

health club management

FEBRUARY 2016

No 232

FITNESS FORESIGHT™ 2016

Beacons, biomimicry
and a new sharing
economy

COMING HOME?

Holmes Place has
its eyes set on a
return to the UK

Upcycling
Inspirational ideas
to set your cycling
studio alight

EMBRACING THE STOCK MARKET

What does the
Gym Group's IPO
mean for the rest
of the sector?

DARCEY BUSSELL

The Strictly Come Dancing star unveils
her new group exercise concept



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When sport meets fitness



Sport is just one part of a far larger entity that is physical activity, observed Jennie Price at the ukactive Summit in November – hardly a shocking revelation in itself, but nevertheless an interesting perspective coming from the CEO of Sport England, whose mission up to this point has been to develop grassroots sport across the UK.

So was Sport England about to change tack and embrace other forms of activity? Were we about to enter an era where all those involved in getting the nation active would abandon their silos and work co-operatively and collaboratively in the centre ground? After all, we'd already seen a similar move in the fitness sector: the 2012 rebrand of the Fitness Industry Association to become ukactive, which simultaneously allowed the organisation to spread its wings and take a much broader approach to getting 'more people, more active, more often'.

In December we got our answer in the shape of the new DCMS *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*. Finer details are yet to come – Sport England will unveil its plans in April – but we already know the government is eyeing a far wider remit for the organisation.

For example, we know investment will be earmarked for initiatives that encourage physical activity among the inactive; demographic groups that generally have

low participation rates – including women, older and disabled people, and those from lower socioeconomic groups – will be targeted with financial backing. There will also be projects to help young people gain skills that aid employment and tackle social exclusion and mental health problems.

Meanwhile sports governing bodies will have to demonstrate that projects have a 'meaningful, measurable impact'

All future funding will go to any organisation that can achieve one or more of the core aims of the strategy

on improving people's lives if they want to continue to receive funding.

We also know that – spurred on by Sports Minister Tracy Crouch's comment that the current distinction between sport and broader physical activity is "unhelpful, outdated and irrelevant" – Sport England's *Active People* survey will be replaced with *Active Lives*, embracing activities like cycling, dancing and walking alongside traditional outdoor sports.

So what does all this mean for operators of gyms and leisure centres?

Perhaps the most immediate point, as ukactive Steve Ward points out on page 75, is that it marks an end to 'them and us' and a new era of working together to deliver physical activity outcomes for local communities.

But it's not just about idealistic hand-holding: the new strategy puts very

practical measures in place that will play into the hands of the fitness sector. As Ward explains: "All future funding will go to any organisation that can achieve one or more of the core aims of the strategy" – and these aims fit hand-in-glove with what the fitness sector is geared up to deliver: mental, physical and economic wellbeing.

The challenge and opportunity for our sector is therefore to think creatively about the way we package our offering, and the organisations we partner, so we tap in to this new funding stream. What best practice can we roll out in terms of working with troubled youths, disabled people, the sick and elderly? How do we prove the positive impact of our offering on mental health or workplace productivity?

We have an opportunity to play our part in the delivery of government policy. Let's seize it with both hands.

Kate Cracknell

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Photograph by Ray Burmiston

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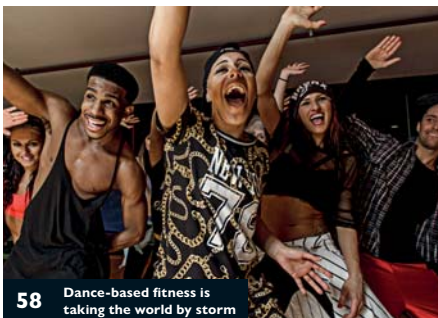
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Darcey Bussell
on her new group
exercise programme

PHOTO: IAN BURTON



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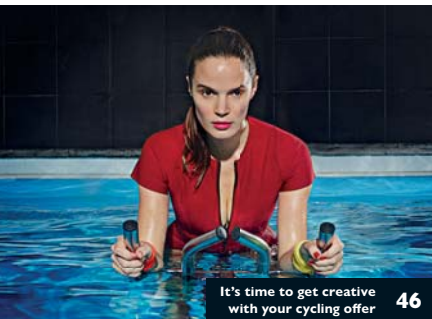
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Exercise may enhance the plasticity of the adult brain, making it more flexible and open to new ideas and ways of learning, according to new research from the University of Pisa, Italy



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PEOPLE

We're not expecting people to become qualified dancers. It's just about being happy being active



DARCEY BUSSELL, FORMER BALLERINA & STRICTLY COME DANCING JUDGE

You've launched a dance-based group exercise programme. Why?

I've seen my two daughters try to tackle competitive sports at school and it gave me realise there's a big gap – an opportunity to create a way of keeping active even if you're not an athlete of any kind.

I also know from my own experience how dancing can make you feel and give you confidence. It's a lovely way of keeping active without feeling intimidated. I just wanted everyone to be able to get a bit of it.

Tell us about the programme

It's called Diverse Dance Mix (DDMIX) and it brings together all sorts of styles and eras of music and dance. We do about 10 styles in every class, each with their own specially created music. We've created 20 genres so far – including flamenco, line dancing, 1990s vogueing, African, 1960s, Scottish reeling – and we'll launch about 12 new genres each year.

Nowadays people expect variety, so we have to mix it up and make sure everyone finds something they like in each class – particularly as we want to bring in people who wouldn't normally try dance.

The main thing is, DDMIX isn't designed to put any pressure on the participants. They don't have to be any good at dancing – it's just about having fun. Even then though, if you have the word 'dance' in the title, people always take a step back – so we refer to it as 'fitness aerobics'.

Where is DDMIX available?

We're delivering adult classes in community locations in the UK, as well as at Champneys, and David Lloyd Leisure is looking to launch DDMIX as part of its DL Kids offering.

You can also download a virtual taster class from our website – but for me, it's all about getting out and about with friends, doing the class together, having fun, maybe tying it in with going out for some tapas afterwards.

You mention DL Kids. Are children a big focus for you?

In fact my main focus at the moment is schools. For me – with the pressures at school only getting harder – it's so important that kids have a release and a chance to express themselves. We're therefore doing a number of pilots with state schools. The kids have no inhibitions and they love it. They love the bursts of energy and the chopping and changing between styles. We encourage them to jump a bit higher, to lunge a bit deeper, but

we don't make it technical and we never tell them they're doing anything wrong.

We do eras like 1960s – with moves like the Monkey and the Funky Chicken – and we have a Rocky boxing theme for the 1980s, so it works for boys as well as girls. In any case, I think the public perception of men in dance has changed. Young boys are much more into it these days.

What results are you seeing from the pilots so far?

From the kids' perspective, they've gone from 'forgetting' their PE kit to always having it with them, because they're looking forward to the DDMIX classes.

The teachers have also noticed a difference in attitude. The kids get all their angst out in DDMIX, so they're more focused in their academic lessons.



DDMIX is being offered in local communities, gyms and schools



DDMIX instructor courses are running throughout 2016, in London, Bournemouth, Leeds and Manchester.

For more information, visit www.diversedancemix.com

.....

If we can continue to deliver strong results, hopefully we'll get funding to roll DDMIX out as part of state school PE. But it will need support – it isn't designed to make money, so we need funding to keep producing the music and programming.

What excites you about DDMIX?

It's a chance to show people how dance can make you – can make everyone – feel. So many people shy away from it, even kids. They think dance isn't for them. But I believe we make decisions far too early. We all have that heartbeat, that rhythm in us, and our classes show how simple it can be.

We're not expecting people to become qualified dancers. It's just about being active and happy. Happy being active.

What's your message to gyms?

I think gyms sometimes believe that, unless people can feel a difference after their first class – walking away with aching muscles – it isn't going to work. I don't think that's right.

Just giving people a sense of wellbeing, fun and achievement – having been able to put some dance steps together – will satisfy many people. I think gyms need to broaden their understanding of what people across all different age groups want.

Do you now dance for fun?

Absolutely. When I gave up dancing, I was constantly latching myself on to anything I could find to act as stress relief. I used to go to contemporary, jazz, tap classes, Zumba... After dancing all my life, it was a revelation to be able to enjoy it in such a different way. In the end, exercising has to be fun for me. I can't get serious about it.



Busnell believes many people mistakenly think dance isn't for them



In Malawi, the average rural wage is US\$1.5 a day. Bitwalking could help transform lives



Bahar and Imbesi are co-founders of the app that enables users to make money by walking

NISSAN BAHAR & FRANKY IMBESI, CO-FOUNDERS, BITWALKING

What is Bitwalking?

Put simply, Bitwalking enables users to generate money by walking.

How does it work?

The free app validates and converts steps to Bitwalking dollars (BW\$) that you can manage and use as you wish. People earn about BW\$1 for every 10,000 steps walked; the money you generate accumulates each day and remains in your account until transferred or spent.

We've created a central bank that verifies steps and oversees transfers. It uses the block chain method used to transfer other crypto-currencies such as Bitcoin. Bitwalking users have access to their own wallet that stores the dollars they've earned. They can then transfer these BW\$ to other people via the app.

What can people buy with their BW\$?

Users can spend their dollars at our in-app marketplace, which is filled with products – both tech and non-tech – with a wide price range. Users can complete a wish list to help us create a more personalised market.

Bitwalkers are also able to connect and use BW\$ with our third party partners: online retailers, brands, charities and local governments that share our belief in an economy for all.

At launch, BW\$1 is worth US\$1. The global Bitwalking economy – including the physical human limit of how many BW\$ a user can generate – will guide our valuation of the currency.

When did Bitwalking launch?

It launched in November 2015 to over 200,000 users at launch. People from all countries can request an invitation at bitwalking.com; our system prioritises countries with the most requests.

How will it pay for itself?

At this stage we're focused on user experience and user growth, not monetisation of the scheme.

What most excites you about it?

The impact Bitwalking could have in developing countries is one of our main reasons for creating the currency. In

Malawi, one of the African nations to join at the launch of the project, the average rural wage is just US\$1.5 (£1) a day.

In developed nations, the average person would earn around BW\$15 a month – roughly equating to a cup of coffee each week – but in poorer countries where people have to walk miles to work, school or simply to collect water, we believe Bitwalking could help transform people's lives.

What's next for Bitwalking?

We'll continue to expand our global partnerships – online retailers, brands, charities and governments – but an equal priority will be bringing on board small local businesses to accept BW\$ in-store.

Can you see a way for gyms to get involved?

We've been approached by many health clubs/gyms with different, exciting ways to collaborate and accept BW\$. For example, accepting BW\$ as partial payment for monthly dues, or accepting BW\$ for a full day access. ▶

A black and white photograph of two women on stationary bikes in a gym. The woman in the foreground is blonde, smiling, and wearing a black Reebok tank top with a large white '4' and 'LES' on it. The woman in the background is Asian, looking intense, and wearing a black tank top with 'LM' on it. A man's arm is visible on the right side of the frame. The background is a brick wall.

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Gyms could provide small rewards for arriving by foot, bicycle or public transport



TfL's Bruce McVean

BRUCE McVEAN, PRINCIPAL STRATEGY PLANNER – SURFACE TRANSPORT, TRANSPORT FOR LONDON (TfL)

TfL recently created a 'Walk the Tube' map, showing how long it takes to walk from one station to another. Why?

We wanted to encourage more Londoners to walk part of their daily journeys by highlighting how close many stations in central London are to each other – thereby both improving people's health and reducing Tube congestion.

Our 2014 Transport Health Action Plan – which sets out how TfL helps improve the health of Londoners – found that only around 25 per cent of adults in London get all the physical activity they need from walking and cycling as part of their everyday travel. However, as many as 60 per cent could be achieving 150 minutes a week just by adding a little more walking into their daily travel. We therefore identified ways to encourage more people to walk and cycle, and the idea for the Walking Tube map was developed.

What's been the feedback so far?

Feedback from our customers through social media and emails has been very positive and we're seeing people download the map from our website. It's too early to say whether the map is encouraging more people to walk, but this is something we'll monitor in our research.

How are you promoting it?

We're going to trial putting the Walking Tube map on digital screens at Paddington Tube station, which is a busy commuter and visitor station, and we're producing printed versions of the map for our Visitor Centres. This is in addition to the standard maps already in place at all Tube and

mainline rail stations to help people find walking routes in the local area.

Londoners already do thousands of steps on their daily commute. What more can be achieved with the map?

Our research shows that Londoners already do a lot of walking, and half of all the walking they do is as part of public transport trips, but there are lots more short trips that could be done on foot.

We hope the map will encourage more Londoners and visitors to think twice before they jump on the Tube, and to

consider whether it might be just as quick and easy – not to mention better for their health – to walk their trip.

How can health clubs get involved?

They can do a lot to encourage staff and members to build more activity into their daily routines, by providing information on public transport alternatives to using the car. For example, provide walking and cycling route maps and apps – and even incentivise members to travel actively, by giving small rewards for arriving by foot, bicycle or public transport. ●



People can download the map from the main TfL website



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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

ClassPass – friend or foe?

I was interested to read your feature in *HCM* January 16 (p44), which looked in-depth at the ClassPass offering and asked: is it a friend or foe to operators?

1Rebel and ClassPass both launched in London in Q1 of 2015 and enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship. 1Rebel provides a range of fitness experiences (Ride, Reshape and Rumble) and ClassPass provides paying customers to participate in those experiences.

Our customer base is approximately 30 per cent ClassPass and, at this point in time, intentionally so.

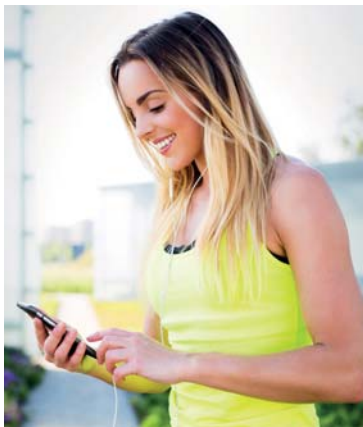
Launching a boutique fitness studio is much like launching a restaurant. You have the certainty of fixed and controllable costs but, in the beginning at least, no certainty of revenue. Without customers you also have zero atmosphere, which from an experiential perspective makes it harder to attract more customers.

This, for 1Rebel, has been the central benefit of ClassPass. An empty seat carries cost and detracts from the experience. ClassPass, as a dedicated marketing machine, solves this problem by providing an immediate and paying customer base, which in turn provides atmosphere as well as positive word of mouth.

Then, as home-grown (non-ClassPass) revenues grow, it becomes the operator's responsibility to manage the seats made available to ClassPass. One of the real benefits of ClassPass is the flexibility it offers: operators can make seats available in any number of combinations, from particular seats in particular classes to whole classes at particular times.

For these reasons, managed properly, ClassPass is definitely friend, not foe.

Giles Dean
Co-founder, 1Rebel



Flexible memberships models in the UK bring fresh business

Supporting, not undermining, operators

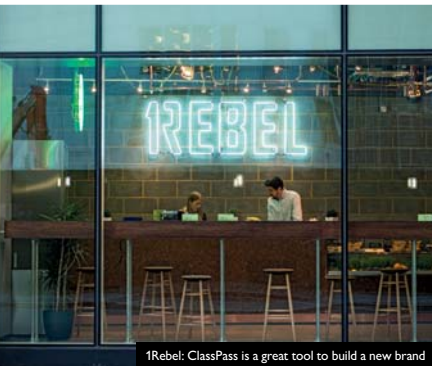
I wanted to respond to your article entitled 'A New Way of Buying' (see *HCM* Nov/Dec 15, p44). The article looked at the proliferation of digital middlemen in the health and fitness industry yet, with its focus very much on the US market, failed to provide any real comment on what's happening here in the UK.

While it's absolutely right to point out the risks and threats of some of the models appraised in the article, I'd like to point out that there are other flexible membership models here in the UK that are designed to sustain operators rather than undermine them.

MoveGB is one of these businesses. We designed our model around operators' needs and we focus first and foremost on supporting our partners. Our model brings our partners new income and we pay healthy revenues, rather than competing for the same members and devaluing their product as some of the US models do.

We want to work with operators to grow the industry, and believe the different digital aggregators need to be understood clearly rather than tarnishing them all with the same brush.

Justin Mendleton
MD, MoveGB



1Rebel: ClassPass is a great tool to build a new brand

Ninth club for Athletic Fitness Bulgaria

Athletic Fitness Bulgaria continues to grow its health club estate on home territory, with the launch of its ninth club in a shopping mall in Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria.

Spanning 1,000sq ft, it comprises a gym with cardio, strength and free weight areas, a studio and sunbeds. The CV equipment has been supplied by BH and Matrix, while Panatta has supplied the remaining equipment.

"Our target market is the working class between the ages of 18 and 65," says director Svetoslav Chankov. "Our USP is that everything, excluding PT, is included in the €20 a month membership."

The chain is currently looking for further sites, with one more in early negotiations.

Details: http://lei.sr?g=r4c5c_H

IMAX to combine cycling and cinema

Immersive cinema company IMAX is understood to be looking to move into the US health and fitness industry.

According to a report that appeared online recently, the company has applied for a permit to open an indoor cycling studio in Brooklyn, New York, which will be fitted out with a giant screen.

"The studio would consist of tiered rows of stationary bikes facing the screen, which would play original content created by IMAX and its partners," Robert Lister, the company's chief business development officer, told reporters.

Details: http://lei.sr?g=g6j6R_H

Marriott International in Belarus project

Marriott International is opening a luxury hotel in Minsk, Belarus, this month, within a wider sports and leisure complex developed by the investment fund of Qatar's Ministry of Defence.

The five-star Minsk Marriott Hotel will be located alongside a 4,500-capacity sports arena and will have a health club featuring a gym, wellness centre and spa. In addition, there will be an aqua fitness centre that will feature a swimming pool, gym, sauna and massage rooms.

Interiors have been designed by a number of local designers and feature paintings and pictures created by the Belarusian Union of Artists.

Details: http://lei.sr?g=x4z5V_H

New approach to obesity in Dubai

With a recent study showing that more than 60 per cent of the adult population in Dubai is overweight, the Dubai Health Authority (DHA) has drawn up a behaviour change plan in an unprecedented effort to get residents to eat more healthily and take more exercise.

According to a report in *Gulf News*, the new programme will allow people to collect points when they eat healthily or take exercise, which can be converted into

rewards such as gym memberships, cinema tickets or meal vouchers.

The programme is being fine-tuned, but is slated for launch next month. Linked to Dubai's new mandatory health insurance scheme, it will be open to everyone.

Data from gyms, fitness apps and other technology will be used to measure participation and rewards, with residents able to sign into a personal online account. Details: http://lei.sr?g=2P5E5_H



Dubai has launched a new rewards scheme to get its population healthier

Leading by example at Anytime

Managing director of Anytime Fitness Spain, Rod Hill, has shown his confidence in the model by investing in his own club.

Speaking to *Health Club Management*, Hill said: "An opportunity came up for a club in a great location, above a supermarket

in Terrassa – a city just outside Barcelona – so we decided to invest our own money. My wife will run the new club while I will focus my main efforts on continuing to grow the Anytime business in Spain."



Rod Hill launched his own club last month

The 600sq m club opened on 15 January and has two group exercise studios, as well as a gym with the latest cardio equipment from Precor, plus strength and functional training areas.

"In line with the Anytime Fitness ethos, we will be focusing on coaching; both one-to-one and via a new small group personal training package we're working on," said Hill. "This will cost each person around €15 per session and get them into groups with like-minded people working towards the same goals."

Hill is aiming for around 1,000 members, and the club launched with 400. Memberships cost €45 a month, targeting aspirational over-35s who are willing to pay more for quality and service.

This is the 19th Anytime Fitness club in Spain, with plans for 40 by the end of 2016 and 200 in three to four years.

Details: http://lei.sr?g=N6Ugy_H

Multi-million investment for Mayo



Lisa Clarke (above) speaking to GWS delegates about DMC's plan for Minnesota

The area surrounding Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, US, is set to be developed to provide a community for the medical organisation's patients, visitors and local residents, using public investment that adds up to US\$585m.

Speaking at the Global Wellness Summit (GWS) in Mexico City, Lisa Clarke, executive director of the Destination Medical Center (DMC) Economic Development Agency, said DMC will position Minnesota as a premier global destination for health and wellness.

"Normal life as we know it is suspended when you go to Mayo Clinic," said Clarke.

"You thought you'd be there for two days, but you have to stay for two weeks. Patients have said they want to feel normal at Mayo. That means providing everything people need: the right food, hospitality, places to pray, sing, meditate and so on. We're becoming more deliberate about this now."

One of the reasons for the DMC initiative is that 70 per cent of patient time is spent in the community, but there aren't enough high quality experiences to be had in the surrounding area.

The clinic serves 1.3m people a year.
Details: http://lei.sr?a=8f6Z8_H

£100k joining fee for Nantucket club

The development of a health club is underway at a high-end resort on Nantucket island, Massachusetts, US, which will have a US\$150,000 joining fee and cost \$5,000 a year in membership.

Aimed at affluent executives and their families, the Ezia Athletic Club will provide an integrated approach to wellness, backed by performance coaches, physical therapists, nutritionists and medical doctors.

Founder and general manager Isaiah Truymen told *Health Club Management* that the resort's hefty price tag would provide members with "privacy, and quality, with a result-oriented focus."

Facilities at the new club will include an Olympic-size pool and a performance-based 650sq m gym.
Details: http://lei.sr?a=j8V7A_H

Adidas unveils new eco-friendly trainers

Global sports clothing brand

Adidas has unveiled a pair of trainers made from ocean plastic pollution, after collaborating with Parley for the Oceans, an organisation that seeks to repurpose ocean waste.

The shoe has an upper made from ocean plastic and a midsole that's 3D printed using recycled polyester and gill net content.

Adidas has also ended the use of plastic bags at its retail stores, the use of plastic microbeads in its bodycare products, and the use of plastic bottles during meetings at its German HQ.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=Z3v9p_H

Impuls opens premium Vilnius club

Impuls has launched a new €1m full-service fitness club in the heart of Lithuania's capital city, Vilnius.

Located in a former casino and restaurant building, the new club spans 2,150sq m over three floors and, as well as the gym includes a sauna, rest areas, two group exercise studios, a functional training zone and a weights area.

Membership costs €65 a month, with the primary audience being city centre workers. "We're confident both residents and people working nearby will appreciate this place and its high tech equipment," said Impuls CEO Vidmantas Siugzdinis. "The centre of Vilnius has a shortage of top level fitness facilities."



Impuls has created a premium club in central Vilnius

The club is the first in the Baltic region to feature milon equipment, which performs a body analysis and produces a tailored programme for members.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=k4p8F_H

Glass-bottomed sky pool wins competition

A glass-bottomed swimming pool connecting two matching skyscrapers has been named the winner of an ideas competition called Sky Pool Paris.

The design, named Skyframe, is the work of French architect Tommaso Bernabò Silorata. It proposes two 54-storey towers with a large central void between them, bridged at the top by the pool. Swimmers would have a head-spinning view all the way to the bottom of the void, where a ground pool would be located to offer a sense of symmetry. Silorata's tower design includes a gym, hotel, restaurant, wine bar and auditorium, plus a rooftop lounge next to the pool.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=P5j2M_H

Nuffield Health merges wellbeing, hospital arms

Nuffield Health is to merge its wellbeing and hospital divisions both at board and operational level as part of the strategy set out by new CEO Steve Gray.

Gray, who took the reins from David Mobbs on 1 December, has also shuffled the charity's executive board as he bids to strengthen the delivery of the organisation's integrated healthcare strategy.

He said that the charity itself must be fully integrated if it is to deliver on its vision of offering more accessible, innovative ways for people to get and stay healthy.

"Creating one Nuffield Health sets us up for success, placing our members, patients and customers at the centre of all we do," said Gray. "The new executive board has a great combination of healthcare and business knowledge; it's a mix of the existing executive board, internal promotions, new faces and has everything it needs to be a high performing team."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=D5k7Q_H

£25m Wycombe Leisure Centre open for business



The facility has a large fitness offering

A brand new leisure centre has opened in Wycombe, making physical activity a central part of the district's new £150m Handy X Hub mixed-use development.

Operated by Places for People Leisure (PiPL) on behalf of Wycombe District Council, the £25m Wycombe Leisure Centre was designed by AFL Architects and replaces the former Wycombe Sports Centre, which has closed after 40 years.

Central to the offering is a 150-station gym which features products from a host of suppliers including Precor, Matrix Fitness, Escape Fitness, Octane Fitness, Queenax, Gravity and Les Mills. There are also indoor cycling and dance studios hosting a range of fitness classes, as well as a sauna and steamroom for post-workout relaxation. Continuing the activity offering, there is a multi-use 12-court sports hall and a 10m (33ft) high climbing wall.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=A3K4M_H

Fitness First sells founding site

Fitness First has sold its Queen's Park health club in Bournemouth – the site on which the gym chain's 360-club-strong global empire was founded.

The Queen's Park Fitness First site – launched in 1993 by Mike Balfour – has been bought by leisure trust BH Live for an undisclosed amount. BH Live will now operate the centre independently under the new name BH Live Active, Queen's Park.

The disposal of the founding site is a significant landmark in the transformation of Fitness First, at a time when the chain's UK arm has been put up for sale by its

owner Oaktree Capital Management. The latest development deals another blow to the legacy of the health club sector's ailing mid-market, which last year saw former heavyweight LA fitness taken over by budget giant Pure Gym.

A Fitness First spokesperson declined to comment on the financial aspects of the Queen's Park deal, but confirmed the site was one of several regional clubs being offered to operators as part of Fitness First's strategic shift upmarket towards premium clubs in metropolitan centres.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=SqJzn_H



The club will now be run under the new name BH Live Active, Queen's Park

DLL seals £350m property sale

David Lloyd Leisure (DLL) has agreed a £350m deal with M&G Investments for the sale and leaseback of 44 UK health clubs.

Described by an M&G spokesperson as a "routine property transaction" for the firm, the sites acquired will be leased to DLL for 125 years on a full repairing and insuring basis with contracted annual reviews linked to inflation. The portfolio comprises 25 freehold and 19 long leasehold properties.

According to Kris McPhail, investment director of M&G Real Estate (which sourced the deal), sale and leaseback transactions in alternative property sectors such as leisure have been particularly popular in recent years. The



The deal covers 44 of DLL's 80+ sites in the UK

deal gives DLL a significant amount of capital which could be used to boost the business. It is, however, unclear how the funds will be used, as DLL has declined to comment on the deal.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=qzt6G_H

Pure Gym ponders £500m IPO



(L-R) Pure Gym founder Peter Roberts and chief executive Humphrey Cobbold

Pure Gym is preparing for a change of ownership, with a stock market float worth £500m or more the most likely outcome, *Health Club Management* can confirm.

Having taken control of Pure Gym three years ago, US private equity firm CCMP Capital Advisors has hired the investment bank Rothschild to review options for cashing out on its investment.

With around 140 sites, Pure Gym is the UK's largest gym chain and is currently in the process of converting the majority of the 42 clubs it bought from LA fitness last year for an estimated £70m. Pure Gym was recently named the 9th fastest growing private

company in the UK, and is expected to open a further 35-40 sites (including the remaining LA fitness sites) during 2016.

This rapid expansion has seen Pure Gym grow to double the size of nearest budget rival The Gym Group, which it nearly merged with 18 months ago. The Gym Group's value has increased to around £260m since its own IPO in November, and the market appetite for a directly comparable business would suggest Pure Gym could receive a valuation in excess of £500m if it were to follow suit.

It's understood a change of ownership will likely happen in the next six to 18 months.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=C8M4c_H

Serco decides to scrap sale of its leisure arm

Serco has ditched plans to offload its leisure business, with the services giant reluctant to dispose of another profitable arm amid profit warnings and the recent sale of its lucrative business processing outsourcing (BPO) division.

Serco Leisure – which manages around 60 UK locations including Bisham Abbey and Lilleshall National Sports Centres, plus the National Water Sports Centre – had been expected to be sold this summer, with two UK buyers initially understood to have been in contention.

However, *Health Club Management* recently revealed that the sale had stalled and it now appears that CEO Rupert



Serco CEO Rupert Soames has had second thoughts

Soames has decided against selling off both Serco's environmental services and leisure businesses, both of which are strong and profitable arms of the wider business.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=u5j3P_H

John Lewis dismisses reports of gym concept



John Lewis was linked to a gym push

Retail giant John Lewis has poured cold water on speculation that it is planning a push into the gym market.

Local media reports suggested the company was looking at a tilt into the gym sector, with a club to sit in the basement of a forthcoming £30m department store in Cheltenham.

However a company spokesperson told *Health Club Management* that the company has "absolutely no plans to expand into the gym market."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=V3Aaj_H

énergie partners Rocky to fight new year flab



Rocky is a fitness inspiration to many

The **énergie Group** has announced a new tie-up with Warner Bros for the latest instalment of the Rocky film franchise: *Creed*, which launched in the UK on 15 January.

Having previously partnered films starring fitness heroes Arnold Schwarzenegger and *The Rock*, the gym chain is working with the latest outing for Sylvester Stallone's iconic character on several activities. **énergie's** go-plus UK clubs is running promotions with the film during the busy new year period, including member incentives to win a range of film-related goodies and merchandise.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=W4c4M_H

London Marathon to aid expansion of GoodGym

The organiser of the London Marathon is to fund the expansion of running community GoodGym across three new locations in London to help spread physical activity and social good.

GoodGym – an initiative which seeks to make the act of running more purposeful and socially useful – will be able to expand operations across London and support up to 5,000 runners to do good with their training over the next year, thanks to a grant totalling £50,000 from London Marathon Events.

Founded by fitness enthusiast Ivo Gormley, GoodGym works with the NHS, charities and local community centres to match runners to a housebound elderly person who would like a regular visitor.

The GoodGym concept has since been expanded to include projects that assist homeless shelters, community gardens and many more worthy causes.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=u5k6k_H

Club Company plans facelift for latest site



Wharton Park: Plans for a health club

Country club and golf operator

The Club Company has snapped up Wharton Park Golf and Country Club in Worcestershire, with plans to add a sizeable health and fitness facility as part of the undisclosed investment.

Having been named Health Club Operator of the Year at the 2015 Flame Awards, Club Company told *Health Club Management* it's planning to replicate the winning formula at Wharton Park, with further details of the proposition to be released "in due course."

In addition to the latest purchase, the operator recently kicked off a £2m redevelopment of the Castle Royle in Berkshire, as well as a £5m project at The Warwickshire, where the company is building a four-star hotel and is working to make significant improvements to the gym and studio facilities.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=h3P6U_H

Bannatyne's heading upmarket

The Bannatyne Group is working to reposition itself as an upmarket operator in 2016, centred around a major investment programme and a change in philosophy.

After a tricky 2015, which saw the jailing of former finance director Christopher Watson for defrauding the company out of nearly £8m, the business founded by Duncan Bannatyne plans to build on recent growth momentum to offer an "upmarket service with budget club efficiency". The company has a new top team – helmed by MD Justin Musgrove – which aims to lead the business into a new era.

Central to this new strategy is a culture shift which sees the customer journey placed at the heart of the business. "In the past we've perhaps been too focused on sales, whereas now we're



MD Justin Musgrove is leading the transformation

focusing on people and the customer journey," Musgrove told *Health Club Management*.

"We're upgrading our facilities, bringing in new technology and drawing on the synergies between our health club, spa and hotel arms to offer a more upmarket experience."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=u257V_H

Algar: Define what you stand for

Mid-market gyms are in need of a radical overhaul of their traditional models to avoid being squeezed into submission.

That is the urgent warning from fitness analyst Ray Algar, whose new report issues a call-to-arms to mid-market operators, imploring them to stand-up and clearly define what they stand for. He says failure to innovate and attract new members will see mid-market clubs lose out to rivals offering cheaper, more premium, or more specialised services. The *Health Club Industry Mid-market Report* builds on Algar's previous work

outlining how traditional mid-range clubs are having their business 'salami-sliced' away by specialised competitors. The 81-page report explores the plight of mid-range health clubs in three of the most mature fitness markets – the UK, Germany and the US – together with interviews and case studies of brands such as Anytime Fitness, Fitness First and Gymbox. There is also a more in-depth study of successes and pitfalls for the US-founded international Curves network. To view the report, follow the link below.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=h9g4s_H



The report says mid-market operators must redefine their market to survive



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Independent news

truGym team leaps into trampoline sector



Jump Arena has debuted in Leeds

The family team behind independent health club chain truGym are expanding the business into the fast-growing trampoline park sector.

The new leisure venture, called Jump Arena, recently launched its first indoor trampoline park in Leeds city centre. The 20,000sq ft park features a large open trampoline area, foam pits, dodgeball, basketball, "Ninja Warrior" style obstacle course and other foam pit activities too.

"The launch of the new business has been very successful and the feedback from the customers has been great," said MD Parm Singh. "We have plans to roll out the brand and have already secured a 37,000sq ft (3,437sq m) property in Luton city centre, scheduled to open in February." Singh added that the team is also close to securing a further five sites. Details: http://lei.sr7a=X6Bq4W_H

Five-site expansion for Oxygen



The second Oxygen Freejumping location opened in Southampton last month

Oxygen Freejumping has announced a new five-site deal with 5-a-side football operator Lucozade Powerleague which it says will make it the UK's largest trampoline park operator.

The business – set up by ex-ukactive CEO David Stalker and LA fitness founder Fred Turok – launched its debut site in London in July, with a second location opened in Southampton last month. The new deal – which will see trampoline parks open alongside Lucozade Powerleague offerings in Derby, Wigan, Blackburn, North Shields and Trafford Park by the end of summer 2016 – will take Oxygen Freejumping's portfolio to seven sites as it bids to become the dominant player in the UK's fledgling trampoline market.

"The sector is extremely competitive as trampolining grows in popularity," said Rob

Howarth of JLL, who acted for Oxygen on the new deal. "Competition for sites is similar to the early growth of the budget health and fitness market circa five years ago. But just as we saw back then, one or two operators are emerging streaks ahead of the pack and will gain the biggest share of the market."

The five new sites range from 30,000-35,000sq ft and are receiving a combined capital investment of £7.5m. Most of the units have been acquired as a sub-let from DW Sports on a 15-year lease and the combined rent on the five sites represents an annual investment of around £1.2m.

Stalker added Oxygen Freejumping is seeking further locations and currently has two more sites in the hands of solicitors. Details: http://lei.sr7a=V3s7k_H

i-motion adds property expert

Independent chain i-motion gym has secured the services of former Xercise4Less property director Nikolaj Dockree as it bids to ramp up growth in 2016.

Dockree, who takes up his new role as i-motion gym commercial director in February, arrives after four years at Xercise4Less, where he oversaw the development of more than one million sq ft of gym space across the UK.

Having recently opened the second i-motion site in Stafford, the company now expects Dockree to help drive a significant expansion, with plans to reach 20 sites in the next two to three years.

"The opportunity to join i-motion gym was based on the quality they are delivering," said Dockree. "The market leading design and

technology such as TV walls and multiple virtual studios makes this one of the best budget gym brands on the market."

Former rugby player and i-motion gym founder and MD Gareth Evans told *Health Club Management* in November that he plans to self-finance the next three to four sites, with funding potentially coming from banks and private equity houses to fuel growth beyond that. He said the appointment of Dockree places the company in a strong position as it embarks on its next chapter.

"We already have several new sites in the pipeline for 2016," said Evans.

"Nik's wealth of commercial and in particular, acquisition experience, will be a huge asset to our growing brand."

Details: http://lei.sr7a=558g3_H



Nikolaj Dockree has joined i-motion

Technology news

Smartwatches set to dominate fitness tech



The Apple Watch launched last year

Three-quarters of online consumers are likely to purchase health and fitness technology in the next 12 months, with a third of these expected to buy a smartwatch, according to new research from the organisers of tradeshow CES.

The Consumer Technology Association's (CTA) latest study, Consumers' Journey to Purchase: Health and Fitness found that smartwatches are becoming the wearable tech of choice for consumers, followed by fitness trackers, smart apparel and sleep trackers. The burgeoning wearable tech market is expected to triple in value over the next 10 years, according to a research forecast by IDTechEx, with the arrival of the Apple Watch credited as helping to drive the smartwatch's growing popularity.

Overall, the report notes wearables are becoming highly effective workout aids.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=X9u5_X

Fitbit facing lawsuit over accuracy



The Fitbit Charge HR is one of the devices mentioned in the lawsuit

Fitbit, the world's biggest seller of wearable technology, is being sued in the US over claims that its heart rate monitors are inaccurate and place exercisers at risk.

The proposed nationwide class action lawsuit was filed last month by three plaintiffs who say their Fitbit wrist-worn devices – the 'Surge' and 'Charge HR' – do not accurately measure heart rate as advertised. The lawsuit claims the devices – which use Fitbit's 'PurePulse Tracker' technology whereby LED lights reflect on the skin to detect changes in capillary blood volume – dangerously underestimate heart rates during workouts meaning users risk overexerting themselves.

One of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, Teresa Black, claims that in one instance, her

personal trainer recorded her heart rate at 160 bpm, while her Fitbit read 82 bpm.

The lawsuit states: "Plaintiff Black was approaching the maximum recommended heart rate for her age, and if she had continued to rely on her inaccurate PurePulse Tracker, she may well have exceeded it, thereby jeopardising her health."

Fitbit has indicated that it will "vigorously defend the lawsuit" and said that its devices are intended to provide data to help users reach their fitness goals, rather than serve as scientific or medical devices. Accuracy of fitness trackers is a contentious issue and there have been numerous pieces of research into trackers since the technology first came to prominence.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=6X6b5_X

Wearables star at CES 2016

Having been named the biggest fitness trend of 2016 by the ACSM recently, wearable tech dominated proceedings at the recent CES technology show in Las Vegas.

Fitbit made headlines with FitBit Blaze, a new smart fitness watch designed to balance fitness and style – viewed by many observers as the company's attempt to stave off competition from the Apple Watch.

There was also a high-profile launch from Casio, which debuted its smartwatch powered by Android Wear – the first watch with a built-in microphone that is water resistant up to 50m (164ft) and features a dual layer display structure that has been designed to meet US military standards.

Elsewhere, Technogym showcased what it has described as "the world's first music

interactive treadmill". By connecting either to Technogym's Mywellness cloud app or through the Technogym UNITY console found on its cardio training equipment, users are able to access their music and receive personalised soundtracks which match the rhythm of their workout.

Meanwhile, MYZONE CEO Dave Wright took part in a panel discussion on sports wearable data credibility at the FitTech conference on the opening day of CES.

"Keeping people motivated and data intuitive and easy to digest is key," Wright said, on a day when he also welcomed basketball legend Shaquille O'Neal to the MYZONE stand, where the company was showcasing its new MZ-3 heart rate tracker and sports bra.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=z6T6z_X



Wright and Shaq at the MYZONE stand

Supplier & training news

Nautilus snaps up Octane Fitness for £78m



(L-R) Porth and Lee: Octane founders

Nautilus has acquired Octane Fitness from private equity firm North Castle Partners in a US\$115m deal.

Nautilus – which has a fitness brand portfolio comprising Nautilus, Bowflex, TreadClimber, Schwinn, Schwinn Fitness and Universal – has been seeking a strategic acquisition for more than 18 months. Nautilus believes the takeover of Octane – known for its Zero Runner and XT-One cross trainer – will help it accelerate growth by being able to extend into higher price point products, penetrate new distribution channels and expand into new international markets.

"This transaction adds a leading fitness brand, unique products and technologies, broadens distribution and deepens our talent pool," said Nautilus COO Bill McMahon. Details: http://lei.sr?a=Y4R7_R_H

Government backs CIMSPA

The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) has won a ringing endorsement from the government to lead the way in professionalising the sport and physical activity sector and raising standards.

The recent publication of the government's new sports strategy, the first in a decade, featured a strong focus on workforce development and highlighted the pressing need to improve professional standards in order to increase physical activity participation nationwide. It offers encouraging signs for the work of CIMSPA and also casts doubt on the future relationship between Sport England and SkillsActive – the sector skills council for Active Leisure and Wellbeing.

Produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the *Sporting Future – A New Strategy for an Active Nation* report said: "Sport England will support CIMSPA in developing and implementing a single, clear and rigorous set of standards for all sport and exercise professionals, with a similar clear and rigorous system for assessment, and awarding and validating qualifications, starting in January 2016."

The government backing is a major coup for CIMSPA, which has been working with employers, ukactive and

other bodies to galvanise the sector behind an employer-led chartered institute. The organisation hopes the sports strategy will signal a new chapter in the professional progress of the sector.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=A4w3h_H



CIMSPA chief executive Tara Dillon

Fitness suppliers are 'losing ground' online

Fitness suppliers and distributors are failing to make the most of the internet, with many "losing ground rather than gaining" despite notable growth in the wider fitness market.

That's according to new research from business intelligence firm Inside Online, whose *Fitness Equipment Digital Insights Report* looked at the top 50 websites within the UK fitness equipment online market. The report found that 60 per cent of these sites became less visible in search rankings over the past year, with some slipping by more than 50 per cent.

The sector's top 50 supplier websites were analysed in depth against metrics such as Seasonal Trends, Keyword Competitiveness and Visibility vs Authority, to name a few.

The report notes that the outlook for fitness clubs and equipment overall is positive, with the UK's fitness equipment market forecast to be worth more than £400m by 2018. It added however, that brands must look more closely at how they integrate SEO, paid media, content, social and PR campaigns to cement their positions within the search engines and capitalise on increased demand.



60 per cent of the top 50 fitness equipment websites have slipped in search rankings

"It's been a tough year for companies within the fitness equipment sector when it comes to their digital performance," Inside Online client services director Richard Waters told HCM. "More brands are losing ground rather than

gaining, reflecting the changing nature of digital marketing. Brands need to evolve as their customers do, think less about themselves and more about their customer needs."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=j4Y4V_H



"Ridgeway were heavily involved in the refurbishment of over twenty Fitness First reception areas. They helped develop our key signature pieces by building prototypes and supplying samples. Their knowledge of materials, joinery and manufacturing allied to a rich understanding of the customer experience proved a crucial asset, and contributed to the prompt roll out of fully optimised reception areas across the estate. We're thrilled with the final product, and are delighted to recognise Ridgeway with the Fitness First supplier award for 'delivering most outstanding service'."

Harry Kay – Property Director at Fitness First

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People news

Tom Withers named new MD for Gladstone

Gladstone Health and Leisure has announced that it has promoted Tom Withers to the role of managing director. Previously Gladstone sales and marketing director, Withers has worked for the software provider for 17 years.

"I look forward to working with all our customers as we continue to develop and deliver market leading software that will help support and grow our customers' business," said Withers.

"We have exciting plans to release a new product this year, which will be a game changer for the leisure industry and will be the dawn of a new era for Gladstone."

The shift comes as Arthur Morris, Gladstone's MD for the past four years, is also promoted. Morris moves up with the Jonas Group (the operating group in which Gladstone sits under ultimate parent company Constellation Software) to become a business unit manager.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=M9v4Y_H

Matrix promotes Bonnett to strategic director role



Gemma Bonnett joined Matrix in 2013

Matrix Fitness has announced it has promoted UK head of marketing Gemma Bonnett to the new position of director of strategic marketing for UK and EMEA.

Following a strong period of sales in the UK, Matrix is eager to enhance its position in the EMEA region, with brand consistency and added value offerings a key part of this. The promotion sees Bonnett tasked with directing this development and replicating the brand's UK success across the wider market.

"It is a challenge that the company is now ready for and one that will further strengthen our positioning in the EMEA region," commented Bonnett.

"Having been in the fitness industry for more than 15 years, I am very proud to be offered this opportunity to continue making significant steps to developing the Matrix Fitness brand."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=h4A8q_H

New Life Fitness role for Worthy

Life Fitness has promoted

UK managing director Jason Worthy to the newly-created role of managing director, Direct Business, Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA).

According to Life Fitness, Worthy's "excellent track record in delivering growth in both saturated and new markets" have led to his quick progression within the company's leadership ranks.

The new role sees Worthy return to the patch he first covered when he joined Life

Fitness in April 2012 as the general manager for distributor business in EMEA. He is now tasked with leading all Life Fitness direct business within Europe and will help support company growth plans within the International Sales



Jason Worthy joined Life Fitness in April 2012

Business Unit (ISBU). Worthy, who has been UK MD of Life Fitness for the last two years, will stay based in the UK and will report to Frank van de Ven, VP – ISBU, Life Fitness.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=Q2scg_H

Love Build appoints Adie Meyer

Construction firm Love Build has appointed Adie Meyer in a newly created role of UK business development manager, with a brief to expand the company's presence in the leisure sector.

Meyer joins from fitness equipment manufacturer Matrix Fitness, where he was head of sales for the north of the UK.

Love Build is a family-owned design and construction business that specialises in the commercial, leisure and domestic sectors. Within the leisure sector, it is the main contractor for easyGym and has also completed projects for a range

of higher education, local authority and private sector clients.

"I'm looking forward to bringing my 20 years of operational and sales experience to this new role," said Meyer. "I've collaborated with Love Build on a number of projects over recent years and have been incredibly impressed with their professionalism, standard of work and commitment to delivery. I'm excited about the opportunity to introduce them to a wider audience within the leisure industry."

Meyer has previously worked for Precor, Bannatyne's, JJB Sports and Dragons.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=w7R4d_H



Adie Meyer (left) with Love Build contract manager Hazel Martin and MD Brian Munro

Events calendar

FEBRUARY

18-20 | Forum Club- Forum Piscine Gallery Fiera di Bologna, Italy

ForumClub has a new formula this year: ForumClub-Forum Piscine Gallery will offer an exhibition of products and a lively gallery of solutions and applications in the fields of pool and spa, fitness and wellness. www.forumclub.it

25-28 | IDEA Personal Trainer Institute East Coast Alexandria, Virginia, US

A must-attend event for personal trainers, fitness professionals, owners and managers aiming to ramp up the success of their fitness business. A West Coast institute takes place in Seattle, Washington, on 14-17 April 2016.

www.ideafit.com/ptrainer

28-29 | Professional Beauty and Professional Spa ExCeL, London, UK

Showcasing leading global companies in skin care, spa, nail, beauty equipment, medical beauty and tanning. Professional Beauty is the biggest event of its kind in the UK. The Professional Spa event runs alongside. www.professionalbeauty.co.uk

MARCH

1 | Innovate 2016 Loughborough University, UK

A one-day event for organisations looking for innovative activities to enhance both participation and income streams. www.leisure-net.org

CHARITY EVENT

**21-26 SEPTEMBER
Venice to Rome
Cycle Challenge**

This brand new challenge by Macmillan, the cancer support charity, is a 620km cycle from the canals of Venice, through the rolling hills of Tuscany. It finishes in Rome, the historic Italian capital. Registration costs £200. www.macmillan.org.uk





CHARITY EVENT

**14-18 MARCH
MS Trust's Monster Ski**

Why not combine your winter break this year with a fitness challenge and raise funds for the Multiple Sclerosis Trust? The three-day Monster Ski ski and snowboard challenge in Chamonix, France, will see participants covering 30,000 vertical feet (the height of Mount Everest) each day. For the first time, the event will take place in two countries, with one day in Courmayeur on the Italian side of Mont Blanc. Register for £150. Details: www.mstrust.org.uk

18-20 | The 2016 International Fitness Showcase Winter Gardens, Blackpool, UK

Dance, aerobics, step, combat, mind-body, lectures and workshops for fitness instructors and enthusiasts. www.chrysalispromotions.com

21-24 | IHRSA 2016 Orlando, Florida, US

The 35th Annual Convention & Trade Show will offer seminars, keynotes and educational sessions, plus a trade show. www.ihrsa.org/convention

22-23 | BASES Student Conference Bangor University, Bangor, UK

This conference will celebrate how research in sport and exercise sciences has evolved and excelled since London 2012. www.bases.org.uk/student-conference

29 March-1 April | ACSM Health & Fitness Summit & Expo Orlando, Florida, US

Offers the full spectrum of programming, from science to practical application, for students, enthusiasts, PTs and professionals. www.acsmsummit.org

APRIL

6 | EHFF Cologne, Germany

Run by EuropeActive and FIBO, the third annual European Health & Fitness Forum (EHFF) is the opening event of FIBO 2016. www.europeactive.eu

7-10 | FIBO Cologne, Germany

The world's leading trade show for health, fitness and wellness, with brand new halls added for a hands-on exploration of the future of the sector. www.fibo.de



Gym Group CEO John Treharne and his top team on the day of the IPO

FITNESS IPOs

The Gym Group recently completed a successful IPO and Pure Gym is also considering a flotation. What's the likely impact on a growing fitness sector? **Niamh Madigan** asks the experts



ne of the big headlines from 2015 was the high profile flotation of UK-based low-cost operator The Gym Group, now the only

listed health club operator in the UK, with a current market value of around £260m.

The deal was all the more notable given the long absence of any health and fitness club operators from the London Stock Exchange; although Virgin Active has been regularly linked to potential IPOs – both on the London and Johannesburg stock exchanges – any such plans were shelved, at least for now, when the

chain was acquired by South African investment firm Braiit last year.

So what are the implications of The Gym Group IPO for the rest of the fitness sector? Can we expect other operators to float – and if so, who's likely to be next?

There's breaking news on that front: just last month it emerged that the UK's largest operator, Pure Gym, is also considering a flotation; based on the current size of the business, its valuation could exceed £500m. Any deal is months off yet, but it's a sign of growing investor interest in the health and fitness sector.

We've also already witnessed a handful of IPOs in the United States:

Planet Fitness floated on the US Stock Exchange last summer, and SoulCycle is still said to be steering towards an IPO.

So what are the pros and cons of an IPO, and what should operators consider before embarking on this journey? What types of fitness operator might be best suited to an IPO, and are investors more likely to look favourably on other fitness sector stock market flotations off the back of the Gym Group's success? What have been the factors behind The Gym Group's successful IPO, how replicable is this by other operators? We ask our panel of experts for their thoughts.



John Treharne
CEO,
The Gym Group

When we started The Gym Group in 2008, the UK health club market was very expensive and our model was disruptive: a value-based no-frills offering, 24/7 opening, and technology sitting right at the core of the business. That all made it very different from the traditional health club model and our membership reflects this: one-third of our members have never been in a gym before, so we're growing the market. As a result, the City is very interested in what we're doing.

Fundamentally the IPO was the best route for The Gym Group and for the

people who work within it. The advantage of an IPO is that it gives the business long-term funding: we have a number of blue-chip investors who are long-term investors. We raised £125m, with about £90m being used to reduce the debt in the business and restructure it financially. The balance is to help us with our growth plans.

The share price has done as expected: we floated at £1.95 on 9 November 2015, and by 25 January 2016 the price had reached £2.35 – 21 per cent up on launch.

Is what we've done replicable? You have to have a credible business that's profitable and that has growth potential. You have to have an attractive story to tell, otherwise people won't be interested in investing in it: I think over the coming years our business will reach over 250 successful gyms. We currently have 74, so

You need a credible business that's profitable and that has growth potential, and you need an attractive story to tell

John Treharne

it will take us time, but our whole team is really focused on getting there.

It's also an expensive process and involves retaining high quality lawyers, accountants and advisers.



David Burns
Managing
partner, Phoenix
Equity Group

A few years back, Phoenix started to look at the impact the low-cost model was having on sectors such as airlines, hotels and retail.

At the time, The Gym Group was one of the few health club operators with a low-cost model that was changing the face of the local market it was operating in. We saw a super opportunity to rapidly expand the business and felt The Gym Group had a great model, led by someone we had got to know very well, so in 2013 we invested.

Scale is becoming increasingly important in the low-cost gym sector, and these businesses rely on sophisticated technology

and property capabilities. That isn't easy for many firms to replicate, which is why it will be a small number of firms that get through the hoop to be listed on the public market.

Quite a lot of stars have to come into alignment: you have to have a good story to tell, a good historical performance, a team that's credible, and be able to convince investors that you have a good opportunity ahead of you. It's a complex and very time-consuming process, and businesses need the in-house capabilities to be able to cope with such a demanding process. The Gym Group is a good case study of what it looks like when you get it right.

An IPO is a complex process, but The Gym Group is a good case study of what it looks like when you get it right

David Burns





Nicholas Batram

Travel & leisure analyst, Peel Hunt

The IPO of The Gym Group is an important milestone for the health and fitness industry going forward. Going back 15 or 20 years, health and fitness clubs were a vibrant part of the stock market, with north of a dozen listed companies. In the early 2000s, companies left the market – either through takeovers or fails – so the stock market has been without a health and fitness operator for close to a decade.

The Gym Group team is very experienced and has been very disciplined in the roll-out of the brand. That was the Achilles heel of a number of operators looking back: they became ill-disciplined as far as the property side was concerned.

The Gym Group ticks the boxes of being a disruptive business model within a sector of the market that's showing good structural growth, and where management has a lot of experience and is trusted. The low-cost model is definitely fuelling growth and bringing new consumers to the industry. If you look at the level of potential growth in The Gym Group, it's very exciting.



The Gym Group has been very disciplined in the roll-out of its brand

Our clients who are looking to invest are looking for decent growth stories, decent management, decent returns and a real belief that they're in an area of the market where they can see real delivery

coming through over the medium term. You have to be 100 per cent committed to being a publicly listed company, and the most important thing is that it's not the end of the journey – it's the beginning.



Gareth Jones
Head of leisure, Mazars

We believe the successful flotation of The Gym Group is likely to galvanise competitors within the low-cost gym sector into possible similar action. As the industry is rapidly expanding, significant inward investment is required to retain previous levels of market dominance. The Gym Group, through the raising of £125m, now has sufficient resources to continue with a policy of expansion.

The success of this IPO, we believe, is replicable by comparable offerings. As seen in this case, the expansion of the

company in recent years, combined with optimistic projections for sector growth, have allowed for a company valuation both beneficial to current and future investors – hence the success of the IPO.

And for any mid-market health clubs that don't have a low-cost or high-end offering but that would like to consider an IPO? Any operation with a strong product stands a good chance of being successful within the capital markets; product offering is paramount.

Two main advantages of an IPO are the raising of capital and the introduction of more shareholder liquidity. A disadvantage is the increase in compliance costs to meet regulatory requirements. These aspects, inter alia, should be taken into account before an IPO is embarked upon. ●

Any operation with a strong product stands a good chance of being successful within the capital markets

Gareth Jones



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Jonathan Fisher

The group CEO of Holmes Place talks to **Kate Cracknell** about its new Evo gym-only concept, the importance of brand identity, and a possible return to the UK



Boutique can't just be to do with size, design or price," says Jonathan

Fisher, group CEO of Holmes Place. "A great boutique fitness offering has to stand on an idea, an approach to exercise, that really engages people. It needs a very distinct story and philosophy."

"That's been done with group exercise, but I'm not aware of it having been done with a gym offering before, so that's what we've set out to do."

SHARING EXPERTISE

The spark of the boutique gym idea came a couple of years ago, after Holmes Place chief marketing officer Sean Turner went to Norway to see the founders of Evo Fitness (see *HCM* Oct 13, p30).

"What Sean saw in Evo Fitness was a very strong model, but also the potential to build on it and take it even further," says Fisher. "Specifically, we felt there was an opportunity to overlay an idea, a brand philosophy, and this fitted perfectly with the vision I already had: for a gym where people learnt to move skillfully."

Holmes Place therefore entered into a licensing agreement with Evo Fitness to roll out the brand across Europe – an agreement that allowed Holmes Place to build on the existing Evo model with its own vision and philosophy (see p35).

But why, with such a clear vision – not to mention expertise in building health

clubs – did Holmes Place even need to partner with Evo? "We did look at starting from scratch ourselves, but Evo's was a very robust commercial concept – underpinned by very good personal training and IT structures – and was something we were keen to buy into," says Fisher. "In fact, the work Evo had done was the catalyst for me thinking about this boutique convenience segment."

"We wanted to use so much of Evo's model that we decided, if they were happy for us to take the brand where we felt it needed to go, then we should do it. And then, if they wanted to share in that journey and take learnings back from us, we'd be happy with that."

"To their credit, that was the main reason why they did it. They've been very interested in what we're doing and we're now seeing some of our philosophy – the notion of skillful human movement – being worked into their existing clubs."

EVO EXPANSION

The obvious question, given Holmes Place's long track record in high-end, full-service health clubs is: why venture into this new gym-only arena?

"It's always nice to start something from fresh. It gives you huge scope to be innovative, creative, bold," says Fisher. "When you have 35 years of culture and 80 clubs, as we do with Holmes Place, that's quite a big organisation to bring change to."

"The other reason is that Holmes Place is a big model – each new club requires a lot of investment, planning and preparation. We're growing organically, but no more than one or two clubs a year."

"In the meantime, we're seeing areas of the industry that are growing very rapidly. That's exciting from a commercial perspective and we wanted to be part of it."

"But we're not interested in a quick win. We'll only go into businesses where we feel we can bring something genuinely different – where our model will be sustainable and with a unique competitive advantage for the mid- and long term. All of which takes us back to the importance of creating an identity – not just from a brand perspective but also from a content perspective. I believe Evo absolutely delivers on that."

The new Evo offering isn't being positioned as a Holmes Place sub-brand, but rather as a standalone business.

"I think we've been guilty of trying to stretch the Holmes Place brand too much, taking it in directions it didn't really belong," acknowledges Fisher. "We didn't take it too far, but for example we had purely fitness-focused clubs and a few smaller footprint locations where we couldn't deliver the full Holmes Place wellbeing experience."

"About two or three years ago we recognised this and decided to take a step back. You can't stand for everything – you have to stand for something – and we've taken time out to distil the essence of



If we'd positioned Evo as a
Holmes Place sub-brand, it
would have limited what Evo
could become and confused
what Holmes Place stands for

Jonathan Fisher

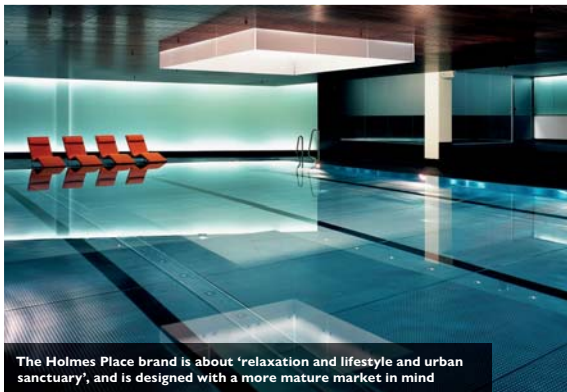


- what Holmes Place is about and make sure we don't dilute that in any way. Holmes Place is about relaxation and lifestyle and urban sanctuary. It's for a more mature market and it's about being comfortable – being well, but enjoying yourself in the process.

"Meanwhile Evo is very different, with tremendous personality and its own sense of purpose. It's a performance brand for committed exercisers who want to develop skills for the outside world. If we'd positioned it as a Holmes Place sub-brand, it would have been the worst of both worlds, limiting what Evo could become and also confusing what Holmes Place stands for."

And the rationale seems to be paying off. Specific figures are off the record, but the Geneva club broke even very quickly and a strong roll-out is now planned: Evo will expand across Germany, Austria and Switzerland by Q3 2016, with a focus on cities like Berlin, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Vienna and Zurich. "In fact, we're about to do a joint venture with Auctus – a very successful private equity firm in Germany – to expand both Evo and Holmes Place in that market," says Fisher.

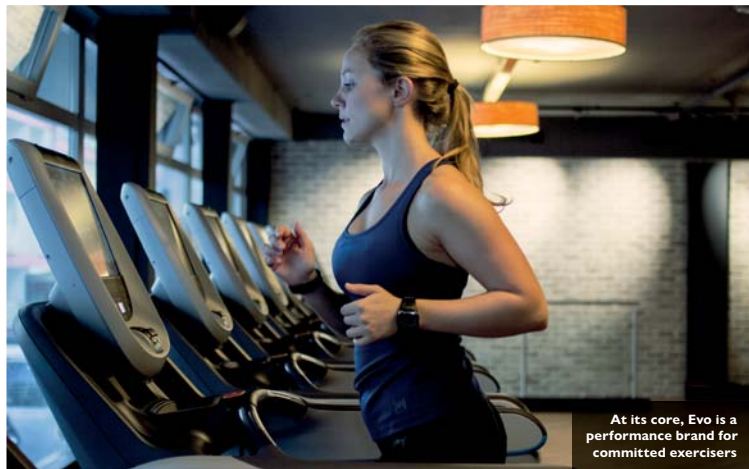
And other markets are on the table too: "We've taken the Evo licence for the whole of Europe other than Scandinavia and Russia. Some markets we'll do on our own, others we'd possibly look to joint venture.



The Holmes Place brand is about 'relaxation and lifestyle and urban sanctuary', and is designed with a more mature market in mind

"We haven't really made decisions around that for the moment, but for example in markets we're not currently in – such as France and Italy – we might look to find a local partner. We've also agreed with the Norwegians that, for the big markets – the UK, US, Japan, China, Brazil, India, Australia – we'll joint venture with them.

"I also think we're coming up with something that will be so well-defined, it will be a great franchise model. We're looking to franchise in the second half of this year, once we've fine-tuned the concept and all of its training methods, with one of the markets we're particularly interested in being Japan." ►



At its core, Evo is a performance brand for committed exercisers

About Evo Geneva

HCM editor Kate Cracknell takes a look around the new Evo Europe club

When you first go into the Evo Europe club – which opened in Geneva, Switzerland, in March 2015 – you're immediately struck by the similarities it has to its sister clubs throughout Scandinavia.

At 600sq m, the club is the same size as the flagship sites in Norway, and the RFID access is part of the same hi-tech IT infrastructure developed by the Evo founders for the Scandinavian clubs. Indeed, this was one of the big draws for the Holmes Place team, which recognised IT's vital role in the commercial success of the Evo model.

The staff-light, PT-heavy model of the original clubs is also evident – as is the high degree to which PTs feel ownership of the club, interacting with members and generally keeping an eye on things.

As you come through the door, the same shelving units are in place to store outdoor shoes, which aren't allowed in the gym. The same round sofas add a sense of welcome to the entry space. Club rules – gym etiquette and consideration for other members – are noted on the walls, and the changing rooms are minimal, with plenty of lockers on the gym floor. Neither are there any group exercise classes, although there is some small group PT.

But what the Holmes Place team has done is take the already successful



Changing rooms are minimal, with many lockers on the gym floor

Evo model and add another conceptual layer that helps it stand out from the crowd – a layer that's allowing the Swiss operation to charge a premium compared to the Norwegian clubs.

That layer is the fitness club's philosophy and *raison d'être*: mastering movement that's skillful, purposeful and playful – movement that's both fun and that will support people in their everyday lives and activities.

Fitness director Kesh Patel is the man behind the detail. "I wrote a book on this – *The Complete Guide to Bodyweight Training*," he explains. "I take the approach of working with people as if they were four years old, when they naturally moved in this way.

"It's all about fundamental movement patterns and we build up from the ground – from their feet. People train every part of their body but they forget their feet. That's the one part that's in constant contact with the ground, so your strength has to come from there.

"We're now formalising our philosophy into an approach called *EvoMove*, which all our PTs will be trained in via a week-long *Evo Academy* foundation course. We want to ensure our PTs are premiership quality."

Split into four separate rooms, the layout and offering reinforces the concept. The first room is deliberately more familiar: a cardio area supplied by Precor, Concept2 and Tomahawk/IC7. Patel acknowledges that some members may not even venture beyond this area.

Those who do will move to a resistance area kitted out exclusively with Technogym Kinesis and Kinesis stations; there are no fixed resistance machines in the club. Everyone has an induction on the kit, and instructional videos are also being developed.

The third room is a performance area offering free weights and benches – but nothing overly heavy as it's all about correct technique – as well as a sprint track and a running lab, including a plantar plate for foot analysis.

The final room is what Patel calls 'the playground'. No free weights – it's bodyweight only – with a stripped-down Octagon rig, TRX, gymnastic rings, wall bars and a traverse wall.



The fourth room at Evo Geneva is dedicated to bodyweight training



I have an overwhelming sense of concern that low-cost is going to turn into a really red ocean, and I really wouldn't want to be there



ICON is an image-focused brand for Millennials, run by Millennials

► A RETURN TO THE UK?

The UK is also on his hit list – which is interesting given that Holmes Place sold its UK estate in 2006. “The UK is very appealing,” says Fisher. “I think it’s almost time for us to return to that market – not just with Evo but with Holmes Place too.”

“I don’t want to try and wrestle market share away from other operators by force – as I said before, we only go into markets if we feel we’re able to bring something sustainably different to the table – but I feel that there’s an opportunity for both brands in the UK.”

Fisher concludes: “In terms of Evo, though – not just in the UK but around the world – I can’t even conceptualise how big it could be. I see it as a new category – one that’s relevant for any mature market. It could be huge. It’s also easy to expand as a business model. The financiers like it. The members like it.”

“It has science – in its IT platform and in as much as the sums add up – and it has soul in its training philosophy. I can easily see it adding 30–40 per cent to our turnover over the next five years.” ●

Creating an icon

As if the roll-out of Evo weren’t enough to keep Fisher and his team busy, Holmes Place has also created another brand: Icon.

Launched in Poland, the premium low-cost offering has been designed specifically with Millennials in mind. “It’s amazing how many businesses start without thinking about who their target market is,” says Holmes Place group CEO Jonathan Fisher. “We started with Millennials as our focus and built a brand and offering that reflects their values and aspirations. It’s centred around group exercise, around looking good. It has great music and high energy and at its heart it’s about being connected – about belonging and about meeting people.”

“It’s also aspirational. In the low-cost sector, you’re always going to be very vulnerable to anyone who’s able

to charge that little bit less. I have an overwhelming sense of concern that low-cost is going to turn into a really red ocean, and I really wouldn’t want to be there. We decided, if we were going to do lower-cost, we’d do it in a way that would be sustainable. This means we’re able to charge around 20 per cent more than the true low-cost operators in the market.”

From the one club currently open, another eight will open in Poland in 2016 – and although originally intended for that market only, Fisher is now looking at other options: “The brand is so cool and so good that it probably should go elsewhere. It could work in Barcelona, for example, or Berlin.”

Does he worry that what’s cool with Millennials today will be uncool next week? “No, because I’m not running it! We have Millennials leading this brand.”

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Fitness Foresight™ 2016

The *Health Club Management* team looks at emerging trends and influences, and identifies opportunities for industry growth and diversification

THE NEW WEARABLES INVISIBLES

As wearable technology innovators and activity app developers such as Under Armour, Jawbone, Fitbit and Strava battle for market share, the next phase of activity and wellness monitoring is already being prototyped behind closed doors.

We will move from a time of wearables to a new evolution in body computing: the age of invisibles, when sensors are integrated into the body to give a continuous data stream and establish a complete picture of what's going on with our health, rather than simply measuring and reporting on one aspect of it.

Invisibles will enable us to more accurately understand and diagnose disease and, in turn, to establish better methods of prevention and adherence to wellbeing programmes through lifestyle change. They'll also return us to a more natural state, by removing the need to carry around intrusive devices.

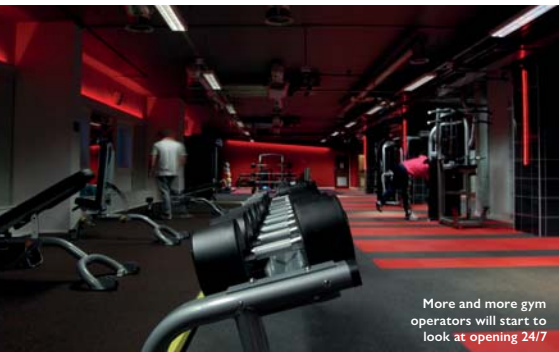
The next generation of trackers won't be wearable; they'll be inside the body



NIGHT OWLS AROUND THE CLOCK FITNESS

Many low-cost clubs already open 24/7 – but with operators increasingly pressured to justify the overheads of their facilities, we're likely to see more health clubs looking at ways of opening their doors throughout the night.

Whether that's by retrofitting access and security technology for overnight operation, or employing one or two members of staff for a night shift, expect to see even the larger mid-market clubs considering this option – especially with virtual classes now going mainstream and allowing for a diverse exercise offering to be made available to customers around the clock.



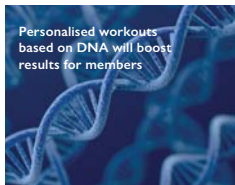
More and more gym operators will start to look at opening 24/7

PERSONAL TOUCH DNA TESTING

The public now expects personalisation: this is a generation of consumers who aren't satisfied if they're not recognised, tracked, personally catered for.

For gyms, that doesn't only mean personalised marketing (see beacon technology, p40). It also means personalised workouts, which will be taken to the next level by DNA testing – programmes tailored to the genetic make-up of people's bodies.

This technology is already becoming mainstream – the 23andMe service is available from UK high street chemist Superdrug – so we aren't far from a time when all workouts will be bespoke to individuals' strengths, weaknesses, nutritional and recovery needs.



Personalised workouts based on DNA will boost results for members

THE SHARING ECONOMY CREATING EXPERIENCES

For the Millennial generation, what matters isn't owning stuff – it's experiencing things.

"Shareable experiences are the new social currency," says consumer behaviourist Ken Hughes, CEO of Ireland's Glacier Consulting. "It's all about creating things for your customers to do that they can then talk about on social media."

Fitness lends itself well to this mindset: events like Color Run and Tough Mudder are good examples. But there's space for quirkiness too. Outside of the fitness sector, Jafflechutes – a business based in Melbourne, Australia – might prove not to be an enduring business model, but it's caught the attention for now: order your Jaffle (toasted sandwich), turn up at a mystery location and stand on the X, and your Jaffle will float down out of the sky on its own little parachute.

Forward-thinking fitness businesses will start creating shareable experiences for the all-important Millennial market – and keep coming up with new experiences to keep the social media stream fresh.

Experiences such as the Color Run, which can be talked about on social media, are what engages Millennials

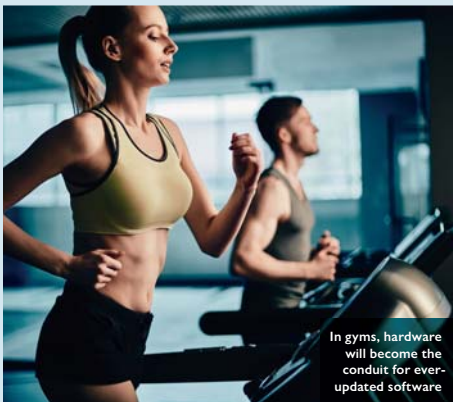
SOFTWARE IS KING CONTINUOUS UPGRADES

We believe 2016 could be the year when fitness equipment R&D begins to focus as much on software as on the physical equipment itself.

Much as the bulk of the iPhone's functionality comes from its apps, so gym equipment will largely be driven by the software that supports it. Regular, remote updates will ensure equipment keeps pace with the latest digital advances – and all in a very cost-effective manner for the operator.

Phillipp Roesch-Schlenderer, founder and CEO of eGym, says: "With the constant advancement of technology, we see that hardware is largely becoming the conduit for ever-updated software."

One of the biggest benefits, he adds, is that data-driven gym kit will provide unprecedented insights into members' behaviour patterns.



In gyms, hardware will become the conduit for ever-updated software

PERSONALISATION BEACON TECHNOLOGY

As beacon technology moves towards the mainstream, clubs can prepare for a new era of personalised communication with customers and prospects.

Beacons precisely know, within inches, where a consumer is – and this information combines with prior search histories and other user information to provide targeted recommendations, information and offers.

We're likely to see some push-back from customers who feel their personal space is being invaded. However, Millennials in particular are open to being tracked geographically, provided immediate, personalised services are the result; Mintel research shows that 33 per cent of UK 16- to 34-year-olds would be willing to give brands they like access to their 'real-time' location to receive more relevant offers.

If operators can educate people about the benefits of beacon technology, and demonstrate the special benefits they would get from their use, the opportunity to improve customer relationships through higher levels of personalisation is significant.



ON A HIGH THE GROWTH OF TRAMPOLINING

Fitness should be fun. That's a statement most would agree with in principle, but thus far little has been done to really deliver on it. Now that's changing with the arrival of the trampolining mega-parks.

Trampolining certainly delivers fitness: NASA research shows that 10 minutes of bouncing is a better cardiovascular workout than 33 minutes of running. It's also undeniably fun, whether you go for the full-size trampolines, a rebounding class or a dodgeball game. And as freerunning founder Sébastien Foucan explains, it's not just about kids but adults too: "People want freedom. They want escapism. They want an activity that's fun and social and that isn't going to feel like a chore after work."

Expect to see a huge boom in this sector in 2016.



OPEN RELATIONSHIPS AN END TO CONTRACTS?

Research by UK trade association ukactive recently found that gyms and health clubs solely offering fixed-term contracts saw an average membership length of 11.2 months, while gyms offering more flexible options alongside fixed contracts saw a 17.2-month average. Far from being an impediment to member retention, it seems flexibility is fast becoming a driver of loyalty.

The younger generations in particular no longer want to belong to just one gym. As The Futures Company points out: "To win with those aged under 30, gym owners must embrace – even encourage – a certain degree of promiscuity of membership."

It's important to understand that in the new consumer mindset, customers aren't being disloyal if they don't only use your gym; operators need to play to their strengths to ensure they stay in the exercise mix, but at the same time accept that 'mixing and matching' is the norm.

The boutique studios have recognised this with their commitment-free 'pay per class' set-up, and now other health club operators must follow suit.

LEARNING FROM NATURE

BIOMIMICRY

Increasingly architects and designers are turning to nature for inspiration – not just for the way buildings look, but also the way they function. Biomimicry – the act of applying biological principles to design – hasn't made its way into mainstream health clubs... yet. But we see it as the next step for a sector that's already embracing sustainable and wellness-focused properties, and that's already taking steps in the right direction.

CLADmag – a sister magazine to *Health Club Management* – outlined a number of striking examples of biomimicry in the leisure industry, including thermo-metal cladding that 'breathes' like skin to heat or cool a building, and super-efficient solar panels modelled on butterfly wings.

In France, the nonLin/Lin Pavilion – consisting of perforated aluminium sheets that can be replicated infinitely – emulates the morphology of coral. Meanwhile, Rome's Jubilee Church uses self-cleaning cement that's inspired by photosynthesis.

In New York, David Benjamin's Hy-Fi art installation is built from fungus, hemp and corn stalk bricks, which grew naturally into shape. To read more about this topic, see CLADmag: <http://lei.sr?a=WIT2p>

The nonLin/Lin Pavilion in France has been designed to emulate the morphology of coral



82 per cent of regular gym exercisers work out at home too

THE 'ALWAYS ON' CONSUMER

AT-HOME FITNESS

As technology continues to create more and more opportunities to work out away from the gym, expect to see a shift in health club operators' mindset – away from 'our business is our club' and towards 'our business is getting people active'.

The 'always on' consumer wants to work out when and where they choose; clubs must recognise this or lose out to apps and online gyms. And with recent Nielsen/Les Mills International research showing that 82 per cent of regular gym exercisers also work out at home, it's clear that operators can expand their offering without cannibalising their own business.

Virtual at-home classes are one great way of reaching into the homes of members and non-members alike. The technology is already out there – Les Mills On Demand and Wexer Streaming, for example – and now individual operators are getting in on the act.

In Asia, the Pure Group has developed mpureyoga.com – free virtual classes for members and non-members – while in Finland, EasyFit has created virtual at-home classes for seniors: chair-based sessions for those not inclined or not able to attend a gym. In the UK, celebrity PT Matt Roberts has launched Body.Network, which has been dubbed 'The Netflix of Fitness'.

At present, libraries of pre-recorded classes are the norm. But live streaming could be the next step, letting members remotely join their favourite class when they can't make it in person.

FRIEND OR FOE?

THE MIDDLEMAN BACKLASH

Businesses like ClassPass – which sell memberships that allow people to cherry pick classes across any participating studios – hit the headlines in 2015.

For consumers, these businesses tick all the boxes: their delivery against the consumer promise of convenience, flexibility and value is unquestionable.

However, operators are starting to query how good these aggregator services are for their businesses. Pitched as a lead generation tool, many studios are finding that the middlemen's customers never upgrade to full membership – too tempting are the discounted rates and choice.

Expect to see a backlash from operators in 2016, with at the very least the terms of engagement being renegotiated – fewer classes offered to middlemen customers, at lower levels of discount, and a club's premium services made available only to their regular members.



Will studios begin to limit the number of classes being made available to ClassPass users?

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

RESPECTING YOUR ELDERS

AGE-FRIENDLY DESIGN

Accounting for around 450 million people, baby boomers are one of the most influential generations in the world.

In recognition of this, the Silver Group in Asia offers an AF Audit tool that helps companies understand the needs of older consumers. CEO Kim Walker says: "A lot of hotel wellness facilities aren't age-friendly because they just haven't given thought to it."

It's about subtle changes as well as obvious ones, he adds. If a non-slip floor looks wet, for example, people still change the way they walk and are just as likely to fall. "Also, when you enter a gym, you're bombarded with instructions that most people would struggle to remember, let alone older adults with cognitive issues. How can you make everything simpler to understand?"

UK-based LiveWire will open a facility in Q3 2016 that's not only age-friendly but also dementia-friendly. Alongside appropriate design elements, staff and members of the community will be trained to understand the condition. It's developing a number of programmes too: walking classes and tai chi for early onset dementia groups, for example. Expect more of this as the world's population continues to age.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Is your facility age-friendly – maybe even dementia-friendly – in its design and programming?

ON A MISSION

BUSINESS WITH A PURPOSE

The right product, price – and even good service – is no longer enough to win customers' loyalty. Expectations have raced onwards and upwards, with consumers looking for brands they feel proud to be associated with. Indeed, in GfK's 2015 global survey of 28,000 consumers, 63 per cent said they only buy products and services that appeal to their beliefs, values or ideals.

Operators that are able to tap into this – setting out a mission and social purpose that members can identify with – will create a strong sense of community in their clubs, and with it drive improved loyalty and retention.

We hope 2016 will see more fitness businesses follow the example of those curated by the Gympopia project, an online library of companies whose altruistic efforts have embedded them at – and in – the hearts of their communities (see www.gympopia.org).



Clubs like My Sportlady aren't just a gym, but a community hub too

SOCIAL SCENE

FITNESS NIGHTS OUT

Working out is fast becoming the new, healthy way of going out, with clubs no longer just places to exercise – it's becoming cool to be fit and well, and to be associated with the right fitness brands.

This trend was kicked off by classes like Zumba: ideally suited to venues like nightclubs, these saw groups of friends joining together for fun as much as fitness.

Now the boutique studios have taken it to a new level, with juice bars to hang out in and retail zones selling branded apparel; exercisers can quite literally wear their allegiance to their workout tribe on their sleeve.

"It's a badge of honour," says Barry's Bootcamp chief executive Joey Gonzalez. "People who do Barry's are so proud of it that they want to wear a branded top, whether in class or at Starbucks, to say to others 'this is who I am, this is how I work out, I'm a part of this community'."

But this is a challenge too, as it puts gyms head to head with other leisure options, from cinemas to pubs. The fitness sector has to learn to compete at a whole new level.

Working out is becoming the new, healthy way of going out with friends

EVERY DROP MATTERS

WATER SCARCITY

Global drought will make water an increasingly precious, and indeed politically charged, commodity in 2016; while not all countries will be directly affected by water shortages, consumer awareness of this issue will demand innovation and new thinking in all markets.

We've already seen websites publicly naming and shaming Hollywood stars with overly green lawns. Meanwhile praise has gone to those doing their bit for the environment – actress Charlize Theron, for example, who has emptied her swimming pool and re-designed her garden with desert plants.

Health clubs may not need to empty their pools with immediate effect – but there are some quick wins for operators. Sell high quality metal drink bottles to refill at the water fountain, ensure showers are on timers, capture rainwater, offer eco-friendly shampoo and shower gel, and install water-saving devices in toilet cisterns. Then ensure your members are aware of these actions.

As consumers respond favourably to brands that help them be good global citizens, innovations in water sourcing, recycling and conservation will be key.

Consumers will demand innovations in water conservation

WILD AT HEART ANIMAL MOVEMENT

Crawling on all fours, swinging from bars, leaping between obstacles: we're witnessing a growing trend towards bodyweight movement classes inspired by the animal kingdom.

Early arrivals include Australian workout ZUU – on offer at Virgin Active clubs – and Animal Flow classes at US gym chain Equinox. Other concepts include MovNat – which has a number of affiliated gyms, predominantly in the US but also in the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and various European markets – and Primal Move, with numerous trained instructors around the world.

All of the classes deliver a full-body functional workout. Crucially, they're also great fun, helping participants to rediscover the joy of movement.

There's a lot more innovation to come from this category.



Animal Flow classes – based on bodyweight exercises – are available at US gym chain Equinox

IRON LEVELS HAEMOGLOBIN TESTING

We're led to believe that iron-rich food is good for you. However, research shows that too much iron in the system can be toxic and oxidising, and can lead to the development of a range of diseases.

Post-menopausal women are especially vulnerable to high iron levels: as menstruation ends, iron counts can climb to levels that are detrimental to health.

With an ageing population, this presents opportunities for health clubs to offer haemoglobin testing and advice on this important health issue. The solution is quite simple too: give blood.



Too much iron can be toxic, but the solution is simple: give blood

THE BIG GET BIGGER SECTOR CONSOLIDATION

Mergers & acquisitions will continue to be the name of the game in 2016 as players across all sectors of the market jostle for position. 2014 and 2015 already saw rising numbers of deals across Europe – the acquisition of mid-market LA fitness by UK low-cost operator Pure Gym being of particular note in the latter part of 2015, and with a sale of Fitness First likely in the first half of 2016.

But it isn't just about the private sector operators. The biggest changes are likely to come in the UK trust sector, as more small local trusts are swallowed up into the mega-trusts like GLL and Places for People Leisure. We can expect more consolidation among the suppliers too: we've seen Precor acquire Queenax, Pulse take on Trixter, and Life Fitness develop a family of brands. Even where we're not seeing full acquisition, larger players are taking on distribution of smaller brands: Matrix Fitness and eGym, for example. Expect the climate to get even tougher for smaller, niche suppliers.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

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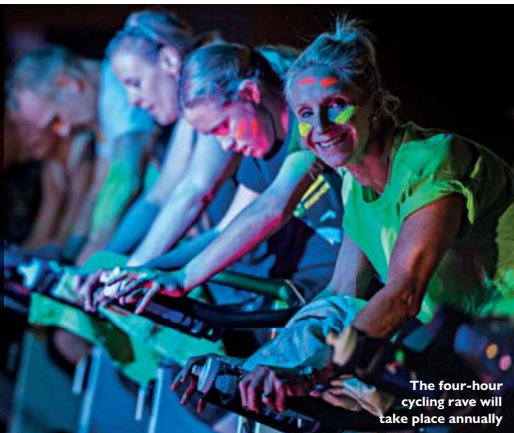
It's time to get creative to make your cycling offering stand out.

Kate Cracknell takes a look around the world for inspiration

TAKE YOUR TIME

Circadian Trust, UK

Circadian Trust has launched two new long-format cycling classes. The first is a four-hour cycling rave, which will take place annually – over 100 participants paid £25 each to take part in the inaugural rave in November 2015, with many also raising money for the British Heart Foundation. Meanwhile, 2.5-hour sessions that replicate being outside for a long ride – complete with a screen showing footage of the great outdoors – will form part of the ongoing class timetable at selected centres.



The four-hour cycling rave will take place annually



The Pursuit mixes solo and team tasks

IN HOT PURSUIT

Equinox, US

The Pursuit by Equinox is an immersive experience that uses in-studio gaming and data visualisation to drive competition in the class. Each Schwinn bike is linked to a leaderboard, with the data used as the basis for games and challenges. There are solo and team tasks; participants work together in some cases and try to beat each other in others.

MAKING A SPLASH

Aqua, New York City, US

Aqua offers underwater cycling classes. The Hydronider bikes are immersed in a pool and you pedal against the water resistance, with water up to the waist. Mainly targeting women, with sessions including candlelit classes, there are also slots on the timetable for men only.



Hydronider bikes harness the power of water resistance

TRI IT OUT

Barry's Bootcamp / Lululemon / BOOM Cycle

Launched last month, London-based UrbanTRI is a co-operative venture between Lululemon, Barry's Bootcamp and BOOM Cycle. Participants begin at Lululemon on the Kings Road for a 45-minute vinyasa flow yoga session before taking to the streets of London for a 10k tour led by Barry's Bootcamp. The last stop is BOOM Cycle, for a 45-minute party on the bike followed by healthy eats and treats.



UrbanTRI combines yoga, a 10k run and cycling in one event

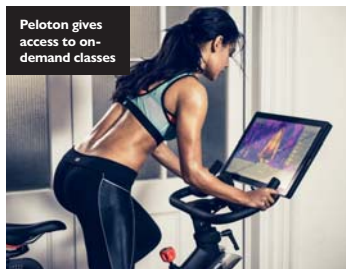


This year's IFS finale will have a carnival-themed Spin class

DRESSING UP

International Fitness Showcase, Blackpool, UK

The IFS in Blackpool regularly features a number of themed classes – including fancy dress Spinning classes. Previous fancy dress themes have included *Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter*, with *Star Wars* soon to come. But as 2016 is Rio Olympics year, this year's IFS will have a carnival-themed 90-minute Spinning class as a finale. Instructors will learn how to create a storyline alongside the music for higher levels of engagement.



Peloton gives access to on-demand classes

HOME FROM HOME

Peloton, New York, US

Peloton brings the energy of a group class direct to your home. Users must buy a Peloton bike (US\$1,995) and pay a monthly subscription of US\$39. This then gives them on-demand access to a raft of classes that are streamed live from Peloton's New York studio.

HIT YOUR RHYTHM

Studio RYT, California, US

Studio RYT Exhale is run by a husband and wife team – Tracy and Sylvi Martins – whereby Tracy runs the cycling offering (RYT) and Sylvi the holistic Exhale side of the business. To add a bit of spice to his sessions, Tracy – a former professional drummer – incorporates live drumming into his Ride X classes. The RealRyder bikes allow exercisers to pivot and lean as they would on real bikes, so they can really move with the beat.



Ride X classes feature live drumming

FLYING HIGH

OTE Sports, Leeds, UK

For those who really want to push themselves and boost cardiovascular fitness, the OTE Performance Centre and Altitude Chamber features Wattbikes in a commercial hypoxic altitude chamber – so you can do a cycling class at a simulated altitude of 3,000m in the heart of Leeds.



OTE has taken exercise to a new level by running classes in a high altitude chamber

ON A TRIP

Pure Fitness, Asia

Pure Fitness in Asia was one of the first operators to adopt Les Mills' The Trip – an immersive cycling experience that uses a three-walled room onto which video content is streamed throughout the class. It's like being inside a computer game – a complete virtual reality that changes with each song, from climbing a vast mountain to being an avatar in the Tron computer game.

The Trip is like being inside a computer game



MIX IT UP

Wattcycle studios, north of England, UK

With a background in CrossFit, the team at Wattcycle incorporate power and strength exercises into their workouts. The timetable consists of Just Cycle, CrossCycle, Performance Cycle and Seasonal Cycle. CrossCycle gets members on and off the Wattbike to execute functional movements taken from a CrossFit workout, while still keeping the bike as an integral part of the workout.



CrossCycle blends the Wattbike with CrossFit moves



WorldRide uses real, unedited cycling footage

HOLLYWOOD STYLE


Kings College London, UK

The new WorldRide system – which has already been installed at a number of sites including Kings College London – has pushed the boundaries of its virtual classes by working with a Hollywood grip company to develop a way of putting a high-end camera amid a peloton group of cyclists. The rides are choreographed before filming and the single take – the footage isn't edited – means the experience is very real and immersive.

SMASH YOUR GOALS

David Lloyd Leisure, UK

DLL is an early adopter of the latest cycling programme from Les Mills International: Sprint, a HIIT-based workout on a bike. Delivered in just 30 minutes, the class pushes you through bursts of high intensity where you work as hard as possible, interspersed with short rest periods.



Sprint is a HIIT-based workout on an indoor bike

FITNESS FUSION

Flow Athletic, Sydney, Australia

Owned by Ben Lucas, Flow Athletic offers customers a number of hybrid classes. Bike Asana comprises 30 minutes on the bike, followed by 30 minutes' yoga, while Strike is 30 minutes' cycling followed by 30 minutes' strength. The two halves of the workout take place in different studios, but are fully integrated.



The Bike Asana class consists of 30 minutes on a bike, followed by 30 minutes of yoga

MUMS' ME TIME

Places for People Leisure, UK

Places for People's Fleming Park Leisure Centre launched Mum and Baby Cycling classes in January 2015, in a bid to help new mothers get into, or return to, exercise. The initiative was launched with the help of Sportivate funding from Sport Hampshire & Isle of Wight, and has now won a Sportivate award. The music, lights and room layout are modified so mums can bring their babies along in buggies or car seats, meaning no need to find childcare. Initially targeting young mums aged 16–25, due to the high rate of teenage pregnancy in the local area, the project now delivers three classes a week.



Music, lights and room layouts are all modified so mums can bring their babies to the class

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SOCIAL STROLLERS

Lightening the load on health services

With health and wellbeing at the top of the agenda for local authorities, we hear about a community walking scheme, run by 1Life in North Kesteven, which is getting great results

With 1Life's involvement and support, North Kesteven Social Strollers – a healthy walking group operating in the East Midlands, UK – has grown into a great success story.

The group was established as part of a nationwide 'Choosing Health' initiative encouraging older people to be more active. Social Strollers' programme of walks has grown to the point where it now attracts a very broad range of local people, with an increasingly diverse range of offerings.

For example, sensory elements have been introduced into some walks to help dementia sufferers, following a collaboration between the Social Strollers, the Alzheimer's Society and Macmillan Cancer Support.

A GROWING SUCCESS STORY

This year alone, North Kesteven Social Strollers has logged 5,700 attendances by members, and welcomed 155 new walkers.

In the main, they're local people wanting to build confidence or lose weight or who need help to get through depression.

Whatever their reasons for getting involved, the free, safe, volunteer-led walks bring about powerful social interaction among members of the local community. Walk leader Ian Kendrick says: "That's what



Social Strollers has partnered with Macmillan and the Alzheimer's Society

North Kesteven Social Strollers is a highly successful project delivered by 1Life. It now extends across the county and continues to fulfil the council's commitment to the health and wellbeing of its residents.

Mike Lock, leisure and cultural services manager, North Kesteven District Council



1Life: Uniting the community

the Social Strollers walks are all about – listening to people, getting them out of the house, getting them exercising, boosting their morale and making them smile."

THE POWER OF 1LIFE

The initiative is a great example of how 1Life collaborates with its local partners to promote physical activity and wellbeing in

the community; Health Walks have now been launched in other contracts managed by 1Life using this model.

As a leisure provider able to deliver a wide consumer offering and appeal to new sections of the local market, 1Life is lightening the load for local authorities and supporting them to fulfil their commitment to health and wellbeing for their residents. ●

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GOING LOCAL

Gyms and health clubs are popping up in increasingly diverse locations. What new opportunities does this present, and how do you decide if a site is right for you? **Tim Baker** reports

These are positive times for the UK fitness industry: almost one in seven adults is now a member of a gym, and we're seeing growth in number of clubs too: according to TLDC's 2015 *State of the UK Fitness Industry* report, there are now 6,312 fitness facilities across the country.

Members are also spending more money. According to Cardlytics – which analyses consumer spending via debit cards, credit cards and direct debits – spending at health clubs via the cards it monitors grew by 44 per cent in the 12 months to August 2015. And the entire industry is benefiting from this growth: the same Cardlytics report tells us that, although growth is stronger at the budget end (with a 66 per cent rise), it also remains strong at mid and top-tier gyms, which have seen 22 per cent and 14 per cent growth in spend respectively.

There's clearly room for all types and styles of gym within the market – what

industry would turn its nose up at a 14 per cent growth rate in these times? The trick is matching your offer to the opportunity around you. Or, to put it another way, working out what your offer is and then finding the places where it fits best. Does the site you're looking at fit you, or can you fit the site?

These decisions will become less straightforward as more opportunities emerge for gyms of all shapes and sizes – but that makes it more exciting too.

PERSONALISED LIVES

One key reason for the growth in the number of gyms and fitness facilities is that there are more and more places to put them: we're seeing gyms popping up in residential blocks, in supermarkets, in sports stores and in suburban neighbourhoods. Landlords and developers see gyms as good covenants – and a 'neighbourly' enhancement to any development – so we'll continue to see gyms of different shapes and sizes appearing in increasingly diverse places, whether as part of new-build projects or refurbishments of existing locations.

This diversification is symptomatic of a bigger trend: a growing customisation of our lives. This trend isn't only affecting health and fitness, and it's therefore important to look at changes in other sectors – such as retail – to draw parallels and gain an insight into how the fitness industry might develop.

People are taking control of their lives in ever more personalised ways. On-

demand TV, online grocery shopping delivered at your convenience, more people working from home, the growth of fitness apps and wearable devices... all these are examples of how technology and social change are enabling people to shape their lives as they want them.

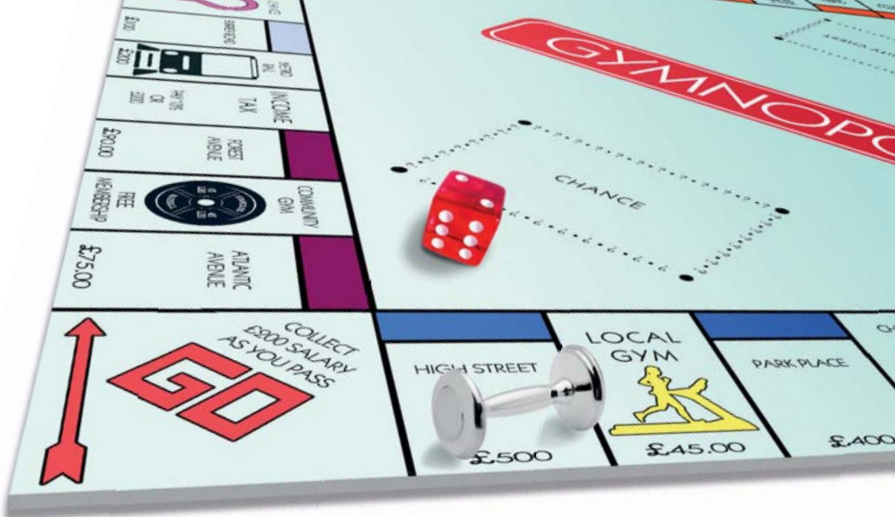
We mustn't lose sight of the more traditional core: 85 per cent of our TV viewing is still done at the time of broadcast, and a similar proportion (85 per cent) of our shopping is still done via traditional bricks and mortar shops. Nevertheless, a small reduction in retail volume can destroy a business where margins are tight: the 15 per cent of shopping that's being done online is clearly powerful enough to support many large and fast-growing companies – Amazon to name just one.

This is an important lesson for health club operators, most of whom continue to focus heavily on bricks and mortar facilities. The uptake of new offerings like apps and virtual at-home fitness might currently be small in absolute terms, but their emergence – and impact on customers' evolving expectations – will be significant.

LOCAL FOCUS

A closer look at the ways the traditional 85 per cent of shopping is done also reveals shifts in patterns. Since 2008 there has been a huge shift, with many people making more frequent, smaller value trips to more local shops. People are typically spending more overall, but this is masked by the smaller value of each individual basket.

Landlords see gyms as good covenants, and a 'neighbourly' enhancement to any development



Every time a person's distance from a location doubles, their likelihood of visiting that location halves

It is this shift, more than any migration online, that explains why the larger retailers are mothballing some of their superstores, selling off land bought for new-build stores and buying appropriate sites and buildings in suburban and town centre locations for conversion to neighbourhood convenience stores. These smaller stores have far fewer products and service local communities with ranges that are developed to suit their environments.

This shift in behaviour – coupled with changing attitudes towards health – opens up opportunities for venues such as gyms to co-locate with shopping centres.

But other potential gym sites can also be identified by understanding these shifts. We know people are acting more locally, finding things to do closer to home. An appropriate gym close to where people tend to congregate is an attractive proposition.



People are increasingly looking to 'go local' – whether that's shopping or going to the gym



BEING SITE-SPECIFIC

But what's appropriate? Clearly this must embrace all elements of the offer: the size, the appearance, the facilities and services offered, opening hours, the packages offered and so on.

Supermarkets have highly sophisticated models and systems that help them determine exactly what product ranges are appropriate for any given location – but even if your business doesn't have access to such systems, the same rigorous analysis must apply. What exactly is the make-up of the local population, and what kind of gym or fitness facilities are they most likely to use?

When assessing potential new sites, it's also worth remembering the double distance rule: every time a person's distance from a location doubles, their likelihood of visiting that location halves. This rule works for shopping centres,

cinemas, theme parks and museums – in fact any location you can think of. It works for gyms and health clubs too.

KNOW YOUR AREA

It's also critical to assess the surrounding area not just for competition – in the form of other gyms, health clubs and leisure centres – but also for businesses and services that might complement and work alongside your club in some way.

What cafés and shops are in the area, for example, and what do they sell? Might this have an impact on your in-club retail offering? Could you create a partnership rather than duplicate efforts?

What about doctors' surgeries, hospitals, sports clubs that could benefit from a closely located dedicated gym? How can you forge links with them?

And what about other leisure offerings in the area? Might these compete with

your gym, offering alternative ways for people to be active, or might they be complementary – offering something for kids to do while mum comes to your club for a workout, for example?

And, of course, how well does this opportunity fit with your business plan? It's easy to be distracted by a tempting opportunity that seems to offer quick wins, high return diversification, the chance to take out a competitor or to increase your presence in a particular area. The fact that, while one operator can't make a location work for them, another can come in, take it over and turn it into a successful business is testament to the diversity of offers, business models and individual needs out there.

But the opposite is also true: a successful operation in one pair of hands can quickly fail in others that have a different orientation. So while life is starting to look good for the sector, still approach with care. Do the basics before you dive in – but if the site fits, apply with the usual passion and enjoy the ride! ●



Supermarkets have sophisticated models and systems to determine which ranges are appropriate for which locations

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tim Baker is chair of Touchstone Partners, a leading research consultancy in the leisure, consumer and shopper sectors. Touchstone's core expertise is in market exploration (to identify opportunities), pricing, brand equity and proposition development.
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The dance fitness revolution

Dance-based fitness classes are booming. Hayley Price looks at how health clubs and leisure operators are responding to the growing variety of offerings on the market

Ever since the dance fitness brand Zumba exploded onto the market in 2010 – its 'exercise in disguise' format meaning even non-gym-goers got involved – there's been a shake-up of classes across the fitness sector.

Consumer expectations have changed: fitness should be fun, fitness should be social, fitness should be more than just

doing press-ups for press-ups' sake. And as Zumba has clearly demonstrated, dance fits this brief perfectly.

No real surprise, then, that in the last two years, a range of quirky home-grown dance fitness classes have arrived on the UK scene – from Clubbercise, which engages audiences with dimmed lighting and glow sticks; to Buxercise, which sees instructors hand participants weighted

feather boas for resistance training; to former Royal Ballet star Darcey Bussell's DDMIX, which offers a mix of dance styles in one aerobic workout (see p8).

Innovative classes are also moving in from overseas – barre being the most recent, which has brought the hip LA fitness scene to the UK. Meanwhile sessions such as Morning Gloryville – an immersive pre-work dance experience



Dance party workouts like Sh'bam have made fitness fun again



Gymbox in London
auditions regularly to
find great instructors

EMDP's research found that 38 per cent of respondents were previously inactive before starting dance fitness

which started life in London, UK, and which takes place in venues from churches to clubs, connecting communities and lifting moods – are thriving worldwide (see HCM March 15, p8).

And the result? New research by YouGov and the Exercise, Movement & Dance Partnership (EMDP) – the UK's National Governing Body (NGB) for

dance fitness, which was founded in 2006 – found that 1.45 million women in the UK are now taking part in dance fitness each month. Not only that, but 38 per cent of respondents were previously inactive before starting dance fitness, and 92 per cent of females said they saw dance fitness as an enjoyably non-competitive way to work out.

DANCE FITNESS EVOLUTION

The make-up of the EMDP attests to the boom in dance fitness. Originally launched as a collaborative effort between Sport England, Fitness League, Keep Fit Association (KFA) and Medau, 10 years later it's still working with those same founding brands as well as a host of new ones.

Emma Forward, COO of the EMDP, says:

"The classes within our community cover a broad spectrum, suiting a range of ages and abilities. It really is a very exciting time for the industry – we're fully immersed in the growing world of dance fitness."

Even specialist dance operators are latching on to the growth in dance fitness. Luke Long, studio manager at Pineapple Dance Studios, says hybrid classes are entering the dance industry at a pace:

"As dancers are never far from injury, they take a special interest in all areas of fitness and recovery. This means they are usually the first to try combinations – for example, yoga and ballet."

But health clubs and leisure operators have been quick to respond to the rise in demand too. Hannah Curtis Nunn, head of studio operations at London-based operator Gymbox, sheds some light on how the operator is dealing with the fast-moving

Street dance classes can appeal to young, non-exercisers



PHOTO: PINEAPPLE



The market will see more hybrid dance classes in the future

► dance industry: "A successful dance class has to make you sweat, but must always have really good choreography to master at the same time. We audition regularly to find new and interesting concepts and instructors – we deliver exercise to music training to professional dancers to ensure the quality of our instructors.

"New classes are introduced each quarter, meaning we keep on top of any trending styles. We've previously launched

classes like Nae Nae – a dance craze invented by Atlanta quintet WeAre Toonz – which was a great hit with our members."

Tanya Camilleri, group programme manager at Reebok Sports Club London, says: "We offer a variety of dance classes including Zumba, Belly Dance Fit, Street Dance, our exclusive Body Fit Burlesque and Latin Fit. The upbeat classes encourage people to switch off from their day and focus on learning choreography

and having fun. We want to keep up with the boutique studios operating in this market, so we listen to our members and expand our timetable and programmes to keep up with the trends out there."

Meanwhile Phillip Mills, CEO at Les Mills International – which offers dance fitness classes Sh'bam and BodyJam among its portfolio of group exercise programmes – comments: "We know there's huge potential with the large Millennial market. These savvy young people demand fast, effective and social workouts. They want exercise experiences that are ahead of the game, and we're committed to making them. We're also working closely with clubs to help them better capitalise on the growing boutique market, supporting them to create boutique studios and workout spaces within their clubs."

North East-based Dance City brings the community together through dance



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

But if dance is bringing new people into gyms, it's also taking operators beyond their four walls and into the community.

Charity-run gym The Armoury, managed by Jubilee Hall Trust, understands the importance of keeping abreast of the dance fitness market. Stuart Flude, club manager, explains: "We recognise that dance is a fun way to keep fit, and it attracts a wide range of people who might not normally visit a gym."

To engage new audiences and promote dance even more widely, The Armoury



The hugely popular Zumba has stood the test of time

A successful dance class has to make you sweat, but must always have really good choreography to master at the same time



Belly dance classes are popular at Reebok's club in London

moves outside of the gym space. Flude explains: "In July this year, we're planning to support the biennial Big Dance initiative by paying for the Big Dance Bus to visit the Covent Garden Piazza, where our club is located. The bus – with its own portable dance floor, sound system and resident dance company – aims to promote grassroots participation."

Meanwhile Anthony Baker, artistic director and joint CEO of Dance City (North East), comments: "We engage widely with our local community, bringing dance opportunities to all – whether in schools, community centres or care homes. We always try and attract new audiences; we previously held a taster day for people aged 55 and over, allowing those who attended to try out different styles of class, from ballroom to flamenco."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

So what's next for the phenomenon that is dance fitness? Forward explains: "We've seen a number of home-grown brands enter the market over the last two years, and more new classes are coming. Chico Slimani's Block Fit for example – comprising four workouts in one, including

EMDP's Dance the Distance class will see participants complete the equivalent of a 5k run – but in dance form

- dance – is another UK launch coming this year. Meanwhile innovative trends from the US will continue to land on UK soil, such as PoundFit – a full-body cardio jam session, combining light resistance with constant simulated drumming – which is already available across the UK."

Forward continues: "The emergence of new hybrid classes looks set to continue too, as disciplines such as Voga – which is a fusion of yoga and voguing, fitness and fashion, inspired by the drag ballroom era of 1980s New York – appear on the global dance fitness scene."

EMDP also plans to launch its own Dance the Distance class in studios later this year. With the strapline 'More fun than a run', participants will complete the equivalent of a 5k run in dance form.

One thing's for sure: if you haven't yet tapped into the dance fitness trend, 2016 will be the year to do it. ●

Dance classes are also ideal for engaging very young children



PHOTO: CAVILIA GREENWELL



Darcey Bussell's DDMIX offers a full body workout

PUT ON YOUR DANCING SHOES

"The great thing about Sh'bam is that you don't need co-ordination or experience. It's the dance class for everyone and anyone. Sh'bam is fun and relaxed, but it's still cardio – you're sweating and you're burning calories, but you don't even know you're doing it."

Rachel Newsham, Les Mills Sh'bam instructor

"It's hard to find a workout that's both extremely fun and effective. Zumba provides the perfect balance. In an hour-long class you can burn up to 1,000 calories, but you won't even realise you're working out. It's 'exercise in disguise' and that's why it's caught on all over the world."

Gina Grant, Zumba education specialist

"I really enjoy working out when I'm fully distracted by the fun and entertainment of the routine, great music and the camaraderie of a group class. This is a core philosophy behind DDMIX. It's ideal for the very young – which is why you'll find it in schools – through to adults who want to exercise in a fun, relaxed and entertaining way."

Darcey Bussell, Strictly Come Dancing star and former ballet dancer

For more information on dance fitness trends, visit www.exercisemovedance.org

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Building rapport is a key part of a tour, and it helps to demonstrate a rapport with existing members

CAN YOUR STAFF SELL?

Mhairi Fitzpatrick and David Hopkins of Proinsight outline the findings of new research into sales performance across the health and fitness sector



Only 60 per cent of prospects who take the time to visit a health club and chat to a sales person are asked for their contact details. This is one of the most surprising findings of research carried out throughout 2015 by Proinsight Research.

Meanwhile, despite it being the *raison d'être* of the sales person, a prospect was directly asked if they would like to join the club or leisure centre only 56 per cent of the time. In terms of follow-up, just 35 per cent made contact in the timeframe specified by the operator – generally 48 hours.

When it came to phone enquiries, the club staff provided a positive greeting 68 per cent of the time. Data capture was again weak though, with fewer than half of callers being asked for contact details. Slightly more encouraging was the fact that 60 per cent of all phone enquiries were offered an appointment to visit the club.

Via the web, the response time was acceptable – within 24 hours – 61 per cent of the time. Responses were personalised 80 per cent of the time, and enquiries were dealt with to the enquirer's satisfaction 67 per cent of the time.

When comparing the overall effectiveness across sectors, the private sector scored best at 68 per cent. The council sector scored lowest at 58 per cent, while leisure centre operator groups and the educational sector scored 65.7 per cent and 62 per cent respectively. (See Figure 1)

"These results highlight some uncomfortable facts," says Jeremy Taylor of The Health Club Collection. "Only half of all prospects who come into our clubs are being asked if they want to join. Making sales is a tough job, but it's also well paid when compared to front of house or gym floor staff. Shouldn't we be demanding more?"

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Throughout 2015, Proinsight carried out a research and benchmarking exercise to investigate how effectively health clubs sell memberships and how different sectors in the leisure industry compare.

Three enquiry types were measured: the face-to-face sales interaction, the response to a membership web enquiry, and the service impression made when a prospect telephones the club.

Over 20,000 metrics from more than 500 UK health club locations were measured using mystery visits, mystery calls and mystery web enquiries as the method of collecting data.

To measure face-to-face performance, secret shoppers were sent into the clubs to look at key elements, including data capture, needs analysis, the tour, effective price presentation, closing and follow-up.

For the phone-based enquiries, speed of response, positivity, data collection and appointment setting qualities were measured.

Assessment of clubs' performance for web enquiries examined response time, personalisation and effectiveness at dealing with the specifics of an enquiry.



Ensure club tours are tailored to the individual prospect – are they interested in classes, for example?

TECHNICAL PERFORMANCE

The Proinsight study broke sales down into technical and emotional aspects. At its most basic level, technical selling can be simplified into three elements:

- **Capturing data:** When someone comes in to enquire, it's essential to record a contact phone number or email address. If not, there's nothing to follow up and the time spent with the prospect has been entirely wasted.
- **Always asking the prospect to join:** If the question isn't asked, there's little chance of a 'yes'.
- **Following up:** These are hot prospects, and should be the easiest calls for a sales person to make at the start of each day.

Figure 2 (see p66) shows the proportion of our mystery shopper enquiries in which these three points were adhered to.

Examining the performance of each sector highlights further where gaps exist. Figure 3 shows the differences between sectors: the council sector scored very low in the key element of data capture, with just 12 per cent of all prospect details being recorded. The educational sector is doing a good job and scored 94 per cent.

Despite it being the raison d'être of the sales person, a prospect was directly asked if they would like to join only 56 per cent of the time

KEY FINDINGS

- Only 60 per cent of face-to-face enquiries are asked for their contact details
- Face-to-face prospects are directly asked if they would like to join only 56 per cent of the time
- Just 35 per cent of people making face-to-face enquiries were followed up within 48 hours
- Fewer than half of phone enquiries were asked for contact details
- 60 per cent of all telephone enquiries were offered an appointment to visit the club
- Messages sent back to web enquiries were personalised 80 per cent of the time
- Web enquiries were handled to the enquirer's satisfaction 67 per cent of the time
- One-third of prospects felt their needs were not being considered during the tour
- Over 40 per cent of prospects felt key questions during the tour weren't being asked in meaningful ways
- One-quarter of prospects felt rapport was not established

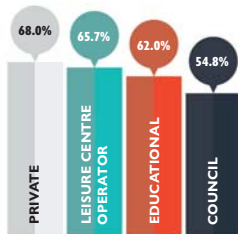
The council sector also scored lowest (28 per cent) in terms of asking prospects to join, but sales staff in all sectors appear to have a reluctance ask this most important question.

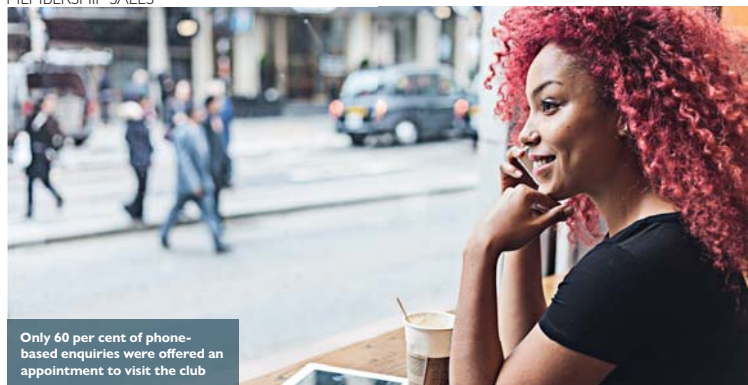
Meanwhile the follow-up statistics are damagingly weak across all sectors.

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Getting the emotional element of selling right – a good needs analysis, a tour that responds to the customer's needs, building rapport, body language and emotionally

FIGURE 1
Sales effectiveness (overall performance on metrics assessed) by sector





Only 60 per cent of phone-based enquiries were offered an appointment to visit the club

- ▶ intelligent selling – is more difficult. Unsurprisingly, then, there's huge scope for improvement. In our study, one-third of prospects felt their needs weren't considered during the tour, over 40 per cent felt key questions in the tour weren't asked in meaningful ways, and one-quarter felt rapport wasn't established (see Figure 4).

THE QUICKEST FIX

The technical aspect of selling is the easiest element to fix quickly. The message to sales staff is clear: always ask the prospect to join, always capture data and always follow up. These should be set as non-negotiable job criteria.

"We spend a lot on marketing, and evidence suggests that quite a bit of this is wasted money, because we're not processing enquiries as effectively as we should," concludes Taylor. "Allocating part of your marketing budget to checking systems and process is well worthwhile. Identifying training gaps and fixing them fast will lead to an improved bottom line." ●



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mhairi Fitzpatrick and David Hopkins are executive director and managing director of UK-based Proinsight, which specialises in mystery shopping and consumer research.

The full sales performance report can be obtained from Proinsight Research – www.proinsight.org/#contact

FIGURE 2 - Technical performance

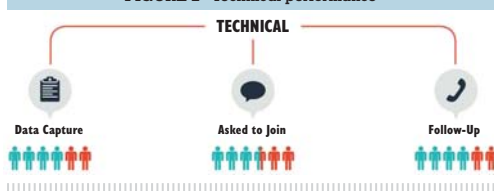


FIGURE 3 - Technical performance by sector

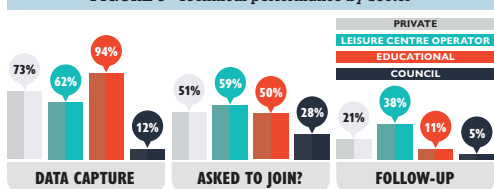


FIGURE 4 - Emotional connection



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TRAINING TRANSFORMED

A

collaboration between the UK's University of Nottingham and Life Fitness has seen the creation of a new outdoor training space, featuring

nine SYNRGY BlueSky training stations across five sites on the University Park campus. The 1.7-mile outdoor Active Trail represents the university's continuing investment in sport and outdoor functional training and has proved hugely successful.

Samantha Bell-Minogue, assistant director of sport participation at the university, comments: "The Active Trail provides students and staff access to free fitness equipment at a time that's convenient to them, as well as delivering limitless options and creating an inspirational exercise space. This has resulted in all of our sports clubs and societies having access to an additional training space for their squads, and giving individual athletes another option to train outside of their fixed sport specific sessions.

"Squads including rugby, lacrosse and American football have used the trail as part of their strength and fitness sessions, and our strength and conditioning coach has been using it with elite scholar athletes. University staff from various departments have also participated in scheduled weekly Active Trail sessions. I'm sure this activity will only increase as the days get longer and lighter."

Fitness trail users reference either placards on the SYNRGY BlueSky stations that clearly outline proper form, or use QR codes to access exercise tutorial videos through the Life Fitness Lfconnect mobile app.

To find out more information on SYNRGY BlueSky and what it can offer, please visit: www.lifefitness.co.uk/bluesky

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Access control systems have long provided operators with attendance data – but the latest products can tell you what customers do once they're in the building. **Rhianon Howells** reports

Until recently, the ability to capture reliable data on exactly what customers do once they go through the reception turnstiles has been limited – especially for operators that mainly offer all-inclusive memberships. But now a number of suppliers have developed multi-sector solutions that control access and collect customer data, not just at reception but at entrances throughout the facility, from the gym and studio to the pool.

There are clear operational benefits to this kind of solution, from preventing fraudulent use of facilities or services that are not within a customer's entitlement, to limiting access to set times for specific groups or clubs.

Just as crucially, being able to collect data on specific facility usage within a club or centre has huge advantages for both marketing and development decisions, as well as being popular with local authorities and private investors who want to know what kind of bang they're getting for their buck.

We speak to three suppliers to understand what the latest product innovations mean for operators.

CASE STUDY 1: GOING SWIMMINGLY

Supplier: Gladstone

Late last year, Oldham Council – based in north-west England – opened two new leisure centres in Oldham and neighbouring Royton, with the dual aim of providing superior leisure facilities to the local community and ensuring that the legacy of the London 2012 Olympics lives on in the region.

At £23m, this was no small investment, so the council was understandably keen to know how the centres would be received – and not just in terms of overall attendance. "Being able to show how the centres were being used was a major condition of our new operating contract

with the council," says Peter Howson, head of customer relations at Oldham Community Leisure (OCL), the trust that manages the borough's 11 leisure facilities on behalf of Oldham Council. "They don't just want to know the number of people coming through the door, but exactly what they're doing and how often."

OCL turned to Gladstone Health and Leisure to deliver a system that would enable it to capture this additional data. While the operator was in favour of installing turnstiles activated by RFID cards or bands at reception and the gym, it did not want turnstiles at the pool, as it felt the wet environment would inevitably cause problems with the electronic equipment.

However, with the pools constituting a significant part of the investment, gathering data on their usage was vital. Howson explains: "We knew data relating to class and activity bookings would be automatically captured when members scanned in at the reception turnstiles, while additional turnstiles at the gym would track gym usage. Swimming was the missing piece of the jigsaw."

To overcome this, Gladstone developed a system that allows data on swimming pool usage to be collected via a mounted touchscreen located at the main reception turnstiles. Before being granted access, customers must



Our new solution provides an answer where installing physical access control in all areas is either not practical or not affordable

Tom Withers, Gladstone



The latest IT systems can track who's doing which classes – not just who's in the club

simply answer yes or no to the on-screen question: "Are you going to swim today?"

According to Howson, the system is already paying dividends. "Until the introduction of the turnstiles, we couldn't track what our members were doing once they got past reception. Now we can identify our popular products."

As well as assisting with programming decisions – for example, holding classes on the gym floor when there are too many people using the equipment, or rescheduling pool-based classes for times when the pool is less busy – the data also provides a much clearer picture of where further investment is needed, says Howson.

The system is also allowing OCL to introduce new products without additional staffing costs, such as an early-morning members-only swim session. Pay-as-you-go customers will also be able to purchase RFID bands to access sessions paid for online without having to queue.

Gladstone – which developed the software and consulted with access experts ASP on the hardware design – is now looking to roll out the solution to other operators. "Providing enhanced data on how a member uses a club or centre would normally involve unprecedented investment in access control hardware covering the whole facility," says Gladstone MD Tom Withers. "Our new access solution provides an answer where installing physical access control in all areas is either not practical or not affordable."

A new feature of the product is the System Monitoring Tool. This solves the problem of data being lost as a result of staff manually releasing the turnstiles to allow customers through when the system denies them access. Instead, staff can click a button on a web portal to override the access denial and prevent the data being lost.

The solution also supports multi-ID options for individuals – allowing one member to check in via RFID band, card or mobile, for example – as well as a biometric option.

Once usage data is captured, operators can market packages to customers based on what their behaviour already demonstrates is their interest

Sean Maguire, Legend



CASE STUDY 2: DATA COMPLETENESS

Supplier: Legend

Another software company using access control for enhanced data collection is Legend, which has installed multi-sector solutions for a number of clients.

"The conventional idea of access control being about membership cards and front desk check-in is outdated," says Legend MD Sean Maguire. "Today's Access Control Management (ACM) systems allow customers to check themselves in via computer, smartphone and kiosk, and gain access via multiple media including swipe cards, proximity cards, biometrics, pin codes, tickets and vouchers."

"Increasingly, providers also need to consider multi-sector access systems that control access not only to the main facility, but also to different areas within it, to reap the full operational and data-led benefits."

In addition to protecting income by cutting down fraudulent access, multi-sector systems offer far greater data accuracy and completeness, says Maguire – insight that can be used to feed back to councils and investors, as well as driving upsell and programming opportunities. ▶



Biometric systems can ensure only registered guardians can access pool changing rooms during kids' swim sessions

- "Once specific usage data is properly captured, Legend's data analytics tool can quickly steer operators to market appropriate packages to customers – based on what their behaviour already demonstrates is their interest – and allow them to swiftly adapt programmes and capacities to optimise take-up and reduce wasted effort and cost. For example, staffing levels can be increased at busy periods, while consistently quiet periods or classes can be promoted through marketing activity or offers."

Another advantage of Legend's solution is its capacity to silently alert front-of-house staff in real time whenever customers are denied access to any part of the facility. For example, if a new member tries to access the gym without completing their PAR-Q, this is immediately flagged on the system, enabling staff to resolve the problem discreetly while the customer is still on the premises.

The system can also combine a variety of solutions to enable operators to offer tiered services, adds Maguire. For example, non-members might be given a card – to pre-pay for sessions online, allowing them to skip on-site queues – while members might use a biometric system to gain access to exclusive changing rooms or a members-only spa.

CASE STUDY 3: FINGERPRINTING GOOD

Supplier: ievio

Among the most advanced modes of access control currently available are biometric solutions, which use biological data – typically captured via fingerprint readers – to identify customers.

Because biometric data is unique to each individual, a major benefit of such solutions is that access can only be gained by that person. This solves the problem of 'buddy punching', whereby members share cards, bands or pin numbers with non-members. In addition to the security and cost benefits, this ensures the data gathered is entirely reliable, says Ashley Westgate, marketing

The data can tell you exactly who attended at which times, without having to allow for no-shows

Ashley Westgate, ievio



manager at ievio, which supplies biometric fingerprint readers to four national fitness operators – among them Lifestyle Fitness – in partnership with Vistec Systems.

According to Westgate, ievio's readers can be fully integrated into a number of membership management systems. Depending on the system and set-up, if a series of readers were then installed at key access points throughout the facility – such as the gym, pool or sauna – this could allow for much deeper monitoring of specific facility usage.

"Being able to analyse data regarding usage and key trends, either for individual members or your overall membership database, is vital to providing a tailored service," says Westgate. "The data can tell you which sessions are most popular, as well as exactly who attended at which times, without having to allow for the no-shows."

When integrated with a membership management system, ievio's biometric solutions can also limit not only who has access to which facilities, but at what times. "For example, the system can be configured so only children and their registered guardians have access to the pool changing rooms during children's swim sessions, which can help with child protection issues," says Westgate.

ievio's Ultimate fingerprint reader is also well-suited to damp environments, he adds. "Many readers stumble when trying to read through water or sweat on a finger, because the moisture fills the gaps between the ridges that make up the fingerprint. Ours can make a positive identification even when a finger is wet." ●

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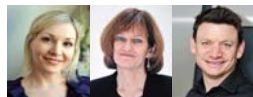
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An active future



The DCMS has launched its new *Sporting Future* strategy. ukactive's **Steven Ward** picks out some of the key points on which our sector can build

December's launch of the new Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) strategy – *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation* – was a significant juncture in UK sporting policy and a clear step in the right direction in terms of getting the nation more active.

It followed the sports minister's widely publicised criticism of the previous strategy, which was dubbed "severely outdated", as well as a thorough public consultation on the remit and expectations of sport in society.

Speaking with the DCMS team in the lead-up to the launch, it was clear they wanted a document that didn't appear woolly – one that had realistic ambitions backed up by specific programmes with genuine targets and outcomes.

DELIVERING CHANGE

For the most part, this has been achieved. Parts of the strategy are bold and challenging and will bring real change to how some of the sector's biggest players operate, and who they partner with.

For example, as called for in ukactive's *Blueprint for an Active Britain*, the strategy states that all future funding will go to any organisation that can achieve one or more of the core aims of the strategy,



The new strategy picks up on the important topic of workforce development

Meanwhile, forward-thinking elements such as the joint work with Public Health England and the NHS will help ensure that physical activity is integrated into all relevant care pathways.

with the sector – has played in bringing this to fruition. We've always campaigned for government to take strong steps to include our sector within its efforts to get the nation moving. Now this thought leadership, together with the fostering of strong relationships across Whitehall, looks as though it may bear fruit.

This is certainly the case with *Sporting Future*, which takes our issues of public health, inactivity, professionalising the workforce and the embracing of a broader delivery team into the very heart of government policy.

In my response to the strategy on the launch day, I described it as a step in the right direction. But it is just one step. We must keep our foot on the gas to make sure the momentum continues. ●

The strategy is a step in the right direction, but we must keep our foot on the gas to make sure the momentum continues

which are focused on mental, physical and economic wellbeing. For our sector, it marks an end to 'them and us' and a new era of 'us and us, together' when it comes to delivering physical activity outcomes for local communities.

There was also a clear endorsement of the decision taken in July 2015 by the ukactive Membership Council to task its chartered institute – CIMSPA – with the delivery of the physical activity sector's workforce development.

Finally, ukactive chair Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson will head up a Duty of Care working group, which will oversee the standards of delivery and conduct for all forms of participation. This detail should not be overlooked as it's central to the delivery of the document, and could lead to some interesting opportunities.

EMBRACING OUR AGENDA

I would of course like to point out the role that ukactive – in close partnership





NIR EYAL

Nir Eyal is a business theorist who specialises in the intersection of psychology, technology and business. He will explain why some products and services fly and others flop – and how to ensure your own success – during his keynote at IHRSA 16



IHRSA 2016 keynote speaker Nir Eyal

Tell us about your career so far...

I've spent much of my career in advertising and video gaming, being exposed to all kinds of tactics designed to change customer behaviour. But I realised many people didn't know why certain things worked, or understand the psychological principles driving behaviour – they just knew they were effective.

Similarly, I've spent a lot of time banging my head against the wall trying to figure out why people were, or weren't, engaging with certain products – why some products and services fly and others flop. I needed to understand user behaviour better, and find out what made some experiences habit-forming – how products could create habits and change behaviour.

And you've come up with a theory called the Hook Model. What are hooks?

Hooks are experiences that connect a user's problems with a company's product frequently enough that customers form associations. Over time, these associations spark unprompted engagement with the product – in other words, habits are formed.

The use of the product is generally associated with one of three things: an



Not every business requires a user habit, but every business that does need one has to have a hook



emotional pain point, an existing routine, or a particular situation. For example, what do people turn to when they're lonely and seek connection? Facebook. What do we do when we feel uncertain? We Google. And what about when we're bored? Many people open YouTube, Pinterest, or check sports scores or stock prices. Lots of products address the pain of boredom.

So what is the Hook Model?

It's a four-step process – trigger, action, variable reward, and investment – that products can use to encourage certain desired customer behaviours.

Triggers are cues to action and come in both internal and external forms. A pang of hunger, for instance, prompts us to snack; an email alert prompts us to open

the message; a glance in the mirror may prompt us to embark on a diet.

The action is the behaviour that we engage in to obtain the desired reward: we snack, we read, we diet.

The variable reward is the result that provides physical, intellectual, psychological or emotional satisfaction: a feeling of satiety, of being well informed, of looking slimmer. The variable part of this hook is important in that people crave variety; they want their next experience to be new, bigger, better. They're rewarded but are left wanting more.

Investment refers to things a user does to increase the likelihood of taking the same action again. For instance, clicking 'reply all' ensures further emailing; buying new training gear boosts their motivation to return to the gym.



Making plans to work out with friends is part of what Eyal calls 'investment' – the things that keep you going back

What are the benefits of the Hook Model for business?

By leading consumers through consecutive hook cycles – trigger, action, variable reward, investment – companies are able to bring users back again and again without depending on costly advertising or aggressive messaging.

Habit-forming products enjoy faster growth, greater pricing flexibility and greater defensibility. They can also help users to incorporate healthy behaviours into their daily lives.

Not every business requires a user habit, but every business that does need one has to have a hook. One need only look at fitness crazes past and present – from Jazzercise to CrossFit to SoulCycle – to see that they all employ hooks.

How can gyms implement this model?

If we look at regular users of health clubs, the hook is already in full effect: using the gym becomes a habit, and the more a member invests in their gains, the more committed they become.

However, to hook their less engaged users, clubs would benefit greatly by asking themselves the following questions. Firstly, what's the user's psychological itch

– the external trigger that prompts them to take action? Is the action simple to do? What's the reward, and does it leave the user wanting more? And finally, what's the investment that will increase the likelihood of their repeating the hook cycle?

The internal trigger could be negative – guilt – or positive, such as the anticipation of a rewarding workout. The action is to go to the gym. The reward is the workout results and the social connections that accrue. The investment might be actively seeking friendships at the gym, and making plans to work out together, to help motivate you to return.

However, the first step is to figure out what behaviour you actually want to change, and to make sure you're promoting the right behaviour – if not, your efforts will backfire and customers will be left frustrated and unhealthy.

For example, for years we advised people to eat low fat to lose weight. Now it turns out the science was wrong: the low-fat, high-carb diet we recommended made them gain weight, and in some cases become diabetic. Even today, it's a little disingenuous when clubs say they promote healthy lifestyles but sell fruit smoothies loaded with sugar and carbs. ●

WANT TO HEAR MORE?

Nir Eyal will discuss 'Consumer behaviour: Creating habit-forming products' at IHRSA 2016, which takes place in Orlando, Florida, US on 21–24 March. His keynote address is on Thursday 24 March 24, 11.30am–12.30pm. For more information or to register, log on to ihrsa.org/convention

ABOUT IHRSA

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SUPPLIER SHOWCASE

We take a look at recent projects from **Matrix Fitness**, **Craftsman Quality Lockers** and **MYZONE**

GETTING STAFFS ACTIVE

OPERATOR: Staffordshire University, UK

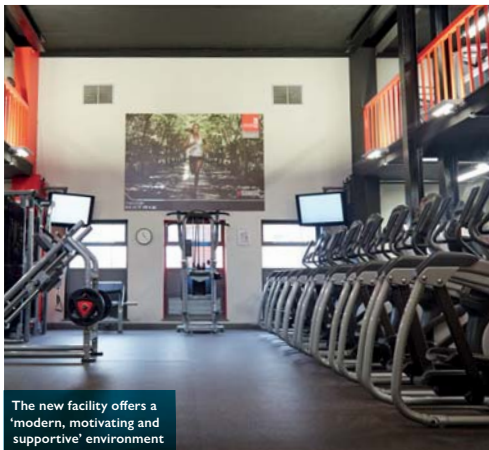
SUPPLIER: Matrix Fitness

Students at Staffordshire University can benefit from a cutting-edge physical workout alongside their intellectual development, following the refurbishment of campus sports facility – the Sir Stanley Matthews Sports Centre.

As part of the £1.25m project, the venue has been completely revamped – from the interior décor, which uses Matrix lifestyle imagery to create an energetic vibe, to new layouts creating dedicated areas for cardio and strength workouts, plus group exercise in the form of a new indoor cycling zone. This is complemented by top-of-the-range Matrix fitness equipment, including cardio products from the 7xi Series, IC7 Indoor Cycles – powered by the Indoor Cycling Group (ICG) and endorsed by Olympic champion Dani King MBE – and a variety of strength training equipment from Matrix's Ultra, Aura and Magnum Series.

The site was also the first in the UK to be installed with Connexus, the functional training system from Matrix that's been designed to offer maximum flexibility and expandability in workout environments, without impinging on other gym-based activities or equipment.

The centre – named after former Stoke City player and football legend Sir Stanley Matthews CBE – was officially opened by Sir Matthews' daughter, Jean Matthews Gough MBE, in a ceremony on 14 November 2015. The facility is open to students, staff and the local community, and will also provide a base for the Staffordshire University Elite Athlete Programme, linked with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Newcastle-under-Lyme Sports Academy.



The new facility offers a 'modern, motivating and supportive' environment



Elite Sports Performance students are currently trialling our new sprint treadmill, so the project has been a win-win for all involved



Commenting on Staffordshire University's partnership with Matrix Fitness, Jonathan Pace, the university's head of sports development, said: "Both organisations strongly believe in the importance and benefits of physical activity. The centre now gives us the ability to promote this to our students and the community with access to top-level fitness equipment in a modern, motivating and supportive environment."

Doug Bell, public sector manager at Matrix Fitness, added: "Matrix is committed to working with its partners to drive a healthier Britain. We've worked closely with Staffordshire University to ensure its students and the wider community have access to an inspirational

facility as part of its fantastic expansion plans. Stoke-on-Trent is also the 2016 European City of Sport, and we're delighted to be helping local people engage in physical activity and wellbeing during this auspicious time.

"The project has been particularly rewarding for us, as the majority of the Matrix workforce lives in the city, but there have been various commercial benefits too. For example, we've been able to access the university's excellent research and testing facilities, with Elite Sports Performance students currently trialling our new sprint treadmill, so the project really has been a win-win for all involved."

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The lockers are spacious, with plenty of room to hang clothes



Manorview wanted to create something really special at the Bowfield, and the attention to detail has been second to none



ADDED VALUE CONSULTANCY

OPERATOR: Manorview Hotels & Leisure Group, UK

SUPPLIER: Craftsman Lockers

Manorview Hotels & Leisure Group recently completed an extensive upgrade of the Bowfield Hotel & Country Club in Renfrewshire to create a state-of-the-art fitness club and spa. Manorview's directors – themselves fitness enthusiasts who regularly use the facilities – were instrumental in the transformation, which included transforming the under-used squash courts into new cycling and dance studios.

The directors also had a clear vision for the changing areas, which were included in the redevelopment project. Member and hotel guest changing areas were created, along with a separate comprehensive family changing area with self-contained facilities for disabled users. All lockers were manufactured by Craftsman Lockers.

Manorview's interior designers, Space ID, worked closely with Craftsman

Lockers to provide a combination of walnut Maximizer-style lockers for spa and hotel guests and health club members. Lockers are keyless and use battery operated digital locks to ensure safe, secure locker management.

Bowfield is one of six hotels in the group – which encompasses everything from nightclubs to leisure sites – with another purchase imminent at the time of writing and an opening scheduled for April. Bought three years ago in a poor state of repair, the venue is undergoing a £3-4m redevelopment that will also include a 40-bed extension, an upgrade of the existing 23-bed hotel and a new function room.

The health club was inherited with a 1,400-strong membership, which has since swollen to 1,750 – nudging on the 1,800 goal set for the facility.

Key to the success of the most recent upgrade was, says property development director Anthony Cowley, the additional consultancy advice provided by Craftsman: "MD John Gibbs spent extended periods advising on the development plans.

"Our experience of using health club changing rooms is that lockers aren't usually large enough to take gym bags without having to force them in, so Craftsman took these comments on board and developed longer lockers with



The hotel's changing areas now have a very upmarket look

compartments for shoes and for separate hanging of clothes."

"It was Craftsman's flexibility to adapt to our requirements that made all the difference. We also found John's advice on our planned spa and hydrotherapy installations very helpful."

He adds: "The finished project looks absolutely superb, in keeping with the designers' vision. Manorview wanted to create something really special at the Bowfield, and the attention to detail has been second to none."

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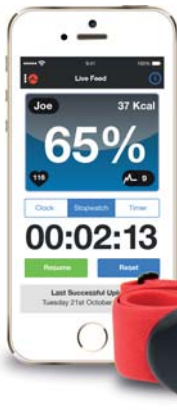
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The Myzone studio class maximises fat burn while preserving muscle

PERSONAL TOUCH

OPERATOR: Heartcore Fitness

SUPPLIER: MYZONE

A class developed around MYZONE has become the most popular session on the timetable for the boutique fitness group Heartcore Fitness.

Jess Schuring launched Heartcore in 2007 with a pilates studio in London's Kensington. Since then, the group has expanded to seven sites in Notting Hill, Hampstead, Chelsea, Fulham, City and Park Lane. The studios offer small group training classes such as dynamic pilates, high intensity TRX and barre.

"We're not a conventional gym. You could describe what we do as personal training in a small group setting," says Gok Yesodharan, head of TRX/HIIT at Heartcore Fitness. "We restrict the size of our high intensity classes to a maximum of eight to 10 people, which allows our instructors to maintain a one-to-one connection with people. That's very important to our concept."

The group was keen to take advantage of the growing wearable technology trend and with it meet the demands of its clients. Yesodharan continues: "Our

members wanted to be able to view their performance; they wanted more transparency from their workouts, to see how their programmes were working.

"So we started scouring the market for the best providers of heart rate monitors and came across MYZONE. We took it on board and spent a few weeks experiencing the system to help refine our model before launching it to our members."

Heartcore launched MYZONE at its Fulham studio last June, developing a small group training class around the technology. The 55-minute class has been designed to maximise fat burn while preserving lean muscle and building strength through a series of bodyweight exercises.

Named FitRX, the high-intensity class uses a unique combination of TRX-based strength training and HIIT intervals to encourage members to work to their maximum heart rate.

The class incorporates MYZONE: participants can view their heart rate and calorie burn data, which is projected onto the wall, so they can track their performance and make sure they're working in the optimal performance zones. "The feedback from members

about the class has been great," says Yesodharan. "They love it. They say that working with Myzone encourages them to push themselves harder than if they were working without it."

"It also allows our instructors to personalise their motivation and identify who they need focus on during the class."

The technology has worked especially well for newcomers. "It takes time to master the technique of the exercises, which can sometimes be frustrating for beginners who feel they're not getting the most out of the class. But when they're using MYZONE, they can clearly see they're still getting a great workout and that encourages them to keep going."

"MYZONE is about challenging yourself and battling your own system, which is perfectly suited to the Heartcore model of delivering a personal service in a small group setting," concludes Yesodharan.

Heartcore currently runs 10 FitRX classes a week and, following its success, will offer the class at its new studio in St John's Wood – which opened in January – before rolling it out to other sites in the group.

www.myzone.org



MYZONE is about challenging yourself and battling your own system, which is perfectly suited to the Heartcore model



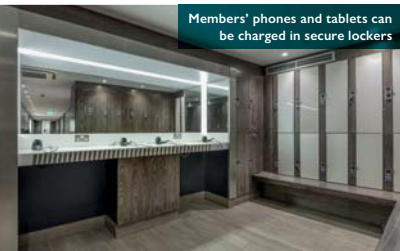
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Do your changing rooms need a bit of a refresh? We look at the latest installations for inspiration

Members' phones and tablets can be charged in secure lockers



RIDGEWAY'S MODERN DESIGNS TO CATER FOR ALL

Ridgeway Furniture has supplied bespoke modern changing room and reception products at two London health clubs.

In the changing room at Fitness First in Bishopsgate, members can charge phones and tablets in one of 32 secure charging lockers. Ridgeway also created an interactive reception TV station unit that displays classes and personal trainer details, which the user can scroll through. It also supplied a white Corian unit where two iPads are available for members to use.

At another Fitness First site in Fetter Lane, Ridgeway installed lockers of various heights, including some with long drops for local lawyers who need to store long coats and gowns while using the gym.

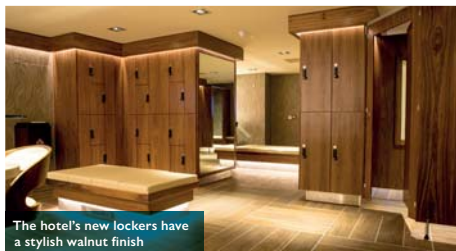
fitness-kit.net KEYWORD RIDGEWAY

BOWFIELD CHANGING FACILITIES CRAFTED ANEW

Craftsman Lockers recently fitted out new changing rooms at the Bowfield Hotel and Country Club in Howwood, Renfrewshire – part of the Manorview Hotels and Leisure Group in Scotland.

Working alongside interior designers Space ID, the locker specialist upgraded the member and hotel guest changing areas, as well as creating a new family changing area with self-contained facilities designed specifically for disabled users.

Now on offer are walnut Maximizer-style lockers for spa and hotel guests and health club members. The lockers are keyless and use battery-operated digital locks.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD CRAFTSMAN


The hotel's new lockers have a stylish walnut finish

HYATT REGENCY AMALA SPA CHOOSES KITLOCK



Keyless lockers solve the problem of many lost keys

The Hyatt Regency Amala Spa and leisure club in Birmingham, UK, has chosen KitLock keyless locker locks for its changing rooms.

The spa and leisure club, part of the Hyatt Regency hotel, installed 150 coded KitLock 1000 locks, manufactured by Codelocks, across its male and female changing rooms. Guests now enter a four-digit code on the keypad to 'lock and go'.

The new locks have solved the problem of keys going missing, which had left many of the previous key-opening lockers out of action.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD CODELOCKS

FITNESS FIRST MIDDLE EAST CHOOSES OJMAR

Ojmar's OCS Locker lock has been installed in changing rooms at two Fitness First locations in Dubai.

The digital locks are designed to provide an easy to use solution where customers enter a four-digit code to open the lock. If the user forgets their code, staff can open and reload it using a separate lock device. The lock can also be configured by the club to open automatically after a set period of time, to guarantee locker availability.

An LED on each lock shows which lockers are already in use.



Customers simply use a four-digit code to open the locker

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD OJMAR

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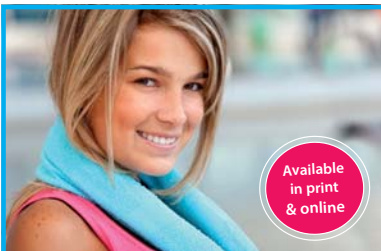
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See the potential

Exercise could enhance the brain's capacity to learn, say researchers at the University of Pisa

The brain's capacity to learn, remember and repair depends on the ability of our neurons to change with experience – a complex process that researchers now say can be boosted by regular exercise.

Reporting in the latest edition of Cell Press journal *Current Biology**, scientists have produced evidence that exercise may enhance the plasticity of the adult brain, making it more flexible and open to new ideas and ways of learning.

Brain plasticity is thought to decline with age but, says lead author Claudia Lunghi of the University of Pisa in Italy: "We've provided the first demonstration that moderate levels of physical activity enhance neuroplasticity in the visual cortex of adult humans."

"By showing that moderate levels of physical activity can boost the plastic potential of the adult visual cortex, our results pave the way to the development of non-invasive therapeutic strategies exploiting the intrinsic brain plasticity in adult subjects."

The findings – with their focus on the visual cortex area of the brain – could also have implications for people with conditions such as amblyopia (lazy eye) and traumatic brain injury, which the researchers believe may be treatable with regular bouts of physical activity.

Eye test

To find out whether exercise can boost brain plasticity in people in the same way it has been shown to in animals, the researchers measured the residual plastic potential of the adult visual cortex using a simple test of binocular rivalry.

Most of the time our eyes work together, but when people have one eye covered by a patch for a short period of time, the closed eye becomes stronger as the visual brain attempts to compensate for the lack of visual input. The strength of the resulting imbalance between the eyes is a measure of the brain's visual plasticity



The research suggests that moderate levels of physical activity enhance neuroplasticity in the visual cortex of adult humans

and can be tested by presenting each eye with incompatible images.

In the new study, Lunghi and colleague Alessandro Sale of the National Research Council's Neuroscience Institute put 20 adults through this test twice. In one test, participants with one eye patched watched a movie while relaxing in a chair. In the other test, participants with one eye patched exercised on a stationary bike for 10-minute intervals while watching the movie.

The benefits of exercise were clear, as Lunghi explains: "After activity, the eye that was patched was strongly potentiated, indicating increased levels of brain plasticity."

Further study is needed, but the researchers think this might be a result of decreased levels of an inhibitory

neurotransmitter, called GABA, after exercise. As concentrations of this inhibitory nerve messenger decline, the brain becomes more responsive.

More things to 'look' at

Lunghi and Sale now plan to investigate the effects of moderate levels of exercise on visual function in amblyopic adult patients and to look deeper into the underlying neural mechanisms.

The findings serve to further underline the importance of exercise in relation to brain function. They follow research by the University of Kansas Medical Center – reported on by *HCM* in July 15 – which found that raising fitness levels in later life can boost brain function, with the intensity of exercise as important as the duration.

HCM also reported in October that scientists in Japan have concluded that regular exercise can help the brain hold back the sands of time and perform in the same way as it did in years gone by. ●

After physical activity, the eye that was patched was strongly potentiated, indicating increased levels of brain plasticity

Lead researcher Claudia Lunghi

*Lunghi, C & Sale, A et al. A cycling lane for the brain. *Current Biology* 25, R1107–R1125, December 2015

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