

health club management



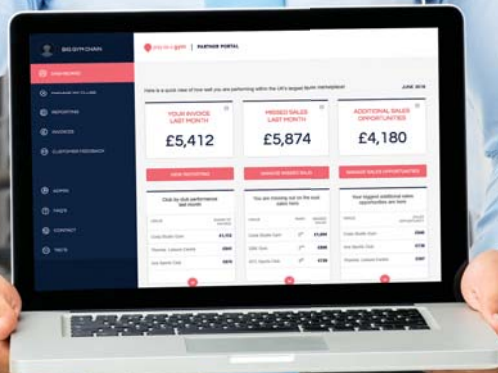
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JUNE 2016

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- Validate PT & Small group training
- Make money out of wearable technology

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The inactivity agenda

The new Sport England strategy, with inactivity as its primary focus, represents a major triumph for ukactive – and a significant opportunity for the fitness sector to prove its worth in getting people moving

Sport England's recent announcement that tackling inactivity is now part of its mandate gives huge cause for celebration in the fitness sector. It means that, for the first time ever, the interests of both sport and fitness are truly aligned – with physical inactivity the top priority for both sectors – and leads to real hopes that our joint efforts can now make a significant difference in getting the nation moving.

This is a huge triumph for ukactive, which has championed inactivity as the biggest health issue in the UK since November 2013, when it used its annual Summit to announce a national ambition to reduce inactivity by 1 per cent a year. The organisation then published its *Turning the Tide of Inactivity* report in January 2014 and has continued to lobby for this cause ever since.

And government has listened, with the DCMS *Sporting Future* strategy, launched in December last year, labelling the distinction between sport and broader activity as “unhelpful, outdated and irrelevant” – and, with it, paving the way for Sport England to take on a far broader remit in getting the nation active.

Sport England has taken this change of direction on board: its new strategy, published last month, makes tackling inactivity its #1 priority, with £250m allocated to this task over four years.

As former ukactive CEO David Stalker says in his interview on p34: “It would have been easy for Sport England to retreat to its comfort zone, focus on NGBs, and say it would get to the rest. But it has recognised, with the DCMS mandate, that the time is now.”

Sport England hasn't abandoned its heartland, with many of its new investment programmes sitting in familiar sporting territory. However, with the organisation now embracing broader physical activity alongside its traditional responsibilities, there are huge opportunities for collaboration among activity providers of all shapes and sizes – not to mention potential funding for any projects that get people moving.

As Sport England CEO Jennie Price told *HCM*: “What we're interested in is a genuinely shared objective. If someone wants to achieve something in sport and physical activity, then we want to work with them. If you're a charity interested in empowering



What we're interested in is shared objectives. If someone wants to achieve something in sport or physical activity, we want to work with them - Jennie Price

women or regenerating your area, we want you to come to us with ideas about how sport and physical activity might do that.

“We don't have the legal permission to fund private organisations, but we know the DCMS is open to us working with a wide range of companies, so we're absolutely open to partnerships.”

And there's already evidence that Sport England will deliver on this ‘partnership to promote movement’ mission – even before its new strategy was announced, it had already created successful partnerships with the Forestry Commission and the National Trust to get people using forests and outdoor spaces to be active.

So with the new agenda playing to the strengths of the fitness sector, the door is truly open. As ukactive executive director Steven Ward says: “We're raring to go to partner and deliver what is a very substantial part of the government and Sport England's plan, and which providers in our sector are uniquely placed to do.”

There will be plenty of opportunities, as the Sport England strategy spans not only the over-arching inactivity brief, but also a new focus on getting kids moving and investing in local projects to create a “more joined-up approach to getting active”.

Partnership details still need to be thrashed out, but it's now possible to see an exciting opportunity for fitness providers to work alongside Sport England to drive through real change.

Kate Cracknell

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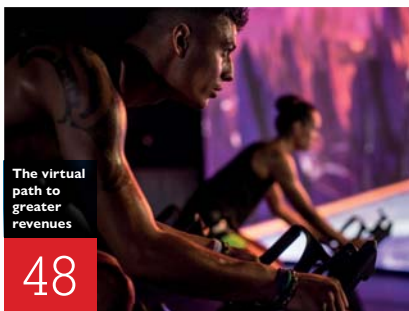
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JUNE 2016



PHOTO PAUL PEARSON

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Fitness blogger Zanna van Dijk on the growing power of the social media 'influencer'

Boutique operator 1Rebel plans to launch a cycling studio on a bus – we canvas opinion



Francine Houben, founder and creative director at Mecanoo, on inspiration as she gets older

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Building an empire: China's plans to become a world football superpower

EU funding: Expert advice on winning financial backing for your sports projects



Green Gym eyes expansion and aims to become UK's largest physical activity provider

Fitbit sales spike prompts the company to raise profit guidance for the rest of the year

Thorpe Park postpones Derren Brown's Ghost Train opening as developers add "final tweaks"



GOCO Hospitality teams with Bhutan's Queen Mother to develop projects in Bhutan

US hotel brand Sentierre to include full-service spa created by Sylvia Sepielli in its first resort

Massage Envy takes first steps in international expansion with new Sydney location



UK's first VR centre caters to special needs kids with tailored virtual reality experiences

Whistler Blackcomb ski resort announces a US\$345m plan to revitalise its mountain facilities

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YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED



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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

Data: The new, portable fitness currency



We read your recent article on new regulations for data portability with interest – the fact that gym members will be able to ask their club to transfer all their personal data to another gym when they leave, and not keep a record of this data (see *HCM* May '16, p54).

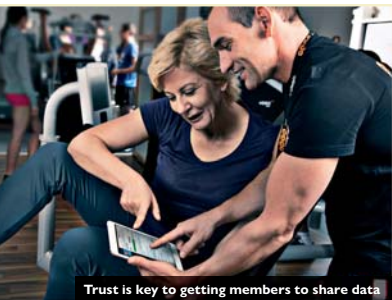
As a digital fitness company, any regulations affecting data processing are of great importance to us, and we're excited about the General Data Protection Regulation. Operating across numerous European markets as we do, we're in favour of homogeneous European data protection standards.

We're also in favour of a data protection regime that strengthens the rights of members. Only when people feel comfortable with the handling of their personal data will they be willing to share their information. Trust is key.

Finally, the new standards affect not only end users and club members, but also eGym's direct customers – fitness clubs. Our experience to date is that many clubs aren't sufficiently familiar with data privacy requirements. With this new strengthening of consumer rights, health clubs will rely even more heavily on extensive consultation. That will put all enterprises providing services and products to clubs that include data processing and storage into the role of consultants.

Businesses that are able to support clubs in their obligations – for example, transferring personal data or implementing the 'right to be forgotten' – will finally bring the digital revolution to clubs. Because data is the currency of the new digital health and fitness experience.

René Hanschke
Chief privacy officer, eGym



Trust is key to getting members to share data



Exercisers often underestimate the importance of weights

Strength training for all



I was interested to read the recent news coverage on newly published studies which have

shown how strength training and maintaining a high level of muscle mass are connected to living a longer, healthier life.

With so much science now backing up the benefits of strength training, particularly as we age, members' understanding of these connections should grow – and ultimately lead to improved retention rates across the sector.

The industry as a whole should be doing all it can to dispel the myth that weights are for bodybuilders. We must encourage all exercisers to incorporate strength work into their routines

by producing intuitively designed machines – but also by bringing knowledgeable staff onto the gym floor to advise and support members in this important area.

The issue for us at Precor has always been how we can make strength training more attractive and user-friendly, particularly to women, older people and those new to exercise – groups who might not traditionally have seen strength training as being 'for them'.

Initial orientation, on-the-spot guidance and drop-in workshops, along with demonstration videos and easy to understand instruction placards on the equipment, all help to build knowledge and confidence.

Justin Smith
Head of UK, Precor

PEOPLE



Many brands assume we'll do everything for free or in exchange for product. In reality, influencers need to be paid



ZANNA VAN DIJK

PT & SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER

How has social media impacted your career?

It's transformed it. By growing a social media following, I've not only developed a larger client base as a PT, but I've been able to expand what my day-to-day work includes.

I'm now able to blog for a living as well as being a signed fitness model, fronting campaigns for the likes of Tommy Hilfiger. I've developed my own activewear collection; I've worked with brands such as adidas and Nike on various projects; and I've set up a company called #girlgains, which hosts female empowerment events.

I'm also now writing my first book, *The Balanced Body* – a complete guide to living a sustainable, enjoyable lifestyle which has lasting results for health and happiness. I'm writing it myself – there are no ghost writers – so the pressure is on!

Which social media channels and what sort of content do you find work best?

Instagram has my largest following and is the quickest to grow for most people. The content people like here tends to be information they can use – ideas for healthy meals, snacks, workouts and so on.

I also have a large following on Snapchat, and this is by far my most engaged audience. Consumers enjoy the personal nature of Snapchat – the way it feels like they're hanging out with you and getting an unfiltered insight into your life.

Do you ever struggle with negativity on social media?

Honestly, no. I can probably count the number of nasty comments on my fingers, which isn't bad for three years on social media. I think that's because my message is positive and I try to be open, honest and helpful.

Have brands recognised the power of social media 'influencers' such as yourself?

There's been a huge shift from celebrity endorsement to influencer endorsement over the last few years, and some brands are catching on to this.

There are, however, many brands that still assume we'll do everything for free or in exchange for product. In reality, time is money and influencers need to be paid in exchange for their skills, time sacrifices and audience.



To what do you attribute your social media success?

First things first, I'd have to say I'm really not that successful compared to the people out there who have millions of followers on social media!

However, I think my following has come for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was in the right place at the right time: I started my social media channels over three years ago, before it even became a 'thing'. I've also been consistent, only putting out content that's true to my brand and my message – quality content that people can learn from rather than just spamming my feed with selfies, because what can people gain from that?

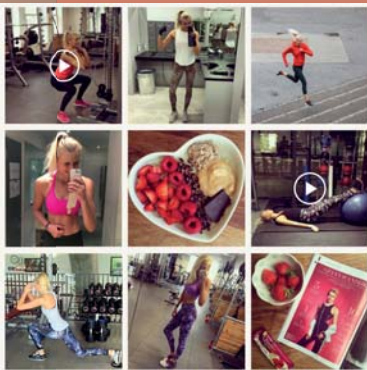
I've also done a huge amount of networking. In addition to that, whenever a brand has worked with me, I've gone above and beyond their expectations to maintain a good reputation.

What do you think the future of social media holds?

The way social media has grown and developed within the past year is insane, and I hope will continue, with the relationships between brands and influencers becoming even stronger. The crossover from social media into mainstream media is also happening, with social media sensations bringing out books and products. I see this happening well into the future.



PHOTOS: GARY MORRIS/SCIENCE



The personal trainer says she only shares high quality, usable content and advice on her social media channels ▶



I believe the brand is strong enough that eventually people will say 'oh, is that like a Spartan Race?'



► **PETER PHILLIPS**
QUEEN'S GRANDSON & MD OF SEL UK

What is SEL?

SEL (Sports & Entertainment Ltd) is a market leader in sport and entertainment, management, marketing and commercialisation, with offices in Australia and the UK.

What is SEL's involvement with Spartan Race?

We've been engaged by Spartan to manage its business elements in the UK. This includes creating business efficiencies, sponsorship and marketing development, as well as identifying new and exciting venues to challenge all levels of Spartan participants.

Tell us about Spartan Race

Spartan isn't your average race – compared to normal road races, it's the adventurous, adrenaline-junkie friend who thrives on excitement. There's running, climbing, crawling, splashing through mud, tackling challenging obstacles and finishing with a fiery leap of victory!

What's the secret to its success?

I believe it's the camaraderie, the challenge, and the attention to detail among the race team and the festival site team.

From the moment you register to the moment you leave, you should have a great experience.

People of all shapes and sizes, and from all walks of life, have completed Spartan Races. If you don't want

Spartan is a big brand in the US and is now set to grow in the UK



Phillips says camaraderie is key in Spartan Races

to run, then walk. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other and before you know it, you've done the first mile. The Spartan community is well known for being helpful – they don't like seeing people struggle. Watch how quickly a helping hand extends your way. Don't be surprised if you feel someone pushing up on the soles of your feet to boost you up. That's normal. They're just helping you.

Why did SEL take on the Spartan Race brand?

The mass participation health and fitness sector has grown massively in the last five years. People are looking for new and interesting ways to exercise. They're looking for challenges and something that's going to push them not only physically, but also mentally.

Spartan is already a hugely strong brand within that sector in the US and we felt, with a few tweaks, it could be just as successful in the UK. There isn't much I'd change about the races themselves, but I believe locations are key – the races need to be easy to find and access – and that's what we're focusing on.

These aren't major changes, but rather refinements that I hope will grow awareness of Spartan across the UK. I believe the brand is strong enough that it will eventually be the point of reference for the category – people will say "oh, is that like a Spartan Race?"

Will there be some sort of Royal connection moving forward?

Ha ha! Well, we had a race at Aston Down in May and will have one at Windsor Great Park in October for the season finale, but I think that's about as far as it will go.

How can gyms and health clubs get involved?

We recently announced a partnership with David Lloyd Leisure in the UK, but Spartan is a great opportunity for all health club operators to motivate and challenge their members. A Spartan Race is a great target to set your members to train towards. ●



WILL YOUR MEMBERS

Fitness has never been bigger. In fact it's the world's biggest sport. 79% of over-18s either exercise regularly or would like to.

So why is it **still** so hard to keep members?

Competition from within the sector, a demanding Millennial audience and digital disruption within the marketplace means there are more choices for exercisers than ever.

Still 50% of members leave within the first year.

This is because many gyms are in the business of selling **memberships, not fitness.**

Les Mills runs programmes in 17,000 facilities across 100 countries. We use this market insight to help shape our practical tools to support business partners to increase member retention.

We have **six strategies** to share, so if you are looking to create bonds so strong with your members that they simply won't want to leave you then why not book onto one of our **FREE** insight seminars today

To find out how, book your place on a **FREE** Relationships Beyond Memberships seminar today.
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LOVE YOU OR LEAVE YOU?

**RELATIONSHIPS
BEYOND MEMBERSHIPS**

International news

Fitness IPO flurry continues with Basic-Fit

Europe's largest budget health club chain Basic-Fit has announced it's planning to float on the Dutch stock market, adding to the flurry of fitness market IPO activity in recent months.

Last month saw Technogym go public in Italy, following on from The Gym Group's IPO last November, while Pure Gym and The Bannatyne Group are also thought to be lining up listings. Now Basic-Fit – which operates 351 clubs across the Benelux countries, France and Spain – has unveiled plans to float on the Netherlands' Euronext market.

The offering will consist of a primary offering of new shares and a secondary offering of existing shares held by current shareholders, with money raised to be used to refinance company debt and repay shareholder loans. The company says this will give it greater financial flexibility and allow it to continue its growth plans, which have seen the chain grow from 199 clubs to 351 clubs in little over two years.

Details: http://lei.sr7a=r6MgJ_H

Fabryka Formy opens club no.15



Fabryka Formy now has 15 clubs

Polish fitness chain Fabryka Formy has opened its latest club in the southern city of Bytom – its first in that city.

The 1,339sq m club is the company's 15th in Poland and offers five training zones and two group exercise studios – one for group cycling. There's also a wellness and spa zone and sauna. The new club has been equipped by Star Trac.

Offering a mixture of functional, CV and strength training, with 45 different group activities on offer – all delivered by Polish trainers – the Fabryka Formy chain has grown quickly since its launch in 2009 and is currently planning further openings.

Fabryka Formy membership gives access to all 15 clubs across the chain.

Details: http://lei.sr7a=Dgr4z_H



The chain was founded by fitness entrepreneur Irina Kutina

New Russian chain opens flagship

New Russian fitness chain Encore Fitness will open its flagship club in Moscow this summer. Due to open its doors in July, the 3,900sq m site will immediately become among the largest health clubs in the capital city and includes a large luxury spa.

Spread across two floors, the club will be set in an art deco setting within Moscow's OKO Tower building and will include eight fitness zones, each based on different trends and innovations. There's a cardio theatre with the newest Life Fitness and Hammer Strength equipment; a large functional training zone for group and individual HIIT sessions; a Pilates studio; a group fitness area; a balance studio; and a martial arts zone with a professional boxing ring.

The second floor houses a spacious 25m pool – fitted with a Silvertronix hydro-purification system – and relaxation and hydro-massage areas.

More than 60 different group exercise classes will be also available, including programmes from Les Mills as well as TRX, mixed martial arts, AntiGravity yoga and theraquaics balance board classes.

The club's spa has been designed as a major feature and a revenue generator for the club and houses a steamroom, sauna, traditional hammam, snow room, bio-sauna, halotherapy suite, Finnish sauna, fantasy shower, Kneipp treading pool and a lounge zone with Yamaguchi massage chairs.

Encore Fitness was founded by fitness entrepreneur Irina Kutina, who leads the chain as CEO. "Encore Fitness fully reflects the idea of the perfect premium club," she says. "It's based on sound infrastructure, a unique design, advanced equipment, trained coaches and branded, international fitness programmes."

Details: http://lei.sr7a=p2f6u_H

Study of centenarians in Italy

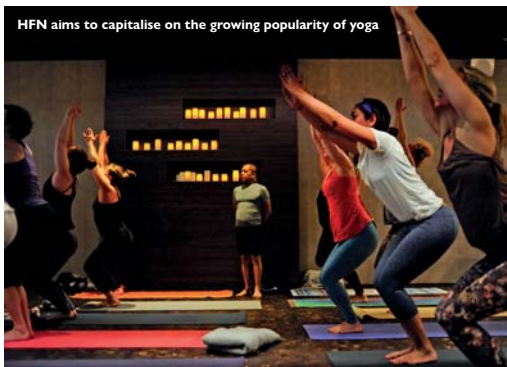
The secret to a long, healthy life could finally be revealed if a study of a remote Italian village – where a high proportion of people live to 100 years of age – is successful. Researchers at University of California, San Diego School of Medicine have teamed up with Italy's University of Rome La Sapienza to study a group of 300 centenarians living in Acciaroli, a hamlet of fewer than 1,000 people.

Acciaroli is nestled between the ocean and mountains on the Campania coast

in southern Italy and one theory is that the craggy surroundings force people to live active lives. "We're the first group of researchers to be given permission to study this population," said Alan Maisel, MD, lead UC San Diego School of Medicine.

Due to the location of the village, Maisel said locals rely on local, organic produce but also walk long distances and hike through the mountains as part of their daily activity.

Details: <http://lei.sr7a=t3y4X>



SATS owner launches new yoga brand

Health & Fitness Nordic (HFN), owner of SATS ELIXIA and Fresh Fitness, has launched a new standalone yoga brand for the Nordic countries. Looking to benefit from the global growth of yoga, the first HiYoga club is located in the Norwegian capital of Oslo and sits within the city's Bogstadveien area – a premium shopping district which also includes luxury residential developments.

According to general manager Anita Hegge, the launch of HiYoga is a strategic move to ensure HFN remains in a position to be at the forefront of yoga teaching as its popularity grows. "HFN offers yoga classes through SATS ELIXIA and is probably the largest provider of yoga in the Nordic area already," Hegge says.

"In order for HFN to capture the full yoga market, however, it's important to have a high quality and dedicated offering of yoga for all tastes and levels, from the beginners to the most experienced yogis. In order to achieve that, it was decided to launch a standalone offering with separate branding, allowing for something that's very different from the clubs."

Opened in April, the first studio in Oslo features three shalas totalling 740sq m, with one of the studios able to offer hot yoga. There are spacious dressing rooms, shower facilities and a sauna. Facilities also include a shop and a café, with plenty of space to hang out with other yoga enthusiasts.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=6zsg9_H

FFME opens first standalone studio

Fitness First Middle East has opened its first ever standalone studio not attached to a traditional health club.

The 800sq m studio in Dubai has a three-in-one concept. XFit (CrossFit-style), X30 (HIIT) and BoxX (boxing themed) classes – among many others – are offered across three zones: LIFT, BOX and HIIT.

"As a business we wanted to explore new models away from the traditional and standard Fitness First health club concept," George Flocks, COO for Fitness First Middle East and North Africa, told *Health Club Management*. "The market in the Middle East is rapidly growing and evolving and our market data showed us there was a need from consumers for a boutique studio box concept model."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=y5g5q_H



The studio at Dubai Media City

CMG opens first sports hub club

France-based Core Motion Group (CMG) has launched a new club under its CMG Sports Club brand in Paris, France. The 3,000sq m ONE Saint-Lazare club opened its doors on 28 April and is described as a new concept by Benoit Mazerat, CMG's director for business development.

"The Saint-Lazare site has been designed as a 'sports hub' – the first of its kind in Paris – and brings together three elements: a fitness club, boutique exercise studios and a juice bar," he told *Health Club Management*. "Spread across six floors, there are two group exercise studios offering 120 classes a week, a huge CV area – including a freestyle track with synthetic grass – and two freestyle areas with kettlebells, ropes, TRX and sandbags."

Equipment has been supplied by Life Fitness and Eleiko, and CMG has partnered with Detox Delight for the juice bar element. CMG has set a target of having 5,000 members within two years, with the target market being young urbanites.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=s2jzm_H

Luxury resort invests in wellness

Resort operator Six Senses has invested in a new health club, wellness pavilion and an elevated yoga platform at its luxury property on Yao Noi island in Thailand.

Fitted with functional training, cardiovascular and resistance equipment, the health club offers 180-degree views of the surrounding jungle.

Equipment includes Technogym's Omnia 8 functional fitness kit as well as Fusionetics performance testing platform – an evidence-based sports science solution helping guests understand, monitor

and improve personal fitness levels.

The Wellness Pavilion is equipped with flying yoga hammocks that are used in conjunction with the resort's yoga classes.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=Q5a3A_H



The wellness areas offer great views

Snap Fitness signs 30-club UK franchise deal

International gym franchise Snap Fitness has announced that it has signed a major UK development plan with MSG Life to open 30 new health clubs – the largest deal in the brand's history.

Financial terms of the deal were not released. However, Snap Fitness – which has more than 2,000 clubs open or in development worldwide – said the move advances the current UK plans in place with master developer TwentyTwoYards.

"With millions of prospective members in this area, this is a paramount move for our brand," said Snap Fitness chief development officer Steele Smiley.

"Snap Fitness will be the gym that dominates the market – as it does in countless other countries."

MSG Life plans to open clubs across the UK. The company is primarily owned by the Grewal family, which has had success as a prominent franchisee of Domino's Pizza.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=V8d5Y_H

Group fitness body aims to double participation



FitGroupUK will represent group ex

A new body representing the group fitness market has laid out ambitious growth targets as it bids to make exercise classes the workout of choice.

FitGroupUK, a body of stakeholders involved in the group exercise industry, will stage its inaugural Summit this summer with a view to realising the full potential of the group fitness sector. With around five million people currently taking part in group fitness, FitGroupUK wants to double this figure in the next five years.

Ross Perriam, CEO of the Exercise, Movement and Dance Partnership (EMDP) – which has been instrumental in getting FitGroupUK off the ground – told HCM the body will "cast the net wide" to align a broad range of bodies behind the bold ambition. This includes reaching out beyond the fitness industry to major retailers and TV shopping channels.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=15V6j_H

£250m war chest for inactivity



The strategy includes dedicated funding to get children active from the age of five

Sport England has made tackling physical inactivity its number one priority, with plans to triple the amount it spends on the issue as part of its new strategy.

Published on 18 May, Sport England's new strategy seeks to deliver against the five health, social and economic outcomes set out in the government's *Sporting Future* strategy released in December. As part of its revamped approach to funding, Sport England will invest £250m in tackling physical inactivity over a four-year period (starting December 2016), with this money available to anyone who can get more people moving

and meet the organisation's core objectives.

The shifting of Sport England's top priority from broadening sports participation to tackling inactivity marks a major win for the physical activity sector. It comes following high profile campaigns from organisations such as uKactive and PHE to underline the severity of England's inactivity epidemic.

uKactive executive director Steven Ward said the focus on inactivity is "certainly a step in the right direction" and said it adds to the policy momentum on the importance of reversing sedentary lifestyles.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=EjX8x_H

Bannatyne profits prime IPO

The Bannatyne Group returned an impressive set of financial results for 2015, putting the health club chain on firm foundations for an expected IPO in the next couple of weeks.

The business is thought to be lining up a £300m float on London's Alternative Investment Market (AIM) and the announcement that the chain's pre-tax profits jumped 138 per cent to £8m in 2015 will no doubt catch the eye of investors.

The latest set of accounts show that last year signalled a return to form for Duncan Bannatyne's business, as revenues climbed 3 per cent to reach £100.9m. Profits had taken a significant hit in 2014 as the company uncovered



Duncan Bannatyne's chain enjoyed a strong 2015

the cost of an £8m fraud by former finance director Christopher Watson. However the firm credited strong leadership – under CEO Justin Musgrove – as a key driver in its revival.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=8f3g_H



Budget operators like Pure Gym are harnessing technology to break new ground

Membership hits record high

The UK's gyms and health clubs have more members than ever before, with a record 9.2 million working up a sweat last year.

That's according to the 2016 *State of the UK Fitness Industry (SOFI) Report* which shows that the fitness market remains on an upward trajectory. As in previous years, the bulk of the growth was driven by budget operators, who are harnessing the power of technology to break new ground. Low-cost gyms now account for approximately 12 per cent of the UK's private health clubs and 32 per cent of the private market's membership.

The buoyancy of the fitness sector was reflected in meaningful gains across all three

KPIs. Market value jumped 3.2 per cent to £4.4bn, the number of gyms increased by 1.9 per cent to hit 6,435, while membership grew 5.3 per cent to reach the record high of 9.2m. Building on last year's gains, the penetration rate leapt forward to hit 14.3 per cent.

David Minton, director of The Leisure Database Company – the firm behind the *SOFI* report – told *HCM* smarter use of technology was a big driver of growth and predicted the uplift to continue for some time.

"We've seen sustained growth over the last few years and I would expect this to continue to be the case," said Minton.

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

Fitness market 'to grow 300%'

The global fitness market is primed for explosive growth over the next decade, as accelerated digitalisation and a convergence of big brands into the sector will spawn a billion global fitness users.

That's according to renowned fitness expert Bryan O'Rourke, who says more consumers will buy into fitness experiences as technology makes it easier to access them. He believes the combination of wearable technology, smarter mobile apps and better use of the resultant data will profoundly affect the way people think about their wellbeing and fuel significant industry growth.

He says omnichannel brands with a blend of digital and physical experiences – such



Technology will alter the fitness landscape drastically

as SoulCycle, Equinox and Under Armour – will continue to reap rewards, whereas established brands unable to shake-off their legacy costs will feel further pain.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=A7Xgr_H

Exercise4Less to grow presence in Wales



The gym will span 30,000sq ft

Exercise4Less plans to launch its second Welsh site as the Leeds-based gym chain seeks to accelerate its UK-wide expansion with growth in the 'land of song'.

Exercise4Less will add to its 35-strong portfolio with a spot at Newport Leisure Park in Spytty Park, taking a central position in the former Megabowl unit.

The Park is owned by Otium Real Estate, the property investment company that runs a £200m investment fund focused on leisure real estate.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=j4B5Q_H

Nuffield Health: new sports performance lab



GM Adam Hanover and his team

Nuffield Health has opened its first specialist sports performance lab at its flagship City Fitness and Wellbeing gym in London, offering elite-level diagnostics to help clients develop tailored programmes.

The City Fitness site, which recently benefited from a £1.9m investment, is aiming to bring elite-level tools and analysis to a wider audience. The Nuffield Health Sports Performance Lab will support those looking to improve sports performance while also supporting injury rehab via a team of specialists.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=g3j7v_H

Finalists announced for Flame Awards 2016

Finalists for the 2016 Flame Awards were unveiled recently by ukactive executive director Steven Ward during a live webinar.

Leisure centre operator Everyone Active led the way with eight nominations, closely followed by 1Life with six. énergie Group and Fusion Lifestyle both received four nods, while Places for People Leisure and GLL have three apiece.

The awards – which are sponsored by Matrix Fitness – will be announced at a glitzy show taking place on 29 June at Telford International Centre. As ever, they will be held in conjunction with the annual Flame Conference – which this year sees New Zealand rugby star and leadership expert Sean Fitzpatrick deliver a keynote.

Also speaking at Flame is futurist Stefan Hyttfors, who has worked with brands such as Unilever, IBM and PwC, to teach businesses about how they can deal with change in an uncertain world.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=8U7v7_H

Virgin Active unveils new Tough Mudder tie-ups



Extreme events are in high demand

Virgin Active has announced new offerings aimed at extreme fitness fans ahead of the Tough Mudder event season.

Shaking up its Tough Mudder partnership which began last year, Mudder Maker 2.0 is a new class from Virgin Active designed to push Mudders-in-training to their physical and mental max. The 45-minute circuit-style class will put participants through five challenging obstacles and five bodyweight conditioning exercises set to a rock soundtrack.

Mudder Maker 2.0 will offer an adrenaline-based workout, to prepare all fitness levels for Tough Mudder.

Meanwhile, Virgin Active is also offering all Mudders signed up to a live event the chance to join any of its 90 UK gyms with no joining fee on a non-contract basis for as little or as long as they like to help them train for the event.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=4t5u_H

ClassPass price hike hits hard

Plans from ClassPass to charge 39 per cent more for its premium package went down like a 50kg kettlebell among London users last month, who vented fury on social media.

In an email to consumers, the studio subscription service explained that its current offering (which allows unlimited access to clubs in its network – although users can only visit the same studio three times in a month) will soon increase in price from £79 to £110 a month. Meanwhile, a new base offering of £55 a month gives access to a total of five classes. The price hike prompted an angry response from users on Twitter, with many suggesting they would cancel their memberships.

According to ClassPass CEO Payal Kadakia, the change reflects a need “to create longevity with members and partners”.

She added: “We’ve realised a one-size-fits-all membership is not diverse enough to serve all our members’ unique needs, which is why we have decided to roll out new plans. We wanted an easier entry point for new users, as well as the ability to keep offering an exceptional experience to those who love our unlimited product.”

Details: http://lei.sr?a=Y7a7_Z_H



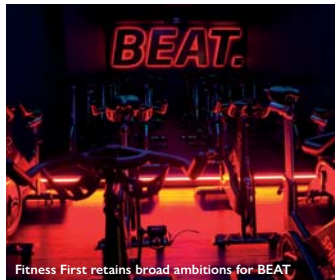
ClassPass CEO Payal Kadakia says the move will ensure ‘longevity’ for partners

Fitness First back on the BEAT

Fitness First is planning to push ahead with the roll-out of its microgym concept BEAT, with ‘club-within-a-club’ boutiques soon to be added to a number of the chain’s London sites.

BEAT, which debuted in March 2014, is a heart-rate focused studio concept launched in response to the growing popularity of boutique studios among London gym-goers. However, the inaugural BEAT boutique was closed earlier this year, casting doubt on the future of the concept.

But HCM has learned that Fitness First retains broad ambitions for BEAT and is working to add the concept into its health clubs at Fenchurch Street and Bishopsgate sites this summer, plus up to four more



Fitness First retains broad ambitions for BEAT

locations by the end of the year. BEAT is currently available at two clubs: Fitness First The Strand and Fitness First London Bridge Cottons.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=Ngy6C_H



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New data intelligence hub for fitness operators



The new portal rolled out last month

payasUGym has launched a new business intelligence platform – dubbed the 'Partner Portal' – designed to help fitness operators maximise the potential of their business and drive profits.

The fitness marketplace provider has invested in the platform as it moves to provide partners, with market data and information that enables them to make better-informed strategic decisions.

payasUGym's Partner Portal will use transactional data gathered from more than 2,300 fitness venues over a five-year period to power innovative new tools such as the Price Calculator, Missed Sales Analysis, Competitive Rank, and new Customer Feedback analysis.

It will also enable operators to assess the importance of online assets such as photography, descriptions and reviews. Details: http://lei.sr?a=zQ3M7_H



Green Gym offers physical activity with a purpose

Big ambitions for Green Gym

A conservation initiative which aims to offer "physical activity with a purpose" is planning to become the UK's largest physical activity initiative as it gears up for expansion.

Green Gym, which was co-founded in 1998 by activity expert Dr William Bird with The Conservation Volunteers, has steadily grown to reach 140 sites across the UK and last year won £475,000 in growth funding from Nesta and the Cabinet Office. Organisers now want to reach 600 locations in the next five years.

Green Gym aims to improve the health and wellbeing of its participants – typically harder to reach demographics who may be experiencing joblessness, ill health due to lifestyle, or mental health conditions – by boosting their activity levels, reducing isolation and supporting better mental wellbeing.

"We're committed to building healthier and happier communities and are firmly of the belief that we need to empower people to look after themselves," said Green Gym MD Craig Lister, a physiologist who has held senior roles in both the fitness and public health sectors with the likes of Public Health England and the NHS.

"People need to feel valued and feel that they're providing value, which is why physical activity with a purpose – creating a new pathway for a park, for example – might appeal to some people more than running on a treadmill"

Green Gyms are a weekly activity, running for three to four hours at a local community facility such as a park. Each Green Gym has up to 50-60 volunteers, with turnout on any one week typically ranging from six to 20. Details: http://lei.sr?a=m7q5Z_H



Classes are soundtracked by live DJs

Best's Bootcamp enters the fray

DW Sports Fitness director Scott Best has moved into the booming boutique studio sector with the launch of his first Best's Bootcamp site in central London's Charing Cross area.

Best is owner of the brand and is said to have "ambitious plans to open other sites in London". The new class-based model is pitching itself alongside Barry's Bootcamp and iRebel in what it calls the 'luxury-fitness block' and says it wants to offer a more personal approach to group exercise.

Key to this is the studio's Trainer Cam experience, which ensures the trainer is visible on screens as they move around the studio – designed to help participants maintain form and technique.

The range of 50-minute classes (£20 each) are soundtracked by Best's resident

DJs, who mix fresh tracks for every session to ensure workout participants never listen to the same music twice.

"We're so excited to launch this dynamic new offering to the boot camp sector in the heart of London," said Lee Drabble, managing director of Best's Bootcamps. "Guests can expect a convenient, effective and stylish experience at our inaugural, sleek new studio with the capital's top trainers in a high octane and social environment."

The studio features FreeMotion Treadmills and has an array of floor-based exercises centred on the Best's Box – which has been designed in-house in conjunction with Escape Fitness and offers two different height options for a versatile workout. Details: http://lei.sr?a=27n5J_H

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UK news

Cycling in bus lanes

1Rebel is planning its own spin on active commuting with cycling studios on London buses. So what's the consensus on this eye-catching new idea?



1Rebel has grabbed the headlines once again with plans for a series of group cycling buses designed to help fitness fans make the most of their commute.

The boutique studio is in talks with Transport for London (TfL) and coach companies over the plans, which would see specially adapted Ride2Rebel buses offer 45-minute group cycling classes while ferrying commuters into London.

Initial interest in the scheme has been "phenomenal" says 1Rebel co-founder James Balfour, who hopes to soon name a bus company partner with a view to launching the concept by the end of summer.

"Time is precious in London and for the many people who want to work out before work, they often face a three-hour

The Ride2Rebel buses would offer 45-minute classes while ferrying commuters into London

“We received more than 300 registrations in the first couple of hours. The demand is definitely there”

— James Balfour, 1Rebel



door-to-door commute each morning," Balfour told *Health Club Management*.

"We want to break the monotony of the soulless commute and offer people a more fulfilling experience by adding our popular Ride class into their morning routine."

Balfour hopes that, by securing an agreement whereby the vehicles can use bus lanes, the service will be a no-brainer for commuters, both in terms of grabbing a morning workout and cutting travel time.

1Rebel is currently calling for registrations of interest on its website and will collate the data to help decide how many bus services it should run, and from which locations around London. The operator plans to end journeys at its St Mary Axe 1Rebel studio in the City, where participants will be able to have a shower and a pre-work smoothie.

"We still have a few hurdles to clear in terms of health and safety and permits, but we've seen incredible enthusiasm for the concept so far and we're convinced it will be a hit," added Balfour. "We received more than 300 registrations in the first couple of hours, and so much interest that our website crashed. The demand is definitely there."



VIEWS FROM THE INDUSTRY

STEVEN WARD

Executive director, ukactive



1Rebel's announcement of a commuting Spin class is exactly what its disruptor brand is all about: being rebellious.

Solutions to the big issues of the day come through radical innovation, which is the category this concept fits in to. Unless we work out ways to make our commutes, our jobs and our everyday lives more active, we won't make the significant dents into inactivity that are needed. Bold plans lead to real change.

The idea of a Spin class on a bus gets people talking and gets people thinking. It sparks a debate about the undeniable dangers of cycling to work, and the need for all

of us to find time within increasingly busy schedules to exercise.

My hunch is that this started out as an idea which even the 1Rebel team thought less likely to happen than commuting on a magic carpet ride – albeit a fantastic piece of brand-led PR – but it's something that just might be crazy enough to work.

If the genie is let out of the bottle, then I can guarantee I'll be one of the first paying customers for this new service.

“Solutions to the big issues of the day come through radical innovation, which is the category this concept fits in to”

SAM YOUNG

Sustainable Design graduate & active travel expert



The Ride2Rebel bus is a very creative and intriguing 'spin' on active commuter travel.

Based on my own research and concept creation in this area, I believe it eliminates a few of the main barriers to active travel – for example, weather conditions, safety on the roads, and initial set-up and cost of equipment. By offering a shower at the end of the journey, and presumably somewhere on the bus for people to leave clothes to change into after their workout, other major barriers will be overcome.

In my research, I also found some of these barriers created a gender split. For example, although road

safety is a universal concern, women were particularly tuned in to this issue.

Women also placed more importance on showers and changing facilities after an active commute. The Ride2Rebel bus service will help eliminate this gender split and encourage active commuting across the board.

As an active commuter myself, I like to be in full control of my commute, able to alter the time I leave to factor in tasks. Ride2Rebel won't offer this degree of flexibility as it will have to run to a set schedule, but I nevertheless feel it's a great way to encourage non-active commuters to break the mould.

The concept will have a few major hurdles with infrastructure and safety, but in the long run I can even see the potential for energy harvesting – which in turn opens up the possibility of creating a fully eco-friendly, renewable service. That would be an amazing step in the right direction in terms of reducing carbon emissions in London, in line with the Ultra Low Emission Zone set for 2020, as well as opening doors to further self-powered transport.

“In the long run I can see the potential for energy harvesting – and with it a fully eco-friendly, renewable service”

Technology news

Fitbit marches on with strong Q1 sales growth



Fitbit Blaze was a key driver of growth

Fitbit reported sales of £345m for the first quarter of 2016 – a 50 per cent increase on Q1 2015 – prompting the fitness tracking giant to raise profit guidance for the rest of the year.

The company shook off potential lawsuits around the accuracy of its fitness trackers to sell 4.8 million connected health and fitness devices in the first quarter, with 70 per cent of revenue coming from the US market.

The new smartwatch-inspired Fitbit Blaze – which the company unveiled at this year's CES Show in January – has sold one million units since it launched and accounted for 47 per cent of the company's Q1 revenue. Having recently floated on the New York Stock Exchange, the company cheered investors with an upgraded forecast for Q2 revenue as well.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=rsy4G_H



Goals is designed to help people squeeze 'me time' into their busy daily schedules

Google wants to boost gym visits

Google has continued efforts to get more people active with the introduction of a new tool to its Calendar platform which helps hard-pressed people find time to work out.

The new addition to Google Calendar, which is used by millions of people around the world via Gmail and the mobile app, is called Goals and is designed to help people squeeze time out of their busy schedules to fulfil their aspirations.

Users simply have to add a goal into their calendar – for example 'work out more' – and then answer a series of questions about the frequency, duration and other aspects of their desired activity. Using artificial intelligence, Goals then scours a person's Calendar schedule and suggests suitable times to squeeze in sessions.

If someone is unable to make a session, Goals will automatically seek out the next slot and then analyse workout patterns to inform its scheduling moving forwards.

The development – which was released for iPhone and Android users to celebrate Google Calendar's 10th birthday – marks Google's latest initiative over recent years to get people exercising more.

The company has teamed up with a number of wearable tech devices via its Android Wear platform and has launched its own fitness tracking and analysis app, Google Fit. The tech giant has also enabled health clubs to offer virtual tours to prospective customers through its virtual marketing tool Google Business View.

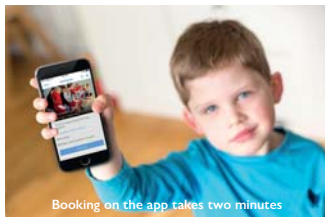
Details: http://lei.sr?a=j6VgS_H

New app to get children active

A serial entrepreneur with experience of working in Silicon Valley has turned his attention to boosting youth activity through an innovative new booking platform designed to get young people moving.

Robin Brattel – who has founded multiple tech companies and who previously worked alongside the inventor of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee – is due to launch Goplaygo this month, a booking app / platform which aims to take the pain out of arranging physical activity sessions for young children.

"It was born out of my frustration at how difficult it was to book activities such as swimming and dancing for my own kids," Goplaygo CEO Brattel told HCM. "Parents



want a painless way to arrange their kids' activities and providers want to maximise capacity, but no-one's really cracked it yet."

Currently, only half of seven-year-olds are meeting recommended physical activity

guidelines of 60 minutes a day, with bad habits often being forged through sedentary early years. There's been increased focus among policymakers on how to reverse the situation, amid warnings that inactive lifestyles are a 'ticking time-bomb' for the NHS.

The timely new app follows recent policy calls from UKactive for the government and technology companies to incentivise and reward developers who are creating technology that can get children moving.

Brattel intends to launch in north London before scaling up across the United Kingdom. He also has plans in place for a US launch later this year.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=ysw2X_H

Supplier & training news

Virtuagym announces raft of new tech tie-ups



NEO Health's tracker The One

Health and fitness software provider Virtuagym has unveiled several new partnerships as the Dutch-based firm seeks to boost its offering for gym operators, PTs and members.

Having recently secured £2.1m in funding from Belgium-based Saffelberg Investments to fuel international growth, Virtuagym is seeking to strengthen its range of products through several symbiotic collaborations.

As such, the firm has partnered with Amsterdam-based tech start-up NEO Health, which is introducing both a new body composition monitor and activity tracking device. The tie-up sees Virtuagym providing software integration and marketing support for NEO Health products, which will automatically sync with the Virtuagym platform (see p79).
Details: http://lei.sr?a=D9t9X_H



ESA staff including astronaut Tim Peake, currently in space, value their fitness highly

Life Fitness ready for lift-off

Life Fitness is playing its part in the space race, having equipped a brand new corporate gym at the European Space Agency's (ESA) first UK centre in Didcot.

To celebrate the launch, ESA staff supported their astronaut Tim Peake in his recent space marathon by putting the new equipment to good use and completing the 26 miles as part of Team Astronaut.

The new £25,000 fitness facility – at The European Centre for Space Applications and Telecommunications (ECSAT) – is open to ESA's 80-strong workforce of scientists and engineers, along with ESA visitors from 12 different European nations and Canada.

Based at the Harwell Campus in Oxfordshire – also known as the UK Space Gateway – ECSAT is the latest

addition to ESA's operational sites across Europe and supports activities related to telecommunications, integrated applications, climate change, technology and science.

Having previously supplied the ESA centre in the Netherlands, Life Fitness was again chosen to cater for ESA's activity needs after winning a competitive tender process.

For CV training, Life Fitness has installed a number of durable, high performance pieces from the Integrity Series including a treadmill, cross-trainer and upright Lifecycle bike, along with the Row GX trainer for a realistic rowing experience and full-body workout. Strength stations include the versatile Signature Series dual adjustable pulley and Smith machine.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=B5PgE_H

CIMSPA: New member scheme

CIMSPA has launched a new membership scheme for sector professionals, which it has billed as an 'alternative to REPs'.

The introduction of a rival accreditation system marks the latest chapter in CIMSPA's efforts to establish itself as the industry's main professional body, as it seeks to improve skills standards.

The past 24 months has seen a period of intense debate over the direction of workforce development in the sector, with several big name employers calling for change in the form of new skills standards being established under CIMSPA.

The chartered body was handed a significant boost in December, when the government's *Sporting Future* strategy charged Sport England to work with

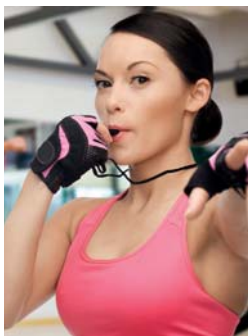
CIMSPA to deliver a single set of skills standards for the physical activity sector.

Eager to strike while the iron is hot, CIMSPA has now unveiled its new membership scheme to a number of leading physical sector employers, in addition to universities, colleges, awarding organisations and training providers.

"We are delighted with the response that we have received from the soft launch of our new membership categories," said Tara Dillon, chief executive of CIMSPA.

"This is a vital step towards our goal of professionalising the sport, fitness and activity workforce and meets the sector's demand for a robust and quality assured skills development framework."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=R8g5Q_Q



New scheme is 'an alternative to REPs'

People news



Averis has spent 15 years in the sector

Pavigym names Colin Averis UK sales director

Sports and health club flooring specialist Pavigym has announced Colin Averis as sales director, UK and Ireland.

Averis, who takes over the reins from Alan Cuthbert, will be tasked with driving sales for Pavigym's suite of products, which includes the functional interactive wall and floor solution Prama.

Averis arrives with broad experience from across the sector, having held a wide range of roles during his 15 years in the industry.

Having started in the public sector as a leisure operations manager working on large commercial projects and procurement, Averis later moved to commercial sales, occupying positions including an account management role for Nautilus, Stairmaster and Schwinn. More recently, Averis held sales roles with Keiser UK and Matrix Fitness.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=V4n4h_H



Wexer's new global marketing and communications manager Lucy Button

Wexer unveils new London HQ

Wexer Virtual has opened a new central London headquarters as the virtual fitness provider seeks to scale up its offering to new and existing partners.

Currently working with leading fitness operators across more than 30 countries worldwide, Wexer wants its office in Bishopsgate to be the launchpad for "a new wave of innovation across the digital landscape". The company now has offices in London, Copenhagen and New York.

"After eight years of continued growth, we are proud to achieve another important milestone in the company's short history," said Paul Bowman, CEO of Wexer Virtual, who took up the reins from founder Rasmus Ingerslev a year ago. "With our new headquarters, we aim to remain focused

on innovation and opportunity as we strive to work with our partners and build new relationships to make exercise more accessible through the use of virtual fitness."

In addition to the London premises, Wexer has also announced new recruits in the form of Daniel Waide and Lucy Button.

Waide will be based in the US office, where he will serve as country manager, handling relationships with Wexer's existing partners as well as working to generate new business.

Meanwhile, Button will join Bowman and the team in London, where she will focus on the company's global marketing and communication strategy. Bowman said both bring a "wealth of expertise" to help the company reach the "next level".

Details: http://lei.sr?a=e2D4c_H

Stalker steps down at ukactive

ukactive has begun its search for a new chair of its Membership Council, with previous incumbent David Stalker having stepped down at the end of last month.

Stalker, who became ukactive Membership Council chair after quitting as CEO in 2015, is leaving the frontline of the fitness sector to focus on growing his trampolining business Oxygen Freejumping.

As such, the search is now on to find a new chair for the Membership Council, which underwent a significant restructuring last year as part of ukactive's 12-month governance review.

The Council is seeking a new chair who will bring a "substantial track record of leadership gained in the sector" with experience of key issues relevant to the ukactive membership base.

"The Membership Council plays a leading role in setting the agenda and tackling the critical issues for the sector," said ukactive executive director Steven Ward.

"We look forward to bringing a person on board with the experience and calibre to continue the excellent work that has been started by the Council. We would like to thank David Stalker for his excellent work in forming and galvanising the Membership Council as he hands it over to his successor and concludes his formal time with ukactive."

To read an explosive interview with Stalker on the future direction of the sector, why we should be working with big business, and what must be done to professionalise the sector, turn to page 34.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=t3b7q_H



Stalker is to focus on his business ventures



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THE FITNESS MARKETPLACE, PUTTING CLUB OPERATORS IN CONTROL

The term 'marketplace' used to mean a physical location that suppliers and customers would congregate to do business, whether that was a street market or a shopping centre. Today, the marketplace is very much online and the health and fitness sector is no different. Since December 2010 the volume of searches in Google for 'gym membership' and related terms has increased by 250%.

Whilst other sectors can point at successful marketplace service providers such as Zoopla, Just Eat and AirBnB, health and fitness has been comparatively slow to realise the benefits of marketplace scale and the new customers they attract.

Since launching in February 2011, PayAsUGym has grown to become the leading online destination for customers to compare and select a gym and now caters for **over 3 million customer searches every month** in the UK alone.

Whilst the name suggests a simple pay-as-you-go gym service you would be wrong to judge a book by its cover. Look again in more detail and you will find a highly tuned sales engine, driving revenue and data for almost half the clubs in the UK.

PayAsUGym recently upgraded their Partner Portal using customer data taken from more than 2,500 fitness venues over a 5-year period. The upgrades to the marketplace provide operators with access to unique customer insight and the tools needed to gain an advantage in three main areas: Intelligence, Control and Competition.

CONTROL

In the PayAsUGym fitness marketplace, operators control every aspect of pricing, pass sales, photography and can interact with highly influential new customer feedback. They can carry out A/B testing rapidly and make their own proposition more competitive as a result.

COMPETITION

League tables show how clubs perform versus one another in local markets and missed sales opportunities are analysed and shared to ensure continuous improvement.

As a result of its 5-year investment in UK club operators, PayAsUGym has become a true partner to the industry and the only genuine fitness marketplace for customers to find the right club for them.

INTELLIGENCE

The key to the success of clubs using the marketplace is based on PayAsUGym putting UK operators at the heart of the proposition by taking customer insight and sharing this through innovative decision making tools.



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Stephen Waterman, Commercial Director, 1Life

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EVENTS CALENDAR

JUNE

25–26 | GoFest Sportcity, Manchester, UK

Now in its second year, GoFest is hailed as a family festival of sport, dance, health and fitness. Other events in the series are scheduled on 13–14 August in Surrey, and on 3–4 September in Winchester
www.gofest.co.uk

29 | ukactive FLAME Conference Telford International Centre, Telford, UK

Attracts more than 850 delegates, with a range of motivational and educational speakers. It's followed by the Flame Awards dinner in the evening.
www.ukactive.com

JULY

13–17 | IDEA World Fitness Convention Los Angeles, California, US

Claimed to be the world's longest-running international fitness convention, with educational sessions from top presenters.
www.ideafit.com/world

27–28 | active-net Australasia Melbourne, Australia

This new event comprises one-to-one business meetings between suppliers and educators, a networking lunch and dinner, plus workshops. Paralympian and vision impaired triathlete John Dondani will also give a keynote presentation.
www.active-net-australasia.org

CHARITY EVENT

28 Jan–8 Feb 2017 Coast to Coast Rainforest Trek, Costa Rica

Oak forests, mangrove swamps, coffee plantations, tropical rainforests, stunning beaches and smoking volcanoes – this 12-day trek across Costa Rica, from the Pacific to the Caribbean, promises much adventure. And it's not for the weak-willed: the longest day has up to 12 hours of walking through tough, tropical terrain.

Along the route, participants will see exotic birds and animals, experience white water rafting, take in the country's highest volcano and have some free time to enjoy the beaches before flying home.

The open charity challenge carries a £399 registration fee and £3,850 minimum sponsorship.
www.discoveradventure.com



SEPTEMBER

1–3 | Annual IHRSA / Fitness Brasil Latin American Conference & Trade Show São Paulo, Brazil

Offers interactive sessions including how-to sessions, and best practice sharing.
www.ihrsa.org/fitness-brasil

7 | UK National Fitness Day UK-wide

Fitness providers across the UK open their doors for free to allow the public to try out a wide range of fitness activities.
www.nationalfitnessday.com

8–10 | FIBO China Shanghai, China

About 6,000 trade and private visitors attended in 2015, while over 80 exhibitors showcased over 100 different health and fitness brands. Expect similar in 2016.
www.fibo-china.cn

20–21 | Leisure Industry Week NEC, Birmingham, UK

The UK's leading leisure industry event, with a new fitness-orientated focus, takes place at the NEC Birmingham each year.
www.liw.co.uk

21–23 | Interbike Expo Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, Nevada, US

With hundreds of exhibitors on one floor, the annual Interbike International Bicycle Expo is where the bike industry gathers to celebrate, educate and conduct business.
www.interbike.com

OCTOBER

17–20 | 16th Annual IHRSA European Congress Seville, Spain

Seminars are designed to help the 500+ delegates improve and grow their business, and there's also plenty of networking.
www.ihrsa.org/congress

CHARITY EVENT

June–October 2016 (various dates) The Channel Row Challenge

Youth charity the AHoy Centre puts together rowing challenges, complete with instructors and training programme, for groups looking to make it 23 miles across the English Channel from Dover harbour to Abbeyville Bouy. For teams of six to eight people.
www.ahoy.org.uk



DAVID STALKER

During his seven years as ukactive CEO, David Stalker was never short of opinions, but often found himself duty bound to hold his tongue. Now, as he leaves the fitness frontline to scale up Oxygen Freejumping, he sheds the shackles of responsibility and tells **Jak Phillips** why the sector should ditch its old guard, embrace big business and scrap SkillsActive

What were the biggest changes to the fitness sector during your time at ukactive?

In the past four years, the industry's been caught in the cross hairs of the confluence of health, technology, sport and popular culture (including fashion and music).

Ours is one of the few sectors able to straddle these mega trends, as relevant in grappling the costs of an ageing society as in appealing to new generations demanding everything on individualised terms.

We've seen the borders of our sector smashed down, with new entrants dominating in all spheres – from Apple leading its prime time TV advertising with activity, to Pure Gym becoming the largest UK operator from a standing start. At the same time, we've seen both public sector austerity and a belief among VCs that there was a quick buck to be made from providing no service at high fees.

This has all come crashing together in the past four years alone. We're seeing new business models and investments in service to meet new demands and expectations. I'm proud that ukactive was laying the path for this during my time there: we've helped transform CIMSPA, won national awards for lobbying and raised millions for physical activity.

Why isn't the sector making faster progress?

This is still an industry largely based on gut feel; we do things because that's the way we've always done them. It's why concepts such as the old LIW run by UBM survived well past its expiry date. All too often there's a reliance on habitual decision-making in the sector, as opposed to a genuine consideration of the value things bring.

Too many people are still in the sector when they should be off doing something new, and they're preventing a new generation from coming in who are more in touch with the future direction of the sector and the changing demands of consumers. We have a whole gaggle of so-called 'gurus' striding around the industry – gurus of data, retention, behaviour, marketing and so on – who make a great living running the industry down and contributing very little to its progress. I should add that the exception to this is Dr Paul Bedford – a true guru of retention with valuable advice to offer.

But I believe change is coming. We're now moving into an era of data, science and fact, beyond this first generation of the sector where we were doing everything for the first time.

We now have things like GYMetrix, which can scientifically show us how to design gym floors to meet consumer need. We have the ukactive Research Institute bringing world-class academic expertise and insight to ukactive members.

We also have outstanding people joining our industry from outside – The Gym Group's Jim Graham and Pure Gym's Humphrey Cobbold being just two examples. We have genuine innovators driving change in the public sector, such as Malcolm McPhail at Life Leisure. And we're breeding a new generation of Future Leaders who are as comfortable talking to the board of a CCG as they are in securing investment from the City. They'll sweep away the gut-feelers in the course of the next few years – and that needs to happen. ▶

This is still an industry largely **based on gut feel**; we do things because **that's the way we've always done them**



Too many people are still in the sector when they should be **off doing something new**

David Stalker





PHOTO: PAUL McLAUGHLIN

Stalker: "Only the sector itself can fail CIMSPA now"

“It would help dramatically if SkillsActive accepted its time has come and slip away into the night”

- Another area we must focus on is diversity. We recently had a Parliamentary Dinner with the Conservative Party, where there were more female Tory MPs than female fitness industry representatives. We have events where Steve Ward is the most ethnically diverse representative, and he's just a little bit Greek. We have to become more diverse at a senior level, and that may prove a major challenge.

How do we improve the credibility of fitness professionals?

The vision for CIMSPA is clear and I feel I've done my bit there. The major employers are behind it, DCMS has backed it to lead the transformation towards having the workforce we need, and Sport England is hugely engaged and ready to support it through lift-off.

But now we need to rally around this and get on with it. If operators don't step up and respond to the institute they shaped, via the consultation I undertook in 2013, they will have nothing. I hear operators are all aligned, willing and good to go, but the 'gut feelers' are waiting to see who else goes first. Time to show some leadership. The job is done – only the sector itself can fail CIMSPA now.

It would also help dramatically if SkillsActive accepted its time has come and slip away into the night. It has no purpose and is simply not needed. The industry set out where it wanted to go explicitly in the SPELG process, gave SkillsActive five years to deliver and it failed. Rather than recognise that its time is up, the organisation has flopped around like a fish on the deck of a boat having been lifted out of the water – gasping for life and spraying everyone in the process.

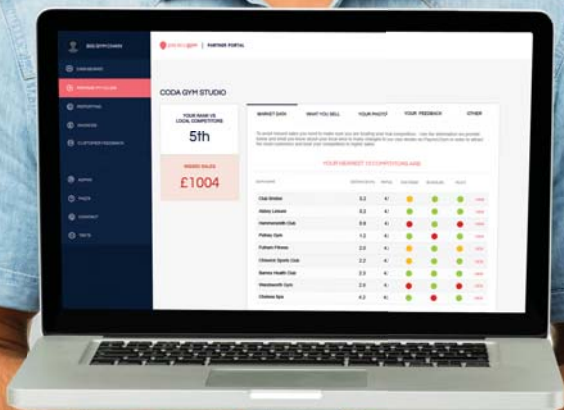
The risk of collateral damage is real and we'd be better off listening to the major employers, training providers and awarding organisations, getting behind our one professional Chartered Institute and driving the sector forward. In Tara Dillon, we now have a dynamic CEO at CIMSPA with the skills to drive this agenda forward; the industry must make it a priority to support her fully.

What's holding the sector's major bodies and associations back from closer collaboration?

It's an area of regret for me that relationships with Sport England weren't better during my time at ukactive. I think there was a lack of fundamental trust in the partnership, as Sport England was running a

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If school sport can be sponsored by soft drinks via the sugar tax, why shouldn't the fitness sector work with Coca-Cola?

If there's going to be £500m coming our way, we'd better make sure we can show its impact

► strategy that believed 'how do we get more people playing sport?' was the question and that 49 National Governing Bodies were the answer. At ukactive, we knew that was ridiculous and we said so.

While we were able to do lots of great work together, this lack of trust and fundamental disagreement on strategy undermined our mutual chances of success.

I'm delighted to see this is changing and I've no doubt the governance review of ukactive is a major part of that. Sport England can now see a very strong, independent, independently sustainable organisation with a unique network and genuine expertise that can enable Sport England to achieve the big tasks within its strategy. ukactive is run by a world-class board and an outstanding chair in Tanni Grey-Thompson – who personifies the level of integrity needed – while in Steve Ward, Sport England has someone to work with who knows its pain and wants to help.

The new Sports Strategy will be key to closer collaboration between Sport England and ukactive, as it's now all about more people, more active, more often. Movement is the goal, not sport, and the wider set of outcomes play to the abilities of ukactive and its members.

The DCMS strategy was a major step in the right direction and Sport England is now following suit. It would have been very easy to retreat to its comfort zone, focus on NGBs, and say it would get to the rest. But Sport England has recognised, with the DCMS mandate, that the time is now.

Where do you stand on big brand partnerships? Does the industry really need to work with the likes of Coca-Cola?

Ask the Treasury: it's just announced plans to have school sport sponsored by soft drinks through the 'sugar tax'. My view on this is simple: big brands have a marketing reach and ability to influence consumers in ways our sector can only dream of. Does it absolve them of the need to remove sugar from the national diet, educate consumers on portion sizes and create a country of nutrition-conscious people? No. They'll be held to account for that.

What I think is interesting is that the sugar tax now gives these companies a fundamental right to have an opinion on all of this. They'll be individually writing cheques with nine figures on them. They'll want to know what they're getting for that and where the evidence of impact is. At the same time, you'll have the nutrition lobby stating that you can't outrun a bad diet, with some truth in it. So, if there's going to be £500m coming the way of our sector, we'd better get our house in order to avoid a situation where these two powerful lobbies point out the lack of impact they think we and their funding are having.

Does the rise of the 'mega-trusts' mean reduced competition or a stronger sector?

Whoever said mega-trusts are reducing competition is wrong. It's fiercer than ever and that's great for local communities. ●

health sport activity



“Working together for a brighter future”



BEATING DIABETES

Diabetes costs the NHS £10bn a year. In a bid to tackle the rising number of sufferers, the health service is turning to the health and fitness industry for help.

Is this the move we've been waiting for? **Kath Hudson** reports



ambitious plans were unveiled in March to try and combat the growing issue of type 2 diabetes across the UK – a condition that currently affects 2.6 million people in England, with around 200,000 new diagnoses every year.

The new Diabetes Prevention Programme – a collaboration between NHS England, Public Health England and Diabetes UK – will identify those with high blood sugar levels, deemed at high risk of developing diabetes, and refer them into a nine-month programme of health and fitness coaching funded by the NHS.

Known as *Healthier You*, the programme will incorporate personal training, exercise classes and nutritional advice. Over nine months, patients will be offered at least 13 education and exercise sessions – a total of at least 16 hours face-to-face. It will be offered to a total of to 100,000 people over the next four years, and from 2020 at a rate of 100,000 people each year (see *HCM* May 16, p5).

And why? Because Britain is now officially the second fattest nation in Europe, with 25 per cent of adults classed as obese. On current trends, one in three people will be obese by 2034, while one in 10 will develop type 2 diabetes.

The NHS can't afford this: diabetes already accounts

for a reported 10 per cent of its budget; Diabetes UK estimates that it costs £25,000 a minute to treat diabetes and its complications.

While type 1 diabetes can't be prevented and isn't linked to lifestyle, type 2 diabetes is strongly linked to lifestyle and being overweight. On the upside, with the right diet and exercise, it's a reversible disease, even for those who have suffered the condition for up to a decade.

And that's where *Healthier You* aims to step in: a pilot scheme that offered two exercise classes a week – including HIIT and interval training – as well as classroom sessions on diet and lifestyle found all participants lost weight, with more than half also reducing their diabetes risk.

Now would seem to be the perfect moment for the fitness sector to prove itself; while there are already examples of best practice at health clubs around the country, the health and fitness industry has been waiting for the medical community to get fully behind its services.

But how can it make the most of this golden opportunity – not just to get a slice of the action, but

to make sure the results are achieved and the burden on the NHS is reduced?

And can the industry use this initiative to spearhead more preventative healthcare measures? We ask the experts...





To enhance compliance, it's important that programme participants are shown tangible markers of improvement

Oliver Patrick Co-founder, Viavi Academy

This scheme reflects a growing understanding of the role of fitness and wellbeing professionals in relieving the pressure on an overloaded NHS. We need to get the cost of diabetes down fast; lifestyle management, in the form of movement and dietary control, will be a vital component of this.

In our experience, to sustain engagement with health intervention programmes, it's important for participants to be shown tangible markers of improvement, ideally blood sugar levels and certainly body composition. Measurements taken at the beginning of a programme give a sense of

strategy and importance, but also give a clear sense of reference and achievement when compared to end results. Proving the effort was worthwhile is key to driving compliance with healthy behaviours beyond the end of the programme and as part of a lifelong plan.

With programme delivery, we've found it's helpful to create as few extra loops in the process as possible. Our models aim to have one highly competent fitness professional do the clinical testing, run the exercise class and coach the nutrition element. Fitness professionals can be easily skilled up to do all three roles and an individual practitioner, as opposed to a team of people, can have an advantage in building strong relationships with the participants.



Create as few extra loops as possible. We have one highly competent fitness professional do the clinical testing, exercise class and nutrition element

Oliver Patrick



Jenny Patrickson

MD, Active IQ

We've been talking about this for some time, and now it's a case of working out the mechanics to establish how the NHS can roll the programme out in conjunction with the physical activity sector. At the moment, I don't think the medical community and our sector fully understand what we can do for each other.

This demographic needs specialist knowledge, so instructors may need to upskill to a Level 4 qualification in order to deliver the programme. However, qualifications also have to be updated to make sure they're in line with current needs. We're in the process of refreshing the Level 3 qualifications now that ownership has transferred from SkillsActive to awarding organisations (following the recent changes to the qualification framework) and there will be an emphasis on client counselling, lifestyle management and motivational change strategies for dealing with people who have health issues like diabetes and obesity.

This initiative represents great progress from the medical community, but a more proactive approach is needed as well, to prevent these problems in the first place. Could it be taken a step further, having physical activity professionals based in GP surgeries to give exercise and lifestyle advice as a further preventative measure?

Similarly, the health and fitness industry is still predominantly focused on formal sessions in the gym and studio, rather than the broader-based community physical activity spectrum, and we need to move beyond that approach.

Dr John Morgan

GP, Pennygate Medical Centre

Type 2 diabetes is a reversible and curable disease, so this is a very welcome development. Sometimes only a small amount of exercise is needed to bring a massive benefit to physical and mental health, as well as quality of life.

Education will be key to making this programme a success, and any support the health and fitness industry can give to promote the message that poor lifestyle, and poor diet, poses a significant risk to health would be very helpful.

Exercise is the mainstay in the fight against diabetes, but this doesn't only have to happen in gyms and health clubs, or even as deliberate 'exercise'. I think, if we're going to reverse the pandemic, we need to create living and working environments that encourage people to move more.

This could include measures such as introducing standing desks to offices, encouraging active commuting and moving more during the day. Ultimately, we need to build more muscle and reduce the amount of glucose in our system.

I'd like to see more fitness professionals coming out of clubs and engaging with people in medical and community settings, such as churches and day centres, effectively taking the gym into the community setting to reach the unconverted.



Nikki Joule

Policy manager, Diabetes UK

A joint initiative between Diabetes UK, NHS England and Public Health England, *Healthier You: NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme* has been designed based on the evidence of successful trials and programmes. It will offer personalised support to help those at high risk of type 2 diabetes to reduce their risk by making changes to their diet and levels of physical activity.

Behaviour change is a key component of the programme, so as well as lifestyle advice, those referred will get support to set and achieve goals and make lasting changes.

However, while the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme is a major step in the right direction, the programme will not be enough on its own to halt the rising tide of obesity and type 2 diabetes. We want to see action taken across a range of areas to encourage people to lead healthier lives. This must include placing restrictions on marketing junk foods to children and having the government set targets for the food and drinks industry to reduce the salt, fat and sugar content in their foods. All of these measures should be included in the government's Childhood Obesity Strategy.

Meanwhile, the health and fitness industry needs to make sure it's sufficiently aware of what type 2 diabetes is, and how diet and physical activity can help reduce risk of the condition. Fitness professionals also need to be confident to refer their clients to their GP if they think they're at risk.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The medical community is waking up to the reach and impact that physical activity providers can bring

Neil King MD, 1 Life

Our healthcare system won't be sustainable without a plan to tackle the growth of lifestyle diseases, so it's important that the dialogue which has been opened between the medical community and the active leisure sector remains intact and grows stronger. We need a partnership approach, with consideration given to the reach and impact that physical activity providers can bring.

Operators need to ensure they have a team of properly trained staff, as well as

a clear vision of what outcomes they're trying to achieve – and these should be specific to the local authorities' health and wellbeing objectives.

As a bare minimum, we need to engage with the agenda and decide how best we can help, without trying to be a total solution. As with many things, collaboration will be the key.

We also need to have a plan in place to promote physical activity to the next generation in a way that's fun, engaging and creates habits for life. That will be the best possible safeguard against the continued rise of diabetes. ●



We need to have a plan in place to promote activity to the next generation in a way that's fun, engaging and creates habits for life – Neil King



Annie Holden

The head of SLM's Everyone Health talks to **Kate Cracknell** about the huge opportunity that lies in preventative healthcare – if you tick all the boxes and do it right

I think 'leisure' as a term underrates what operators provide," says Annie Holden, head of Everyone Health, which was launched in early 2014 as a division of management contractor SLM. "It certainly underrates what SLM provides: it's been in the business of health and wellbeing for many years.

"With the Health and Social Care Act of 2012, which opened things up for a range of providers to deliver community health services, SLM realised there was an opportunity to further grow and diversify its business in relation to public health. It was a natural extension to future-proof the business by creating Everyone Health to sit alongside its existing Everyone Active brand."

Not only that, but the new business had a head-start: a receptive ear among the 37 local authorities with which SLM already had a relationship through its Everyone Active leisure centre brand. "Everyone Health is fortunate to operate under the wider umbrella of a very successful business with 27 years' strong trading history, a huge national infrastructure and an existing relationship with local authority client officers," confirms Holden.

CHAMPIONING ACTIVITY

Holden joined SLM in February 2014 with the specific brief to set up Everyone Health, bringing with her 15 years' experience in the healthcare sector and having already set up Mytime Active.

Her background, though, was in teaching: "I started out as a PE teacher and have always championed physical activity. I worked first in secondary and then further education, where I taught physical education but also taught about fitness, exercise, special populations and chronic disease management through exercise.

"I became caught up with the politics of education though, and had an opportunity to get out and pursue the avenue of physical activity for cardiovascular health at a local council. I was then seconded to a European research programme focused on preventive cardiology. It took a very multi-disciplinary, lifestyle approach to managing risk, with physical activity as an integral component. I was responsible for the physical activity element of the study.

"It was a very successful trial and was published in *The Lancet*. That integrated model was subsequently rolled out into local communities with some great success stories. The project gave me an insight into the huge opportunities out there to apply academic rigour to local settings."

All of which brought her to her current role – although she has yet more strings to her bow. She explains: "I also work for the BACPR – the British Association of Cardiac Prevention and Rehabilitation – and have done so for about 20 years. I qualified as an exercise instructor 18 years ago in the pilot course for working with cardiac patients, so I now course direct, assess and tutor. Although that's more of a sideline for me, it nevertheless contributes to my day-to-day work."

SINGLE ACCESS APPROACH

Holden is excited about the growth potential of Everyone Health. Although it's yet to penetrate all 37 local authorities with which Everyone Active has a contract – its key contracts are in Cambridgeshire and Nottinghamshire, with smaller projects dotted around the country – as Holden explains: "People are living longer but with more chronic, long-term conditions, and the NHS is overly stretched when it comes to acute care and treatment. Prevention is therefore critical." ►

“We're here for the good of the individual and the community. We want people to remain active. It doesn't matter who the provider is

Annie Holden



Activity champion:
Holden started out
as a PE teacher



ChangePoint weight loss services are run free of charge for locals

“We were keen to develop our own identity first, separate from Everyone Active. In the health world, people are disdainful of leisure delivering healthcare”

- She continues: “Prevention is at the heart of the Everyone Health offering. But crucially, it has to be scalable. That means providing integrated, holistic solutions that are very much client-centred and focused around local needs – accessible community services delivered to the right person at the right time in the right way.

“Key to that is a single access approach, which means the patient only has to tell their story once.

“Once a client or a patient is interested in our service, or referred into the service, we have a triage process: they’re assessed to determine what stage of behavioural change they’ve reached, to identify their needs and to decide which service or which expert colleague is best placed to support them through their period of change.

“That’s the principle behind the services we offer in Nottinghamshire and Cambridgeshire. It’s ultimately all about wrap-around care that embraces the full extent of someone’s needs, as opposed to the silo approach whereby an individual goes to one service here one day, and over there the next, resulting in a disjointed approach.”

CARE WHERE IT’S NEEDED

She continues: “A lot of our work is also underpinned by the need to address health inequalities. Even though specific solutions are required within Cambridgeshire and Nottinghamshire, we have to demonstrate a more intensive input into those socially deprived areas county-wide. We also have to encompass the wider determinants of health and provide solutions across the full life course.

“To deliver a solution that’s scalable and meets all these needs, firstly you need a robust model – underpinned by

evidence, national recommendations and NICE guidance – that’s compliant with all the relevant policies, procedures, governance, clinical and quality assurance.

“Secondly, you have to provide robust data, and we report across the full mental, physical and psychological spectrum.

“We’re now being approached by a number of research bodies with a view to publishing data, as we’re getting good results. For example, of the 5,000-plus referrals and self-referrals into our programmes in the last year, 4,500 went on to take up our services. Just from a physical activity perspective, at the outset only 20 per cent were meeting activity guidelines; by the end of their respective programmes, that figure was more than 50 per cent.

“Thirdly, we have a highly expert workforce, guided by us as technical experts behind the scenes. All of our colleagues are experts in behaviour change – whether they’re a dietician, nutritionist, community-based health trainer or physical activity specialist – but we’re also able to bring on-board specialist expertise via partnerships. For example, in Cambridgeshire we work with specialist obesity teams at Addenbrookes Hospital. We have a physician on a Nottinghamshire programme, and a nurse specialist who we sub-contract from Derby Royal Hospital. We also work with a psychotherapy team. So we have a diverse clinical and healthcare practitioner team.

“Finally, the key is to maintain change for individuals, so we also signpost them towards activities and opportunities offered by local partners to maintain their new behaviours. From a physical activity perspective that might be a gym or it might be outdoor activities: a green gym, or perhaps walking or cycling. You have to adopt a menu approach for variety and choice.”

In practice that menu approach means, although Everyone Health will work with sister company Everyone Active where possible, it's also fully open to working with other leisure providers. "In the end, we're here for the good of the individual and the local community. We want to make sure people remain physically active. It doesn't matter who the provider is – we have to work positively, collaboratively and in harmony," confirms Holden.

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Nevertheless, the relationship between Everyone Active and Everyone Health is increasingly reaping rewards. So if the launch of Everyone Health was a natural progression for SLM, not to mention complementary to its existing Everyone Active brand, why has the company been reluctant to overtly connect the two in public thus far?

"The decision to keep it separate was directed by us at Everyone Health as much as anything. In the health world, people are a bit disdainful of leisure delivering healthcare. The credibility of leisure is improving, and in its Level 3 and Level 4 qualified staff it actually has a very strong base, but there's still a way to go in terms of providing the sort of evidence and data and rigour that the medical world will acknowledge. We were therefore very keen to develop our own identity first, separate from Everyone Active.

"We also had a lot of development to do – setting up the robust clinical and information governance procedures and quality control that I mentioned before. We wanted to get that properly established.

"But now, with the Health and Social Care Act firmly embedded – and simultaneously public health within local authorities – we're finding authorities are approaching us for ideas on how to develop a joint offering.

"They want to know how Everyone Active's offer can extend beyond leisure to meet the indicators within the public health outcomes framework, and that's where Everyone Health comes in.

"One example: we've worked with Everyone Active in Fareham, training the staff to deliver NHS health checks. That's a great example of Everyone Active extending its offer. It's opening its doors, going out to the community and working collaboratively with public health to deliver a specific mandatory health service.

"We're also supporting Everyone Active in a number of tenders at the moment, looking at how to add value to the leisure tender by providing other health opportunities or health services.

"Everyone Active has recognised that, in its centres, it's dealing with the 20 per cent of the population who are currently physically active. It's therefore looking to take its services out to where the 80



Everyone Health's sessions are helping to meet the indicators within the public health outcomes framework



per cent are. In doing so, it will also create pathways to bring those people back into the leisure centre.

"In addition, it's aiming to work with us to create more of a community hub around the leisure centres themselves. We'll help them deliver more and more preventative healthcare services within the leisure centre space, bringing in more people who might eventually decide to get active while they're there."

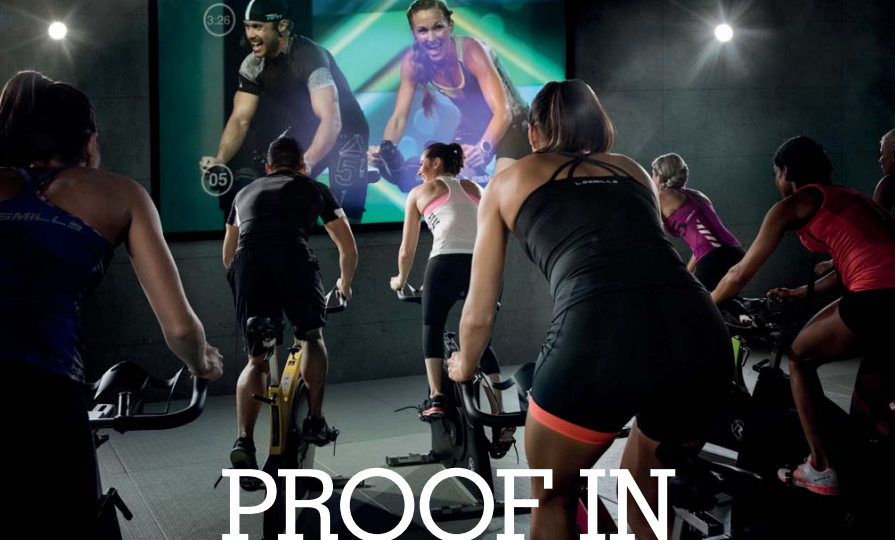
A HUGE OPPORTUNITY

Holden concludes: "Ultimately there's a huge opportunity in preventative healthcare. There's a real chance now to diversify and extend the offer, and these conversations are being started by local authorities and Everyone Active alike.

"Scalability, getting out into the community and diversifying to meet the needs of the local population – that's the opportunity we have at the moment. And if, through initiatives such as CIMSPA's drive to professionalise the sector, we can simultaneously raise the profile and credibility of the sector... I'd love to see that day come." ●

The aim is to reach the whole population – people of all ages





PROOF IN NUMBERS

Les Mills has opened a club in Auckland, New Zealand, which proves the powerful impact virtual classes can have on attendance and bottom line. Manager Carrie Kepple talks to **Kath Hudson**

Ninety-three per cent member retention, 4,200 group exercise attendances a week, and smashing its annual target just six months after opening: the new Les Mills Newmarket club, which opened on 2 November 2015, appears to have found the perfect model. And what's driving its success? Group exercise, says manager Carrie Kepple, with virtual classes a vital component to build usage during off-peak hours.

PUTTING GX FIRST

The club spans 1,900sq m and 70 per cent of the exercise space is given over to group exercise. There are two studios: one with capacity for 110, and the other for around 70, as well as an immersive cycle studio with 28 bikes. "Group exercise is our bread and butter, so we decided to try a different model, putting group exercise first and the gym floor second," says Kepple.

This model wouldn't be viable without a virtual offering, which allow classes to be scheduled throughout the day without creating a huge wage bill.

"Most club timetables are designed around catering for the peaks in usage, but we knew we needed to manage capacity throughout the day to make the club work," says Kepple.

"What we've tried to do is pull people away from the peak times and create an even spread throughout the day. Virtual has empowered us to sell memberships to an audience we couldn't reach before, because their personal timetables didn't fit with our classes."

To achieve its goals, Les Mills has come up with a concept of capacity management called 'spread and churn'. "Spread is about attracting customers more evenly throughout the day, which means we can service them better, so they get a better experience and retention is improved," says Kepple.


"Churn is an efficient turnaround of classes, like turning tables in a restaurant."

SMASHING TARGETS

Incorporating virtual technology has allowed the club to offer an extra 500 classes a month, with no further set-up or staffing costs. All of the virtual classes are scheduled and promoted on the programme, rather than allowing people to choose their own exercise class, as this can limit the appeal and drive down participation numbers.

The annual target for visits was originally set at 100,000, but after just six months the club had already reached 150,000 visits and 2,340 members. Group fitness – live and virtual combined – accounted for 99,000 of these visits. Of the 66 per cent of all daily attendances accounted for by group fitness, 19 per cent have been for virtual classes.

"During the month of March, virtual accounted for 3,379 extra attendances.



Virtual attendance can rival, if not exceed, that of live classes

COMPARE & CONTRAST: LIVE vs VIRTUAL

March 2016 live class attendance

Programme	Number of classes	Attendance	Average attendance
CXWorx	89	3,285	37
Body Pump	79	2,941	37
Grit Strength	78	2,262	29
Grit Cardio	60	1,243	21
BodyAttack	28	837	30
RPM	57	717	13
Yoga	25	646	26
BodyBalance	27	635	24
Sprint	52	573	11
The Trip	10	355	36
BodyStep Athletic	18	302	17
BodyCombat	17	282	17
Grit Plyo	15	218	15
Sh'bam	5	158	32
BodyVive	13	148	11
Seniors	3	33	11

March 2016 virtual class attendance

Programme	Number of classes	Attendance	Average attendance
RPM	236	1,278	5
BodyPump	78	918	12
BodyCombat	70	371	5
CXWorx	45	359	8
BodyBalance	39	327	8
Sh'bam	20	126	6

Annualised that equates to a lot of money," adds Kepple.

Although live instructors are retained for the peak classes, virtual technology means the class programme starts at 5.30am and runs until 10.00pm.

"I went into the small studio at 9.40 this morning and there were 15 people doing Virtual Pump. Given there aren't many overheads for that class, it's awesome," says Kepple. "It's good to have a club that has a nice energy all day long."

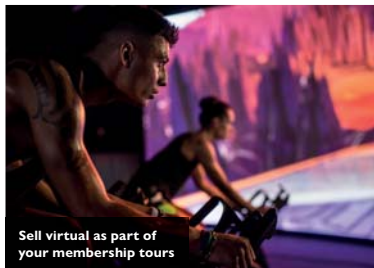
Most of the virtual classes have somewhere between 10 and 20 participants (see 'Compare & contrast', left), but the 7.30pm virtual BodyPump class was regularly pulling between 40 and 50 exercisers, so Kepple decided to install an instructor.

Meanwhile the virtual RPM classes are often busier than the live classes, as a NZ\$5 booking fee is charged for the live classes, while virtual is free.

SOCIAL NIGHT OUT

As well as boosting the bottom line and driving higher usage of the club throughout the day, virtual classes also provide a marketing hook. "We're promoting the fact that we're running more classes, more often," says Kepple.

"It's also another lever to pull in the referral game. We've run a social media campaign where you tag a friend to come for free to try virtual – we're trying to make it like going to a fitness movie with friends."



Sell virtual as part of your membership tours



MAKING VIRTUAL WORK FOR YOU

We ask four experts for their advice on how to maximise the impact of virtual classes in your club

ROBERT LOUW COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR, CLUBVIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL



- Create a real experience by using a darkened room with the biggest screen possible, and matching sound and lighting
- Remember that quality is more important than quantity when it comes to virtual content
- Manage your virtual fitness classes in the same way you manage live classes: set goals and monitor activity. Organise a launch event to give your members a formal introduction to the system, inviting them to try it out and ask questions

the same way you manage live classes: set goals and monitor activity. Organise a launch event to give your members a formal introduction to the system, inviting them to try it out and ask questions

- Think of virtual as another selling point and include it in all membership tours and as part of the induction
- Use online/offline marketing strategies to create a buzz within the club

PAUL BOWMAN CEO, WEXER



- Plan your virtual schedule around the members in the club at that time. If there are a lot of male members using the gym at a specific time, put on a virtual class that caters to them – eg a HIIT class – and avoid choreographed classes
- Allow on-demand timeslots for members to choose their own classes, as this gives control over the studio space and allows members to have flexibility

members to choose their own classes, as this gives control over the studio space and allows members to have flexibility

- Get your team on-board with a workshop and by taking part in a virtual class. Then get the whole team to do a virtual work out – one of the latest releases – each quarter
- Appoint trainers, or key health club members, as your social media ambassadors to report on their thoughts, experiences and feedback on the virtual offering
- Hold themed events: this could be when new content has been released, or a #trainvirtual where five different classes must be attended within a given timeframe

ANDREW EVENSON BRAND MANAGER, FITNESS ON DEMAND



- Let the system advertise itself: in addition to offering pre-scheduled classes, make sure the user interface kiosk is prominently placed for members to see
- Hold popular, pre-scheduled classes and fill them to capacity with your staff and your most active, influential members

to generate a buzz about the new offering

- Continue to promote and tailor the programme to your audience over time, regularly refreshing and promoting it
- Monitor the built-in reports to identify trends at your facility. If certain classes are popular with on-demand use, consider putting them on the schedule
- Don't think of virtual as a replacement for your live, instructor-led classes: it is the perfect complement

IAN DONLEY MD, WELLBEATS



- Get your supplier to provide product familiarity training, to ensure your whole team understands virtual's potential and gets behind the concept
- Design a launch plan and dedicate a member of your staff to project manage the both launch and the ongoing

operation of the virtual class system

- Market the system extensively as part of the launch plan, including promotion from all members of staff at every customer touch point
- Set targets, measure performance and keep designing new strategies to drive participation
- Use the customer engagement tools provided by the supplier to ensure members become familiar with the system and develop a habit of using it without constant staff interaction
- Relaunch the system at least three times a year, using fresh content from your provider

WELLBEATS VIRTUAL IN CLUB SYSTEM



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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

A perfect

Is an app the key to connecting your members socially?

MATCH



Described in jest as dating apps for gyms, gym buddy apps – which help you find the perfect workout partner – have burst onto the scene. **Kath Hudson** reports

Members who make a friend at the gym are 40 per cent less likely to cancel their membership – this according to The Retention People's *TRP 10,000* report, the biggest and most comprehensive survey of member behaviour ever completed.

In this ongoing survey, the lowest levels of cancellation are being seen among members who report having made friends at the gym in the last three months, irrespective of whether this was one of their stated motives for exercising in the first place.

But whereas team sports naturally engender a social atmosphere and make friend-making easy, it's less natural to strike up a friendship with a stranger on the treadmill next to you. Nevertheless, people do want a social experience at the gym, and in the past year a number of entrepreneurs have recognised this, creating internet dating-style apps for people looking for friends with similar workout habits.

Mark Spuy, co-founder of GymPal, says he noticed members looking lost when they had incompatible fitness partners – or indeed nobody to work out with at all. He therefore set out to create a way of teaming people up with suitable fitness friends. "By offering users the chance to find someone to exercise with, we're providing a fitness social network that actually makes a difference to people's lives," he explains.

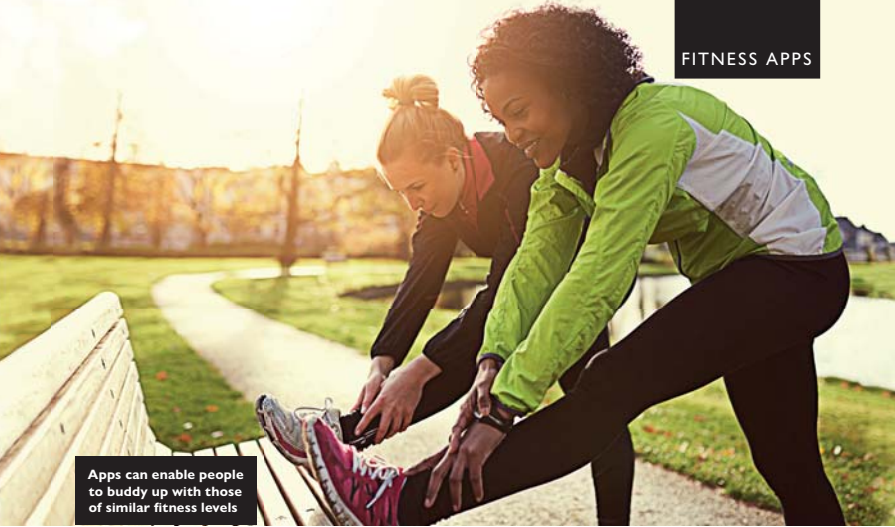
But while internet dating has been a huge success, do we need this sort of approach to make friends? Grant Hilton, founder of GymComrade, believes so: "People are reluctant to approach others in a gym environment: some are too afraid to ask for help and some just need a simple tool/app to make the initial introduction."

Fitsi CEO Emily Stephens believes these apps could be transformative in creating social networks for exercising – a support structure she believes will be particularly relevant for women: "It provides them with a friendly environment to arrange meet-ups, and to find a strong source of support and engagement to stay active. But guys are of course welcome too!"

There's been a rush of these gym buddy apps recently, with a number – all offering similar functionality – launching within a few months of each other. It will be interesting to see if the trend will take off and which apps will thrive. Whatever happens, one thing operators should take from this trend is that members have the appetite to make friends and be sociable at the gym. Any moves to foster this would be welcomed.

"WE'RE PROVIDING A FITNESS SOCIAL NETWORK THAT ACTUALLY MAKES A DIFFERENCE TO PEOPLE'S LIVES"

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Apps can enable people to buddy up with those of similar fitness levels

FITSSI

Originally launched in the UK in April 2015, the new improved version of Fitssi launched last December. With users now in the thousands, co-founder Chris Sweeney – a personal trainer – is setting his sights on the US market, and is currently looking for brand partnerships and ambassadors.

Fitssi is aiming to raise £150,000 in seed funding and Sweeney says the impending monetisation of the app – by adding an 'Uber for PTs' type function – will significantly increase its chances.

According to Sweeney, Fitssi's USP is that it allows people to post messages and photos, and the friendship searches are very targeted. The next market on the hit list after the US is Australia.

GYM COMRADE

Gym Comrade helps people find like-minded friends to train with and offers easy communication to arrange workout times. Free to download, it has so far gained 1,700 users in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand with minimal advertising or promotion. More countries will be added in the coming months, with a goal of at least 10,000 users by the end of 2016.

GYMBUDDIESAPP

Described as a social networking platform for gym junkies, this app also helps people find others with similar workout habits and ability levels. Launched last July, the app allows people to set up routines and exercises and can record weights and reps. It also uses charting and visualisation tools to view data, so users can keep track of progress and identify areas for improvement.

GYMPAL

Gympal enables users to look up nutritionists, dieticians, PTs and fitness instructors in their area, as well as find a suitable training partner, new gyms or exercise classes and look up specialist food and supplement stores.

Free to download, the app is set to make money by monetising advice from personal trainers, fitness instructors and nutritionists who provide their services through the app.

There are currently 1,500 members of GymPal worldwide, with the app also allowing users to send instant messages, videos and photos to each other.

The GymPal team is currently working on developing new functionality to allow users to interact directly with gyms and personal trainers via the app.

SPORTSBUDDY

"Our mission is to connect people through sports," claims the team behind SportsBuddy. The app extends beyond the health and fitness club to encompass running, tennis, yoga and other sports. It also helps people discover venues, review matches and create events.

SWEATT

This app has been described as 'Tinder for people in really good shape'. The founders say they created Sweatt because: "We believe that great dates and great relationships start with strong, motivated, confident people."

Users are asked to provide information of their preferred method of working out, how many times a week they go to the gym, which diet they follow, their favourite workout and favourite time to work out. This is coupled with large photos.

WELLSQUAD

WellSquad pairs people with partners who have compatible fitness goals, favourite activities, motivation levels and geographical location. The founders are aiming to create a fitness community similar to what Strava has achieved within the running and cycling arena.

The app is free to download and use, but is monetised through its WellSquad Squad Leaders functionality: PTs, fitness instructors and dieticians who deliver classes and personal guidance through the app. Users get an initial phone assessment, plus unlimited in-app messaging. ●

A VISUAL EXPERIENCE

Do you know how to fully engage Millennials in your social media marketing?
Kate Cracknell shares the lessons from the recent Millennial 20/20 Summit

Gone are the days of overtly "selling stuff". That was the message from Sid Jatia, Under Armour's vice president of digital, at the recent Millennial 20/20 Summit – an event that looked at all aspects of doing business with the younger generations. Of course businesses will still want to drive sales of their products and services – but the process that leads to that point will be increasingly more experiential and less transactional.

To grow your brand in today's marketplace, you have to focus on three key, interlinked things, Jatia said: engagement and conversation come first – and only after those have been established should you begin to factor in commerce.

CONTEXT IS GOD

Indeed, engagement is so key that it actually surpasses the product itself.

"Don't over-indulge the product," urged Jatia. "Think about the experience around it, because ultimately the experience will become your product."

Marcello Fabiano, head of sport at The Social Chain, agreed. You might have a great new app, he said, but in fact it isn't about the app itself but about how you sell it. "Content might be king, but context is god. It's all about the experience you wrap around it."

He continued: "For example, we ran a campaign for an app called TippyTap. Focusing on the positives – how great it was – wouldn't have made it stand out from the crowd. So instead we focused on the negatives: 'This app is addictive. It will ruin your life. Don't download it if you're doing exams – you will fail!'"

"It received over 100,000 downloads in the first eight hours, 9,281 mentions in the first five hours, trended at number one on Twitter for two hours, and has now had over 2 million downloads."

A SOFTER SELL

Conversations with the consumer stem from that sort of engagement – and once the conversation is flowing, commerce can finally be worked in. "We spent US\$800m acquiring MyFitnessPal, MapMyFitness and Endomondo and their 165 million users," continued Under Armour's Jatia. "People asked us how we'd get a return on that investment, but it comes in many forms."

"It's brought more of an equal gender balance to our customer profile, for example. That in itself is very valuable to the business. But we also make every moment on our apps 'shoppable'. For example, photos of people working out in Under Armour apparel are tagged, so anyone looking at them can click and launch through to a commerce area."

Other presenters agreed with Jatia's 'engagement first, sell later' approach.

"Ultimately, even if it goes wrong, provided you have a good relationship with your customers they'll appreciate that you tried and will forgive you. Social media offers you the chance to push boundaries."

SHOW NOT TELL

Another area of consensus was the idea that visual elements – photos, and in particular video – are key to delivering relevant, engaging content and content to a Millennial market. Not least because, as Sky Sports' Yath Gangakumaran observed, "video content is far more shareable than text" – and being shareable is the social currency of the day.

"We've recently launched on Snapchat," said Arsenal FC's senior business strategy manager James Murray. "We spoke to our young fans and

DON'T OVER-INDULGE THE PRODUCT. THINK ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE AROUND IT. ULTIMATELY THE EXPERIENCE WILL BECOME YOUR PRODUCT

Sid Jatia, Under Armour

"Our measure for success is a growth in engagement and participation," said Fabiano. "It's only some way down the line that you can get the brand involved."

"It's almost impossible to guess at the ROI of a social media initiative," added Vice's Luke Barnes. "You need to be able to take a risk, try things out, have the freedom to be creative.

they couldn't believe we weren't there. It's where they are and they expected us to be there too."

For other brands, the use of such social media channels might be more surprising – but it doesn't mean it isn't right, as Wimbledon's head of digital and content Alex Willis explained: "Wimbledon is very traditional, but there's a huge opportunity





**If you want people to share
your content... use video**

to use social media to add a bit of magic for those who don't have the chance to attend in person. It's immensely powerful.

"During the two weeks of Wimbledon, we very deliberately use social media to bring people content they won't see anywhere else, or content that we'll be the first to show them. One great example was the moment last year when David Beckham – sitting among the crowd of spectators – caught a ball that had been mis-hit by Jamie Murray."

"Short-form video content is what people want," agreed Arsenal's James Murray – not to be confused with the tennis-playing Jamie.

"They want to see things live, in real time. The challenge for brands is therefore to create compelling propositions around which people can – and want to – create and upload video content."

LIVE ACTION

And it's the live, breaking news nature of the videos that's key – especially for things like sport – added James Heneghan, commercial manager for video sharing platform Grabyo. "It doesn't really matter what the content is, or how good the quality. The key is getting it out there quickly, as the story is breaking. The quicker you get it out, the better."

All of which means that really anyone can provide the content. "Competition is no longer just the likes of the BBC," said Gangakumaran. "It isn't even the social media channels, such as Twitter, which are starting to secure broadcasting rights to major sporting events. Competition can be a 15-year-old down the street on his smartphone."

"However, you can also see these people

as partners rather than competitors. For example, Sky Sports collaborates with Dude Perfect – a king of sport on YouTube with a huge number of followers."

"If you can get a good following on social media, that makes you a media channel in your own right," agreed former England footballer Rio Ferdinand in his keynote. "Does that make you more powerful than the traditional channels? That's a question I've been asking myself, but certainly I believe that brands looking to endorse or sponsor players will, going forward, be looking for those with a big social media following as much as those with great sporting skills."

SHORT AND TO THE POINT

But content does still have to be relevant as well as timely – in tune both with your users and your own brand.

"We have fan zones on SportLobster," said the sporting social media forum's co-founder and its CEO, Andy Meikle. "It offers people an uninterrupted experience of what they're really interested in, with other fans they can interact with and no other content – politics and so on – appearing in the feed."

And it has to be attention-grabbing too: "Keep it short and snappy – 30-45 seconds is best – and make sure you post regularly," said Heneghan. "And use square vertical format: this has the best standout and is also watched for longer than other formats." ●

A GOOD FOLLOWING ON SOCIAL MEDIA MAKES YOU A MEDIA CHANNEL IN YOUR OWN RIGHT

Rio Ferdinand, former England footballer



Get in the zone

Innovative Wattbike training zones are transforming studios and gym floors across the country

Boutique studios have transformed how consumers approach fitness, offering a destination for exercise that's motivational, cathartic and inspiring; all the benefits that come from working in a group setting.

For some standalone studios this has been extremely successful, but for some larger operators, studios with the latest equipment, technology and design, can be found empty outside of scheduled class times.

Wattbike has been working closely with both operators and independent studios to combat this issue and find the best fit for each, by helping them bring Wattbike 'Zones' and their small group training out of the studio and onto the gym floor, or individualising their bespoke boutique space.

As early adopters of the Wattbike, David Lloyd Leisure has been using the bikes across its portfolio in a number of ways, experimenting to find the best fit in each facility. Last June it opened its first Wattbike Zone at the Southampton club, which includes six Wattbikes with a separate screen that visually offers power training

workshops, introduction sessions, Wattbike testing and virtual Sufferfest classes.

Michelle Dand, group health & fitness manager at David Lloyd, comments: "All of our Wattbikes are on the gym floor, some have their own Zones and some have been mixed in with other equipment to form 'Performance Zone' areas as part of our gym innovation programme."

"We run live workshops in these Zones that create a great atmosphere on the gym floor, and this works to increase the interest from other members observing. Outside of these sessions there are always people using the bikes. From the cycle enthusiasts to the triathletes, to just normal men, women and teenagers; the beauty of the Wattbike is that it can be used for all ages and abilities."

BRANDED STUDIO

Over the past 18 months, Active Nation's Green Bank Leisure Centre has undergone a comprehensive refurbishment. This included 14 Wattbikes in a bespoke studio and two on the gym floor. Stuart Martin, managing director at Active Nation, adds: "The Green

Bank Leisure Centre has had a dramatic transformation to update and refresh almost every part of the building.

"We selected Wattbikes because of the benefits they bring; accuracy and calibration, real-ride feel and the ability to monitor and regulate everything.

"The studio and gym floor bikes are very popular with people that are into their sports, particularly cycling, triathlon, rugby and football as well as attracting people that want just general fitness improvement."

The new Wattbike studio has been created to mirror the bikes colours and branding. "We decided to completely design the studio based on the bikes because it created an exciting, professional atmosphere for our supporters," Martin explains. "The feedback we've had is that users feel like they're in a specialised training centre. It brings the studio to life, and transforms the room into more than just an indoor cycling space."

Ben Keenan, founder of Suffershire, a Cheltenham-based bespoke Wattbike studio which opened in May 2015 with world class coaches and workout videos from



Njinga Cycling offers a Wattbike performance lab for training and testing



users feel like they're in a specialised training centre. It brings the studio to life, and transforms the room into more than just an indoor cycling space





While some clubs are opting for dedicated Wattbike studios, others are creating special zones on the gym floor

The Sufferfest, has maximised the use of Wattbikes by transforming the space in a way that was geared around the bikes.

Keenan explains: "When we were researching indoor bikes we kept coming back to Wattbike. The build quality, the sports science and the amount of data and feedback for the riders is phenomenal. When we planned the studio, we knew that we would be catering for a lot of cyclists, from beginners through to professionals. It therefore made sense to transform the space to reflect Wattbike, because it is such a well-known, and respected brand within the sport and the industry.

"We have all abilities filling our sessions, from ladies in their 60s who cycle with friends for fun through to an ex professional racer. Even our two-hour hill climbing session late on a Friday night is full."

Keenan continues: "The fact we only have 10 bikes means there's a real social aspect, it's not a large room of faceless people, its small group training designed to motivate and encourage, while the Power Cycling software allows me to keep an eye on people's performance as individuals."

Njinga Cycling opened in January 2015 to support cyclists new to road cycling or for intermediate level riders who want to improve their efficiency, confidence and

overall fitness. Its Wattbike performance lab, which includes 14 bikes and a large data screen, is used for 1-1 coaching, group classes and programmes, pedal technique sessions and physiological testing.

Togo Keynes, Njinga co-founder and CEO, comments: "We were looking for an array of data, a real-ride feel, and a way to monitor pedalling technique and for all indoor bikes to be calibrated the same.

"Our training sessions are devised by a British Cycling coach and a Wattbike Performance Instructor. Using the bikes to develop the space has really produced a specialised, performance based zone.

"On top of this, each training session has a clear objective and training zones hence each rider can work to their own abilities, whilst working on pedal technique to improve rider efficiency and power output.

"That's why the Wattbike sessions are such a great alternative to spinning classes."

RIGHT INTENSITY

On the rise of popularity of Wattbike Zones and bespoke studios, Rich Baker, commercial director at Wattbike, adds: "It's important to us to work with operators and studios in order for them to best utilise the bikes. There's a lot more understanding, and demand for power training and an

alternative to indoor group cycling that provides workshops geared to a purpose.

"It's been fantastic to see so many people in the industry begin to use the Wattbikes to transform areas on the gym floor, bringing the studio atmosphere to an open space where it can motivate all the members and encourage them to try something new, if they haven't already."

Wattbike small group training sessions ensure that everyone is training at the right intensity, whilst the Power Cycling software displays all individual data from the Wattbikes on the big screen.

Class instructors or personal trainers can work on pedalling technique using the Wattbike Polar View and monitor individual riders much more closely.

Sessions can be tailored to specific goals, or sports through high quality, individualised training that still remains in a motivating group environment.

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wattbike

Growth market



The health and fitness market continues to expand across Europe, according to new research. So where does continued growth potential lie? **Karsten Hollasch** and **Herman Rutgers** report

2015 was another year of strong growth for the European fitness market, as the total number of health and fitness club members increased by 3.9 per cent to 52.4 million. This is one of the topline findings of the new *European Health & Fitness Market Report 2016*, published in April by EuropeActive in co-operation with Deloitte.

This growth was driven not only by the continued growth of less developed fitness markets like Poland, Turkey and Russia, but also by new concepts that drew in additional members in the more mature markets of western and northern Europe.

In terms of market value, total fitness club revenues increased at an even higher

rate of 4.9 per cent. While this was largely driven by exchange rate effects in the UK and Switzerland, the emergence of higher priced boutique clubs and special interest gyms also played a major role.

With a total market value of €26.7bn, fitness continues to rank as the number one sports activity in Europe. Not only that, but this value makes Europe the largest fitness market in the world, ahead of the US market, which was valued by IHRSA at €23.5bn in 2015.

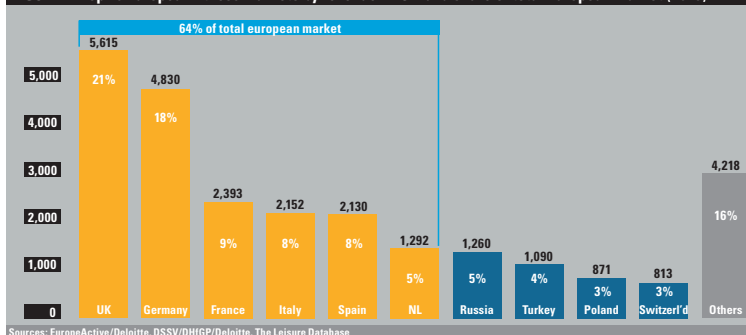
THE KEY PLAYERS

The European chain operators were a key driver behind the growth. Compared to the previous year, the top 30 operators increased their membership by about one

million to 11 million in total. The fastest-growing companies again included a large number of discount operators, underlining not only the continued market consolidation – especially in more mature markets – but also the increasing polarisation between the discount segment and the specialist boutiques and premium operators.

The leading operator in terms of membership remains the German discount chain McFIT/High5, with an estimated 1.37 million members – an increase of around 70,000. While the number of McFit-branded clubs grew in Italy, Poland and

FIGURE 1: Top 10 European fitness markets by revenue in €m and share of total European market (2015)





The value of the European fitness market now exceeds that of the US

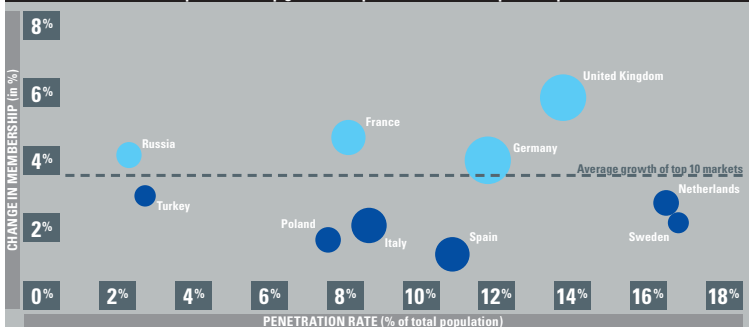
Spain, the company also launched its new High5 concept in April 2015, with a total of 10 clubs in Germany and one in Austria by the end of 2015. High5 clubs are smaller in size and focus on functional and strength training, priced at €990–€34.90 a month depending on the contract type.

Dutch low-cost operator Basic-Fit ranks second by member numbers, with

approximately one million members at the end of 2015, followed by British low-cost fitness chain Pure Gym. After the addition of 35 former LA fitness clubs via acquisition, as well as the opening of 37 of its own clubs, Pure Gym was the fastest-growing fitness operator in Europe by member numbers – up by 260,000 to 680,000 members in 2015.

Fast risers also include the German discount chains clever fit (+105,000) and FitX (+95,000), which is estimated to have almost doubled its membership to 200,000. Another fast-growing fitness company, British low-cost operator The Gym Group (+83,000), successfully completed an IPO on the London Stock Exchange in November 2015.

FIGURE 2: Total membership, membership growth and penetration rate of top 10 European fitness markets (2015)



Notes: Light blue bubble represents above-average growth markets, dark blue bubble represents below-average growth markets, bubble size represents total membership as of 2015.
Sources: EuropeActive/Deloitte, DSSV/DHGP/Deloitte, The Leisure Database



The UK's David Lloyd Leisure is second in the revenue rankings after Virgin Active

► REVENUE LEADERS

The European revenue ranking is led by British operator Virgin Active, which operates 142 clubs in Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK with estimated total revenues of €485m in 2015. In April 2015, an 80 per cent stake in Virgin Active was acquired by South African private equity firm Brait, while 20 per cent remained with Richard Branson's Virgin Group.

Ranking second by revenue is fellow British-based operator David Lloyd Leisure (€460m), followed by Scandinavian market leader Health & Fitness Nordic (€321m) and McFIT/High5 (€268m), as well as the British operators Fitness First (€246m) and Nuffield Health (€230m).

While three of the top 10 operators in revenue terms state annual revenues

“Three of the top 10 operators state annual revenues of more than €1,000 per member; three others earn less than €300 annually per member”

(excluding VAT) of more than €1,000 per member, three others – McFit/High5, Basic-Fit and Pure Gym – earn less than €300 annually per member.

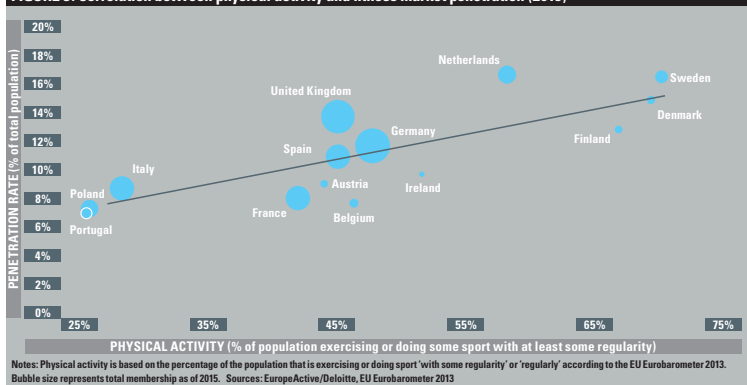
M&A ACTIVITY

Health clubs remained highly attractive to investors in 2015, from both inside and outside the industry; there were 19 M&A transactions in 2015, the same as the previous year and twice as many as two years ago.

M&A activity was also strong on the supplier side, with Precor's takeover of Queenax in June 2015, Nautilus' acquisition of Octane Fitness in December 2015, and Life Fitness' purchases of SCIFIT in July 2015 and Cybex in January 2016.

Overall, 2015 was another year of strong growth for the global commercial fitness equipment industry, which has an estimated market value of €2.65bn. The five leading B2B manufacturers – Life Fitness, Technogym,

FIGURE 3: Correlation between physical activity and fitness market penetration (2015)



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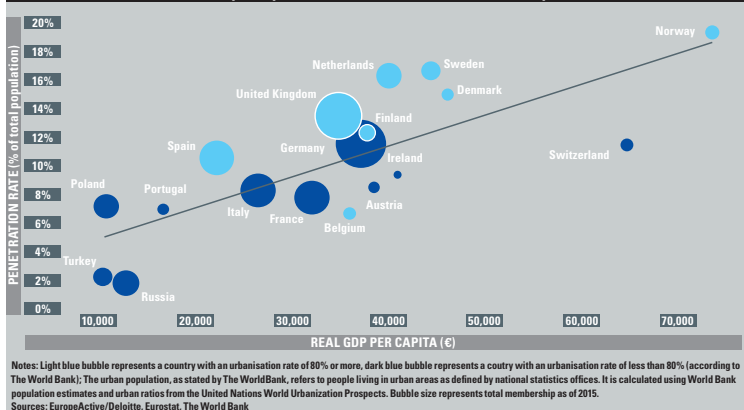


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FIGURE 4: Correlation of real GDP per capita and urbanisation with fitness market penetration (2015)

- ▶ Johnson Health Tech, Precor and Cybex – accounted for 72 per cent of the market and saw 14.6 per cent growth in 2015 (influenced by currency effects and the strong US dollar).

FURTHER GROWTH POTENTIAL

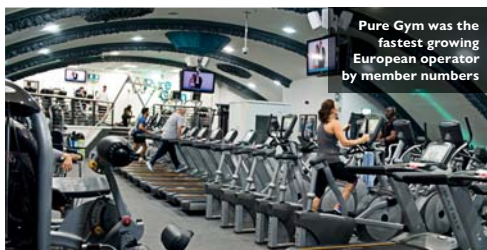
Although the market has expanded rapidly in the last two years – from around 46 million members in 2013 to 52.4 million members in 2015 – growth potential remains.

While Germany (9.5 million members / €4.8bn revenue), the United Kingdom (8.8 million members / €5.6bn revenue), France (5.2 million members / €2.4bn revenue), Italy (5.1 million members / €2.2bn revenue) and Spain (4.9 million members / €2.1bn revenue) already account for 64 per cent of the European market in terms of both membership and total revenues (Figure 1, p58) all five countries continue to grow and offer further potential, with penetration rates currently between 7 and 14 per cent.

This is in contrast to Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, which have already reached penetration rates of 19.4, 16.7 and 16.4 per cent respectively.

At the same time, Turkey and Russia – with relatively large populations – have shown rapid development in the provision of fitness opportunities. Both countries still display considerable potential, with more than 47,000 inhabitants per club and penetration rates of just 2.4 per cent (Turkey) and 1.9 per cent (Russia).

The report found that penetration rates were primarily correlated to three macro-economic factors: the general physical



activity of the population, a country's gross domestic product per capita, and the degree of urbanisation – all of which positively impact fitness membership (Figure 3, p60 and Figure 4, above).

Thus, countries with a large percentage of the population exercising or doing sport (source: EU Eurobarometer 2013) – such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland – are among the leaders in terms of fitness market penetration, while less active

countries like Poland or Portugal have relatively low percentages of members.

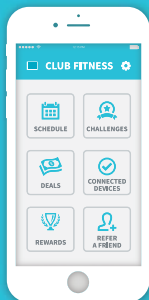
Likewise, countries with a high real GDP per capita and high degree of urbanisation – like Scandinavia and the UK – have the highest penetration rates, whereas lower ranked countries like Russia and Turkey have less developed fitness markets.

If physical activity and disposable income continue to grow, the fitness industry has a great opportunity to benefit. ●

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Karsten Hollasch is partner at Deloitte and head of the German Sports Business Group. Herman Rutgers is a board member, chair of events and research director for EuropeActive. A hard copy of the report can be purchased via the EuropeActive website: www.healthclubmanagement.co.uk/europeactive. The report costs €95 for EuropeActive members or €195 for non-members, plus delivery.

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MINE OF INFORMATION

Many operators store a vast amount of data in their systems but never use it. Could they be sitting on a gold mine? **Rhianon Howells** investigates new developments in data mining that are aimed at unlocking this hidden wealth

it was Peter Sondergaard, head of research at Gartner, who famously claimed that data – or, more specifically, information – is the “oil of the 21st century”.

In the health and fitness industry, as in any other, there’s no doubt that data is an invaluable asset, delivering greater business insights. This in turn enables more tailored offerings, better customer service and more effective retention strategies, which ultimately drives revenue and profit. But, like crude oil, data is worthless until it’s extracted, refined and put to use. Information is oil, Sondergaard said, but “analytics is the combustion engine”.

Most operators already collect data on everything from their customers’ preferences and habits to financial measures such as income and costs – but how can they improve their access to and understanding of this information and, more importantly, use it to benefit their business? We look at some key areas.

RETENTION

Analysing and responding to attrition and retention data is vital to improving performance in these areas. Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) County Borough Council, which runs 10 leisure sites, uses Gladstone’s business intelligence tool eyeQ to generate reports in this area, then adjusts its procedures accordingly.

“We made changes to our corporate membership renewal process after an eyeQ report identified a high drop-off in corporate membership numbers at the annual renewal point,” says the council’s business manager John Hancock. “Looking into this, we concluded that the renewal process was too long-winded and formal, and we simplified it accordingly.

“The drop-off of corporate membership renewals at our facility has now more than halved, from 25 per cent to 10 per cent, and length of stay has obviously increased as well.”

Taking this kind of action on the back of a report is risky if you’re not 100 per cent sure of its reliability, however – and before eyeQ, the council didn’t have enough confidence to do this. “Our

“Data is worthless until it’s extracted, refined and put to use”





Serco Leisure uses Legend across its 70 facilities

previous system was more complicated and often led to the same data delivering slightly different results, depending on who ran the report," says Hancock.

In contrast, eyeQ's Query Builder means that, as long as you have a reasonable understanding of your database, producing specific data extracts is simple, while the ability to export the data to Excel means the reports can be easily understood. The key, says Hancock, is that "even with different report routes, the end results are the same".

COST SAVINGS

Data mining can also lead to substantial cost savings. Serco Leisure, which manages 70 facilities, has made annual savings of more than £1m by driving down utilities bills using Legend's proprietary business intelligence solution.

A key feature of Legend's solution is its targeting and alerting functionality, which allows operators to set targets within specific sets of data. If these targets are not met at any point, managers receive a real-time alert which enables them to take immediate action. "This allows customers to avoid 'analysis paralysis', which is a genuine risk when there's so much data available in modern leisure management systems," explains Legend MD Sean Maguire.

In the case of Serco Leisure, the operator set reduction targets for its water, gas and electricity consumption based on the previous year's results – for example, 'reduce gas consumption by 5 per cent on a like-for-like basis compared with the same month last year'. If a centre fell behind on a target, managers were alerted to intervene, perhaps by implementing actions that had proved beneficial at other centres. The analysis also enabled the company to pinpoint when the performance of a centre was out of kilter with that of its other centres, which helped to identify specific issues such as a leak, an equipment fault or ineffective insulation.

According to Keith Thomas, MD of Serco Leisure, not only have these savings been significant in themselves, but they have also enabled the company to be more environmentally accountable – "something to which Serco Leisure is 100 per cent dedicated".

INCOME MANAGEMENT

Another area where data mining can make an impact is income management. Life Leisure, which manages 13 facilities in Stockport, has achieved a 19 per cent rise in direct debit income and a halving of direct debit failures using the financial reporting and forecasting feature within Legend's business



RCT is automating the process of ensuring users' payments are up to date

► intelligence solution, says the operator's chief executive Malcolm McPhail.

This is largely thanks to more efficient BACS processing. "Much of the success in fees processing is down to ease of use when doing small but important daily administrative tasks, combined with the accuracy of the data," says Maguire. "If you can easily run status reports that highlight issues, you can remedy them before submitting a BACS file, resulting in a higher submission rate."

Meanwhile, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the council is planning to introduce Gladstone's Business Process Manager (BPM) module – which streamlines administrative processes – and link it to eyeQ, in order to automate email communication with customers who have unpaid debts or dishonoured bookings. "For example, we might run a report identifying customers with failed direct debit payments," says Hancock. "This would automate an email via BPM to inform the customer that there's a debt on their record, and to tell them how to contact us to arrange payment."

Gladstone also offers a data consultancy service to help eyeQ clients delve deeper into their database, with further implications for income management. Shetland Recreational Trust (SRT), which operates eight sites, uses the service to



There's been an uplift in corporate membership renewals at RCT centres

streamline its invoicing procedures by creating an interface between its member management software and external accounting package.

Guy Bickerton, head of Gladstone's data services, worked with SRT to create an extract file to pull out the relevant data, organise it for compatibility and export it to Excel for uploading into the accounting system. According to clerical

assistant Norma Johnson, no longer having to enter this data manually saves one full day a month and also ensures much greater accuracy.

While business intelligence solutions are invaluable, says Bickerton, data consultancy fills the gap when expert input is needed. "In short, if it's stored in your system, we will be able to extract it, and in the format you require," he says. ●

SHARING THE BENEFITS

DataHub, a collaborative project which allows sport and leisure providers to share and align their data, gives operators access to business critical data, not only from their own sites but from across the sector

DataHub was launched in 2014 by software supplier Xn Leisure, operator Places for People, national governing bodies Badminton England and the ASA, and sport intelligence provider 4 Global Consulting, which administers the initiative together with an industry steering group. The project, which is free for operators to join, now has more than 1,200 DataHub Club member sites and tracks over 150 million facility visits.

It also has a number of specialist partners – including Gladstone, Leisure-net Solutions, Right Directions, Big Wave Media, Max Associates, England Squash, Experian, and Sheffield Hallam University's

Sport Industry Research Centre – who support sport and leisure operators to maximise returns from the data via online modules, each providing specialist participation and business intelligence.

These include a Social Value Calculator, delivered by Experian and Sheffield Hallam University, which allows operators to quantify in monetary terms the social value their organisation has generated, as well as benchmarking its impact within the sector. Based on CASE – the DCMS culture and sport evidence programme – the calculator uses data feeds from each facility to profile the customer base for risk. It then equates the physical activity

undertaken by each individual with the proven saving to the local community in the key areas of health, community and crime, education and employment, and wellbeing.

Also available to DataHub Club members is Insight, a business analytics solution delivered by Xn Leisure. Operators pay an annual licence fee to access the module, which not only enables them to run time-saving reports on internal membership, finance and occupancy data, but also allows them to benchmark these figures against those of their peers, helping to identify both under-performance and growth opportunities. www.DataHubClub.com



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Sporting success

How Inverclyde Leisure has driven business transformation, cut costs and grown revenues

Turning a business around need not be a complicated process nor depend upon significant resources. One leisure operator in Scotland has demonstrated this over the last two years with an impressive performance, resulting in a reduction in overall costs and a step increase in revenues. An ageing leisure centre due to be closed has been rescued and the leisure trust continues to grow revenues in spite of the economic climate.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS

When Inverclyde Leisure appointed Kieron Vango as chief executive in mid-2013, the trust operated 13 facilities including five gyms, two pools, three outdoor pitches, three sports centres and one large leisure centre which also has an ice rink. The facilities and service offering were on a par with other public sector facilities in Scotland. Some failing centres were due to be closed. The trust was under pressure to improve its financial performance.

"We needed to really take stock and reassess our entire proposition," Vango explains. "We started with a straightforward business review."

"The analysis was very interesting. It was clear we had to rethink our service offering. We needed to put the customer experience at the heart of our plans. It was evident we could improve membership and that there was room for revenue growth in other areas such as swimming and skating lessons. It was also apparent we could implement sensible cost savings in IT. Most glaring was the lack of good information to run the business with. The conclusion was we needed a solid technology platform to take the business forward."

TECHNOLOGY MIGRATION

The Inverclyde Leisure team therefore developed a three-year business transformation plan, which included the following main deliverables:

- Invest in a new front of house software platform for its sites
- Move from the council's infrastructure to a new IT platform and networks
- Introduce a new, tiered membership structure to respond to local needs and ultimately improve membership revenue



Swim school numbers have grown by 45 per cent in just a year

- Implement a much more modern telephony solution
- Implement a wider range of swimming lessons and other courses to grow courses revenue
- Shift customers to self-service and smartphone bookings instead of them queuing at reception
- Introduce a budget offering for struggling facilities
- Invest in a refurbishment programme and new gym equipment to underpin the new approach

"Legend won the tender for the new front of house platform. This was installed smoothly and the project completed by March 2014," explains Vango. "In fact, we made such good progress we decided to accelerate phase 2. In January 2015 we tendered for a new IT platform, new networks and new telephony."

"Again, Legend's overall proposition for a one-stop solution was very compelling and economical – Legend could offer a solution with one 24x7 support desk for all of our IT services."

By April 2015, Inverclyde Leisure had a new IP Telephony solution installed across all 13 sites, new networks and had decided to migrate to the cloud and run Office 365. Vango says: "Not only did the whole migration go smoothly, but it resulted in substantial cost savings. We now have a modern, more reliable service at less than half the previous cost."

"Inverclyde Leisure has become a rapid adopter," explains Sean Maguire, Legend's managing director. "It's a compliment to an organisation's leadership team when it can embrace new systems and make wide use of the tools at its disposal. For example, the Inverclyde Leisure team has employed



People can now join via smartphone



Legend has helped Inverclyde Leisure put customers at the heart of its services

our ticketing solution, our LegendFM tablet, our BACS Bureau services and our KPI Targeting and Monitoring reporting. They have exploited our powerful sports courses and poolside swimming lessons module to grow swimming lessons and even introduced ice skating lessons."

BUSINESS ENHANCEMENTS

In parallel with the implementation of its new IT platform, the trust diversified its product offering, starting with the introduction of tiered membership packages: a budget offering 'IL Fitness for Less' was introduced at two centres to increase base level engagement; a middle, all-inclusive offering which offered access to all the trust's centres and moved customers from PAYG to a monthly direct debit payment scheme; and a premium membership which offered additional elements such as taster personal training sessions.

"The combined effect of the budget price point, three-tiered membership including a 'premium' offering, and the use of Join Online on the web and smartphone, was felt almost immediately," says Vango.

"Between April 2014 and March 2016 Inverclyde Leisure has seen a 34 per cent like-for-like direct debit income increase, equating to nearly £600,000 per annum."

In addition, the trust has driven significant revenue increases through an expansion of its sports courses, particularly swimming.

"In the last two years, income from swimming lessons has become our second largest revenue stream," Vango says.

"It's been helped by the way in which our teachers can interact with students and parents through Legend, which has also automated what was historically the hugely stressful element of re-enrolment and course bookings. Over the last year, the swim school has grown by 45 per cent."

Inverclyde Leisure is now rolling the Sports Courses software out to additional course programmes, including activities such as ice skating and gymnastics.

The final element of the services transformation was around giving customers more control over the way in which they could engage with the trust, and implemented Legend's BACS Bureau services as part of a fully outsourced membership management service.

Vango says: "Our aim was to allow customers to better manage their membership online, giving staff more time to focus on customer care. We wanted to reduce the volume of general enquiries, and serve more customers online. The Legend Direct Debit service saves time and money and runs like an internal department. Our average collection rate is now 98.7 per cent versus 96.3 per cent in 2014."

SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS

Two years into its business transformation programme, Inverclyde Leisure has seen

just that: a truly transformed and successful leisure organisation.

With Legend's reporting capability and the use of the KPI functions, the Inverclyde Leisure team now also has real time information and business intelligence at its fingertips. Vango explains: "We knew we could operate more effectively as a business. But now we can easily measure it and we can use the data to drive action. Legend has given us a clear, dashboard-style presentation of our progress against KPIs on all aspects of the business and has allowed us to make really meaningful benchmarking comparisons."

"It's an astonishing story. Whereas 24 months ago we had zero online bookings, today over 60 per cent of bookings are done online. Before the recent re-opening of the struggling Ravenscraig facility, we saw 700 online joiners within six weeks."

"And we feel there is still substantial growth to come. I am hugely proud of what we have achieved."

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changing LIVES

Sentinel Leisure Trust is leading a wellness revolution in the east of England as it develops its commercial arm to create a positive impact on the local community. **Kate Parker** talks to Chris Ames, Sentinel's head of business development

When was Sentinel Leisure Trust established?

Sentinel Leisure Trust (SLT) was formed in 2011 when Waveney District Council outsourced the management and operations of its leisure and outdoor services.

A somewhat bumpy road followed, with the trust facing a loss of £1.2m during its first year of operation. However, its fortunes were quickly turned around after a new board of trustees and a new senior management team were appointed in 2013, and that loss became a surplus this year.

How is the trust structured?

SLT is a charitable a non-profit distributing organisation (NPDO) where any profit is reinvested in services or business growth.

Then we have its subsidiary company, Sentinel Enterprise Limited (SEL) – the trust's commercial arm – which delivers any responsibilities that aren't charitable. This includes, for example, the trust's outdoor services: beach huts, boat moorings, golf courses, caravan parks and so on.

All profits earned from SEL are ploughed back into the trust's charitable objectives



Chris Ames, Sentinel's head of business development

and go towards reducing prices, improving facilities and increasing access.

Councils are going to be facing growing pressure to significantly cut their budgets. We want to get as

much revenue as possible through our commercial arm to support our charitable activities and ensure leisure services are sustainable in the future.

What does your commercial arm allow you to do?

The main thing is it allows us to keep membership prices at our leisure facilities down and accessible to as many people as possible. We manage contracts in some of the most deprived regions in the UK and we do everything we can to engage with people who wouldn't normally consider going to their local leisure centre, to get them thinking about their health.

We offer access to the best equipment and programmes for £34.95 a month – and that's across five gyms, six pools and five studios, with some 250 free classes to choose from each week. We also have a relaxation thermal suite and spa at Waterlane Leisure Centre, and we're looking to develop more leisure centres.

As our commercial arm has grown, it's also allowed us to look at other activities and initiatives that meet our charitable objectives. The Changing Lives scheme is one such project, launched in 2013.

What is Changing Lives?

The scheme came about through one of our trustees who highlighted the case of Marc Rivett, who at the time worked in outdoor services. He'd lost his speech and ability to walk unaided after suffering a stroke in December 2013.

In January 2014, Marc began an intensive 12-week rehab programme with East Coast Community Healthcare,

We want to get as much revenue as possible through our commercial arm to ensure leisure services are sustainable in the future - Chris Ames

and then progressed onto a sponsored six-month fitness and personal training package with Sentinel.

The success of the programme, in terms of Marc's recovery and his return to full-time employment, became the inspiration to seek out more people we could help. Changing Lives was born.

How do you identify candidates for the scheme?

They tend to be highlighted by East Coast Community Healthcare (ECCH), our local health practitioners who provide community-based NHS and social care in Norfolk and Waveney.

We have a partnership with ECCH and together we flag up anyone directed to us for rehab or GP referral who requires further support. Changing Lives isn't proactively advertised. Highlighted cases are submitted to senior management, who in turn present them as anonymised case studies to the board for consideration.

Changing Lives offers something above and beyond the usual routes people might take. It's for people who really need extra support on a weekly basis, with tailored programmes and targeted goals for their specific conditions and needs.

Our latest participant has successfully battled cancer, but the treatment left her severely immobilised and in a poor state of health. We're now supporting her with free personal training and aqua cycling in the pool, so there's less impact on her joints and bones. Our mission is to keep her out of a wheelchair.



Through a rehab and PT package, Marc Rivett's life was turned around after his stroke



Even those who don't get on to Changing Lives are offered incentives to stay active, such as discounted memberships or free PT for 12 weeks



But even if people don't get on to Changing Lives, we deliver an exit route so they don't just drop off at the end of a 12-week ECCH-referred course. It might be a discounted gym membership, for example, or free personal training for 12 weeks – some form of phased route towards mainstream exercise.

What other projects do you have on the horizon?

We're about to launch a wellness app and website that will enable our specialists and our partners, ECCH, to assess lifestyle trends among the population; not everyone needs physical activity support – some people might need dietary advice, sleeping or stress support.

We hope it will help us better understand individuals' lifestyles, so we can give them realistic goals to improve their health. In addition, it will allow us to look at whole towns and districts as blocks of data, so we can focus resources

with the local health providers to hit the specific needs of each community.

In addition, the app is about educating people to set their own goals, and to get used to doing this, but at their own pace. People are then rewarded for reaching their goals – maybe with a free swim session or some free personal training.

And you also have a consultancy arm?

Yes. We're a local trust and we aren't seeking to expand further geographically, but we are able to go out and support other councils in setting up their own local trusts. Equally, we can advise other trusts who might want to re-create our commercial model to help ensure their own leisure offering is sustainable.

We already have a number of contracts around the UK. It's nice to see that something we're doing locally, successfully, will help centres in other counties as well. It's something we feel passionate about. ●



MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

The IHRSA Institute 2016 takes place in the US in August, offering executive education for club professionals. **Kristen Walsh** looks forward to the event

The IHRSA Institute is nearly as old as IHRSA itself. The first event was held in 1984, just three years after the association itself was established, and over the years some 1,500 individuals have travelled from nine different countries around the globe to attend.

Early on, IHRSA's leadership recognised the need for a high-level, industry-specific educational opportunity for club owners and managers. IHRSA wanted to professionalise the sector to better serve members, to protect the industry from unnecessary government regulation, and to encourage industry colleagues to take justifiable pride in the important work they were doing to improve the health, fitness and wellbeing of their clients.

The result: the creation of the IHRSA Institute, where a faculty of industry experts and renowned academics provide a balanced curriculum covering virtually every aspect of club management.

So who should attend? The ideal candidate is a manager who's on their way up, or a top-tier manager who's keen to polish their leadership skills.

During three full days of graduate-level instruction, attendees learn the skills required to run a club successfully, including in-depth discussions of real-life business situations, as well as interactive events designed to foster long-term relationships. IHRSA keeps the sessions small in size to maximise personal interaction.

"The IHRSA Institute is without doubt the best fitness business educational programme in the world," says Alan Leach, regional manager of West Wood Clubs in Ireland. "Without the knowledge and expertise our managers have gained from attending the institute, I doubt we would have survived the catastrophic recession in Ireland. The powerful sales, marketing, programming and retention strategies presented at the institute have allowed us to build a strong, sustainable competitive advantage in our market."

HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2016



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– Frank Furness, author & consultant, *Frank Furness & Associates, UK*

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FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

– Rick Caro, president *Management Vision, US*

Creating meaningful budgets, managing expenses and understanding variances are core skills that lie at the heart of any business leader's success. Collecting relevant data as well as understanding and leveraging key performance indicators (KPIs) will further strengthen your ability to create better solutions for your business.



THE INNOVATOR'S METHOD: CREATE & SUSTAIN A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

– Christopher Bingham PhD, professor & chair of strategy and entrepreneurship, *Kenan-Flagler Business School, US*

Discuss how leaders can continually help their organisation capture attractive opportunities for growth and profitability. This session will outline the innovator's dilemma, unpack the distinct and subtle steps in the process of innovation, and detail fresh tools

to help leaders effectively drive innovation over time. The ultimate goal of the session is to help leaders know how to better create and sustain competitive advantage in their workplace.



DAY-TO-DAY LEGAL ISSUES

– Helen Durkin, executive VP of global public policy, *IHRSA*


Gaining an understanding of the legal issues club operators regularly face can be instrumental to ensure they never turn into a legal crisis. Learn how to avert headache-causing problems that can consume your time, drain your money and harm your reputation in the community if they 'go viral'. Armed with basic knowledge, delegates will learn how to identify the legal issues lurking in everyday situations, the steps to avoid them, and where to turn to when they can't be avoided.



MEMBER RETENTION, EXPERIENCE & ENGAGEMENT

– Brent Darden, CEO, *Brent Darden Consulting, US*

Learn how your organisation can become more customer-centric and succeed at building member loyalty. Discover the importance of Net Promoter Score and member feedback to deliver great customer experiences and gain competitive advantage. Develop strategies to help your staff engage and retain members and explore practical approaches to creating a service culture.



Hiring and keeping the right people is key to business success



STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR CLUB OPERATIONS PROFESSIONALS

– with Mark Miller, vice president, *Merritt Athletic Clubs, US*
Your department's results affect your company's success.

Learn to manage more effectively through the development of goals and objectives, timelines and implementation plans, and understand the importance of resource allocation and positioning your team for growth.



STAFF HIRING, TRAINING & RETENTION

– with Allison Flatley, COO, *Corporate Fitness Works, US*

Hiring and keeping the right people has a huge impact on the overall success of your business. Understand first how to find people with the right knowledge, talent and skills. Then learn how to train and empower your staff to create a motivated, productive and engaged team.



SALES MANAGEMENT

– with Alan Leach, regional manager, *West Wood Clubs, Ireland*

Effective sales teams work with a plan. In this seminar, delegates will learn the importance of goal setting, projections, tracking, the sales cycle, generating leads and referrals, and how to motivate a sales team through compensation, incentives and contests. ●

Without the knowledge and expertise we've gained from the institute, I doubt we'd have survived the catastrophic recession in Ireland – Alan Leach, *West Wood Clubs*

INTERESTED IN ATTENDING?

This year's IHRSA Institute will be held on 2–5 August at the Kenan-Flagler Business School, at the University of North Carolina in the US.

Visit www.ihrsa.org/institute

ABOUT IHRSA

Founded in 1981, IHRSA – the *International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association* – is the only global trade association, representing more than 10,000 health and fitness facilities and suppliers worldwide.

To learn how IHRSA can help your business thrive, visit www.ihrsa.org

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BREXIT

Bad for Britain, bad for fitness? **Steven Ward**, executive director at ukactive, offers his thoughts

It takes a brave executive to surface as a Brexiteer or a proud advocate for Remain. The director general of the British Chambers of Commerce found himself out of a job after declaring himself pro-Brexit. Icy ground all round!

I was asked by Number 10 to explore the willingness among CEOs of the major multinational operators in the issue of Britain remaining in the EU.

Of those I approached, only Glenn Earlam – the new CEO of David Lloyd Leisure – was willing to do so publicly, perhaps because of the more politically active nature of his previous role, heading up Merlin in the entertainment industry, where he campaigned strongly for regulatory change. Earlam is in favour of remaining in the EU.

WAITING IN LIMBO

Never one to sit on the fence, my personal view is this: on nearly every count, the uncertainty caused by a vote to leave the European Union would be as bad for our sector as it is bad for the wider economy. Indeed, I believe that the stakes for the physical activity sector are even higher than the average.

The uncertainty resulting from a Leave vote would stifle key reasons why our sector has experienced growth

While we as a sector are on the fast-track to becoming the backbone of the UK's emerging wellbeing industry, the uncertainty resulting from a Leave vote would stifle many of the key reasons why our sector has experienced growth over the past few years.

Leisure operators are now more intrinsically linked than ever to the UK's financial centres, and understandably keep a close eye on what happens in the City. The very fact that the referendum



Would Brexit stop the advance of our sector in its tracks?

is happening is already holding the industry back from growth; a well placed source recently indicated to *Health Club Management* that Pure Gym will hold off from an IPO until the jittery nerves of investors are calmed by a firm decision on the EU. Bannatyne is rumoured to be following suit. In the background, we have the resolution of the future of Fitness First.

All of this is impacted by the uncertainty, and a vote to exit would destabilise the entire economy for the next decade, leading to more of the same.

A BACKWARDS STEP

Away from big leisure IPOs, the other areas that a British Exit from the EU would impact are clear to see.

In health, where many big players from our sector now hang their hat, there's a clear indication from all sides that leaving the EU would be a backwards step for preventative health and wellbeing. Charities and research bodies cite the importance of European funding for large-scale research projects, and the ability to put evidence into practice.

For public health, many of the pan-European programmes and initiatives have been influential in bringing the activity agenda to the fore.

It's clear that leaving the European Union would have implications for businesses of all shapes and sizes.

STOPPED IN OUR TRACKS?

The fact that – according to the *Financial Times* – Britain would have to renegotiate all of its trade deals would also present a peripheral (but frustrating) barrier to business.

Key here, though, is the fact that this would have an effect on the service industries most of all, via the disruption – at least in the short term – of free movement and free trade.

Finally, from a big picture perspective, the whole issue is amplified when it comes to health and fitness. And this is purely because of the state the industry finds itself in: firing on all cylinders, attracting interests from all sides, and certainly on the right path. ●



REACH NEW HEIGHTS

Could you lead the commoditisation of the spa industry in the UK? Massage Heights is looking for international expansion partners. The company's VP of Marketing, Alice O'Donnell, explains

At Massage Heights, we have an established network of franchise businesses across the USA and a master franchise operating successfully in Canada. Our business model has taken the successful gym membership model and applied it to the spa experience, creating a network of high street wellness retreats. This part of the sector has developed into a multi-billion dollar market in North America over the past decade.

Massage Heights' retreats generate more dollars per square foot than our competitors and we have developed a reputation for providing among the best experience in the massage industry, offering professional, affordable and convenient therapeutic services.

With the USA many years ahead in this sector, we are ready to expand through a structured, effective and rapid roll out of our proven business model in similar economies with a more traditional spa industry. Leading the commoditisation of a sector, in our case the massage and spa industry, provides a well-financed first mover with a great opportunity to dominate in their country.

Following Massage Heights' success crossing into Canada, we are now working to bridge the Atlantic. The current focus is on promoting the opportunity to attract an appropriate individual or corporation to take on the UK and Ireland markets.

EXCITING OPPORTUNITY

According to Spa Creators' 2014 UK Spa Market Analysis report: "UK consumers currently make an estimated 6 million visits per annum to spas throughout the UK."

Hotel spas account for 41 per cent of the total number of spas and attract around 12,600 consumers per annum.

Spas within health and fitness clubs account for 27 per cent of the market and attract 10,900 consumers. Local day spas only account for 12 per cent, but attract 20,400 consumers.



Massage Heights is looking for ambitious wellness entrepreneurs

The Massage Heights model presents an exciting opportunity for an ambitious, entrepreneurial business person to commoditise the spa experience in Britain.

Take the proven business concept from Massage Heights across the Atlantic, and mirror the rapid roll out of its franchise network over here in the UK, providing you as the proprietor with a profitable first mover advantage from a business model built on recurring income that boasts a 97 per cent customer retention rate. Taking the successful gym membership model and applying it to luxury spa treatments has created an elegant business model:

- Membership model with positive cash flow
- Recurring revenue
- High referral rates
- Multiple revenue streams
- Currently no network of direct competition
- Average clinic revenue equivalent to £800K

Taking this business model and the spa experience to create high street wellness retreats has created a multi-billion dollar market in North America over the past decade, and presents an opportunity to replicate that success in the UK. "The UK has an established luxury market, with an aspirational populace, exactly how the US and Canada were a few years ago," says Lesley Hawks of Massage Heights.

"Demand for health and wellness is predicted to continue to grow with the increasing awareness of the importance of caring for your body and mind."

WHY MASSAGE HEIGHTS?

Founded in 2004, the company has achieved its goal of making massage and spa services more accessible, and so more frequently experienced – we now have 125 outlets across the US and Canada run by hand selected franchisees.

With spa retreats located in busy urban areas, and open during hours to suit local



The company has 125 franchisees across North America and Canada

people – and with well-trained therapists, multiple levels of membership and product upsells all contributing to revenue – dedicated Massage Heights outlets are able to offer an unrivalled client experience, and as such generate more income per square foot than their competitors.

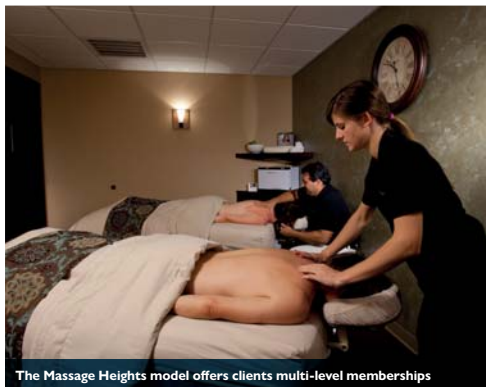
Given the current levels of opportunity in the UK spa and wellness sector – combined with Massage Heights' proven membership

model – the stage is now perfectly set for early adopters to establish a strong and successful foothold in the British luxury massage and spa market.

That's why the search is on for an enterprising British entrepreneur to take the reigns at the forefront of the firm's UK expansion, to grow the Massage Heights brand and franchise network into a household name across the country.

Once considered a treat, massage has now gone mainstream in the United States, and we've identified the United Kingdom as the next new market that is ripe for expansion.

We've developed a model that is proven to be successful and transferable, so becoming our UK master franchisor is a relatively low-risk opportunity with high potential rewards.



The Massage Heights model offers clients multi-level memberships

FRANCHISE DETAILS

To get more details on the Massage Heights franchise opportunity and the Master Franchisor role, contact Iain Martin at The International Franchising Centre:
iain@thefranchisingcentre.com
 +44 (0)1562 261162


MASSAGE HEIGHTS
www.massageheightsfranchise.com/territories/uk

New to the market

We take a look at some of the new products & services launched at FIBO 2016. Log on to fitness-kit.net and type the company name under 'keyword search'

INNOVATION WINNER

YAB.Fitness (Your Active Body) won the Jury Innovation Award at FIBO 2016 for its new free weights.

Described as the missing link between dumbbell and kettlebell, YAB weights can be used with three different grip variations to change difficulty level. Extended lever (heaviest part of the weight held horizontally) offers the highest intensity; Centric (heaviest part of weight pointing down) is the mid-level; and Short (heaviest part of weight pointing into body, lying on forearm) is the easiest.

The product has been designed by physiotherapists and sports medicine professionals to take pressure off the joints. The weights range from 1.3kg to 18.7kg and can also be attached via a belt to the feet, for leg and glute work.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **YAB**



IN-EAR HEART RATE SENSOR

German technology company Cosinuss has developed the Cosinuss One, a wearable in-ear device that – using its Earconnect technology – captures heart rate, heart rate variability, core body temperature and arterial oxygen saturation of the blood.

Developed with the help of German athlete of the year Jan Frodeno and triathlete Anja Beranek, the sensor works with a Cosinuss app or sport watch.

The One device aims to monitor dehydration, improve accuracy in calculation of calories burned, detect and prevent heat-induced illnesses and bring performance measures and exercise control to the next level.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **COSINUSS**



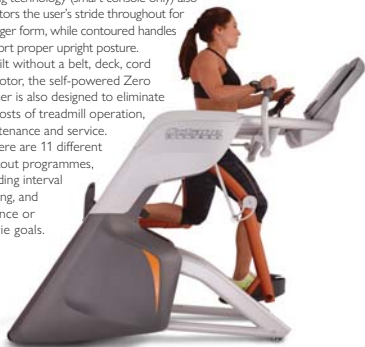
ZERO RUNNING

Octane's new Zero Runner gives a walking, jogging or running workout without any repetitive stressful impact on the body.

With independent hip and knee joints, the Zero Runner facilitates natural motion with a stride length of up to 147cm. Users can concentrate on their form, engaging the core and activating the hamstrings and glutes without the pressure of impact. Stride tracing technology (smart console only) also monitors the user's stride throughout for stronger form, while contoured handles support proper upright posture.

Built without a belt, deck, cord or motor, the self-powered Zero Runner is also designed to eliminate the costs of treadmill operation, maintenance and service.

There are 11 different workout programmes, including interval training, and distance or calorie goals.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **OCTANE**

WATER-SAVING INNOVATION

A new shower system with technology inspired by jet engines, aerospace and automotive engineering is designed to halve water usage and costs for gym chains.

Kelda Technology's shower system, which launched to the gym industry at FIBO, uses a patented water-in-air technology that breaks water into droplets to form a spray. This is then accelerated using a jet-type nozzle.

The technology has been developed in partnership with the University of Southampton in the UK, and has been commercially trialled in a national gym chain in the UK. Designed to deliver a better shower than conventional ones, as well as to lower water costs and be environmentally friendly, the showers can be retrofitted to existing systems.



fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **KELDA**



FITNESS TAKES FLIGHT

Icaros is an award-winning innovation that delivers virtual reality workouts – it enables you to fly, dive and drive through virtual worlds and exercise at the same time.

The human-sized gyroscope-looking device is designed as a gaming machine with measurable physical training effects. Users can explore a simulated virtual world using virtual reality goggles, controlling their flight path via their movements on Icaros.

The device is designed so users can train different muscle groups – shoulders, chest, neck, triceps, lateral abdominal muscles, quads and calves – and improve their reflexes, balance and concentration.

Users can choose from different gaming scenarios: a relaxing free flight, a thrilling race, or the action-packed Battle Mode.

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD** ICAROS



A HATTRICK FOR PULSE

Pulse Fitness has added Versus and Trixter VR to its product portfolio, as well as new lines of weights.

Versus – a product for which Pulse has exclusive UK distributor rights – uses virtual trainer software and advanced motion tracking technology to track and score weights exercise against personal best scores or a fellow gym-goer. Form and motion are tracked and continual feedback is displayed. Users can also

challenge friends across social channels.

Trixter Virtual Reality is a fitness gaming bike that uses facial recognition to log user workouts. It gives a 360-degree virtual cycling experience around forests, mountain lakes and tropical islands, with real-time results and feedback. Existing Trixter bikes can be retrofitted with VR capability.

Pulse's new Strength line comprises 26 stations, while the new plate-loaded line includes 10 pieces of equipment, all with the same look and feel: black upholstery on a black frame.

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD** PULSE

HI-TECH PARTNERSHIP

Fitness software provider Virtuagym and NEO Health, a tech start-up from Amsterdam, have teamed up to deliver new products which were announced at FIBO.

Together they have created the One, a wearable activity monitor; and the Onyx, a body composition scale. Both products sync wirelessly via Bluetooth to Virtuagym at home or in the club, with the activity monitor tracking the number of steps taken, achieved percentages towards daily activity goals, sleep patterns and burned calories. The scale measures the body composition, including weight, BMI, body fat, muscle mass, bone mass and more.



fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD** VIRTUAGYM

INTRODUCING THE SKILLMILL

Technogym launched SkillMill, a non-motorised machine designed to improve sports performance, combining power, speed, stamina and agility training.

Using Technogym's multidrive technology, users can select different levels of reactive resistance. By shifting gear, it's possible to switch from resistance-free running to an all-out sled push – and with it increase the user's metabolic rate and maximise muscle activation.

Technogym says electromyography (EMG) studies by the Sports and Rehab Engineering Lab at the University of Padova, Italy, show there's a "significantly higher activation of the posterior chain, in particular glutes and hamstrings, compared to traditional treadmills".

Technogym also released Group Cycle Connect – a turnkey solution that creates a connected, interactive and immersive indoor cycling experience.

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD** TECHNOGYM



► MATRIX DRIVES FORWARD

Matrix Fitness has unveiled its latest innovation: the S-Drive Performance Trainer, which brings a new dimension to circuit training. The self-powered treadmill allows coaches to deliver intense sprinting and sled-pushing workouts while being able to stand alongside the user and provide immediate feedback.

The design also complements small group training circuits, by enabling sprint training, interval training and weighted sled resistance pushes to be completed in restricted spaces.

A parachute brake with 11 resistance levels simulates outdoor parachute resistance, while an adjustable harness allows for a complete range of upper body motions. The built-in seven-degree fixed incline helps build strength and explosiveness in sprinters, and no pre-set belt speeds mean users can match their workout to their personal needs and fitness goals.

A dedicated sled bar and sled brake with eight resistance settings mimics pushing 270lbs on natural turf.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **MATRIX**



CUSTOMISED INTERFACE

Precor showcased its new P82 console with MyUI – an Android and HTML-based system that allows health clubs to customise the whole walk-up screen with their own images, branding, videos and embedded offers.

Clubs can upload Android apps, and can also have their own entry on the menu, allowing members to click through to the club web page, class schedule and offers; this can be done on a club-by-club basis.

The system also offers extra-fast processing speeds; embedded wifi, Bluetooth and NFC technology; and automatic console software updates.

Precor also launched three new Spinner bikes: the Spinner RIDE, the Spinner SHIFT and the Spinner RALLY.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **PRECOR**



NEW TO THE CORE

Core Health & Fitness showcased a number of innovations at FIBO, including the Nautilus Inspiration Strength, three new Star Trac Studio Series bikes for indoor cycling, plus the new StairMaster Upper Body Ergometer.

The Studio Series bikes are designed to provide a high degree of adjustability to deliver the optimal bike fit for riders of all shapes and sizes, and are available in metallic charcoal or candy apple red.

The new StairMaster AirFit Upper Body Ergometer, and a redesigned StairMaster Gauntlet StepMill, are both high intensity products created to appeal to large format venues as well as boutique training.

Lastly, the Nautilus Inspiration Strength line is a US-made collection with modern aesthetics and uniform towers. The tower housing can now accommodate custom graphics and wraps, allowing facilities to personalise their equipment.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **CORE**



MAXIMISING SPACE

ZIVA Infinity Universal product range is a premium, commercial, modular functional storage system. The Infinity range also includes a new flooring configuration which, along with pre-set training stations, empowers the individual to be creative with their routines.

Corner-mounted modules are designed to allow for the smallest possible footprint and turn dead corner spaces into high-utility functional storage and exercise areas. There are also wall- and floor-mounted add-on storage extensions, with barbell, bumper, bag and ball storage racks.

The series also features a ladder system that includes interchangeable attachments to easily switch the type of exercise programming.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **ZIVA**



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► A MODULAR SYSTEM

New Italian equipment designer Outrace has launched a modular suspension and functional training solution.

The system is designed to fit any space and is customisable to the club's needs. Using premium design and materials for a luxury product, clients can decide the width, length and height of the structure.

The solution can be used for PT, circuit training, small and large group activity, and is compatible with other equipment for simultaneous use including TRX, AntiGravity Yoga, Trapezex, 4D Pro training and others.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **OUTRACE**



MOBILE ADD-ONS

Netpulse has added four new add-on features to its Netpulse Club Mobile App.

The new features allow health club operators to use their members' smartphones to attract new members and motivate existing ones. Using members' smartphone contacts, operators can send mobile referrals, provide digital guest passes, reward members to engage them with the club, and send impulse offers to members for things like available personal training sessions.

Mike Escobedo of Netpulse says: "Operators can now generate referrals through a device their members already love to use – their smartphones – and reward members for this behaviour."

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **NETPULSE**



SCORES ON THE DOORS

FitQuest revealed its new online portal that allows members, personal trainers and gym operators to track progress and share success on social media.

FitQuest measures five fitness tasks to give an overall FQScore and this score, as well as fitness data from FitQuest, is accessible by the user from anywhere – via desktop, tablet or smartphone.

The FQScore portal can be incorporated into an operator's website, allowing members to book classes, get club news and track their FQScore progress. Gyms can also create FQScore leaderboards to get members more engaged.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **FITQUEST**

INCLUSIVITY FROM KEISER

The Keiser Rehab M7WTBT is a low-impact body trainer machine that can be used with a wheelchair or standard chair. Designed for cardiac rehabilitation, senior living facilities and physical therapy programmes, it uses Keiser Magnetic Resistance for a smooth, natural movement.

Dependent upper and lower cranks enable passive assistance. The machine also features measurable parameters, such as METS, watts and distance.

It's designed to be easily transportable, with wheels on the base, and is small in footprint for busy gym floors.

The adjustable arms have a 12-inch range and there are wheelchair stabiliser straps on each side.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **KEISER**



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MARRISSA MUNDY, THE BRIDGE HOTEL AND SPA



WWW.PREMIER-CORE.COM/CASESTUDIES/BRIDGEHOTEL

Growing the massage market

The Massage Company has worked with CORE by Premier to launch its innovative massage membership model to the UK market

Launched this April, The Massage Company's driving philosophy is set to change the way the British public views massage treatments. The concept, successful in the US and new to the UK market, brings together the idea of massage treatments fitting into people's lives with ease of access for town centre workers and the surrounding population.

"If you look at the UK, only 8 per cent of people have regular massage treatments. We're looking to grow that number. In Europe, it's around 15 per cent and in the US it's 20 per cent," says Charlie Thompson, founder and operations director of The Massage Company.

The concept is to deliver high quality massage treatments through a very simple menu and membership system, similar to a gym. Members pay a fee of £44.95 a month to receive a monthly 50-minute massage, or £54.95 for a non-contract membership.



The Massage Company will sell £44.95 a month memberships for massages

ALLOCATING CREDITS

"We really needed a software provider that we were already familiar with, and that could meet our business needs without additional development," says Thompson. "We also needed a turnkey solution: database, online sign-ups for members, online functionality for booking – and we definitely wanted the marketing element and business insights, because we're looking to create a national brand."

He continues: "It was also crucial to find a software provider that could deliver our membership concept, whereby each direct debit sees a credit allocated to that customer for a treatment. As members don't have to use the credit that month, we also needed a system that would allow people to build up their credits. At the same time, it needed to offer flexibility to take additional payments from those wanting to include the add-ons and upgrades we offer."

"CORE by Premier works really effectively here, and its multi-property capabilities fit in with our plans to open the concept up to franchise opportunities."



In the UK, only 8 per cent of people have regular massage treatments. We're looking to grow that number" – Charlie Thompson



Thompson continues: "We use CORE's online sign-up and online booking systems. We've found that over 50 per cent of our massage bookings have been online since we launched. We can take bookings 24/7 – we've had night shift workers from the hospital booking in at 2.00am or 3.00am for a massage appointment."

The Massage Company was initially conceived to target women aged between 30 and 60 years, but in fact 40 per cent of its members are male. Thompson believes that men tend to be more comfortable booking their massage treatments in the digital space rather than face-to-face.

REPORTING CAPABILITIES

When discussing CORE by Premier's reporting capabilities, Thompson highlights several that offer crucial business insight. "We use the allocation analysis from a staffing perspective, as well as financial reports, client listing and, increasingly, staff reporting as we want to be able to give the team a breakdown of their performance."

Thompson sees The Massage Company as being a category disruptor: "If we can get this industry and customers in the UK more open to the idea of regular treatments, then the whole health, fitness and spa industry will improve. That's what we're looking to do."

www.premiersoftware.co.uk



"Since introducing the kiosks, we've eliminated all queuing in our facilities and seen a 9 per cent increase in usage, which leads us to believe we're now counting the number of people using our sites more accurately"

Keiron Butcher
IT and Communications Director
activeNewham



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Gladstone supports activeNewham's move to wholesale self-service



activeNewham has seen a 9 per cent increase in usage across its centres since installing self-service kiosks

London-based leisure trust activeNewham has collaborated with Gladstone Health and Leisure to dramatically change the way customers access its sites – including the new £20m Atherton Leisure Centre, which opened on 2 April with 2,750 pre-sold members.

activeNewham moved to Gladstone from another software supplier in 2013, after taking over the management of Newham Borough Council's leisure services from GLL. Since then, it has introduced a wide range of Gladstone products across its existing three leisure centres and one fitness centre, including but not limited to Plus2 membership management, Connect for online booking, the smartphone app MobilePro, Learn2 for course management, the business intelligence tool eyeQ and Business Process Manager for streamlining administrative tasks.

A SELF-SERVICE MODEL

In January of this year, the trust took the unusual step of replacing staffed reception desks at all its sites with an entirely self-service system using Gladstone Kiosks.

Keiron Butcher, activeNewham's IT and communications director, says the move was part of a wider efficiency project that has also seen activeNewham stop taking

cash payments: "Now, all customers are required not only to pay with debit or credit cards but also to 'self-serve' their way into our centres – although we do make sure that a member of staff known as a 'concierge' is on duty at all times to assist people where needed."

The process to install the kiosks was very simple and the trust has upgraded the software since with no problems, adds Butcher. To meet activeNewham's specific needs, Gladstone has also extended the cashless module within Plus2 to the kiosks. This means customers can now top up their cashless account at the kiosk using a single membership card, as well as online or via the trust's call centre. They can also use their membership card instead of a credit or debit card to pay for activities or services at the kiosk.

"It works in a similar way to Transport for London's Oyster Card system," explains Butcher, who adds that the development of this functionality was very straightforward and took only eight weeks.



"Since introducing the kiosks, we've eliminated queuing and have seen an 8 per cent increase in casual income since bringing in self-service – Keiron Butcher

MORE ACCURATE DATA

So far, activeNewham could not be happier with the results. "Since introducing the kiosks, we've eliminated all queuing in our facilities and seen a 9 per cent increase in usage, which leads us to believe we're now counting the number of people using our sites more accurately," says Butcher. "We've also seen an 8 per cent increase in casual income since bringing in self-service."

This all bodes well for the new Atherton Leisure Centre, which in addition to the full range of Gladstone products on offer at the other centres, has been equipped with four new kiosks and is a completely cashless site.

"The kiosks have been a crucial factor in the success of our efficiency project," concludes Butcher. "Generally speaking, this project amply demonstrates Gladstone's willingness to develop new software and expand its current systems to meet its customers' unique requirements, which is one of the reasons we value the company as a technology and software partner."

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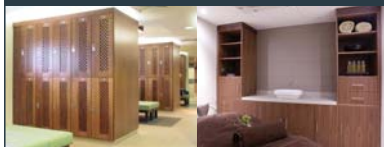
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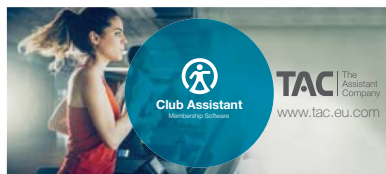
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Buddy up

Men who go to the gym with friends may enjoy unexpected health benefits, according to US scientists

It's well known that having a gym 'buddy' – someone to spot as you lift weights, or simply to socialise with as you work out – makes people more likely to stick to their exercise routines. However, the health benefits of men going to the gym together could be even wider-reaching, if findings from US research released in March* are anything to go by.

In a study of male rats, scientists at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, found that male friendships could provide positive health effects similar to those seen in romantic relationships – especially when dealing with stress.

Support through stress

Human studies show that social interactions increase the level of the hormone oxytocin in the brain, and that oxytocin helps people bond and socialise more, increasing their resilience in the face of stress and leading to longer, healthier lives. Studies of male-female rat pairs and other rodents, such as monogamous prairie voles, confirm these findings.

The UC Berkeley research extended these studies to male rats housed in the same cage. After a mild stress, the rats showed increased brain levels of oxytocin and its receptor, and huddled and touched more – the stress actually made male rats more social and co-operative than they would have been in an unstressed environment, in much the same way as humans come together after non-life-threatening events such as a national tragedy.

"A bromance can be a good thing," says lead author Elizabeth Kirby, who started work on the study while a doctoral student at UC Berkeley and continued it after taking a post-doctoral fellowship at Stanford. "Males are getting a bad rap



when you look at animal models of social interactions, because they are assumed to be instinctively aggressive. But even rats can have a good cuddle – essentially a male-male bromance – to help recover from a bad day. "These rats are using their rat friendships to recover from what would otherwise be a negative experience."

A cure for PTSD?

The research also has implications for post-traumatic stress disorder, says senior author

Daniela Kaufer, a UC Berkeley associate professor of integrative biology. The work supports attempts to treat PTSD with oxytocin nasal sprays as a way to encourage social interactions that could lead to recovery.

"We think oxytocin, which is released after stress, is a way of bringing people closer in times of acute stress, which leads to more sharing, bonding and potentially better fear extinction and an increase in cognitive health," says Sandra Muroy, a UC Berkeley graduate student. ●

PHOTO: WWW.SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

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* Kirby, E et al. Moderate Stress-Induced Social Bonding and Oxytocin Signaling are Disrupted by Predator Odor in Male Rats. *Neuropsychopharmacology*, March 2016

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