signature treatments with Elier, as well as launching in-room products for the hotel.
- **Russie Blanche:** The brainchild of Russian model Julia Lemigova, this luxury line is used to enhance the ‘banya’ experience. It comprises creams, masks, essential oils and scrubs, produced in France but based on traditional Siberian recipes.

and restaurant. But there was, as she explains, “no unity between the various elements of the offering”.

It was to the heritage of Jurmala that the Sokolovs turned as a potential source of that unity. Created in 1959 by the merging of seaside resort Rigas-Jurmala and hydrotherapeutic spa resort Kemeris, what is now known simply as Jurmala had long enjoyed a reputation as a health destination. Indeed, archaeological findings suggest that Kemeris’s sulphur springs were already being used for medicinal purposes in the 16th century, and by the early 19th century Russian Tsar Nicholas I had granted funds for the creation of bathing areas. The resort’s popularity continued to grow, even throughout the Soviet era when it was used both as a training base for professional athletes, and as a destination to which top-performing citizens were sent as a reward for their efforts.

“We decided to draw on this heritage, delivering the sort of treatments that this area has long been famous for – mud

cures, sulphur water bathing and so on – but with a modern feel and in a more luxurious environment,” explains Alla.

holistic approach

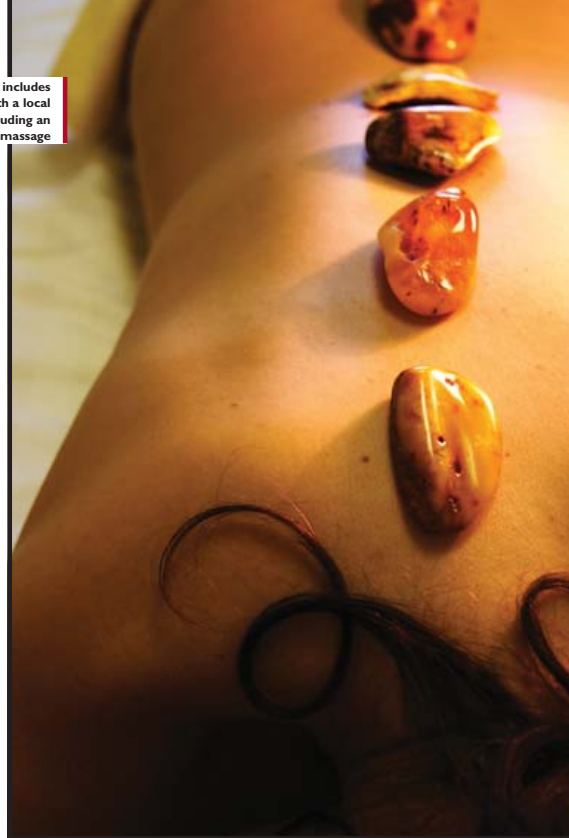
With an overall investment of €6m, Amber Spa is certainly that. The 21-room boutique hotel, designed by architect and interior designer Evgenii Zakmanis of Zakman Design Studios, adopts a gentle, amber-influenced décor throughout, from the colour palette to the close-up photographs of pieces of amber on the walls, right down to small details such as amber beads adorning the ends of the bathroom taps.

Meanwhile the spa – originally built in 2005 and refurbished in early 2009 – offers 15 attractive treatment rooms, a consultation room, a relaxation area,

a pedicure/manicure area, sunbeds and a hair salon. The treatment menu includes the usual range of relaxation and beauty-focused options, with one-off treatments and day spa packages available. However, the main purpose of the spa is to complement the rest of the International Wellness Centre offering, with locally-influenced treatments such as hydrotherapy, body wraps and amber stone massages integrated into the centre’s broader wellness programmes.

“Spa is too narrow a word and doesn’t really reflect what we do here,” says Alla. “What we’re about is a wellness lifestyle.”

And this is where all the pieces of the jigsaw start to come together, in a holistic approach to wellness and vitality that encompasses fitness (in the Balans Club gym), nutrition





► (including personalised menus in the MyLife restaurant) and relaxation (in the spa and Russian banya).

All Balans wellness programmes begin with a consultation with a doctor and a personal trainer, all of whom have been trained in a holistic approach to bring their expertise together, and comprises six diagnostic tests (see information box, below). From there, a bespoke six-week 'vitality' programme of fitness, nutrition and relaxation is put together for each client, working with the expert in-house team – including GPs, acupuncturists, kinesiologists, physiotherapists and nutritionists – with the ultimate goal of restoring them to a natural, balanced state of wellbeing.

The first week of the programme consists of the diagnostics and a chance to practise the recommendations under expert supervision, with at least two or three hours of spa treatments each day,

The wellness centre offers a range of facilities for relaxation (including an infra-red sauna, above left) and fitness (above)

one or two personal training sessions, and individually tailored meals.

The remaining five weeks of the programme can either be undertaken on-site or at home: recommendations are designed to be sustainable in real life, so clients don't simply slip back into their old ways. "We teach you to listen to your own body, so you continue to make the right decisions. However, redressing the body's vitality also makes it more capable of re-balancing itself if you occasionally make the wrong decision," explains Alla.

"At the end of those five weeks, you either come back to us to repeat the diagnostics, or else we follow up by skype or email. The maintenance phase should then be a lifelong thing.

"The programmes can have a different focus depending on your goals – weight loss, anti-ageing or detox, for example – but it's the vitality you feel as a result of your programme that brings down the barriers to achieving those goals."

widening the net

"Some of our guests come to us specifically for the full Balans programme. However, we realise that not everyone will be immediately drawn to the 'International Wellness Centre' brand, whereas they might be attracted by some of the other elements of our offering, such as the banya or the restaurant," she continues. "We therefore view our business as having four entry points.

"The membership-based Balans Club is our core business locally, especially the banya. We have about 550 members and three different membership packages (see information box, p71), all of which

a diagnostic approach

Initial consultations at the International Wellness Centre consist of six tests:

- **Applied Kinesiology (AK):** Uses manual muscle testing as a primary feedback mechanism to examine how a person's body is functioning.
- **F-Scan:** Uses resonating frequencies to detect the presence of different bacteria, viruses and parasites in the body, then zapping them at the precise frequency needed to deal with them.
- **Prime Test:** Blood tests for food intolerances, ensuring the patient is

choosing food that won't destroy their white blood cells.

- **Rhythm Express:** Similar to a cardiogram, this monitors the body's energy reserves, using heart patterns to assess levels of stress/environmental influences on a person's nervous system and organs.
- **Bach analysis:** Uses kinesiology techniques to find the correct Dr Bach essence(s) to balance the emotions.
- **Musculo-skeletal assessment:** Paul Chek method of assessing areas of strength, weakness and imbalance in the body.



The 21-room hotel was designed by architects and interior design company Zakman Design Studios



include the initial diagnostics, with basic recommendations on exercise, relaxation and nutrition. Members can then trade up to the full Balans programme if they have something specific they want to achieve.

"On top of that, every hotel guest – whatever the reason for their stay – is automatically a member of the club, with an opportunity to meet with the doctor and personal trainer for an initial consultation, as well as having access to all the facilities. They also receive 10 per cent off in the spa.

"And finally we have the restaurant and the bowling club, which gives us access to people who might not naturally come to us for wellness, allowing us to introduce them to the rest of our 'healthy living' offering.

"Every department has to be profitable in its own right. However, having so many access points does broaden our reach into new markets."

The spa encompasses 15 treatment rooms, a relaxation area, a manicure/pedicure area and a hair salon

Currently around 40 per cent of clients come for the full six-week wellness programme, often as a result of a word-of-mouth recommendation, but the objective now is to build on this, further developing the international client base to encourage more visitors from countries such as Scandinavia, Germany and the UK – at present almost half of all hotel guests come from Russia. "At just €1,500 for the full six-week programme, including full board at the hotel and spa treatments for a week, the offering is very good value compared to western Europe," says Alla.

"Our vision is to create an internationally recognised concept and brand here in Latvia, which we could then potentially roll out elsewhere. We're already being asked to build Russian banyas in Moscow, St Petersburg and Paris, and in the longer term we could consider franchising that part of the business out: our banyas could be standalone as well as part of a broader wellness centre.

"It's been very tough launching the business in a recession, and there were moments when I felt we wouldn't be able to continue. But I really believed we had the right approach, and our staff believed in it too – there were occasions when we couldn't even pay them on time, but they understood and we managed to weather the storm.

"The wellness industry is often considered to be young, but here in

business by numbers

- Average hotel occupancy: 55 per cent across the year; almost 100 per cent in the summer
- Length of stay: 60 per cent weekend breaks; 10 per cent stay for six weeks.
- 2010 nightly hotel rates: €50 (35 lats) – €300 (210 lats)
- Sample spa prices:
 - Amber stone massage (90 mins): €54 (38 lats)
 - Full body mud wrap (30-40 mins): €57 (40 lats)
 - Individual hydrotherapy showers (15 mins): €21 (15 lats)
- Balans Club membership packages:
 - Amber package: 39 lats a month/ 399 lats a year (gym and swimming pool access only; group exercise classes an additional 2 lats per class)
 - Balans package: 59 lats a month/ 599 lats a year (gym, pool, banya, classes; 10 per cent off in the spa)
 - Deluxe package: 2000 lats a year – includes full Balans programme; unlimited use of wellness facilities, plus guest passes; and discounts for the hotel, spa (25 per cent) and restaurant (10 per cent)

fitness facilities

- Separate CV and resistance rooms – equipment from Life Fitness, plus the Paul Chek Fitness Works and Triple X brands
- Large studio offering everything from salsa and pilates classes to a table tennis club
- 18 x 6m indoor pool – includes aquaerobics and kids' swimming lessons
- Classes such as yoga and tai chi on the beach in the summer
- Nature walks in the woods
- Tennis courts

Jurmala we have centuries of heritage and I've always felt we were on the right track.

"And now we're at a really exciting point, with great added value thanks to new partnerships with Elier and Russie Blanche [see information box, p69]. Our brands are all new to the market and we're all taking off together. It's taken five years of development for us to get here, and I feel we've only now achieved the balance we need in our business. Now we need to learn how to maintain that balance, just as our customers have to do on their Balans programme."



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spa software

Luke Tuohschere asks a selection of spa and health club operators about their spa management software systems

**margaret lora, spa director
spa merge, hilton grand vacations club, nyc**

supplier: spabooker



what's your favourite feature of the software system?

The reporting functions are amazing with Spabooker. As a spa director within a large corporation, it's vital that I have accurate reports I can count on. Spabooker's reporting system allows me to customise reports to fit my needs.

The gift certificate tracking report is my favourite. These reports have tended to be a nightmare with software I've used in the past, but with Spabooker it's simple for me to track my liabilities, expired gift certificates and series numbers [services purchased in a package – ie the software must be able to keep an accurate count of remaining treatments]. This is invaluable from an accounting standpoint.

Another fantastic aspect of the software are the upgrades and training/webinars. Typically, as software companies enhance their programmes, you're obliged to pay for the upgrade. But Spabooker's enhancements are free of charge and they provide a webinar

to train you in the new developments. They also provide marketing strategies and business-building tips that go beyond a typical software company's commitments, showing an interest in helping you to build your business.

what impact has the software had on your business?

The reporting aspect has allowed me to feel 100 per cent confident during financial meetings. The accuracy and

confidence I have in the reports saves me hours of having to backtrack and verify numbers before reporting.

Meanwhile, the online booking facility has increased our client volume and is a great marketing tool for the spa.

what would you change about the software if you could?

I would adjust some of the point of sale steps that tend to be a bit time-consuming. This is hard, as security is – and must be – of prime importance, but it would be good to find ways of storing more data to make it easier to book additional purchases, for example.

[Note: Spabooker has since released version 6.2 of its software, which condenses the entire checkout process to one page]

software briefing

Spabooker is: "A web-based appointment book with simple to learn and use navigation; advanced customer relationship management that allows you to view complete member profiles and preferences, as well as booking history and product purchases; and an online retail store designed to match the look and feel of your site. You can sell your products and series with a real-time

inventory and the ability to create and sell customised, printable gift certificates on your website."

Other features include: "Advanced marketing tools and online booking to drive revenue to your door by creating specials and selling products and instant gift certificates. You can also add or remove levels of memberships with a single click to match your membership profile."

www.spa-booker.com

**lorraine barry, spa manager
radisson blu hotel & spa, cork**

supplier: reservation assistant - tac software



what's your favourite feature of the software system?

There's a wealth of information that can be obtained from this system, but the one feature that stands out is how easy it is to train new staff members to use it – it's very user-friendly.

It's also a good way of keeping track of membership profiles: the software alerts us well in advance of any membership

that's up for renewal, ensuring we speak to members at the relevant time. We can also accurately target lapsed club members to find out why they left the gym, encouraging them to rejoin.

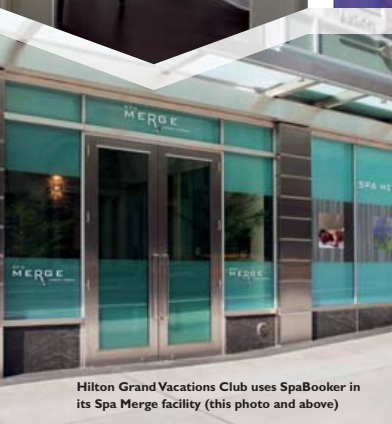
Another useful feature is that we can use the same system for booking treatments in our spa as well as for tracking our health club members. The system lets us add notes to certain

treatments, which is very beneficial when clients have special requests or just need information passed on to their therapist. This affords us the luxury of tailoring treatments to each individual, making the client feel more welcomed.

I also think it's a very good system for completing end of night cash-ups: there's very little room for error and it's very simple and quick to complete.

what impact has the software had on your business?

We can now target gym members to tell them about our special offers in other parts of the hotel, such as discounted spa products, as well as our recently



Hilton Grand Vacations Club uses SpaBooker in its Spa Merge facility (this photo and above)



The Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa uses its software to track individual preferences, by adding notes on certain treatments

introduced Product of the Month and Treatment of the Month.

With the swipe card system, we can also roster staff in a more cost-efficient manner, as the software shows us when our busiest and quietest times are.

The cards are good from a security aspect too, as they include photo ID.

what would you change about the software if you could?

As the recession took hold, we reacted by changing our price structure and our on/off peak hours in an attempt to expand into new and unexplored markets. We found that the system could not keep up with the changing

times and only allowed us to have a certain number of rate codes in place. I would allow for unlimited brackets with times to match these memberships, allowing better management of the gym.

software briefing

Reservation Assistant's supplier, TAC, says: "Efficient spa software has to help the spa manager administer all bookings and resources with only one tool. From voucher sales to membership management and retail, the right software solution simplifies your workflows and optimally aligns all resources, enabling you to save

In addition, sometimes it's a little difficult to get some information on our members, and the system could ideally offer a more efficient way to complete a direct debit.

precious time that you can invest into outstanding guest service."

Reservation Assistant offers: "Long-standing experience on five continents in 16 languages, more than 1,000 report options, a modular structure for individual development, local project support and more than 90 interfaces."

www.reservationassistant.com

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▲
Thornton Hall uses Premier Spa+ software

**roy burke, health club general manager
thornton hall hotel & spa, wirral**

supplier: premier spa+

what's your favourite feature of the software system?

There are several. One example is that Premier Spa+ has an efficient and simple way of organising and sending the direct debit run collection. I also like the ability to design and build a client record card to include details of all members' visits, bookings and purchasing history, in addition to the standard contact details.

When it comes to putting together membership letters or promotions, the software also links with Microsoft Word, so we can produce mail merges without any problems.

what impact has the software had on your business?

The Premier Spa+ software manages entrance to the health club, which includes our fitness suite, spa, hair spa and bistro. Client cards are set up for each member, giving details of their membership – membership type, payment status, renewal date.

Members gain access to the club by swiping their card at the entrance; any classes or treatments booked, products purchased or meals taken

at the bistro are also recorded on the card. This data can be used to assess membership activity, target promotions and incentivise repeat bookings.

The system has helped us build a better understanding of our members and their purchasing habits by looking at the retail history on their client cards. This has allowed us to offer more targeted promotions, with higher success rates, because we've answered their needs more effectively. Generally, it also means we can offer a more professional service when it comes to booking future appointments and link-selling retail purchases.

It's helped us manage our waiting list for membership too, which is currently six months. We can store the details of anyone who's interested in joining on the system and then keep in touch with them until the time comes to promote them to full membership status.

We also have an extensive aerobic class timetable that needs to be closely monitored to ensure we're optimising our schedule. Premier Spa+ helps us do this by recording class usage and the trends in class popularity – information we can pull off as reports.



MindBody has improved
staff efficiency and guest
experience at Champneys ▼



Finally, our hair spa has also benefited from the software: we can log all our clients' hair colours on their record card and use the software for appointment reminders. We're currently looking at a text message service to remind clients of their beauty and hair appointments – something I know Premier can offer.

what would you change about the software if you could?

I'd like to have the ability to book aerobic classes online, as this would allow for a smoother operation. I understand this feature is currently in development at Premier.

software briefing

Premier Software says: "Premier Spa+ is a simple yet powerful management system that allows for sophisticated scheduling, comprehensive point of sale, complete client history, gift voucher tracking, stock control, medical and contra-indications, membership administration, comprehensive management reports, package and course management, detailed client/staff analysis, mail order management, card payment processing, property management system interface, quality after-sales support, post code validation, multilingual access control and extensive CRM capabilities."

www.premiersoftware.co.uk

**helen wynne, health club & spa project manager
hand picked hotels****supplier: ez-runner****what's your favourite feature
of the software system?**

Hand Picked Hotels has been using Ez-Runner management software for the past four years. It's a sophisticated system capable of dealing with both spa packages and health club membership.

The system benefits from a multitude of features that play a significant part in making daily operational procedures run more smoothly and helps improve our overall competence as a business. It gives quick and effective capacity to check availability and book several different spa days at one time.

The flexibility of the configuration allows the member of staff to design the database structure, enabling it to work with both spa packages (day and residential) and within a health club membership environment.

**what impact has the software
had on your business?**

The implementation has had a significant impact on the business. The tried and tested system has played a key role in helping us create a highly effective health club and spa revenue stream for the group via an increased exposure to all sales opportunities:

software briefing

Ez-Runner

says: "Ez-Runner is an end-to-end 'intelligent' web-based resource management system, designed to improve efficiency and maximise yield through integrated booking, point of sale, membership, stock control, reporting and web modules. This offers operators the convenience of installing one system and dealing with one supplier."

from central reservations to hotel revenue teams, spa/club teams to the Hand Picked Hotels website.

We're sure the relationship we have with the team at Ez-Runner will go from strength to strength. The initial training and installation of the system allowed us to buy into its efficiency and sophisticated features.

**what would you change about
the software if you could?**

In the future, a strong interface between the Ez-Runner software and our internal hotel reservation system, Opera, would be a significant enhancement.

"As the Ez-Runner application is integrated, all customer activity is linked to the personalised membership screen. This enables facilities to actively prospect, profile members, carry out targeted marketing campaigns as part of CRM strategies and accurately monitor usage to focus on retention."

www.ez-runner.com**darren corke, group technical manager
champneys health resorts****supplier: mindbody****what's your favourite feature
of the software system?**

The use of the software within the resort has made it possible to manage around 100 employees, allowing scheduling teams to concentrate on guest satisfaction instead of trying to remember which therapist does which treatment, the duration of that treatment and which treatments complement each other.

The software has streamlined the management process and improved staff efficiency and the guests' experience.

**what impact has the software
had on your business?**

Moving to a totally online system was a leap of faith – albeit one that has paid off financially and from a functionality perspective. The system we've chosen has improved the way in which the business manages its staff and client database – both existing and new.

We can view guest history and monitor which treatments sell, and this has allowed senior staff to manage special offers and maximise revenue. The ability to pull off live data reports

and monitor guest spend has had the biggest impact on the business.

Meanwhile, the simplicity of the system has had a positive impact on both staff and guest experience. MindBody allows the information to be displayed in so many formats, giving staff the information they need while removing functions that are irrelevant to them and reducing the time needed to perform tasks.

**what would you change about
the software if you could?**

I would like to see the system introduce a level of artificial intelligence to allow a greater level of interaction with the guest – more like a Q&A session with a member of staff. Simple questions could be asked at a touch-screen kiosk, with the system then making recommendations and designing a schedule that's perfect for the guest.

For now, however, there's nothing better than the skills of a good scheduling team – something I think will be the case for many years to come.

software briefing

Mindbody

says its Spa Management Software will: "Let clients book service packages online, auto-confirm appointments via email and text, improve retention with custom marketing

tools, boost revenue with PCI-compliant credit card processing, track sales, inventory and performance and access [their] business from [their] mobile device."

www.mindbodyonline.com**luke tuchscherer**

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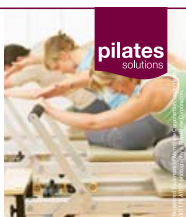


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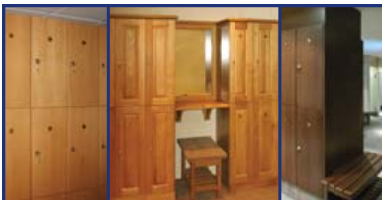
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AQUA SHEKO FISH THERAPY FOR LONDON

The UK's first fish therapy spa – Aqua Sheko – has opened in Kensington in London.

While fish therapy is popular in places such as China and Malaysia, and has recently spread to South Africa, this is the first of its kind in the UK.

The spa, which specialises in 'fish pedicures', uses eight tanks of water which are home to garra rufa – a species of omnivorous carp that are native to the Middle East and Turkey.

Visitors put their feet in the tanks while the fish nibble at their feet – believe it or not, they love to feed on flaky or diseased skin. The tiny, toothless creatures will suck at the dead cells of the epidermis to reveal a fresh new layer beneath. The process is said not to hurt and is claimed to be especially good for combating psoriasis.

A deluxe, 45-minute pedicure, which includes a 30-minute fish pedicure and a 15-minute foot wash and massage, is £45. Details: www.aquasheko.co.uk

DALESAUNA'S NEW SAUNA ETIQUETTE POSTER



Can you remember the swimming pool posters that showed bathers how to behave – the ones that depicted a multitude of offences on which lifeguards would quickly clamp down?

While swimming rules are generally now understood, the protocol of using a sauna is still a little foggy. So, to help health clubs educate their clients on the benefits and use of saunas, thermal equipment supplier Dalesauna has designed a Sauna Etiquette poster which communicates the serious messages and benefits but in a fun way.

The A3 poster is water-resistant and can be used in a heated area.



GETTING IN A SPIN ABOUT SPA

Those seeking a spa break with a difference need look no further than Europe's first rotating hotel, due to be built in Croatia.

Masterminded by Richard Hywel Evans of Studio RHE in the UK, the new hotel and marina will be built into a hillside olive grove on the island of Solta, just 35 minutes by boat from Split. The development will rotate within the centre of an infinity-edged swimming lake that cascades down onto the hillside spa below. As it rotates, at a gentle speed of 1.3 times a day, guests will be able to enjoy a range of ever-changing views over the Adriatic Sea, the surrounding countryside and local Roman remains.

40-year spa habit for austrian nuns

The 144-bedroom Kurhaus Marienkrone hotel in eastern Austria is no newcomer to spa treatments: for the past 40 years, it's operated as a health spa as part of the Marienkrone Abbey.

What makes the facility stand out, however, is the fact that it's run by nuns – who developed their first 50-bedroom guesthouse in 1969 after their chicken farming and peach-growing businesses proved unsuccessful.

The Sisters of the Cistercian Order lead all types of activities at the health spa, from a game of hockey or qigong in the abbey grounds to gymnastics, line-dancing or cycling along undulating lanes overlooking vineyards.

The wide range of therapies include massages, colonics and acupuncture. But the signature treatment sees jets of cold mineral water blasted at the body to help boost the immune system.



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