

health club management

JANUARY 2017

No 242

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*Source: Google Trends Jan-11 to Jan-16

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BATTLING ATTRITION

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NEW YEAR, NEW RESOLUTIONS

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ON THE WRONG TRACK?

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MARTIN & SCOTT SEIBOLD & BEST

Bringing Fitness First UK and DW Sports together
"not the coolest, nor the biggest, but the best" **p34**

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Partnering with the NHS

The NHS is opening the door to collaboration and inviting us to step through. It's now down to us to show how our sector's services, and not just physical activity in general, can be aligned with the public health agenda

“Why don't we just shift £100m from drug therapy to wellness therapy?” asked Sir Muir Gray at the recent ukactive Summit. When such a bold question is asked by someone like Gray – an eminent doctor, public health expert, creator of the NHS National Knowledge Service and chief knowledge officer for the Department of Health – it's clear a seat at the top table of public health is within reach of the UK's physical activity sector.

And Gray was firm in his commitment to this idea. “I'm involved in commissioning the NHS, NHS England CEO Simon Stevens is here this afternoon. Let's do it,” he urged.

While £100m might be a drop in the ocean in the context of the overall NHS budget, the sentiment behind Gray's comments drew loud applause from the crowd. And this wasn't the only cause for positivity at the Summit: when Stevens stood up to make his keynote, he was also strongly in support of physical activity. Speaking of a wonder drug that's effective against a wide range of mental and physical diseases, Stevens noted that, if available in pill form, it would “be a worldwide pharmaceutical blockbuster”. But, he clarified, the ‘drug’ is activity and exercise – “and it's why the NHS has a deep vested interest in the activity sector's success”.

He added: “The Academy of Royal Medical Colleges estimates that more than £18bn of headroom could be created in the NHS budget if we achieved serious improvements in physical activity across this country. That's £18bn that would be spent wisely on new and modern treatments for conditions that could not have otherwise been prevented.” Prevention, it seems, is finally

The public has some 300 million GP appointments each year, so ask your local surgery how you can partner with them to signpost patients into activity

claiming its rightful place alongside treatment on the NHS agenda – and this is a hugely exciting opportunity for our sector.

So how do we prove our worth as a preventative health partner? At the Summit, ukactive chair Tanni Grey-Thompson called for £1bn to be invested in UK leisure centres, to turn them into a “preventative frontline” that can move us “from a health system that treats illness to one that supports wellness”. This could be our sector's contribution to a sustainable NHS that empowers people to make healthy choices.



Gyms must track and reward all activity members do

But we shouldn't sit back and wait for this money to be made available. Individual operators also have a significant role to play in proving the contribution our sector can make, one project at a time – and Stevens' speech touched on several key areas of opportunity.

Firstly, embrace a broader definition of exercise. As Stevens said: “It's about going to the gym, but it's also about walking the dog, vacuuming, lawn mowing, swimming and dancing” – so let's track and reward all the activity our members do, anything that gets them moving more often, rather than focusing only on visits to our facilities.

Secondly, look at opportunities among new audiences: schools, corporates, commuters. What new services can you develop that will address the needs of these groups, and with it broaden your user base?

Thirdly, collaborate with GPs. Stevens highlighted a new *Lancet* study which found that simply adding a 30-second reminder about physical activity at the end of a GP consultation has a meaningful impact on health. Add to this the Royal College of General Practitioners' recent decision to make physical activity and lifestyle a clinical priority for GPs for the next three years, and it's clear the momentum is swinging our way. And it's a huge opportunity – the public has some 300 million GP appointments each year – so approach your local surgery and ask how you can partner with them to signpost patients into activity.

There's so much our sector can bring to the preventative health agenda. With the NHS now taking encouraging steps towards collaboration, it's time to put words into action and prove our worth.

Kate Cracknell
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January 2017



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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

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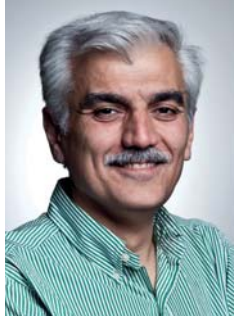
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Can activity trackers actually make you gain weight rather than lose it? Experts discuss



Patrik Schumacher, director of Zaha Hadid Architects, on how he plans to keep on innovating

Designing buildings that promote wellness is a growing trend, but it's not always straightforward

Across Asia, architects are creating landmark buildings for the public to exercise in



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Powerleague CEO Rupert Campbell on improving five-a-side football for the customer

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Baby boomers are a 'growth area' for fitness, with two-thirds not doing any moderate activity

Sports participation for women is on the rise – particularly in hockey, netball and gymnastics

Four Olympic sports have had their funding cut by elite sports funding body UK Sport



The Lanesborough hotel in London set to open new 18,000 sq ft exclusive spa

Supermodel Linda Evangelista becomes vice president and creative director for Erasa

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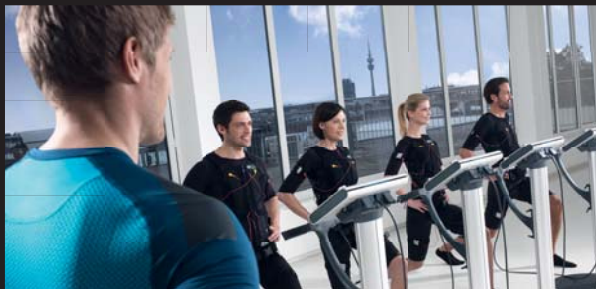
Atari founder Nolan Bushnell predicts computer brain implants in next decade

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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

Have the experts got obesity wrong?

A recent **UK government** report stated that "obesity is caused by an energy imbalance: taking in more energy through food than we use through activity". This is a gross simplification that leads to high rates of failure and despondency.

We should instead be asking: "what drives the obese to consume high calorie (especially sugary) foods and drinks?" and "what inhibits their inclination to be physically active?"

If an adult or child has central obesity, it is possible they have undiagnosed insulin resistance (IR) – a metabolic dysregulation that decreases people's ability to metabolise carbohydrates from any source. It limits their body to burning sugar for energy, which leads to fat storing and an inability to access stored fat.

By following typical healthy eating guidelines, these people will likely exceed their body's individual carbohydrate tolerance and be unable to deal with their IR – the precedent of almost all obesity. An energy-reduced diet and/or added exercise will simply make them hungrier, and hunger is the enemy of weight loss.

The solution? Offer a coaching programme that helps them determine their body's individual carbohydrate tolerance and, based on this, provide a list of foods they'll like and can tolerate. They'll lose weight without hunger – and at that point, many will want to start exercising.

The common belief is that exercise leads to weight loss.

In fact, the opposite is true: weight loss leads to exercise. Help people with obesity to lose weight and they'll become more interested in exercise.



Jamie Hayes
CEO TRIBE Team Training – Asia Pacific



The new model may disadvantage young workers

Monopolisation is detrimental

The **Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)** recently published its Post-16 Skills Plan, drawing on recommendations from the independent panel headed up by Lord Sainsbury.

The plan, which is aimed at reforming the 'overly-complex' skills system in England, proposes that just one awarding body should be licensed to deliver all qualifications within the 15 new technical routes.

At YMCA Awards, we believe that having one single body with full control over cost and quality would be detrimental to the leisure sector. Not only could it present a single line of failure if that one body fails to deliver, such monopolisation would also diminish the drive to compete and improve – stifling research and innovation, and potentially holding back the development of new delivery and assessment strategies.

Not only that, Lord Sainsbury's model could also threaten niche and non-profit award organisations, such as trade or professional bodies. With the proposed technical routes covering less than half of occupations, this would mean a sizeable portion of the labour market isn't catered for – making it even more difficult than it already is for young people to secure employment.

Given, however, that we are a charitable organisation and have evolved over the last 175 years, we do need to be open to reforms. We are willing to help implement these changes, but only in a way that ensures the best outcome for our young people. In

order to do that, we need the government to listen to the needs of the leisure sector and to be willing to work with us – not against us.



Rob May
Director, YMCA Awards

PEOPLE



This industry can end the obesity epidemic
and prevent any number of health conditions
– there is no better industry to be in



FLORIAN CARTOUX

DIRECTOR, IHRSA EUROPE

What's your background?

For the last 15 years, I've worked in Brussels helping different industry associations – including some in the sports field – to grow their memberships. My previous experience was in the sports betting industry, which gave me the opportunity to connect with the sports world.

What attracted you to the role of director for IHRSA Europe?

I have always had a personal connection with sport. Having been diagnosed with diabetes at a young age, practising sport, keeping fit and trying to eat healthily have always been important aspects of my life.

I was particularly attracted by IHRSA's mission to help health and fitness clubs become a primary solution to the obesity epidemic in Europe and across the globe.

IHRSA opened a European office in January 2016 – what has it achieved in its first year?

We now have a team of four people in Brussels. We've worked on developing and promoting the 2016 European Congress in Seville last October, as well as going out to existing members to understand how IHRSA Europe can serve them best.

What are IHRSA Europe's plans going forward?

First, we'll ensure continuity of services and content to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to Europe.

We'll then go a step further and improve the value proposition we present to current and new members, by working more closely with our network of partners, ambassadors and

national federations. The specificities and expectations of each market in Europe are different, and we want to better understand their challenges – as well as how we, as a global organisation, can help.

How does IHRSA believe it can complement the work of existing industry bodies?

There is a demand for IHRSA in Europe. We have 1,300 members across Europe, and it's our role to provide them with the content and services they need to grow their membership and manage their clubs. Our events, research and educational materials form part of that.

We're happy to collaborate with EuropeActive and other organisations when it's in the interests of our members. We hope this will be the case in 2017.

What do you see as the greatest opportunities for the health and fitness sector?

Our industry offers what the world needs to end the obesity epidemic and manage and prevent any number of conditions that adversely affect health. There's no better industry to be in.

We also need to embrace the digital revolution. It's often seen as a challenge, as the growth of digital and the proliferation of apps mean a customer's journey is no longer limited to the four walls of a health club – but the fitness industry should look at this as an opportunity. For this reason, IHRSA is creating an advisory council on technology and innovation, to ensure IHRSA members have the necessary information and resources to capitalise on innovation and technology trends.





Cartoux says clubs must embrace the digital revolution



People can use any kit – they can even do the cycling leg of the triathlon on a tandem bike!



MICHAEL BURKERT

INTOTRI

► What is INTOTRI?

By offering free entry-level triathlons, INTOTRI has ambitions to do for triathlon what parkrun has done for running. Similar to parkrun, we schedule events at the same time and same place each month, harness volunteer support, make them free to enter and offer a welcoming environment.

Distances are set to be achievable, but still a challenge. The super sprint distance is a 400m swim, 10k bike ride and 2.5k run. There's also a junior distance (200m, 4k, 2.5k) and, for those who want to progress, a sprint distance (400m, 20k, 5k).

Why did you launch it?

Despite triathlon being a friendly and fast-growing sport – and one many health club operators are embracing, supporting members to prepare for the events – there are a few barriers to participation: the swim, especially if it's open water; the idea of getting on a bike wet, having the right gear and expensive entry fees.

We've removed the barriers. Participants can stop and rest in the swim, and can even walk if they want to. The first transition isn't included in the overall time either, so people can go to the changing room and change after the swim, which means they don't have to wear a trisuit.

In fact, they can use any kit – they can even do the cycling leg of the triathlon on a tandem bike if they wish! – and there are no cut-off times.

INTOTRI is removing the barriers to triathlon participation by offering events for free



Burkert has ambitions to take INTOTRI into schools

How can health club operators engage?

We're looking for partners so we can run more events. We need access to a pool (usually between 7.00am and 8.00am on race day), safe bike and run routes, and buy-in from operators. We take care of everything else: the insurance, risk assessments, child protection policy, the route, marshalls and marketing.

Who is the core target market?

People coming back into sport after a few years, or who are confident in one discipline but not all three. Once people are inspired by triathlon, they might then take out a swim membership at a club, or have swimming lessons, or join the gym to work on strength training for the bike and the run.

What are your plans going forward?

Our first site, Elmbridge Xcel Leisure Centre at Walton-on-Thames in Surrey, has hosted 11 events so far and is going from strength to strength. More sites are set to come on-stream as well: Redcar and Cleveland Leisure Centre will go live in April, as well as a site in south Manchester which we're just finalising, and discussions are underway with other centres. Taking the concept into schools is also an ambition.





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Businesses that use design as an element of their culture do 200–300 per cent more business than companies that just sell a product



RUDY FABIANO

FABIANO DESIGNS

► Tell us about your company

Our New York-based agency has been working in the health and fitness industry for 25 years, designing health clubs including NuYu in Saudi Arabia and BFX in the US.

What's your design style?

I've never really thought about us having a style. Rather, we have a process to understand clients' needs. However, we do like to have fun with our designs and we don't shy away from using different shapes, materials, colours or lighting.

The main thing at Fabiano Designs is that we're intent on creating places where people feel entertained, inspired and looked after. As soon as they come in, we want them to feel interested and wanting to see more.

What's the secret to creating an inspiring health club environment?

It's all about creating a space that's unique to your brand, and that has a consistent design message.

Some health clubs can achieve a big impact, without requiring a huge budget, by adopting a raw look and feel in their interior design. Others, like £300-a-month country clubs, use superb materials and lighting to get the same kind of impact.

Generally, it's important to use lighting well and to have enough space for users to feel comfortable.



How does good design benefit a club?

Design can do two things: seduce people into buying a membership, and improve retention by enhancing their experience while they're at the club.

We're continually trying to educate clients that good design really does matter. Studies have shown that businesses which use design as an element of their culture – such as Virgin or Apple – do 200–300 per cent more business than companies that simply sell a product to the consumer.

Health clubs are no different. People visit a few times a week and they want it to be enjoyable.

What are the most common design mistakes made by health clubs?

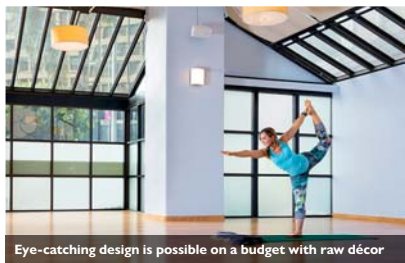
Not working with a design professional is, in my opinion, short-changing the product. The most common mistake is that the owner will think they know enough about fitness to design their

health club. They tend to think it's all about the equipment – but that's a tool to achieve success, not the only experience members are there for.

Aspects such as privacy in the changing rooms, socialisation and lighting need to

be carefully considered. Beyond bad aesthetics, other common mistakes include bad acoustics and lighting, and using materials that really don't hold up to the high usage levels of a health club.

However, this is one of the cleanest industries, it produces little waste and does a lot of good within society as a whole, so fitness operators should be proud of that. It's a very fulfilling industry in which to work. ●



Eye-catching design is possible on a budget with raw décor

A photograph of three people in a gym setting. On the left, a man in a blue t-shirt smiles. In the center, a woman in a white tank top holds a black water bottle with 'MATRIX' on it and a black resistance band. On the right, another man is partially visible, looking towards the woman. A large black punching bag is in the background.

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Move Smart: Personalising fitness in Malta

Move Smart, a new gym concept in Malta based around high levels of personalisation and customer care, is gearing up for an official launch in January.

Located in the town of Kalkara in the south of the island, the new club is the brainchild of owner Xandru Grech, who set out to create a high quality, high value offering. "I wanted to create an offering that was very much tailored to the individual, so everyone gets a bespoke programme," he said.

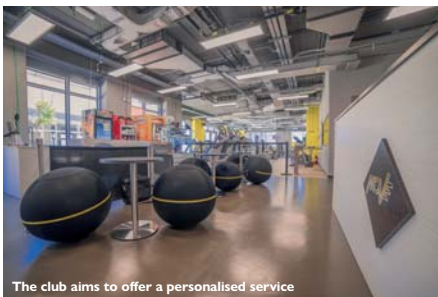
"Many operators assume consumers know exactly what their goals are when they come into a club. That isn't true. In fact, you have to work with them to understand exactly what they want to achieve.

"We do that and then follow up by designing a personalised programme for them based around these goals – and we make sure there's an element of fun to keep them engaged."

The club sits within the SmartCity technology park, which is being developed by the same company that created Dubai's SmartCity. The goal: the regeneration of the area. As a local, Grech is keen to play his part in this, and he approached SmartCity to come on board as one of the businesses in the new development.

"The south of Malta is beautiful and has been Malta's Cinderella for way too long," says Grech. "This is the second Move club in Malta, but the first in the south and definitely not the last on the island."

He continued: "In line with the objectives of the regeneration scheme, I wanted our project to deliver social benefits, so we've made it very affordable: it costs €275 a year for gym access, while €49 a month gives you everything – functional training and use of the milon circuit, as well as the gym."



The club aims to offer a personalised service

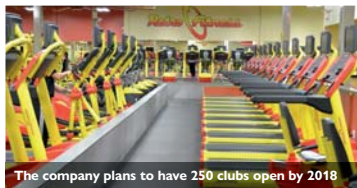
Alongside milon, other suppliers include Pulse, Technogym, MYZONE, Precor and Life Fitness, with Rephouse flooring. Many of the interior design finishes were put in place by AD Consulting.

The club measures 480sq m and there's also a large outdoor space for additional

activities – such as classes, bootcamps and running groups.

Already used by a number of corporate clients following a soft launch, the finishing touches are now being put to the club – including a juice bar – in time for its doors to be opened to the public.

http://lei.sr?o=u4w7f_H



The company plans to have 250 clubs open by 2018

Retro Fitness to open 100 clubs over next two years

US-based budget health club operator Retro Fitness plans to add 100 new franchised sites to its portfolio over the next two years.

The group, which currently operates 150 clubs across 16 states in the US, added nearly 20 new clubs in 2016 with a further 20 franchise deals secured for future openings.

Announcing a target of 250 locations by the end of 2018, Retro Fitness founder and CEO Eric Casaburi said the company had been successful in attracting a "wide group of franchise prospects" and is increasingly attracting multi-unit franchisees.

He added that in the past 18 months alone, 15 separate groups of multi-unit franchise owners have joined the franchise.

"Our diverse group of franchisees is a big part of what makes Retro Fitness so successful," Casaburi said.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=Z6c2E_H

SoulCycle in Canada

US-based boutique cycling studio operator SoulCycle will launch its first international site in Toronto, Canada this year.

Due to open in March, the Toronto site is set to be the first of a number of studios in Canada, as the company plots its expansion north of the US border.

SoulCycle currently operates 67 locations in the US, with four more set to open by June 2017.

Last year, the rapidly expanding group announced its plans to float on the stock

market, outlining a fundraising target of US\$100m (€91m, £64m) to fuel its growth.

Founded in 2006 by former real estate broker Elizabeth Cutler and former talent agent Julie Rice, SoulCycle has gained a cult following in the US, enhanced by celebrity fans such as David Beckham and Tom Cruise.

The SoulCycle model is based on a premium offer and riders pay around US\$34 (€32, £27) for each class, with no option for monthly passes. Details: http://lei.sr?o=pgp8t_H

The Toronto studio will be the first of many in Canada



Equinox launches first club on Canada's west coast

US-based health club

operator Equinox has opened a new site in Vancouver, Canada – its first on the country's west coast.

Designed to echo "Pacific Northwest sensibilities", Equinox Vancouver's 33,000sq ft (3,065sq m) interior boasts bleached walnut woods, concrete floors and reflective metallics, with the aim of "juxtaposing manmade and natural materials".

The main fitness space houses a large gym floor and six exercise studios, which will offer a range of classes from yoga, cycling and barre to pilates and boxing.

Above the ground floor there are separate cv and fitness floors, where members can work out on their own or with one of Equinox's personal trainers.

There are also plans to launch specialty exercise classes at the club – such as Precision Running, a treadmill class



The club has been designed to echo local sensibilities

created by celebrity trainer David Siik, designed to 'strike balance between aerobic and anaerobic interval training'.

Other classes include The Pursuit, a competitive cycling class that converts data from members' consoles into real-time virtual games and visual projections; Ropes and Rowers, a calorie-torching

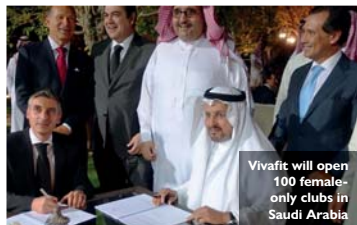
cardio workout that mixes water rowers and battle ropes; and True Barre, a combination of Pilates-based core work with ballet movements and isometric contractions.

"Vancouver is a world-class city full of driven entrepreneurs, artists, families, and thought leaders who embrace a high performance

lifestyle," said Harvey Spevak, CEO of Equinox.

"In a city that already has the appetite for a holistic approach to fitness, our offerings will enrich it even further."

The Vancouver club is Equinox's second in Canada – the other is in Toronto – and its 84th property globally.
http://lei.sr?o=YgN8J_H



Vivafit signs Saudi deal

Portuguese fitness chain Vivafit has secured a deal to open 100 women-only health clubs in Saudi Arabia.

The franchise operator has signed a contract with Saudi investment bank Ithraa Capital to fund the new sites, which will see the first 10 clubs launch in the capital city Riyadh in 2017.

A new company has been set up to operate the clubs – called Vivafit Saudi Arabia – which will be owned jointly by Ithraa (90 per cent) and Vivafit (10 per cent). Exact details of club facilities are to be confirmed, but the first 10 clubs will all offer Electric Muscle Stimulation (EMS) personal training sessions.

Vivafit has been active in expanding its offering to developing markets in recent years. It has opened multiple sites across India, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Oman.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=t3MzN_H

LA Fitness in Memphis

US-based health club

operator LA Fitness has opened a new 45,000sq ft (4,200sq m) flagship club in Memphis, Tennessee.

Facilities at the US\$5.7m (£5.1m, £4.6m) club include large cv training areas, a group exercise studio, separate indoor cycling studio and a free weights and strength equipment zone. There is also an indoor lap pool and a convenient creche.

The club has been built on the site of a former 24 Hour Fitness facility. Located within a mixed-use retail park in East

Memphis, the site is the first of three new LA Fitness clubs planned for the city.

In March, the California-based group secured planning permission from the City of Memphis Planning & Development Commission for a 63,435sq ft club in the city's Bartlett district.

It has also announced plans for a US\$4.5m club in the Cordova area of Memphis.

The three new openings will bring the number of LA Fitness clubs in the city to five.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=zzk7j_H



£1bn leisure centre fund would “save the NHS”

The future of the National Health Service (NHS) could be secured by investing £1bn in the UK's ageing fleet of leisure centres – and turn them into a new “preventative frontline” against lifestyle diseases.

That's the message from ukactive chair, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, who wants the healthcare sector to adjust its focus from treating illnesses to promoting wellness.

The 11-time Paralympic champion has called for the government to implement a new strategy that would leverage cross-sector funding to transform a number of 1970s-era leisure centres into community wellness hubs.

Grey-Thompson said the hubs – which would combine

swimming pools, gyms and sports halls with GP drop-in centres, libraries and police services – would create a network of “one-stop-shops for public services” and empower the public to take greater responsibility for leading a healthy lifestyle.

She added that having physical activity and health services located under one roof would: make it easier for GPs to prescribe exercise plans for patients battling lifestyle conditions; signpost them to wellness professionals; and ease the pressure on hospitals.

Grey-Thompson's plan to renew the UK's leisure stock forms part of a new report from ukactive, called *Blueprint for an Active Britain: Milestone*



Grey-Thompson wants GPs and leisure “under one roof”

Review, which highlights how the NHS is under growing pressure to plug a £22bn funding gap by 2020.

The move would also help redevelopment the 2,000 ageing leisure centres currently in need of renewal, leading to net

savings of up to £500m per year in operating costs alone.

Costing £10-15m, the wellness hubs could be strategically placed in order to absorb the capacity of up to three outdated facilities.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=Bzp3m_H

WeTRAIN seeks £600,000 through crowdfunding

Fitness company WeTRAIN is looking to raise £600,000 through a crowdfunding campaign, as it plans to expand its business by launching WeEXPERIENCE.

The new concept will look to bring socialising and exercising together, and cater for what it calls “the brunching generation”.

Users will be able to book a range of experiences, such as being trained by athletes and experts before joining them for drinks or a meal. Taster sessions running in November

include a kickboxing masterclass with Ruqsana Begum, followed by a superfood breakfast hosted by the world champion kickboxer herself.

Adrian Mooney, WeTRAIN's CEO, said: “Our mission is to help people ‘exercise their social life’ and change the way people work out. WeTRAIN has huge potential within the £62bn global fitness sector. By creating a credible alternative to other social activities, we tap into the leisure market.”
Details: http://lei.sr?o=F2Ug_A_H



The “new PE” is based on making physical activity fun

Virgin Active creates ‘new way to teach PE’

A new approach to physical education (PE), based on physical literacy and “fun fitness”, could transform school sport and help all children embrace physical activity – according to its creators.

Developed jointly by health club operator Virgin Active and the University of Bedfordshire, the Playmakers programme is the result of a one-year pilot initiative involving 30 primary schools and 7,500 pupils.

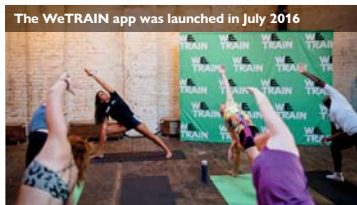
Rather than focusing on traditional aspects of PE, the Playmakers pilot used teaching

methods which encouraged pupils to “harness their imagination” and focused on teaching children fundamental movement skills.

The Playmakers sessions included getting children to design their own activities, such as dances based on animal movements and adventure circuits where they tackle obstacles while in character.

The results showed that the Playmakers approach was more effective in getting children active than traditional PE.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=E6f9Q_H



The WeTRAIN app was launched in July 2016

Barrecore appoints new CEO and plans UK expansion

Boutique fitness studio operator Barrecore is looking to expand "rapidly across the UK and Europe" after securing private investment funding from venture capital firm Octopus Investments.

The company currently operates nine studios in the UK – located in London, Manchester, Bristol and Leeds – and its growth has been helped by celebrity endorsements from the likes of Pippa Middleton and dancer Darcey Bussell.

Barrecore is looking to benefit from the increased demand for high-end, studio-based fitness offerings.

According to the latest figures from the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), there has been an increase of 200

per cent in boutique studio openings in the last two years.

Rebecca Hunt, Octopus Investments, said: "The growth in boutique fitness has come to Europe and Barrecore is uniquely positioned as the market leader to capitalise on this fast-growing trend."

To drive the expansion push, Barrecore has appointed Peter Woods as its new CEO.

Woods has over 20 years' experience in the health and wellness industry, having previously held senior roles at David Lloyd Leisure, Aspria, Holmes Place and Skin Clinics. As part of the shuffle, founder Niki Rein moves to the role of creative director and remains on the board of directors.

Sunaina Sinha, Barrecore chair, said: "The investment from Octopus will enable us



Peter Woods has been named Barrecore's new CEO

to expand rapidly throughout the UK and in Europe. Peter, as the new CEO, brings a wealth of experience in scaling fast-growing businesses."

Barrecore classes integrate high-intensity, low-impact movements designed to achieve "fast change in the body."

Details: http://lei.sr?o=G4Eze_H

The tax will target the producers of sugar-rich soft drinks



Sugar tax to fund activity

The UK government has published draft legislation for its planned sugar tax on soft drinks, with revenue from the levy being used in programmes to reduce obesity and encourage physical activity – especially among the young.

The UK government tax, which is expected to come into force in April 2018, is predicted to raise £520m in the first year.

The document says: "Across England the government will invest the revenue during this parliament in giving school-aged children a brighter and healthier future, including programmes to reduce obesity and encourage physical activity."

The estimated indirect cost to the UK economy from obesity is between £27bn and £46bn. The direct cost to the NHS includes £6.1bn a year on overweight and obesity-related ill health and £8.8bn for type 2 diabetes.

The publication of the document comes as the city of Bristol is considering implementing its own local sugar tax.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=M9r7z_H

Surgery 'ban' on the obese

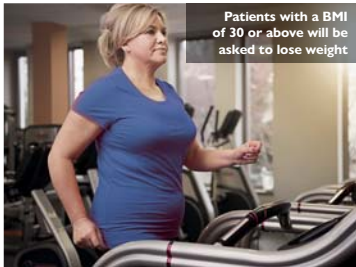
An NHS body has told obese patients to lose weight or face delays in having non-emergency surgery, arguing that eating healthily and exercising can make a 'real difference' to the results of operations. Patients who have a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or above will have to either lose weight or wait 12 months before having elective surgery. They will have to reduce their BMI to less than 30 or lose 10 per cent of their body weight.

New criteria also relate to smokers, who will have to quit two months before surgery or wait six months for their procedure.

The new rules will be introduced in January by NHS Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in North Yorkshire.

Local patients who need to lose weight or quit smoking will receive help and support information from CCG.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=A2H9w_H



Patients with a BMI of 30 or above will be asked to lose weight

Anthony Joshua opens his boutique boxing gym

London's first boutique, boxing-themed gym is set to open this month (January) – with backing from Anthony Joshua MBE, the International Boxing Federation heavyweight world champion.

BXR will be a members-only fitness facility, offering the highest level of professional boxing training.

The Marylebone site has a 6-metre-high triple glass frontage and spans 12,000 sq ft across ground and lower ground floors. The gym will have a full-size Ringcard boxing ring and the operation will be kitted out with the latest Keiser, Technogym, Wattbike, Hammer Strength and Eleiko equipment.

A limited number of invitation-only lifetime memberships will be available and memberships will start at £1,500 per annum.

Joining Joshua on the BXR founding committee are DJ and music producer Mark Ronson, English boxing promoter Eddie Hearn, businessman Andre Balazs and Victoria Secret models Sara Sampaio and Maryna Linchuk.

Joshua, who is an investing partner in the business, has helped establish a team of elite trainers, including boxing coaches, ex-champion boxers, mixed martial arts fighters and top sports therapists and osteopaths.

The line-up includes Jamie Reynolds – Joshua's head strength and conditioning coach – and Dr Mike Loosemore of the Centre for Human and Health Performance. BXR will be offering members the same level of advice and consultation that a professional athlete receives. Members will be able to measure and track their

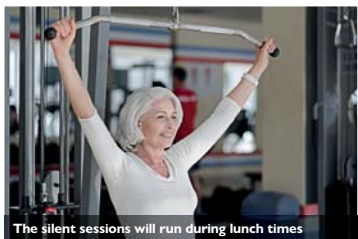


Joshua is personally backing the new BXR gym

progress using a smartphone app, camera feeds and other analytic tools powered by RNF Digital. The gym will also boast an in-house clinic, consisting of three treatment rooms.

Joshua said: "BXR is a passion project for me. I want people to train like I train. We have pulled together the best coaches, medical teams and equipment in the business and brought the ring to Chiltern Street for anyone who wants to join."

Details: http://lei.sr?a=q2p5n_H



The silent sessions will run during lunch times

Gym trials quiet sessions to create 'peaceful spaces'

A UK leisure centre gym will begin offering "silent sessions" following requests from members who want to work out in a quiet and peaceful environment.

Leisure trust 1610 will introduce the Music Free Moves (MFM) sessions at Trinity Sports and Leisure in Bridgwater, Somerset, a centre that it operates on behalf of Sedgemoor Council.

The MFM sessions are scheduled to run at

lunchtimes and will cater for a number of groups – including older people who have impaired hearing and people on the autistic spectrum, who are sensitive to loud noise and have difficulty processing sensory information.

Customers will still be able to listen to their own music on headphones while working out, but the gym floor at the leisure centre will be kept quiet and music-free.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=x6W5X_H

PPL secures 30-year deal for southern England sites

Test Valley Borough Council has appointed Places for People (PPL) to manage its leisure centres on a 30-year contract starting on 1 April 2017.

The deal will include "significant investment" in improving the borough's leisure facilities – including replacing the ageing Andover Leisure Centre with a brand new facility.

There will also be a number of improvements to four other centres – Romsey Rapids, Romsey Sports Centre, Knightwood Leisure Centre and Charlton Lakeside Pavilion.

The new Andover Leisure Centre will feature a 25m six-lane swimming pool with 15m learner pool, 165-station fitness suite, virtual cycling studio, dance studios, an eight court sports hall, squash courts, adventure play and café.

PPL will build the new Andover Leisure Centre with the help of its construction partners Pellikaan Construction and architects Roberts Limbrick.

Details: http://lei.sr?a=r737gh_H



The deal includes a new leisure centre for Andover

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CORE HEALTH & FITNESS

Wexer acquires ClubVirtual

Fitness technology firm
Wexer has bought Dutch-based company ClubVirtual for an undisclosed fee.

According to Wexer the deal gives the company the largest market share in the virtual fitness market. The company already had virtual installations in more than 40 countries, but is now seeking further opportunities in the Asian market with the acquisition.

ClubVirtual will continue to produce virtual fitness content under its brand and will be overseen by the majority of its existing leadership team.

However, the firm's commercial director Robert Louw will join Wexer as head of business development.

Announcing the deal, Paul Bowman, Wexer CEO, said: "Over the past eight years, we

have been able to secure a very strong market position across all continents, predominantly by helping operators transform dead studio space into active space through the use of virtual classes.

"Now, we're additionally helping clubs expand outside their four walls through streaming and mobile technology. This acquisition will allow us to help more clubs engage their members."

The fitness industry is undergoing a period of intense change as the sector embraces technology. Through strategic partnerships as well as developing products and services, both Wexer and ClubVirtual have helped fitness providers operate more effectively in this technology-centric market.



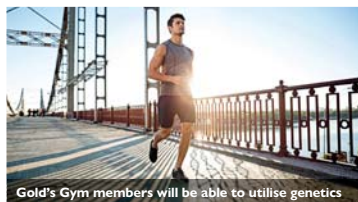
Wexer opened its London HQ in May 2016

Laurens de Kock, ClubVirtual CEO, said: "The thinking of our two companies is aligned and becoming part of Wexer is a great next step for us and an incredible opportunity for our clients. We'll continue to support operators in their endeavours to be of value to their members 24/7 through the effective use of

technology, and are excited to lead the transformation of our industry."

First launched as an 'online health club' in 2008, Wexer offers health clubs and other fitness facilities virtual group exercise and cycling studios. It opened its UK headquarters in London in May.

Details: <http://lei.sr?o=1WtP7>



Gold's Gym members will be able to utilise genetics

Gold's Gym Egypt enters partnership with DNAFit

UK-based DNA profiling
company DNAFit will start offering its services to members of the Gold's Gym health club chain in Egypt.

The partnership deal, signed in November 2016, will allow members to plan out their individual fitness goals, not only based on expert advice by Gold's Gym staff, but with the guidance of their individual genetic make up.

Personalised reports will explain details such as members' response to power or endurance exercise, food

sensitivities, and recovery time. Each member will also be given training in order for them to read and understand the reports.

Mohamed Nassif, chair of Gold's Gym Egypt said: "We've been the leader in the fitness industry in Egypt for the last 20 years and we recognise that these new types of technologies are absolutely fundamental to securing the ongoing expertise needed in order for us to provide the best services to our staff and our members."

Details: http://lei.sr?o=R9jq4q_H

BA to introduce 'wellness sensor' for passengers

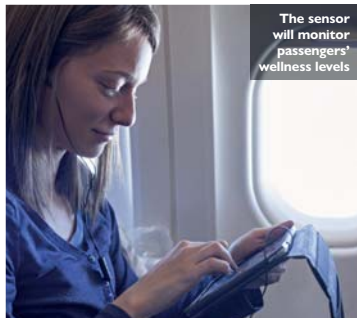
UK's flagship carrier British Airways (BA) is developing an ingestible "wellness pill," which would allow the airline to monitor passengers' health information during flights.

The company has filed a patent application for a sensor that would be able to measure a number of indicators, including stomach acidity levels, body temperature, sleep phase and heart rate.

Collecting the data would allow the airline to assess the passenger's 'wellness levels' and adjust the services it offers accordingly – such as changing in-flight meals, managing sleep times and suggesting appropriate in-flight entertainment.

"The sensor inputs provide information on the physiological state of the passenger and environmental conditions in the vicinity of the passenger," the patent application states. "A dynamic event schedule is then generated based on the data."

Details: http://lei.sr?o=y8hgZ_H



The sensor will monitor passengers' wellness levels



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A black and white photograph of a person performing a deadlift. The person is wearing a tank top and shorts, and is lifting a barbell with large weights. The background is dark and out of focus.

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Supplier and training news

Fitness workforce “ill-equipped” to handle changes

The UK's fitness workforce is “ill-equipped” to deal with the needs and requirements of a modern-day, diverse customer base – according to an industry report published today.

The *Raising the Bar 2016* report, compiled by Future Fit Training in partnership with ukactive and CIMSPA, charts the results of a survey which set out to identify the ability of fitness employers and their employees to deliver a service in a market that increasingly includes special populations. The results show that a huge majority (88 per cent) of the sector's employers believe personal training staff are not adequately educated to engage with special populations – such as children, older adults, pre and post-natal women, diabetics and overweight clients.

Published in November, the report states: “The survey clearly shows that the industry's personal training qualification standards need to improve in a meaningful way to meet the shift in expectation and demand from today's changing customer base.

“No longer is the industry simply working with healthy people looking to get fit. Today's trainers are increasingly asked to work with special populations and children and tasked to help deliver on NHS, government and Sport England policies.”

Details: http://lei.sr?o=x7yz_H



PTs need more education in training different groups

SUPfit partners with Active IQ to develop qualification

SUPfit has teamed up with Active IQ to develop a nationally-recognised bespoke qualification for those wanting to use stand up paddle boarding (SUP) to develop their fitness.

The new instructor package combines SUP, yoga and fitness to give participants the skills they need to teach three of SUPfit's classes: SUP and Run, SUP Circuits and SUP Stretch and Strengthen.

SUPfit offers classes, workshops and retreats in SUP Fitness and SUP Yoga, as well as training courses. Its founder, Lucy McCormick, says there is a growing demand for SUP fitness instructors.

SUP Yoga and SUP Fitness courses have been available as additional CPD courses for three years and are very popular. Due to their popularity McCormick decided to formalise her training and work with an awarding body to develop a recognised qualification specifically for water sports and activity centres.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=n8U6X_H



ActiveLab will look to identify future fitness trends

ukactive chooses first 12 ‘disruptors’ for ActiveLab

The first 12 physical activity disruptors to benefit from the ActiveLab startup mentoring scheme have been named.

Set up by not-for-profit health body ukactive, ActiveLab aims to help develop and support innovative health solutions designed to tackle the UK's ‘inactivity epidemic’ which is estimated to cost the NHS around £20bn every year.

The 12-week programme will look to accelerate startups and help them develop their inactivity-busting products and services further.

Among those chosen for the programme are VRGO Chair, a virtual reality chair to get computer gamers active; Stepjockey, a wireless circuit that inspires movement in the workplace; and Shapelog, described as a ‘Fitbit for strength training’.

Over the course of the ActiveLab programme, the chosen 12 companies will receive a series of networking opportunities with investors and leading physical activity firms, as well as tailored mentorship and expert workshops on scaling a business.

Details: http://lei.sr?o=v7k7W_H



Paddle board courses have become very popular

Bode to lead Planet Fitness' franchise operations



Bill Bode joins Planet Fitness from Dunkin' Brands

US-based fitness operator

Planet Fitness has named Bill Bode as its new vice president of franchise operations.

In his new role, Bode will oversee operational performance and ongoing franchisee support.

He joins Planet Fitness from global restaurant franchisor Dunkin' Brands, where he held various senior leadership positions.

"Bill's extensive experience in brand building will be extremely valuable as we continue our strategic expansion across the US and beyond," said Chris Rondeau, CEO of Planet Fitness.

"Supporting our franchise partners and providing an exceptional member experience in our stores is

paramount. Bill's leadership and deep understanding of franchise operations make him a strong addition to the company, and I am thrilled to welcome him to our leadership team."

Last month, Planet Fitness reported a 10 per cent increase in like-for-like sales during the third quarter of 2016, mirroring a steady strengthening of the US economy and the return of consumer confidence.

During the quarter, Planet Fitness opened 37 new franchised clubs, increasing the number of sites in its portfolio to 1,242. The company now has 8.7 million members across the US, Canada and the Dominican Republic.

Details: http://lei.sr7a=c8eqZ_H

The Gym Group names new operations director

Budget health club operator

The Gym Group has appointed Nick Henwood to the newly-created role of operations director.

Henwood will be tasked with overseeing 200 operational management employees, 1,100 self-employed personal trainers and a number of third party service-related businesses – as well as being responsible for the delivery of sales, retention targets and yield management for all 82 locations.

He has also been made part of The Gym Group's executive committee and will be involved in decision making regarding the strategic direction of the business

and the selection of new gyms which are key to the company's growth plan.

Henwood joins from David Lloyd Leisure, where he was UK and European operations director. Prior to working in the fitness sector, he held senior operational positions at Autoglass, Mothercare, Sainsbury's and M&S.

"I'm looking forward to driving the continued growth of the company," said

Henwood. "I want to ensure we deliver

a great value, member-focused product and build on the outstanding company culture that CEO John Trehan has created since he founded the business back in 2007."

Details: http://lei.sr7a=8u6A3_H



Henwood joins the company from DLL

Thomas Ott to lead Miha Bodytec expansion to UK

Germany-based EMS equipment specialist Miha Bodytec is focusing on expanding its reach to the UK with the opening of a new branch office in central London.

The company's UK operations will be run under a wholly-owned subsidiary.

As part of the expansion, the company has appointed athletics coach Thomas Ott to lead the new UK office.

Miha Bodytec's managing director, Jürgen Decker, said the launch of a branch office in the UK is a logical step.

"Along with the rapid growth of EMS in Germany, we observe a growing international demand," Decker said.

"The UK is one of the most important European fitness markets. Thus, as a world market leader, our own presence here is overdue. This allows us to offer the fastest delivery possible along with the same high-quality support as in Germany."

Launched in 2007, Miha Bodytec now exports around 70 per cent of its equipment and has a sales presence in 30 countries.

Details: http://lei.sr7a=4z9G8_H



Thomas Ott has been appointed to lead the UK office



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2017 EVENTS CALENDAR

JANUARY

26 | FIBO Innovation Tour Europe-wide

Kicks off in London, UK, with presentations on the fitness market and the latest innovations from FIBO exhibitors. Next stop is Paris, France on 31 January; Vienna, Austria on 7 February; Riga, Latvia on 9 February; and finally Barcelona, Spain on 14 February. www.fibo-innovation-tour.com

31 January–2 February | Spatex Ricoh Arena, Coventry, UK

This event, celebrating its 21st birthday, is the UK's largest international swimming pool and spa exhibition, representing all sectors of the wet leisure industry. www.spatex.co.uk

FEBRUARY

1–5 | ACSM Team Physician Course – Part II San Diego, US

Gives primary care, specialist physicians and other healthcare providers the knowledge to care for sports teams in the community. It runs in two parts (Part I ran in 2016), but participants do not have to complete them in sequential order. www.acsm.org/tpc

16–18 | ForumClub Fiera di Bologna, Italy

For those who design, build and restore private, public and commercial fitness clubs, pools, wellness centres and spas. www.forumclub.it

23–26 | IDEA Personal Trainer Institute East Coast Bethesda, MD, US

For PTs, fitness professionals, owners and managers aiming to ramp up the success of their fitness business. A West Coast institute takes place in Seattle, Washington, on 30 March–2 April 2017. www.ideafit.com/ptrainer

26–27 | Professional Beauty ExCeL, London, UK

Showcasing skincare, spa, nail, beauty equipment, medical beauty and tanning. www.professionalbeauty.co.uk

MARCH

6 | SMMEEX International Wembley Stadium, London, UK

Provides a platform to network and strike up partnerships with some of the biggest sports clubs, associations and universities in the UK and beyond. www.smmexevent.com

8–11 | IHRSA 2017 Los Angeles, US

With presentations from business leaders and top industry presenters, and education on the topics that matter most to health club operators, as well as a full trade show. www.ihrsa.org/ihrsa2017

14–15 | Quest NBS and CIMSPA Conferences Chesford Grange, Kenilworth, UK

A two-day event featuring the Quest and NBS (National Benchmarking Scheme) conference and networking evening on 14th, and the CIMSPA conference on 15th. www.questnbs.org

17–19 | The 2017 International Fitness Showcase Winter Gardens, Blackpool, UK

For fitness instructors and enthusiasts, with three days of dance, aerobics, step, combat, conditioning, lectures, workshops and mind-body sessions. www.chrysalispromotions.com

22–25 | ECA World Fitness Conference / OBOW Show Marriott Marquis, New York, US

ECA World Fitness is an international organisation representing the fitness and wellness sectors. Its annual shows in New York and Florida highlight new products, ideas and concepts. www.ecaworldfitness.com

25–26 | The OM Yoga Show SECC, Glasgow, UK

The total yoga experience under one roof, including free yoga and pilates classes, a range of workshops, children's yoga and hundreds of exhibition stands. Other events will take place in London (October) and Manchester (May). www.omyogashow.co.uk

29–30 | Active-net 2017 Eastwood Hall, Nottingham, UK

A networking event aimed at suppliers and operators with a focus on the public leisure sector. Educational seminars and keynotes take place alongside one-to-one buyer/supplier meetings and networking. www.active-net.org



The IDEA Personal Trainer Institute helps PTs to grow their business



The OM Yoga Show includes a range of workshops demonstrating the latest classes and incarnations of yoga

APRIL

5 | EHFF

Exhibition Centre Cologne, Germany

EuropeActive and FIBO invite visitors to join them in Cologne for the fourth annual European Health & Fitness Forum (EHFF) – the opening event of FIBO 2017. www.europeactive.eu/events/ehff2017

6–9 | FIBO 2017 Cologne, Germany

The world's leading trade show for health, fitness and wellness, offering an international business platform for managers, distributors, suppliers, investors and decision-makers across the industry. www.fibo.com

6–9 | ACSM Health & Fitness Summit & Expo San Diego, US

The Summit gives students, fitness enthusiasts, PTs and others the full spectrum of programming, from scientific to practical application. www.acsmsummit.org

12–13 | BASES Student Conference University of St Mark & St John, Plymouth, UK

The theme for 2017 is Clinical Exercise Science, but the conference will also cater for the wider sport and exercise science audience. www.bases.org.uk/student-conference

28–30 | Fitness & Health Expo ICC, Sydney, NSW, Australia

The southern hemisphere's largest fitness and health expo, with world-class events, fitness demonstrations and tips on leading a healthy and active lifestyle. Three further expos are in Perth (5–6 Aug), Melbourne (13–15 Oct) and Brisbane (21–22 Oct). www.fitnessexpo.com.au

MAY

3–4 | Millennial 20/20 Old Truman Brewery, London, UK

Millennial 20/20 will gather more than 2,000 brands, companies, founders and start-ups to examine and understand the highly desirable Millennial consumer and the future marketplace they create. www.millennial20-20.com/london2017

10–11 | Elevate ExCeL, London, UK

Brings together academia, healthcare, government, the physical activity sector and performance experts to focus on an increasingly important and complex societal challenge – turning the tide on inactivity. www.elevatearena.com

12–14 | BodyPower Expo 2017 NEC, Birmingham, UK

An event for fitness enthusiasts, with international stars and industry experts, as well as a large exhibition, interactive feature areas and national competitions. www.bodypower.com/expo/uk

Date TBC | Retention Convention Venue TBC, UK

A two-day event covering a range of approaches to increase retention, reduce attrition and improve member loyalty. www.retentionguru.co.uk

24–25 | SIBEC UK 2017 The Belfry, West Midlands, UK

Brings together the UK's most influential suppliers and buyers in the local authority, trust and education markets for a series of one-to-one meetings. www.sibecvents.com/uk

30 May–3 June | ACSM 64th Annual Meeting Denver, Colorado, US

This comprehensive sports medicine and exercise science conference covers the science, practice, public health and policy aspects of sports medicine, exercise science and physical activity. www.acsmannualmeeting.org

JUNE

27–28 | ukactive FLAME Conference Telford International Centre, UK

A leading sector event to learn, network and celebrate, attracting more than 850 delegates, with a range of motivational and educational speakers. It's followed in the evening by the FLAME Awards prize-giving and gala dinner. www.ukactive.com

2017 EVENTS CALENDAR

JULY

19–23 | IDEA World Fitness Convention Las Vegas Convention Center, US

Claimed to be the world's longest-running international fitness convention, featuring a programme of educational sessions from industry-best presenters.
www.ideafit.com

AUGUST

31 August – 2 September | IHRSA Fitness Brasil Latin American Conference & Trade Show São Paulo, Brazil

Designed for all types and sizes of clubs, with educational opportunities in a variety of interactive formats: traditional seminars, how-to sessions, and best practice.
www.ihrsa.org/fitness-brasil

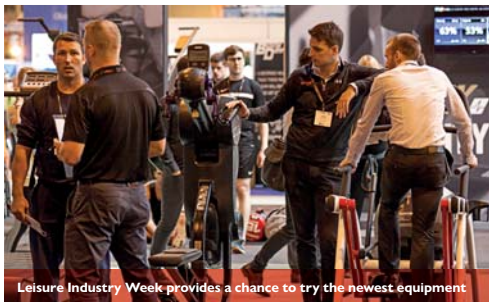
SEPTEMBER

Date TBC | National Fitness Day UK-wide

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

7–9 | FIBO China Shanghai, China

Thousands of visitors are expected at this trade show, which debuted in 2014, with hundreds of brands set to be showcased.
www.fibo-china.cn



12–13 | Leisure Industry Week NEC, Birmingham, UK

The annual Leisure Industry Week (LIW) has a new fitness-orientated focus.
www.liw.co.uk

20–22 | Interbike Expo Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, US

With hundreds of exhibitors on one floor, this is where the bicycle industry gathers to celebrate, educate and conduct the business of cycling.
www.interbike.com

26–29 | SIBEC North America Palm Beach, Florida, US

Major operators in the health, recreation, sports and fitness organisations meet with leading executives from national and international supplier companies.
www.sibecvents.com/northamerica

OCTOBER

4–6 | Club Industry Show Hilton Chicago, US

A conference and trade show aimed at leading, connecting and inspiring the fitness community. The programme aims to inspire personal growth and provide insight into the future of the industry.
www.clubindustryshow.com

16–18 | ISPA Conference & Expo Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, US

Three days of presentations covering a range of topics including business strategy, customer service and management, as well as a show floor.
www.experienceispa.com

Date TBC | IHRSA European Congress London, UK

IHRSA's annual European Congress is one of the best networking opportunities in Europe, with more than 500 industry professionals in attendance. Seminars are designed to help visitors improve their operation and grow their business.
www.ihrsa.org/congress

NOVEMBER

8–11 | SIBEC Europe Venue TBC

Bringing the UK and Europe's major operators in health, fitness and leisure together with leading suppliers for a series of one-to-one meetings.
www.sibecvents.com/europe

9–11 | International Council on Active Ageing (ICAA) Orlando, Florida, US

Brings together professionals from across the active ageing spectrum to learn and connect with colleagues, as well as industry leaders and active ageing experts.
icaa.cc

Date TBC | ukactive National Summit London, UK

The largest political event in the sector's calendar, bringing together key stakeholders from public health policy and beyond. The event attracts senior influencers from across physical activity, health, policy, brand, media, research, the charity space and local authority commissioning.
www.ukactive.com



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1Life (formerly Leisure Connection) – Head of Fitness, Marketing & Communications

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Scott Best Martin Seibold

In September 2016, DW Sports confirmed it would be acquiring the UK estate of Fitness First. Kate Cracknell talks to the managing directors of both companies to see how the new relationship has gelled

When one health club chain is acquired by another, you might expect some sort of resentment in the party being acquired, especially when that party used to be the world's largest fitness operator. But Scott Best and Martin Seibold – respectively managing director of DW Sports and managing director of Fitness First UK – seem to be on great terms when we meet to discuss DW's acquisition of Fitness First UK, laughing and chatting like old friends.

"We're just dating at the moment," jokes Seibold. "It will take six to nine months for all the pieces fall into place. But we have a combination of two brands that are really going places, and that's very exciting."

"The more time we spend together, the more we think about how we can change things for the better – what DW does well that Fitness First can incorporate and vice versa," adds Best. "It certainly won't be a case of DW just jumping in and dictating how things are done."

FOCUS ON THE WINNERS

The acquisition of Fitness First shot DW almost overnight into a position as one of the UK's largest health club chains. But the business had already been growing, with Best a long-time member of the team. "I was already in business with Dave Whelan when he sold JJJB," he explains, "and I was still

there when he bought the business back in March 2009. At that point, there were 53 health clubs and 51 retail stores. We organically grew the business to 71 clubs, and then we bought seven of the former LA fitness clubs from Pure Gym in November 2015 to take us to a total of 78."

However, in the last few years and until the Fitness First deal, the focus for growth at DW was firmly on retail, as Best explains: "Retail felt it had found a winning formula. It joined Intersport in 2012, which boosted its buying power, and in the last two years we've opened 18 retail stores. Meanwhile, our Bristol health club opening in December 2016 was our first in nearly three years."

But the Fitness First acquisition has switched the focus of the business back to fitness. Confirmed at the end of September 2016, the deal saw a further 62 clubs added to the DW-owned estate – although the group ultimately held on to only 45 of those sites. Three clubs have been closed since the acquisition, with the remainder sold to GLL (nine clubs), low-cost operator the Gym Group (four clubs) and a hotel in Jersey owned by Whelan's portfolio of businesses (one club).

"Bristol we had to close, because DW was about to open its second club there – a great club with a pool," says Seibold. "But the other clubs we sold or closed... we'd have done that anyway. We'd already reduced the Fitness First portfolio from 185 clubs to 62 – and now we've reduced it to 48. In the end, ▶

All change but no change: Fitness First and DW Fitness will continue to operate as distinct brands in the market





Seibold and Best are working on the ideal mix of their two fitness brands



There will be over 50 refurbishments across the DW estate in the next three years

- ▶ nobody has the money to give every club love. You have to focus on the ones that are winning."

And the winning formula for Fitness First is focused firmly on central London, as Seibold explains: "The brand we've now built in London is very successful. Four years ago, you probably would have expected our clubs to be rebranded as DW after this acquisition, but with what we've created in the last few years – the transformation of our clubs, our staff, our philosophy – we'd be crazy to do that."

"We aren't as successful out of London though, and that's because – in contrast to DW – we're highly under-invested outside of the capital. So the question now is: how far does London stretch? What about clubs in commuter towns, where residents travel to London for work and use our clubs near their offices – should they still be Fitness First?"

"The availability of 'home' and 'work' clubs is key in London: in total, 43 per cent of our members use multiple clubs. Similarly with the commuter towns, some of them see around a fifth of members travelling into London and using our clubs there too."

"So we need to have a good look at what we're going to do with the 10 or so clubs we still own outside of the capital."

TWO BRANDS, ONE BUSINESS

What seems to be emerging is that Fitness First and DW Fitness will continue as separate entities, with Fitness First focusing exclusively on London and DW taking on – and rebranding – any clubs deemed 'non-London'.

"Fitness First in London is an awesome brand – it would take DW 10 years to get to that level," says Best. "We wanted to have a London presence for our business – that's why we bought Fitness First – but we're happy to run two separate businesses at the front end and play to the individual brands' strengths. Then, behind the scenes, Martin and I will work together to see where we can build synergies."

There is, say both men, no hurry – late 2017 is touted as a possible completion date for the rebranding project. It will simply, as Seibold explains, be a case of "using the two brands cleverly to match the demographics" – there will be no overlap of estates, no direct competition between the two brands.

But there will be some investment in both sides of the estate. While Best prefers not to say what DW paid for Fitness First, it was, confirms Seibold, "a really good purchase – which means there's still cash there to do something with the business."

Swimming pools will be added to a number of Fitness First clubs – but not all. "One of the things we discussed in probably our first ever conversation was the notion of 'cluster clubs,'" says Best. "The Fitness First team explained how, in London, not every club needs a swimming pool. In any one area, you can have three or four dry clubs and one wet club, and you sell memberships that give access to the whole cluster of clubs."

"It was a lightbulb moment for me, because when we bought the old LA fitness club in the Waldorf hotel in 2015, we had no experience of ▶

“To set ourselves apart from the budget operators, we needed to get our sense of community back. That's something we're working very hard on now – Scott Best”





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*Source: Google Trends Jan-11 to Jan-16



The focus for the Fitness First brand will remain on the London market

- London. We had no idea you really couldn't own only one club in the capital, because people expect access to a number of clubs. We lost 17 per cent of the members on day one."

DW has, however, enjoyed far greater success outside of London, with a model that plays to local demographics and lifestyle. "I visit a lot of DW sites, and what I'm really impressed with is the community feel," says Seibold. "It's something we don't have in London. There are big lounge areas, and if you go in around 4.00pm – the sort of time our Fitness First clubs are dead – the DW clubs are full of mums and kids. There's so much space for all sorts of different activities and classes, so much for the kids to do."

Best adds: "A few years ago, when the budget operators came along and started opening clubs, operators like us – and I will hold my hands up to this – got side-tracked into believing that was the way forward. We now acknowledge that we went too deep in terms of trying to compete on price, and it negatively impacted our customer service."

"After a while we realised that wasn't the way forward for us. We realised, if we wanted to set ourselves apart from the budget operators, we needed to get our sense of community back. That's something we're working very hard on now."

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

DW is also refining the offering in terms of facilities at its clubs, with the newest location in Bristol – opened last month – the first of a new model that introduces elements such as functional zones, dedicated mind-body areas and cycling studios on the gym floor alongside the existing offering of gym, group exercise, swimming pool and wet area.

There will also be a new look and feel for the brand launching this month, with a total of 54 refurbishments taking place across the DW estate over the next three years.

And both men are keen to explore other new ways to push the agenda forward too. "With the DW retail arm, we

“Membership will always be all-inclusive at our gyms. People simply don't expect to pay extra for classes being offered within their club – Scott Best

have a real opportunity to know the customer from end to end, encompassing training apparel and nutrition as well as fitness," says Best. "The likes of Nike and Adidas are very excited by the 120,000 members in London. There are huge opportunities for e-commerce – promoting yoga apparel to those booking yoga classes and so on."

"Digital is another opportunity. It's here already and you have to embrace it," adds Seibold. "If you look at BasicFit in Europe – which floated on the stock market in June 2016, with a value of €1bn – it can live stream classes from all its clubs. We have the technology to do that at Fitness First too – one of the studios at our club in Bishopsgate is a recording studio for group exercise, so we can record or stream the classes."

"This is the sort of thing you have to be looking at as an operator. Bricks and mortar is fine, but you have to address the customer 24/7. You have to meet their needs outside of the club as well as inside it."

GROWTH ON THE CARDS

But in spite of the focus beyond bricks and mortar, growth of the club estate remains firmly on the cards. "There's so much opportunity to grow in London that, over time, we may look at opening as many Fitness Firsts as we open DW clubs," says Best.

"We're very versatile – anything from 750sq m to 1,500sq m can work for us – and there's huge potential for growth," adds Seibold. "There are currently 20 Fitness First clubs in the City of London [the financial district of the city] and we could easily take ►

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Seibold and Best are on a mission to get members active

▶ that to 50 clubs, whether through acquisition or slower growth. We're in no hurry, but the opportunity is definitely there."

"The good thing about Fitness First is you really don't need every element of the total offering in every club," continues Best. "Because the clubs are so close – you'll walk past two or three on your journey to work – you can have different offerings in different clubs, and members can use different clubs on different days depending on what workout they want to do that day."

And there are plenty of options, as Seibold explains: "We now have 12 signature training concepts, from our 'freestyle' functional training to an athletics-based workout, and from hot yoga to boxing to mind-body. So we can look at all of our clubs – and going forward maybe also the DW clubs – to see where there's space for an additional offering, and what might work in each location."

"These might be dedicated spaces, but they won't be boutiques charging an additional fee," observes Best. "Existing members will always have everything included in their membership package – people simply don't expect to pay extra for classes offered within their club."

And in fact neither Seibold nor Best are worried about the competition from London's growing boutique segment. Seibold explains: "In the locations where our clubs are near a boutique, what we're actually noticing is a growing demand in our clubs for whatever discipline is offered at the boutique.

We've had to build bigger cycling studios in the clubs located near cycling boutiques, for example. People start off going to the boutiques for the 'tribe' and all that sort of thing, but over time they come to us, because they can get not only cycling but also everything else at our clubs."

BEING 'THE BEST'

So looking forward, what are Best and Seibold's ambitions for the combined DW / Fitness First business?

"Although we now have significant national coverage, our ambition isn't to be the biggest operator. We won't win that race and we don't want to," says Seibold. Best nods and adds: "We want to be the best fitness operator. I believe that's achievable."

"But the question is, what does 'best' mean?" Seibold continues. "And our definition is quite simply this: we want to be people's partner in fitness."

He continues: "One of the things I'm proudest about at Fitness First over the last few years is that we've increased the proportion of members who actually use their membership by about 10 per cent. Our focus is on understanding member motivation and harnessing this to ensure they train at our clubs on a regular basis."

"I saw a documentary on NASA and they were asking all the staff what it was they did. They asked the cleaner, and he said his job was to get people to the moon. Everyone at NASA felt they were contributing to that same end goal. So I took that to Fitness First and told all the staff: 'If anyone ever asks you why you work for Fitness First, tell them your job is to motivate members to train'."

"We're never going to be the coolest, or the biggest, and we don't want to be. We want to be the ones who make people work out. How you do that depends on the market – the customers in each location are different – and that's exciting, because we can now cater for that." ●

“We're never going to be the coolest, or the biggest, and we don't want to be. We want to be the ones who make people work out – *Martin Seibold*”



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MONEY TALKS

As we move into 2017, will economic conditions improve in the UK – and how can the health club industry get the capital it needs to grow? **Kath Hudson** reports

After a period of relative calm in the UK economy, the Brexit referendum result last June caused ripples large enough to derail the planned IPO of low-cost operator Pure Gym in October 2016.

Pure Gym had been planning to raise £190m to pay off debt and to bolster

future growth, but CEO Humphrey Cobbold was forced to concede: “Given the challenging IPO market conditions, the board has decided not to proceed with a listing.”

Pure Gym is the UK’s largest gym operator, both in terms of clubs (163) and members (785,770) – so what does

this mean for the rest of the sector? If even Pure Gym couldn’t pull off an IPO, will other chains be dissuaded from trying? And how does the broader investment community view the health and fitness sector – how should the industry go about getting the capital it needs to grow? We ask the experts...



Steven Ward

ukactive: executive director

Pure Gym was just one of a number of IPOs which ran into choppy waters last year across a broad range of sectors. However, ukactive’s recent report, *Rise of the Activity Sector*, shows that in the medium to long term, the prospects of our sector have never been stronger, and the diversity of interested investors has never been so deep and so wide.

Meanwhile, our sector straddles exciting macro trends – such as the integration of fitness and lifestyle with technology and wellbeing – which are impacting society globally. As long as the sector continues to innovate and evolve in line with these major trends, there are huge opportunities. However, investors have long memories and some never forget. There are many with burnt fingers from previous investments in the sector, and that of course adds a degree of caution.



Will Pure Gym try again with an IPO, or could another brand float first?

We have a continuous rehabilitation job to do. Our sector needs to show a passion for innovation and new business models, display refreshed and invigorated leadership and take advantage of favourable trends. We also need to be more professional in the collation of market performance-related information. At a recent ukactive event, major investors criticised the sector for being behind in this respect.

Before long, when the choppy waters calm down, I expect another major player

to come to market. It could be Pure Gym, given it’s already prepared, but don’t be surprised to see a dark horse storm through. It may be easier for another to float first and give investors a choice in another part of the market – low-cost operator the Gym Group is already listed on the stock exchange – leaving Pure Gym to complete a private transaction.

In the meantime, the sector must keep its blinkers off, eyes open and be brave enough to continue to innovate.

It's an attractive market, especially at the budget end, and there's still potential for more gyms in the UK – *Richard Taylor*



Richard Taylor

Business Growth Fund:
Investment director

While there has been recent volatility following Pure Gym's aborted IPO, we don't believe this volatility reflects the market as a whole. As investors in both Xercise4Less at the low-cost end of the fitness market, and Gymbox at the premium end, we view this sector positively and welcome innovations.

It's an attractive market, especially at the budget end, and there's still potential for more gyms in the UK. However, it's becoming an increasingly polarised market and those clubs stuck in the middle face a challenge and need to be well differentiated in order to stay interesting.

One of the concerns is at what point the market will become saturated, but as the budget market has doubled in terms of gym numbers within three years, these concerns are starting to dissipate. With regards to staying favourable to the investment community, the industry needs to stay differentiated, observe trends overseas to stay relevant and bring in the latest concepts. There are interesting developments in the US, with super budget gyms bringing the price point even lower, so it will be interesting to see if that's also the case here. What gyms mustn't do is become stale or conservative.



Gymbox has achieved success and expansion in the London market



David Bains

LDC: Investment director

I really like this sector – it's full of likeable, glass-half-full people with a passion for what they're doing. We like the dynamics of the sector and are actively seeking investment opportunities in this space.

Pure Gym's aborted IPO won't have a negative impact; we see this as a post-Brexit, UK stock market issue. That said, there's still some scepticism among the investment community as a result of investors losing money on fitness

operators in the past, including Fitness First, Esporta and LA fitness.

However, confidence is slowly returning thanks to success stories like Pure Gym, Gymbox and The Gym Group. Furthermore, the investment community has bought into the health and wellness trend, so there's also a lot of interest in all the ancillary companies such as food and beverage, clothing and apps.

Going forward, I think there will be further consolidation, particularly in the mid-market, with private equity creating a healthy M&A environment for premium, low-cost or boutique deals.

Before parting with their cash, investors will be watching closely to see how quickly health and fitness companies are expanding, whether there's sufficient demand in the locations they're choosing, if they're signing sensible rental deals and if they're continuing to invest in their kit to maintain quality. If these are all in place, then companies will find themselves with the ability to raise capital and grow faster.

Pure Gym's aborted IPO won't have a negative impact: we see this as a post-Brexit, UK stock market issue – *David Bains*



As Fitness First joins with DW, will the market see further consolidation?

**Matt Merrick**

Stretchtone Advisory: Director

Bexit scuppered Pure Gym's first launch and market conditions for new IPOs haven't changed very much.

A number of other organisations were looking to IPO in the second half of 2016, but the market has been flat in comparison to 2014/15. Nevertheless, the investment community certainly has a positive view of the sector and is excited by the macro trends and potential value creation, especially at the venture capital end.

That said, the fitness sector is not as mature as, say, retail and hospitality. Steps must be taken to become more focused and transparent, as there are a lot of good stories which go unnoticed. This generation of leaders are more open to collaboration and cross-sector data sharing than earlier generations – and this

is important for investor understanding and trust – but more needs to be done.

The middle ground is oversupplied, so I think we're set for more consolidation in the UK – as in fact we've already seen with Pure Gym acquiring LA fitness, and DW and Fitness First partnering up. I also think there will be more considered investment at the top and bottom, in premium and low-cost clubs.

However, with greater saturation and tighter controls on capital, investment in bricks and mortar will likely slow down and we'll see established and new operators investing in virtual memberships, using the power of digital to develop their brands.

Steps must be taken to become more focused and transparent, as there are a lot of good stories which go unnoticed – Matt Merrick

**Wyn Ellis**

Numis Securities: Director of leisure and travel research

The health and fitness sector is viewed positively by the investment community and this will continue to be the case, provided the low-cost two market leaders – Pure Gym and The Gym Group – keep delivering such strong

returns and expanding at a healthy rate.

The sector is backed up by trends showing an increasing focus on health, fitness and wellness, especially among Millennials, and this is leading to a growth in memberships and market penetration: the attractive low-cost, flexible membership schemes offered by the low-cost segment are helping to expand the market.

However, there are some concerns. The barriers to entering the marketplace are not considered to be that high, and if more players come into the sector, it might impact the returns and expansion of Pure Gym and The Gym Group. However, these barriers are rising as these two operators gain in scale and are able to buy effectively to bring down costs. There have also been fears that the 30 per cent-plus returns are not

sustainable, but as they've managed to deliver these for several years, these fears are also lessening.

The investment community had some issues with Pure Gym's acquisition of LA fitness, as the latter were mid-tier gyms with a different business model based on relatively high monthly charges and relatively low membership numbers. Pure Gym now has the challenge of turning those health clubs around and adapting the model, and the jury is out on whether or not it will make a success of the acquisition.

Whether people will cut back on their memberships if there's an economic downturn is another issue. However, one view is that people would simply trade down to cheaper memberships, which will further benefit low-cost operators. ●



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Look back to Look forward



Kate Cracknell reviews the great strides forward taken by the fitness and physical activity sector in 2016, and the foundations these lay for an exciting, opportunity-filled 2017

What a year 2016 was for the global fitness and physical activity sector. It's rare for us to look back rather than forwards in HCM, but it's worth reflecting on a year in which the door to wider collaboration, and to a greater impact on the world's health, was truly opened to the sector – because this, in turn, lays exciting foundations on which to build in 2017.

UK SUCCESS

Let's start with the UK, where years of lobbying by the likes of trade body ukactive bore a wealth of fruit.

A highly significant moment came in May, when – in response to the UK government's observation that the distinction between sport and broader activity was "unhelpful, outdated and irrelevant" – Sport England unveiled a new strategy in which tackling inactivity was named its #1 priority. The organisation has allocated £250m to this task over four years – funding the fitness sector must now tap into to reach further into inactive communities.

Then, in July, the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) announced physical activity and lifestyle as one of its clinical priorities for the next three years. With Ipsos MORI data suggesting 57 per cent of consumers would ask their GP for advice on how to stay healthy – just one per cent would ask a gym or personal trainer – this is a significant breakthrough.

The onus is now on activity providers to forge closer relationships with local doctors' surgeries – building trust, sharing knowledge and creating clear channels of communication and referral.

Another boost for physical activity came in the pages of *The Lancet* in July – a study on the dangers of an inactive office, which found that sitting for eight hours a day can increase the risk of premature death by up to 60 per cent. Given the numbers of us to whom this applies, this is a huge opportunity and one the physical activity sector must seize; corporate wellbeing remains a largely

specialist area at the moment but, as the 'sweatworking' trend – networking while working out – shows, there's no reason why more providers can't offer creative ways to get office workers moving.

Last but not least, the UK government's much-maligned childhood obesity strategy came out in August. "Underwhelming", said the healthy food lobbyists – and yet for the activity sector, there were opportunities in the shape of the recommended 60 minutes' activity a day for all children, part-funded by a new sugar tax. So how will you make sure your club plays a role in that 60 minutes?

In 2016, Pokémon Go turned activity into a game, with huge success

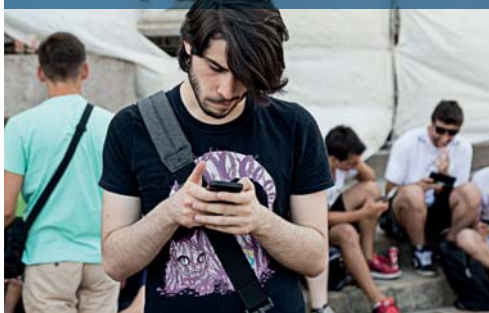


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Michelle Obama is a high profile campaigner against childhood obesity

CORPORATE WELLBEING REMAINS A SPECIALIST AREA, BUT THERE'S NO REASON WHY MORE PROVIDERS CAN'T OFFER CREATIVE WAYS TO GET OFFICE WORKERS MOVING

TEENS, GREYS & TECH

The UK wasn't alone in its year of success. In Europe, the local office of the World Health Organization (WHO) published a report on physical activity and health in women which featured a strong endorsement of the fitness sector, while the EU Commission once again backed a successful European Week of Sport in September.

WHO was also in action in North America, when the World Health Assembly set out plans to make 2020–2030 the Decade of Healthy Aging, calling on society to embrace this movement. This is still a relatively untapped market among health club operators, and a significant opportunity as the population continues to age.

But this was just one of a long list of notable achievements in the US last year, from the Surgeon General's official Call to Action to promote walking; to the education reform that established physical education as part of the core curriculum – potentially providing an additional funding source for PE programmes; to the transportation funding bill that includes funding for safe routes to school, as well as other access

to biking, walking and other health-promoting modes of transportation.

Perhaps even more visible were First Lady Michelle Obama's ongoing work to fight childhood obesity and physical inactivity, and the release of the *National Physical Activity Plan* – a comprehensive set of policies, programmes and initiatives designed to increase physical activity in all segments of the US population.

All of this sets a hugely positive backdrop to the efforts of the fitness sector, placing physical activity at the forefront of people's minds. And while health clubs themselves may not be the first to benefit in terms of membership growth, nevertheless raised participation levels will ultimately benefit the sector; in the shorter-term, providers will simply have to be more creative and broad-thinking in their efforts to get people moving beyond the walls of the gym.

BROADENED HORIZONS

Moving across to Asia, China has long been seen as a market with huge potential, and it's now living up to this: in March 2016, a 17 per cent annual growth rate was reported in the value of the sector;

and in June, the China State Council announced plans for a national fitness strategy focused on teenagers, building towards a predicted 1.5trn yuan sports industry by 2020. It will be fascinating to see what impact this has on participation rates in that part of the world.

And while many feel threatened by technology, events in 2016 suggested we should instead harness its ability to exponentially grow the pool of active people. The obvious example was the success in 2016 of Pokémon GO, the gaming app that saw 75 million downloads in the month of July alone. Its recipe for success? Turning activity into a game – something we can all learn from.

THE MOMENTUM BUILDS

Of course, many of these opportunities have been out there before now: active ageing, corporate wellbeing, childhood activity and so on. But what's changed in the last year is that those in the corridors of power, who have the influence to help the physical activity sector's efforts, finally seem to have the inclination to do so. The onus is on our sector to take advantage of this momentum in 2017. ●



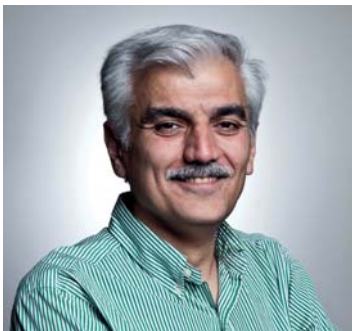
WAR ON ATTRITION

Crime-busting software is now set to be used in a new war on health club attrition rates. Dr Paul Bedford reports

In 2004, while working as a computer scientist at the University of Southern California, Jafar Adibi took counter intelligence to new heights when he developed software capable of finding hidden links between known criminals and their as-yet-unknown confederates.

Adibi used mathematics, combined with publicly available information, to determine hierarchical relationships that could help fight the war on crime. In short, he was able to analyse things criminals have in common in order to find connections, and with this identify other potential criminals with a high degree of accuracy.

Predictive technology – an area of data mining that deals with extracting information and using it to predict trends and behaviour patterns – is not new. However, Adibi's model goes much deeper than has previously been the case, collecting and merging many different types of data source and applying novel predictive modelling analytics to discover hidden leads.



Adibi's software has proved invaluable to gyms

MOVING INTO FITNESS

Adibi is now CTO and co-founder of Reunify – a company that specialises in bringing his predictive modelling analytics to discover hidden patterns in other sectors – and his technical genius is set to take the global health and fitness industry by storm, by helping clubs

address the age-old problem of member retention.

Working alongside Rob Gregory and me, Adibi's model of predictive technology is now being used to predict – from the moment a member joins – their likelihood of quitting, the length of time they're likely to stay as a member, their lifetime value and whether they're likely to buy personal training, as well as a host of other useful information.

Unlike traditional software that applies the same algorithms each and every time to predict a risk of quitting, Reunify learns the member's behaviour and then constructs a risk of quitting score. Applied to the health and fitness industry, it enables operators to identify and interact with high value/

high risk clients in real time, as the data is constantly updated. Armed with truly personal information, these interactions help improve levels of engagement, customer satisfaction and ROI.

Essentially, the system combines two types of data: structured and unstructured. Structured data is displayed in columns and rows that can easily be ordered and

**THE SYSTEM CAN PREDICT SOMEONE'S LIKELIHOOD
OF QUITTING, THEIR LIFETIME VALUE AND WHETHER
THEY'RE LIKELY TO BUY PERSONAL TRAINING**



Using Reunify's data, Life Time clubs are able to craft scripts for staff to speak to each individual member

processed by data mining tools such as CRM systems. Most operators are familiar with this and use it effectively.

However, unstructured data is less familiar and can include video, text and voice. It's much harder to analyse, but is incredibly useful because the content is so rich. It's also vast – just think of all the social media content out there. In fact, it's estimated that up to 80 per cent of business-relevant information originates in unstructured form, primarily in text.

Combining both types of data is extremely powerful, but very few fitness operators have started this journey. Think of it like a puzzle; without using unstructured data, you will never complete the picture.

By collecting and merging both types of data, we can add hundreds of additional data points to the customer profile – information such as occupation, income level, neighbourhood, shopping habits, important affiliations and satisfaction levels.

INDUSTRY GAME-CHANGER

Life Time, a chain of private health and fitness clubs in the US and Canada, was the first to trial the software back in 2013. It rolled it out to all 121 clubs less than two years later, having experienced a 20 per cent increase in retention.

Harlan Smith, vice president of member services and retention, explains: "Most companies carry out surveys and use NPS scores to react to members' opinions, but in addition to this we want to be proactive – to anticipate what our members want."

"We tested Reunify across 15 clubs and used the predictive nature of the software

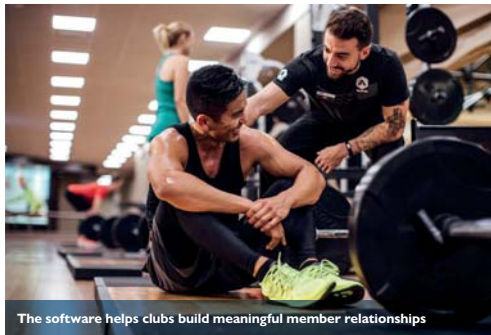
to intercept members. The interface is designed from a team member's point of view, to help them take action. As the customer swipes in, we can see their risk rating alongside a photograph and other personal information, enabling the team to connect the dots and help direct the customer accordingly.

"It's not complicated – just a series of small, easy fixes – but health clubs have thousands of members. It's very hard to get to know everyone personally. The software gives our staff a reason to approach members and make personal connections. That's very important for retention, because it's very easy to break up with a company or a brand where there's no loyalty; far harder to do when you have a relationship with people."

That may sound similar to other retention solutions on the market, but it's all about the quality of the data – using Reunify's technology, a crafted script can be written for each individual member.

Adibi explains: "Until now, operators haven't had either enough data or the right type of data to consistently deliver the sort of results we're achieving. If we can deduce member sentiment from text analytics, it vastly improves our understanding of whether a member is going to leave or if they are at risk of posting a negative review, and so helps operators decide whether to intercept."

"The interactions clubs typically have with members may be friendly – 'hello, how are you getting on with your programme?' – but they don't



The software helps clubs build meaningful member relationships



Life Time completes 50,000 intercepts a month, and exceeds industry retention rates

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Life Time rolled Reunify out to all 121 clubs, having experienced a 20 per cent increase in retention in under two years

► really make a difference. We're reinventing the membership proposition, taking it to a new level where we can help operators and their staff develop meaningful relationships with their members. Operators that understand this and take action will win the race."

Life Time has certainly recognised this. It has observed a significant difference in retention rates between members who were intercepted off the back of Reunify and those who weren't – even among low-risk members. It currently exceeds 50,000 intercepts a month, has retained members better than the industry average for the past three years, and is looking to increase the volume of intercepts per club during 2017.

"We're interested to see what happens in the long term," adds Smith. "This is likely to impact things we haven't even measured yet, such as how intercepts impact brand loyalty, as well as referrals and ancillary spend."

HUMAN TOUCH

But customer engagement isn't just about technology: it's the combination of this technology and the human touch that's critical to optimising results, which is where our partnership with Reunify comes into play. Every member of staff plays a vital part of the solution, and globally Rob Gregory and I will deliver the personal interaction training angle to help health and fitness operators really maximise the benefit of every member interception.

"The technology is incredibly powerful, but it's only a tool to help us connect with members and have deeper relationships with them," continues Adibi. "Staff and trainers of the future will need to be experts in the field of member engagement."

How expert staff have become is another thing Reunify can measure, as the technology allows operators to judge the quality of staff interactions with members. It automatically understands the information staff input following their customer engagement, so operators can quickly see which interactions are most successful and how staff are performing.

SEEING INTO THE FUTURE

No one has really moved the needle on attrition in health clubs over recent years: we're still losing at least 50 per cent of our members annually. The ultimate aim must be to get close to the customer, so we understand their opinions, needs and aspirations – and new innovations such as Reunify allow us to do exactly that.

It's a little scary to think just how much information we're putting out into the ether every time we buy online or post on social media, but used in the right way, this data can make our lives easier and our experiences better, both inside and outside of our health clubs. ●

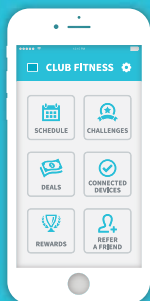
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr Paul Bedford is a leading authority on retention, attrition and customer experience, and author of the world's largest retention study.

www.retentionguru.co.uk

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**WHAT NEW GROUP EXERCISE TRENDS WILL APPEAR IN 2017?
STEPH EAVES ASKS A SELECTION OF CLUBS FROM AROUND THE
WORLD ABOUT THEIR PLANS FOR GROUP EXERCISE THIS YEAR**

DAVID MCLEAN

GROUP FITNESS MANAGER
EDINBURGH LEISURE, UK

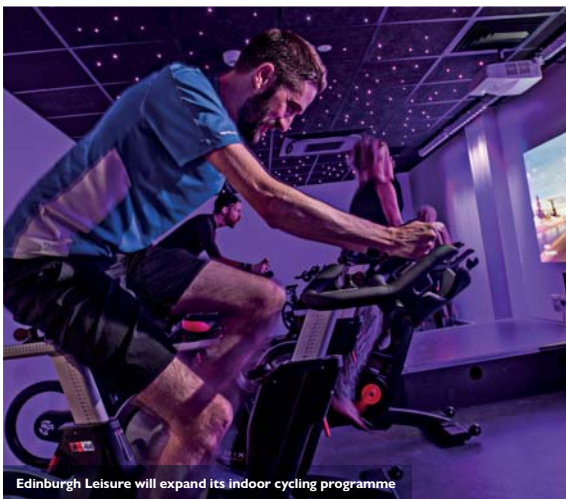
In 2017, we'll be expanding our group fitness offering by developing our use of MyZone, virtual, indoor cycling and water-based classes, as well as evolving our studio-based fitness.

This year we introduced H2O HIIT classes to our aqua programme, as well as Lane Fit swimming sessions. We're assessing a Float Fit class for 2017.

In the new year, we expect higher demand for dance-based classes, high- and low-intensity sessions and short, 15- to 20-minute gym-based classes. We'll be increasing our indoor cycle programme and introducing fitness classes at one of our Victorian baths.

We'll also be developing our group fitness environments, adding experiential effects. Our lighting, virtual on-demand and mind-body experiences at the refurbished Drumbrae club have been well received, as have the new areas for HIIT and group training.

We recognise that the most inactive people in the community and those attending our targeted health referral programmes don't always feel confident about our mainstream programmes. Lower intensity options like chair-based exercise, strength and balance classes and low-level gym and circuit-based classes will feature more prominently in our timetabling, improving pathways from our existing health referral programmes and providing more opportunities for people to be active.



Edinburgh Leisure will expand its indoor cycling programme



"Lower intensity options like chair-based exercise, strength and balance classes will feature more prominently"

David McLean, Edinburgh Leisure



From battleropes to Zumba, aerial yoga to drumming, Crunch will be taking its innovative class programming up a few gears in 2017

MARC SANTA MARIA

NATIONAL DIRECTOR
OF GROUP FITNESS
CRUNCH, US

Crunch is excited to change the game with new, innovative and fun group fitness in 2017. In our Action Sports arena, we're launching first-to-market class Adrenaline Rush, featuring a gravity-defying bungee suspension system.

In our Mind Body Burn genre, Yoga Beats – a meditative drumming and yoga class – allows participants to 'ohm' to the beat of their own drum in rhythmic, powerful patterns. Meanwhile Cardio Dance has always been a huge pillar for

Crunch, and in the new year there'll be an expansion of dance-based workouts, as well as a variety of circus and aerial-inspired movement classes.

Lyra (aerial hoops), Trapfit (trapeze-based), Pole Dancing and Red Velvet (aerial silks) classes will continue to grow in our major markets. Additionally, our newest class concept Mash-Up – which fuses two popular classes together into one intensive workout (eg. Zumba vs Hard Knocks) – will hit all major US cities.

Finally, our indoor cycling programme Ride will welcome the addition of new technology. Our immersive and interactive classes will complement and amplify current programming in our Rhythm, Road and Remixed Ride buckets.



"Yoga Beats allows participants to 'ohm' to the beat of their own drum in rhythmic, powerful patterns"

Marc Santa Maria, Crunch



GROUP EXERCISE



Les Mills: 'Piling on more Grit classes' in response to the growth of HIIT

► PHILLIP MILLS

CEO LES MILLS CLUBS, NEW ZEALAND

Group exercise (GX) has always been key to the success of our New Zealand clubs and this year we will build on that, based on key global GX trends.

HIIT remains the hottest trend in the industry and we're piling on more Grit classes, plus a new 30-minute HIIT cycle workout: Les Mills Sprint.

Grit is our second biggest class after BodyPump, with 8,000 weekly attendances across our 12 clubs. Launched in 2016, Sprint is already attracting 2,000 per week.

We'll also add more Immersive cycle studios and virtual RPM classes, which are filling studios in off-peak times. With weekly attendances of 1,800 across the seven clubs offering virtual cycle, we'll expand the class into the five remaining clubs.

Mind-body classes are trending strongly, with 4,300 weekly

attendances for BodyBalance and 800 for freestyle yoga. We've just had a record-breaking pilot response to yoga, barre and meditation classes; these will therefore be a major timetable addition in 2017.

Despite the rise of HIIT, slow strength classes remain our most popular category, with 6,000 weekly attendances at CXworx and 10,000 at BodyPump. We'll be launching the 100th release of BodyPump on 14 January with a major promotion.



"Slow strength classes remain our most popular category and we'll be launching the 100th release of BodyPump on 14 January"

Phillip Mills, Les Mills



Fitness Frenzy involves double workouts every day

CINDY KEMPTON

OWNER LIFE AND SOUL, AUSTRALIA



Kicking off the year includes putting all our members through a 'Fitness Frenzy', which means they do a double workout each day for 14 days. This engages them in all group exercise classes. It's designed to kick-start our members' fitness regimes for the new year. Anyone who completes the Frenzy receives two weeks free on their membership.

The Australian school year starts at the beginning of February, so we begin this programme the second week after school goes back – we don't have a rush of New Year's resolutions until February, as many members leave town in December and January.

Our '21 Days Clean' programme then leads us to the Easter break. We bring in nutritionists, focus on BodyBalance, yoga and core classes, and aim to provide a holistic programme. Results show that attendance increases to capacity in our group fitness studios during these times. ►

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► **DAVID COOPER**

BRAND AND PRODUCT
DIRECTOR GYMBOX, UK

Gymbox is expanding, bringing its 'Play Harder' attitude to three new sites in London in 2017. As group fitness is the heartbeat of Gymbox, each of our new gyms will offer totally new and unique spaces designed to both challenge and enhance the way people exercise together.

Next year will see us launching some completely new group fitness concepts: Flat Line, Counter Punch and Rope Burn, to name a few. We'll also be launching new studios that will enhance our group offering. Our fitness team has worked closely with the design team to ensure each studio is optimised for a particular type of class, paying special attention to flooring, lighting and technology.

2017 will also see us expand how we use tech to enhance the member experience in the class, providing genuine feedback on performance.

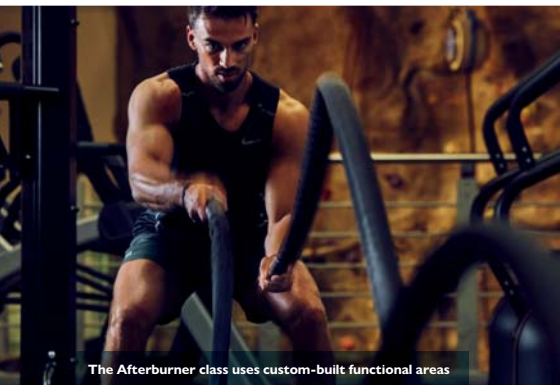


Gymbox will bring its 'Play Harder' attitude to three new sites in 2017



"We want to ensure our members not only benefit from the most creative classes, but also the most credible"

David Cooper, Gymbox



The Afterburner class uses custom-built functional areas

COLIN WAGGETT

CEO
THIRD SPACE, UK

At Third Space, we're continuously improving our programme with exciting new class launches in each new timetable. New for January we have Afterburner, a high-intensity functional

training class designed for maximum EPOC (burning calories for many hours after the class is over).

The class takes place on our custom-built rigs using a wide range of equipment including plyo boxes, kettlebells, weights, battle ropes and slam balls. This is combined with calisthenics exercises such as pull-ups and dips to constantly challenge our



"Our Afterburner class is set on our custom-built rigs using a wide range of equipment"

Colin Waggett, Third Space

members, who are continuously looking for inspiring ways to get fit.

Our boutique concept, Another Space – which is based entirely around group exercise – continues to grow as we plan new site openings for 2017. HIIT has been particularly popular and we're extending this continuously. We're also planning some new yoga fusion classes for 2017, as these are increasingly popular. ►



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CHRISTIAN RUGGERI

FOUNDER
KAYA HEALTH CLUBS,
AUSTRALIA

In 2017, we'll be looking at where we can include new scientific exercise principles in our group fitness classes. We've always kept a rather traditionalist approach, but we don't fight the tide. There will be some exciting developments for us within the realms of high-intensity training and pilates.

Our pilates teacher training courses have proven incredibly popular, and that has inspired us to start planning unique yoga retreat opportunities in Indonesia. For the solo traveller, a yoga retreat can be hit-and-miss, so our members are pleased to know we'll be organising and quality-checking the retreat to ensure they have a beautiful experience.

We're also immensely proud of our recent partnership with the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. We're introducing fortnightly classes of gentle movement and mindfulness to the children and offering the parents access to our Kaya Health Club facilities during their child's stay in hospital. We want to make sure these parents have somewhere to go and put some energy and care back into themselves if they need to. Whether it's yoga or boxing, we're proud to open the door for them and hopefully take a little of the strain off.



"Our courses have proven incredibly popular, and that has inspired us to start planning retreats"

Christian Ruggeri, Kaya Health Clubs

DARAGH MURPHY

GENERAL MANAGER BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT, FITNESS AND EVENTS
SOUTHPORT SHARKS, AUSTRALIA



We have long focused on continuous improvement in our group fitness programme. We seek to implement a steady stream of change to keep the experience fresh and engaging. We find this helps us to improve our retention of members, which is now much better than industry averages.

In 2017, we plan to run a series of workshops for our instructors, facilitated by a qualified drama teacher. We hope to enhance our instructors' delivery and add character and energy to their performance.

We will also look to supplement our core programmes with new content. This allows our members to continue to experiment and explore new concepts, while at the same time maintaining their



Popular outdoor workouts will continue to be offered

progress in favourite classes such as BodyPump or our popular outdoor workout offerings.

Two new programmes we're launching – the Metafit HIIT workout and the locally-developed ZUU workout – involve no equipment whatsoever, and link in with the current trends of bodyweight training and HIIT. ●



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BOUTIQUE BOOM

The boutique studio market continues to grow and evolve, as the latest Association of Fitness Studios report shows.

Stephen Tharrett and Mark Williamson report

Over the last few years, boutique fitness studios have emerged as a disruptive force in shaping the delivery of fitness around the globe. In the US alone, there are approximately 100,000 fitness studios – three times the number of traditional commercial fitness facilities (source: Association of Fitness Studios – AFS).

To further advance the story of how fitness studios are changing the industry's landscape, data generated by IHRSA's 2016 *Health Club Consumer Report* indicates that, in 2015, consumers spent approximately US\$4bn more on fitness studio privileges than on membership to traditional commercial fitness facilities.

Further insight is provided by the AFS' *Fitness Studio Financial and Operating Benchmarking Report*, now in its second year. Produced in co-operation with ClubIntel, the report offers a snapshot of this growing segment of the market.

KEEPING IT PERSONAL

While barre studios (such as Pure Barre and Bar Method), cycling studios (including Boom Cycle and SoulCycle) and HIIT studios (such as Orangetheory and 1Rebel) receive a tremendous amount of press, they remain in the minority among studios. Personal training and small group training studios are the most prominent studio type; just over 40 per cent of studio operators report operating this type of studio.

DIVERSIFIED OFFER

The percentage of fitness studios focused on delivering a singular, specialist experience is giving way to more multi-disciplined experiences – i.e. sites are increasingly offering at least two different programming formats such as cycling and yoga, cycling and HIIT, HIIT and yoga or personal training and barre.

Approximately 30 per cent of studios in this year's study said they specialise in two or more modalities or offerings.

RETURN OF SUBS

Fitness studios appear to be shifting from pay-as-you-go to a subscription model.

When the fitness studio segment first burst onto the scene, one of the novel aspects of the business model was its variety of flexible, pay-as-you-go packages. The founders of the studio boom focused on providing transparent, simple and convenient options to take part (single drop-in rates, five-class packs, 20-packs and so on).

But the 2015 data shows a shift toward a membership model – i.e. payment of a monthly fee for unlimited access to the studio's services. In fact, 71 per cent of studios now offer a membership option of at least one month's duration.

Membership encompasses a range of options, from unlimited group exercise classes to unlimited small group training, or indeed a combination of unlimited small group training with a limited number of personal training sessions.

This directional shift – while affording studios an additional means of generating value for consumers – could misfire with many fitness consumers by limiting the flexibility associated with the pay-as-you-go approach.

RETENTION LEVELS

Fitness studios are more effective at retaining clients than their counterparts in the traditional fitness industry. The average attrition level for fitness studios in 2015 was 24 per cent. Within that, personal training/small group training studios reported attrition levels of 20 per cent, compared to group exercise-orientated studios (such as barre, cycling, HIIT and yoga) that had attrition levels of 27 per cent.

EBITDA EFFICIENCY

The average EBITDA margin for studios in 2015 was 24 per cent, compared to a



A huge 63 per cent of revenue is spent on staffing fitness studios



PT and SGT studios dominate, while barre, cycling and HIIT studios remain in the minority

range of 16 – 20 per cent for traditional health and fitness clubs (data from IHRSA's 2015 Profiles of Success).

Studios under 2,000sq ft and those measuring 5,001– 10,000sq ft were the most efficient, with EBITDA margins of 37 per cent and 34 per cent respectively.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

A small footprint is associated with greater revenue productivity and earnings efficiency.

Studios measuring less than 2,000sq ft generate revenue of US\$104 per square foot and EBITDA of US\$38 per square foot. Studios between 2,001sq ft and 5,000sq ft generate revenue of US\$104 per square foot and EBITDA of US\$23 per square foot.

The data shows these smaller studios combine excellent revenue productivity with lower staffing costs, lower rental costs and lower investment and reinvestment costs. These smaller studios have a powerful blend of attributes that all speak to their capacity for greater profitability.

CLEAR WINNERS

Studios in the top quartile significantly outperform the industry average in terms of revenue per square foot, generating US\$189 per square foot compared to the industry average of US\$77, and EBITDA of US\$38 per square foot compared to the industry average of US\$18.

PRICE OF PEOPLE

Staff and rent represent the two largest costs for studios. The average studio spends 63 per cent of revenue on staffing and 21 per cent of revenues on rent.

Interestingly, though, the top quartile of fitness studio operators spend 51 per cent of revenues on staff and 13 per cent on rent – another indication of what drives best-in-class performance.

ACTIVE INVESTMENT

In 2015, the average fitness studio spent US\$9,500 investing in new equipment and US\$23,000 reinvesting

in the facility. This represents 11 per cent of average studio revenues.

While these numbers represent industry averages, they demonstrate a strong commitment by studios to reinvesting in the capital assets of the business.

LOW SET-UP COSTS

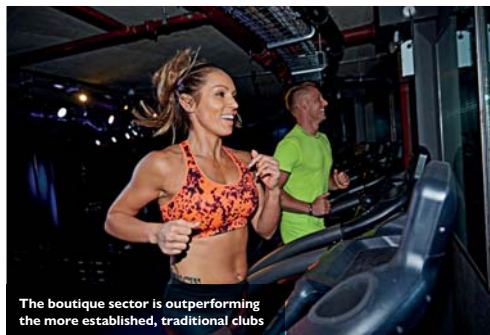
Fitness studios have a low capital barrier to entry and are asset light. The average fitness studio invested a total of US\$166,000 to open its business. This cost represents the total capital investment, including hard costs such as tenant improvements and equipment, along with pre-opening expenses.

When viewed by studio type, studios that are group exercise-driven spent approximately US\$208,000 to launch their businesses, while personal training/ small group-driven studios spent approximately US\$117,000.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Metrics related to net client growth, operating efficiency and revenue productivity of studios all point to a sector outperforming its larger, more established competitors in the traditional fitness sector.

As studio operators evolve to leverage their competitive strengths, this sector will be well positioned to capture a larger share of fitness consumer spend. ●



The boutique sector is outperforming the more established, traditional clubs



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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www.club-intel.com



DESIGNING FOR THE DECONDITIONED MARKET

Empowering inactive populations to take control of their health through physical activity is one of the biggest challenges local authorities currently face. Step forward 1Life, which has pioneered a winning solution to transform lives across Milton Keynes' deconditioned market

With the NHS pushed to its limits by Britain's physical inactivity epidemic and local authorities facing funding crises as stretched social care budgets come under unprecedented demand, the onus on leisure providers to get the nation healthier is greater than ever before.

Tough times call for serious ingenuity, and leisure operator 1Life has been leading the way with a multi-pronged approach to health needs across its new contract in Milton Keynes. Eschewing the conventional one-size-fits-all approach to local leisure provision, 1Life has harnessed technology and innovation to create tailored solutions for the diverse needs of the local community.

INSPIRING ACTION

Across the five-site leisure contract 1Life has developed a range of different activity options to engage specific sections of society as part of a £1.3m investment. Committed to inspiring a more active Milton Keynes, the operator

has applied its expertise in behaviour change and exercise adherence to align with Sport England's recently published strategy *Towards an Active Nation*.

Windmill Hill Golf Centre is a case that has seen 1Life focus its efforts on one of the toughest demographics to support: the deconditioned market. Along with the existing golf course, driving range and venue hire, the operator has put cutting-edge technology at the heart of its new Health and Wellbeing Studio, which is anchored by the unique milon exercise circuit. The easy-to-use machines automatically adjust to users' settings, delivering a full-body workout in just 35-minutes. Meanwhile, 1Life's team

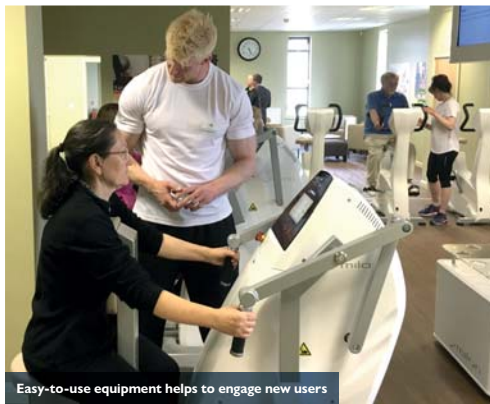
of experienced exercise professionals are on hand to support customers in their pursuit of a balanced health regime that uses carefully-set goals to maintain motivation.

"In the age of zero-subsidy contracts, local authorities are looking for leisure operators who will go the extra mile in delivering turn-key wellness solutions that really make a difference to the health of the local community," says 1Life managing director Neil King.

"There will always be the 13 per cent or so of adults who naturally go to the gym, but we must come up with more creative solutions if we are to inspire the deconditioned market.



1Life's exercise team are on hand to support customers



Easy-to-use equipment helps to engage new users



Above: The Windmill Hill Golf Centre is popular with older clients who have limited experience in gyms
Below: The centre houses the milon exercise circuit, which adjusts automatically to users' personal settings



"This can present more of a challenge, but by having the right people, environment and exercise offering, we've been able to make a real difference to the lives of our new members in Milton Keynes and it's a formula we're eager to expand elsewhere as well."

For King – and his growing company – every contract requires a highly bespoke approach and this was certainly the case for Milton Keynes. The borough has one of the most competitive gym markets in the country, but despite this, almost three quarters of the population are overweight – suggesting standard fitness offerings haven't had the desired effect. This has led to 1Life imagining a broad range of new concepts, including the UK's first Group Fitness Centre of Excellence and the conversion of a tired tractor shed into a thriving cross-training hub.

As for Windmill Hill Golf Course, the new Health and Wellbeing Studio was created out of a disused clubhouse, and the specialised centre has quickly made its mark – on both Milton Keynes' deconditioned market and the city's local authority.

"The reimagining of Windmill Hill clubhouse into a state-of-the-art wellness hub has been a massive hit with the deconditioned market, leading to a notable increase in usage and viability" says Paul Sanders, MK Council's assistant director, community facilities.

"The situation needed innovation and 1Life provided that with a completely out-of-the-box wellness offering. The package they've put forward has provided exactly what we wanted in terms of income, protection and investment – it's been a great result for us."

SERIES ROADMAP

This series outlines the raft of innovative leisure projects that 1Life has introduced as part of its new contract in Milton Keynes.

Contents:

1. Introduction to 1Life (HCM Jan 2016, p.40)
2. How the MK contract was won (HCM July 2016, p.56)
3. Transforming Woughton Leisure Centre (HCM September 2016, p.66)
4. Reinventing The Depot (HCM October 2016, p.50)
5. Designing for the deconditioned market

The reimagining of Windmill Hill clubhouse into a state-of-the-art wellness hub has been a massive hit with the deconditioned market, leading to a notable increase in usage and viability

Paul Sanders, MK Council's assistant director, community facilities

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FRIEND OR FOE?

Are activity trackers a help or a hindrance when it comes to weight loss? Kath Hudson reports

Increased exercise and a low-calorie diet, supported by an activity tracking device, is less effective than the same regime supported by regular counselling, according to a two-year study from the University of Pittsburgh in the US.

For the research, participants were put on low-calorie diets and prescribed increases in physical activity – but while device users lost an average of 7.7lbs, those being counselled lost an average of 13lbs.

The study concluded that, although devices allow for easy tracking of

physical activity and give feedback and encouragement, they may not enhance adherence to a healthy lifestyle – ultimately the most important aspect of any weight-loss regime.

Lead researcher John Jakicic says:

“Questions remain regarding the effectiveness of wearable devices, and how to best use them to modify physical activity and diet behaviours in adults seeking weight loss.”

Not only that, but a growing number of media reports and internet chat forums indicate that people who have

turned to trackers to help them lose weight have found their weight plateau, or even rise – an outcome generally attributed to inaccurate calorie trackers, or to the fact that any nutritional advice from the tracker is insufficiently personalised, so users tend to make the wrong food choices.

So, what advice should operators be giving their clients when it comes to using activity trackers for weight loss? Might using a tracker stop you losing weight – or worse, cause you to put it on? We ask the experts.

DAVID MINTON

The Leisure Database Company: Director



It's good that wearable technology and physical activity trackers are being debated, but we need to put them into context – we're only at the start of the journey of their functionality. We're at the stage where we can only use tracking information as an indication and not take it too seriously. If companies like Nike and Microsoft have withdrawn

their devices, it shows we're at a very early stage.

There's so much confusion over healthy eating and weight management. Monitoring activity is only part of the answer and people need to be careful about setting their caloric intake based on the information from a tracker: most people tend to over-estimate their physical activity levels and under-estimate what they eat.

Going forward, to make trackers more effective, there needs to be more use of artificial intelligence. There also needs to be more gamification. This needs to be fun – it shouldn't be boring or dreary.

We're at the stage where we can only use tracking information as an indication and not take it too seriously – David Minton

LIZ DICKINSON

Mio Global: Founder and CEO



The majority of trackers on the market today are limited to a single objective: to provide information on steps, calories or sleep. What's missing are the appropriate actions that must be taken to lead a healthy lifestyle. To have a significant impact as a weight-loss tool, wearables must also be able

to provide personalised actions.

It isn't an appropriate strategy to just rely on calorie deficit as the primary means of achieving weight loss. There are complex and dynamic properties which alter how we metabolise calories, including the type of calorie composition and the individual's physiology and genetics.

Wearables can have a significant impact as a tool for weight loss, but only if they provide both insights and personalised actions. Mio's approach is to transform information into insights, using a scientifically-validated metric called PAI (Personal Activity Intelligence), which contextualises sensor-acquired data. Contextualising a user's physiological habits, sleep, daily activities and exercise – all 24/7 – should positively impact the likelihood of behaviour change by providing truly personalised insights and meaningful actions.



Participants in a Fitbug challenge almost double their average daily steps

ANNA GUDMUNDSON

Fitbug: CEO



This is a new segment that will evolve and get more accurate in terms of using the data generated.

Wearables aren't a magic wand, but they can help

with a healthier lifestyle. Just like scales or a mirror, trackers can't be weight-loss tools on their own, but they can help shift us towards a healthier lifestyle.

Education and awareness is key, and Fitbug is focused on creating programmes that have context and explanation. Working within the corporate environment rather than health clubs, we look at holistic wellness and seek to change overall health and wellbeing – not just to support weight loss.

We aim to be an education tool that helps people recognise their bad habits and address them. For example, the device made me realise how few steps I do when I'm travelling. Those using the app also receive feedback based on their behaviours – for example,

suggesting fewer sugary snacks or offering tips on how to get a better night's sleep. The more people engage, the more they get out of it.

The impact wearables can have in getting people to move more, and adopt a healthier lifestyle, should not be underestimated. Our research shows that people increase their daily average from 4,900 steps to 9,900 during a Fitbug team challenge and afterwards their activity levels remain 16 per cent higher. This won't guarantee weight loss in itself, but it's unquestionably an important part of achieving a healthier lifestyle.

DAVE WRIGHT

MYZONE: CEO



Any form of self-awareness that's driven through the use of an activity tracker (or reminder) can help with consciousness of food habits.

However, what people don't realise is that many trackers currently on the market are simply not accurate in their measurement of calorie burn. This lack of awareness on the part of consumers, in conjunction with a pay-back mindset ("I've exercised – I deserve a treat"), could certainly lead to weight gain.

For example, if you have an accelerometer that tries to measure exertion by movement, you could be sitting on a bus to work and the bouncing of the bus could trick your tracker into clocking up 3,000 steps. You then see the calorie tracker and think you can have a bar of chocolate.

The bottom line is that the more data points that a tracker uses, the more likely it is to measure true calorific output. Not only that, but the more data that you see, the more likely you are to change both your exercise and food habits for the better.

ANDY CADDY

Virgin Active: CIO



The problem is that the technology is limited and over-hyped, so there's a tendency to put too much faith in it. In five to 10 years, we'll have the functionality we're

looking for, but at the moment it's early days.

Steps don't give enough insights and although people are initially excited, after a while they lose interest. When trackers can take into account nutritional and exercise knowledge, they will be able to increase engagement in a contextual way – for example, summarising what people did last week and giving them advice on how to build on that with some nutritional guidelines. ●



GOOGLE YOUR GOALS

Goals in Google Calendar helps users make time for the things that are important to them – like fitting in more exercise. **Florian Goerisch**, product manager at Google, tells **Kate Cracknell** how it works

What's the thinking behind Goals in Google Calendar?

We heard from our users that they often have so much going on, it can be hard to find time for the things that are important to them – especially if those things require sustained investment, such as learning a new language or improving their health and fitness.

Research from behavioural science told us that, if we could get people to schedule time for these activities in their calendar, they were much more likely to actually do them. But constantly scheduling and rescheduling time in your calendar is a pain, so we wanted to offer them an easier solution.

And so the idea of Goals in Google Calendar was born. Goals is a feature in Google Calendar that helps you achieve your goals by automatically scheduling them for you, based on your preferences and when you have open slots in your calendar. It uses cutting-edge machine intelligence to do the scheduling for you – harnessing the power of commitment, while maintaining the dynamism and flexibility that people need in their busy lives.

What sort of goals can people set?

There are five broad categories: exercising, building a skill, spending time with family and friends, creating 'me' time, or just having time to organise your life and stay on top of things. But if your desired goal doesn't quite fit into any of



Goerisch says more features may be added

those categories, you can also create a custom goal.

What's the most popular type of goal?

Our data shows that exercise goals are the most common: about 20 per cent of users set working out as a goal, while running is a goal set by 10 per cent of users.

The most frequent duration for exercise goals is a 60 minute session in the evenings.

How do you set a goal?

For the end user, Goals is very straightforward to set up. You don't need to provide background information – you just tell Goals what you want to do and it helps you schedule it to make it happen.

To use Goals, simply open the Google Calendar app and:

- In the bottom right corner, tap 'Create'.
- Then tap 'Goal' and choose a category – for example, Exercise or Friends & Family. To create a custom goal, just pick a category, then tap 'Custom'.
- Follow the directions on your screen to set up your goal. For example, if you choose exercise as your goal, Goals will ask you what sort of exercise, how often you want to do it, for how long, and what time of day is best for you. It allows you to clearly define your goal.
- Then you tap 'Done' – and that's it.

Sessions will be automatically added to your calendar, starting with the first four weeks. You can adjust the time or length of these events at any time. For more information, see www.health-club.co.uk/goals

What happens when there's a scheduling clash?

We've designed Calendar to help you adjust in a number of ways when the unexpected comes up and gets in the way of you achieving your goals. For example, Calendar will automatically reschedule if you add another event that's in direct conflict with your goal. Calendar also gets better at scheduling the more you use it – just defer, edit or complete

Exercise goals are the most common: about 20 per cent of users set working out as a goal, while 10 per cent set running



People using Goals in Google Calendar report higher levels of goal achievement

your goals as normal and, using machine intelligence, Calendar will choose even better times in the future.

Does Goals actually work?

The Calendar team performed a longitudinal study examining the benefits of using Goals, how the usage of Goals changed over time, as well as how it affected users' goal-related behaviour. While we can't reveal the full results of the study yet, the data certainly shows that Goals prompts people to spend more time on their goals.

Goals users also report higher levels of success in achieving their goals. Anecdotally, we've heard a number of great stories about how people have accomplished their goals thanks to the feature.

Does Goals incorporate any motivational tools to encourage people to stick to their plans?

No, not at the moment. If you share your calendar, then those who have access will be able to see your scheduled goals, but they only have view-access. They can't see whether you completed or deferred them.

How smart is Google Goals – how much does it learn about you and your habits?

Goals in Calendar is a machine learning feature, which means it gets better based on your interactions with it over time.

As a user, you set your initial preferences when you first create a goal (number of times a week, duration and so on). With this information, your user profile is created and your goals are scheduled, avoiding conflicts with other meetings.

These goals will automatically move as conflicts occur with other calendar events. However, if a user manually moves a goal (to a specific time, for example, or to the weekend), Google's machine learning algorithms will recognise the pattern and add it as a signal to your profile. Additional signals are also taken

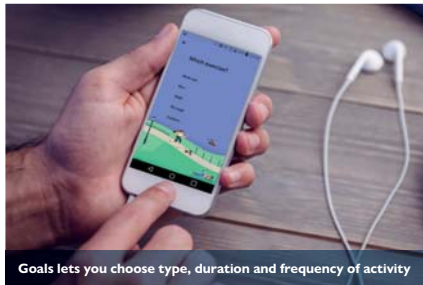
into account, such as if you mark a session as done or manually defer it. In this way your profile is built up, and this is taken into account for the scheduling of future sessions. For example, if the signals are strong enough, all future sessions will be moved to the particular day/time to which you've manually moved a goal.

Does Google Goals have any way of checking a goal has been achieved?

Goals relies on the interaction between the user and the Calendar app, so self-reporting is the primary way in which the feature operates.

Are there plans to further develop Goals?

We're always considering ways to better the user experience, which might include adding more features to Goals in Google Calendar. That said, we don't have anything specific to share at the moment. Stay tuned! ●



Goals lets you choose type, duration and frequency of activity



VIRTUAL HEALING

Many clubs and leisure centres offer swimming lessons for children – but what happens when they're scared of the pool? **Tom Walker** finds out about a Swedish project that set out to turn 4,000 water-fearing children into swimmers



lympic champion swimmer Adam Peaty, who broke his own world record en route to gold in the 100m

breaststroke final in last year's Rio Olympics, doesn't exactly come across as someone who's scared of water.

Yet, following his remarkable victory, it was revealed that as a child he was so petrified of water that his mum, Caroline, even struggled to bathe him.

"He used to scream every time he got in the bath," Peaty's grandmother, Mavis, revealed on morning TV a day after his success in Rio. "When his mum took him to the pool to learn to swim, he used to scream there too – so she had to ask a friend to take him, because it broke her heart to see him like that."

FEAR FACTOR

It's clear that, as a child, Peaty probably belonged to the two per cent of people estimated to suffer from aquaphobia – an irrational fear of water.

The condition is particularly harmful for children, as it can prevent them from learning a skill that at the very least has the potential to keep them fit and healthy throughout life – and which, for some, could one day prove life-saving.

Last summer, the Swedish branch of energy provider E.ON recognised this and decided to act. "One in five Swedish children can't swim, and a fear of water is one of the prime reasons," says Karin Rosell, head of brand and marketing for



Olympic swimmer Adam Peaty was scared of water as a child

PHOTO: OWEN HUMPHREYS AT PA WIRE



A promotional video showed the positive effects of the initiative

E.ON's Swedish operations. "For a land which is full of lakes and surrounded by sea, that's one in five too many. As we're one of the main sponsors of the Swedish Swimming Federation (SSF), it's a topic close to us and we wanted to do something about it."

After some research and a brainstorming session – together with its creative agency, M&C Saatchi – E.ON wanted to concentrate on the children who couldn't swim due to their fear of water. The team at M&C then suggested the use of virtual reality (VR) to help get these children more comfortable with the idea of water. Called The Power of Swimming, the project aimed to help children clear that crucial first hurdle – getting into the pool.

PLUNGING IN

To help children overcome their fears, E.ON and Saatchi set out to produce a video to convince them that swimming was a fun and safe activity and there was nothing to worry about.

Swedish Olympic swimmers filmed the VR programme using a special camera



Through E.ON's sponsorship agreement with the SSF, the project team was able to gain access to a rare resource: famous faces. Three of Sweden's most successful swimmers – Simon Sjödin, Erik Persson and Jennie Johansson – were recruited, with the video produced using VR cameras in which the trio virtually guided the

viewer into the pool. Once in the pool, the swimmers coached the viewer on breathing and basic swimming techniques – and even encouraged them to plunge beneath the surface.

The footage was made available for all iPhone or Android devices, viewable using a special headset into which the user could slot their smartphone, along



"IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THE FEAR-PROVOKING STIMULUS IS VIRTUAL OR REAL – AS LONG AS THE EXPERIENCE OF FEAR IS"

Philip Lindner, University of Stockholm

- ▶ with earphones. E.ON, which funded the entire project, made 4,000 free headsets available to be distributed to children.

To raise awareness of the availability of the headsets, Saatchi also produced a promotional video. In it, a group of young children – all with a fear of water – shared their stories, explaining how they had suffered due to their phobia. “It makes me sad when my friends go swimming but I can’t,” said one.

The video then demonstrated the power of VR, with each aquaphobic child sitting down to try on the headset and view the footage involving the three Olympic stars. The change seemed to happen immediately, as the children got to ‘experience’ a swimming pool – in virtual form – for the very first time. After initial hesitations, it’s obvious that each child warms to the idea, and by the end of the video it seems they can’t wait to try the real thing.

An opportunity to do just that is then offered to them, as after their VR experience, the children get to meet the three swimmers in a real pool – and the results which follow are amazing as they take to the water.

VIRTUAL IS REALITY

The project was well received, not just by parents but also by experts in the field. Swedish psychologist Philip Lindner, from the University of Stockholm, has studied and used virtual reality in treating a number of phobias, and says: “The best way to rid oneself of fear and phobia is controlled, graded exposure to the thing that makes you scared – be it water, spiders, thunderstorms or whatever –

and remaining in the fearful situation until the fear has subsided, so you learn that the fear will always subside and that it wasn’t as bad as you thought.

“In traditional exposure therapy, we use real water, dogs and so on. VR exposure therapy works according to the same

principle, but we use virtual water and virtual spiders instead. As it turns out, it doesn’t matter if the fear-provoking stimulus is virtual or real – as long as the experience of fear is.

“VR also allows us to do a lot of things that can’t be done in the real world. For example, at Stockholm University, we’ve recently developed a gamified self-help application to treat spider phobia that anyone can download from a digital store. The preliminary results show that it does indeed make people significantly less scared of spiders. This is pretty amazing considering that it only takes three hours to complete, there’s no therapist, and it runs on an £80 VR headset.”

Whether any of the 4,000 children given the opportunity to rid their fear of water will follow in the wake of Adam Peaty to the Olympic podium remains to be seen – but there is no doubt that this pioneering project will have changed many lives for the better. ●



The partnership with Swedish Swimming Federation allowed E.ON to use Olympic swimmers such as Simon Sjödin (far lane) in the video

PHOTO: DAVID J. PHELIP / PA



4,000 free headsets were made available

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PREPARING FOR FIBO 2017

FIBO 2017 is fast approaching. FIBO's Cornelia Tautenhahn went behind the scenes with event director Ralph Scholtz to find out what goes into the organisation of this global trade show

In the over 30-year history of FIBO, fitness has developed from an exotic pastime into a sport for the masses – driven by numerous innovations from manufacturers and new concepts promoted by fitness club operators. Illness prevention and health promotion, digitisation and the emergence of special-interest clubs are just some examples of the changes this market has seen over the years.

FIBO has actively promoted this development. As fitness became a popular activity, the range of training methods for various target groups has become increasingly overwhelming. We want to present trends to trade visitors in a way that's easy to digest, so they can find the products they need.

In 2017, we will focus on nutrition and its importance in the business models of both club operators and retailers.

Furthermore, we're stepping up our efforts as an active player in the industry. We see the trade show as an industry leader and a promoter of a healthy



Event director Ralph Scholtz

lifestyle. Every year, approximately 1,000 journalists relay the industry innovations presented at FIBO to the public. We consider FIBO, along with the European Health and Fitness Forum (EHFF), which takes place the day before, to be an influential voice directed at policy makers.

What do you see as the big trends in fitness for 2017, and how is FIBO responding to these?

Market diversification means there's no such thing as one big trend. We're more concerned with the challenges facing the industry and how we can rise to them. One such challenge is the rise of low-cost clubs, which is a cause for concern for many owner-managed clubs.

Operators must give better justification for high membership fees than ever before. Apart from the equipment and programmes offered, support by skilled staff plays a decisive role. This will be a key theme at FIBO this year.

What's your main focus for the 2017 show, and why?

As mentioned, we have a strong focus on skilled staff in clubs. To assist with this, we're collaborating with the Federation of International Sports, Aerobics and Fitness (FISAF), the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS), INLINE consultancy and EuropeActive, to name a few.

We'd like to present trainers with an extensive overview of the latest workouts and training methods. To make this happen, we're completely re-arranging the Group Fitness Area in Hall 4.1. Themes covered in this area will include virtual group exercise classes, the recurring trend of hip-hop and courses for kids.

A very special highlight will be the inaugural FIBO European Convention – powered by FISAF and supported by EuropeActive and EREPS – which will bring together trainers from all over Europe. The aim is to create the biggest line-up of education and further training courses for fitness trainers in Europe.

What have you learnt from organising FIBO over the years?

We learn with each and every trade show. This year, visitor management and safety



FIBO presents instructors with the latest workouts and training methods



Visitors to the show will find everything that is new and innovative in fitness, from the latest technology (top left), to new group exercise classes (top right) to state-of-the-art equipment (bottom left and right)

will be a major focus for us. Managing visitor flow is a constant challenge due to the growth of the event. In response, we'll have a completely new allocation of exhibition space for FIBO PASSION, with visitor access made easier thanks to the new Group Fitness Hall.

FIBO 2017 is also the first year that bags will be controlled at the entrances. Given that we're expecting over 150,000 visitors, this has already been a mammoth project, requiring a great deal of planning to ensure smooth access to the event. We will, of course, be relying on the understanding and co-operation of exhibitors, visitors and the press, who may have to allow for longer waiting times.

How do you reflect the different interests of visitors from all over the globe?

We have visitors from well over 100 countries, and our wide range of exhibitors successfully reflects international fitness trends. This is complemented by a focus on global trends in the accompanying programme.

But we believe an international approach is not only a question of content, but also about the way we address and attract visitors. To attract

trade visitors from around the world, we collaborate with numerous FIBO ambassadors. Every market has its own language, challenges and information needs. These ambassadors liaise with industry representatives in their respective countries to determine their requirements and expectations for the show.

What are your key aims for 2017?

We've seen strong increases in visitor numbers over the past few years, which has often exceeded our expectations. But qualitative growth has always been the main focus for us – both for the international industry decision-makers who attend FIBO EXPERT, and for all the fitness fans with high purchasing power who visit FIBO PASSION.

The aim for 2017 is, therefore, to further develop the trade show content and to cover emerging and future trends. We want visitors to go home with a 'knowledge headstart'.

What can you tell us about this year's EHFF?

'Consumer engagement' is the theme for this year's EHFF (European Health and Fitness Forum). We will again bring together managers from Europe's top

manufacturers and leading European industry insiders who will share ideas.

Speakers already confirmed for the event include professor Luis Huetde of the IESE Business School in Barcelona. Meanwhile Christophe Collinet, director of marketing and strategy at Fitness First, will explain consumer engagement using his clubs as a concrete example.

What other events are coming up in the near future?

We look forward to the imminent FIBO Innovation Tour, which will kick off in London on 26 January 2017. The tour provides valuable insights into the innovations and challenges of the sector.

This tour is not only a joy to organise, but has also become an indispensable learning opportunity for us as organisers. The exchange with local industry representatives and the insights we gain into the European fitness markets inform our organisation of future events.



EXPERT
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A SERVICE CULTURE

Health clubs are often criticised for their poor standards of customer service – but it needn't be that way. Executive business coach **Andy Bourne** offers his advice

If health and fitness operators want to improve customer service, they need to think about their organisations, their people and their customers in a totally different way – and that starts by asking themselves some notably different questions.

In the first instance, the CEO or business leader must build and sustain a culture where everyone understands how excellence in customer service provides a competitive advantage. This may require the CEO to ask themselves the following sorts of questions:

- What's the real objective of customer service in my organisation?
- What's the intended end result?
- Am I ready to make customer service a competitive imperative?
- What will success look like?
- Am I thinking like the customer?
- Do I really understand what my customers are thinking?
- How do I influence, rather than control, staff at all levels to deliver my vision of customer service?
- How are my behaviours regarding customer service influencing others?
- How might I be more influential in energising, enabling and releasing others in the organisation to better serve the customer?
- What must I do personally?

LATERAL THINKING

After considering these issues, the CEO will no doubt have a number of unanswered questions and may well turn to his/her senior leadership team for their views on the subject.

The challenge here is that, in my experience, senior leadership teams often contain functional experts who are trained to think in a linear dimension, which involves rationality, logic and analytical thinking – whereas I believe this issue will benefit from a combination of linear and non-linear thinking styles. Indeed, if you want to make customer service a competitive imperative in your organisation, your efforts will be boosted by adopting an indirect and creative approach, using reasoning that isn't immediately obvious and involving ideas that more often than not won't be reached via traditional step-by-step logic.

The CEO must be prepared to encourage this non-linear approach, allowing the team to draw on intuition, insight, creativity and emotions to arrive at novel and unexpected conclusions.

THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

The first question the senior team will need to consider is: What behaviours are required throughout the organisation to create a culture where service excellence is regarded as the competitive imperative?

It's important to recognise here that improving customer service can often lose out to other competing concerns such as short-term sales goals, cost-cutting or the 'we've never done it that way before' mentality – but you won't bring about a change in behaviours if your teams are pulling in opposite directions.

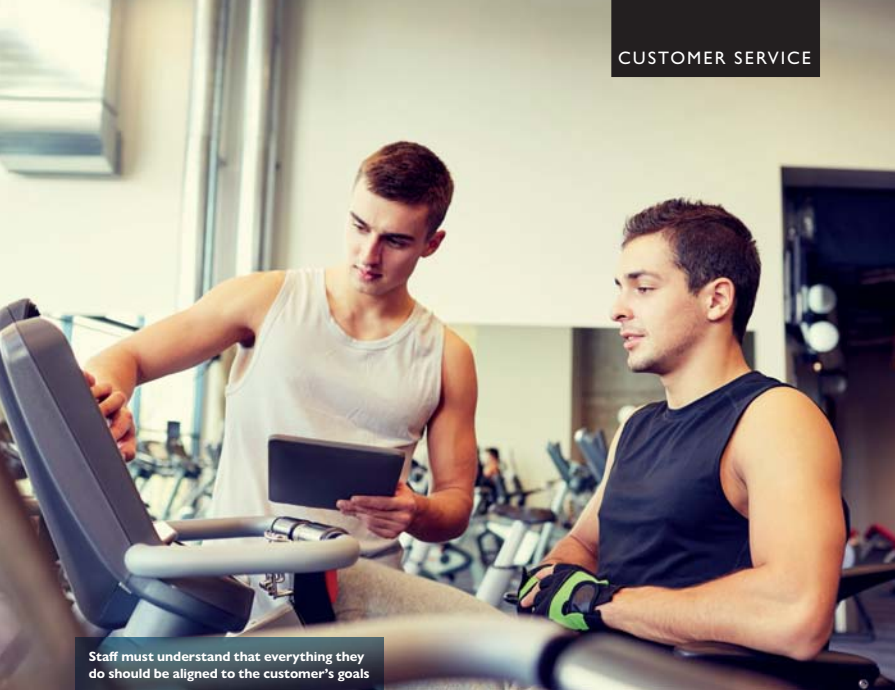
Don't expect everyone to automatically put the customer first every time. There will be some who believe 'customer experience' is a buzzword disguising an actual goal to improve performance metrics among frontline staff. Some may not buy into the vision and may still see things from the perspective of 'How can we do fewer things that upset our customers?' as opposed to 'How can we delight our customers?'

Only when there's an acceptance that everything must be aligned to the customers' goals will you be ready to move to the next question: How will we drive customer service performance throughout the organisation?

Richard Branson is reported to have said: "The way you treat your employees is the way they will treat your customers." The leadership team should therefore ask themselves questions like:

- Are our employees treated well?
- Do my employees enjoy working for the organisation?
- Do I know how it feels to work for my organisation?

IF EMPLOYEES DON'T ENJOY WORKING FOR THE ORGANISATION, IT'S DIFFICULT TO INFLUENCE THEIR BEHAVIOURS TO PROVIDE TOP RATE CUSTOMER SERVICE



Staff must understand that everything they do should be aligned to the customer's goals

If employees don't enjoy working for the organisation, it's difficult to influence their behaviours to provide top rate customer service – and influence, rather than control, is the key here.

One effective way to gain a deeper understanding is for the leadership team to work alongside employees serving and helping customers. I've found these frontline experiences to be hugely insightful and transformative. If leadership teams do this on a regular basis, their understanding of the employee and customer experience will be real and front-of-mind.

The business leaders should ask the frontline teams these types of questions:

- Why are we doing it that way?
- What's holding you back from providing better service?
- Why are we not providing good service to our customers?
- How might we take a step forward, even if only an imperfect step?
- What's important about this for you, your colleagues and our customers?
- What do you think?
- How can I help?

Also ask yourself if your front-line teams have the discretion to make decisions relating to customers without having to continually refer the matter to head office or senior management. While employees must be accountable for their decisions when dealing with customers, they mustn't be afraid to make decisions – and empowering them to do so will lead to better customer service, as well as higher levels of job satisfaction.

LEAD FROM THE FRONT

Ultimately, business leaders should try and make the lives of frontline staff easier, removing any obstacles that stand in the way of making customer service a competitive imperative. Start by reviewing management structures and processes, as well as the funding that's available to bring about real, meaningful change – change that will immediately benefit the customers, as well as the organisation in the longer term.

All that said, improving customer service first and foremost requires good leadership, with a focus on behaviours that positively influence the choices, commitment and behaviours of everyone in the organisation.

I accept that high standards of customer care can be achieved more easily in smaller organisations, but I firmly believe it's possible for larger, multi-site companies to make a major step change. After all, Richard Branson has been able to create and deliver a vision across a number of companies and thousands of employees. Surely we can improve standards across the health and fitness sector. ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Executive business coach **Andy Bourne** has held marketing director posts on the boards of several multi-site leisure companies and has created, operated and sold three businesses. He works with a variety of businesses to support leadership development, succession planning, change management and team building.
www.bournecoach.co.uk



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THE MIRACLE CURE

Simon Stevens, NHS England CEO, recently challenged the fitness industry to get involved in the prevention of lifestyle diseases. ukactive's **Steven Ward** reports

Late last year, at the ukactive National Summit in London, Simon Stevens – chief executive of NHS England – stood before leaders of the physical activity sector and began shaking a bottle of pills at them.

This unexpected gesture marked a seminal moment for the physical activity sector. The man responsible for a yearly budget of £120bn was throwing down the gauntlet to our sector.

He noted that the pharmaceutical industry dreams of discovering "a treatment that could cut 3 per cent of strokes, prevent 30 per cent of dementia, 30 per cent of osteoporosis, radically reduce breast cancer and bowel cancer, not to mention prevent depression, reduce stress, eliminate type 2 diabetes and cut the falls that our parents' generation experience each year."

He continued: "If you could pack all of that into a magic pill, it would be a worldwide pharmaceutical blockbuster. But the label on the side of this treatment says 'activity and exercise'."

The message was clear: the NHS knows the power of your product – now show us how we can use it to its greatest effect.

Stevens' message – that physical activity is a miracle cure which represents



this country. It will identify the most successful schemes so they can be scaled up to have national impact and lighten the load on the NHS. It will also determine best practice.

We know from the inaugural *Promising Practice* research in 2014, which looked at 952 activity programmes, that there are gaps in routine data collection, evaluation

contribute to making 'everyone active every day' – PHE's mission, as well as our own – we can uncover exercise solutions that deliver the associated health, economic and social improvements for communities.

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Concluding his speech, Stevens reiterated his challenge to our sector. "Experts at the Academy of Royal Medical Colleges estimated that more than £18bn of headroom in the NHS national budget could be created if we actually made serious improvements in physical activity across this country," he said.

"My plea to those of you working in the leisure sector, in gyms or local councils, is to proactively seek out your local hospital, community trust or ambulance service and begin this dialogue with them about how you can help advance this agenda."

The opportunity is there. Now the onus is on our sector to seize it. ●

The NHS knows the power of our product – we must now show how to use it to its greatest effect

the best chance of saving the NHS from bankruptcy – was nothing new to any of us in the room. What was significant was that he and the rest of the health service are now prepared to listen.

BEST PRACTICE

Two weeks after this speech, ukactive teamed up with the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine (NCSEM) and Public Health England (PHE) to launch *Promising Practice 2*. This project aims to significantly improve the standard of physical activity programmes in

and research around such schemes. Through the *Promising Practice 2* report – due in February – we can raise standards and build on the growing case for the wider commissioning of activity programmes.

The report will offer practical guidance on how this sector can consolidate good practice and build an evidence base. It's essential that we're able to demonstrate our impact and the return on investment of our services in the same way that other public health services can.

By highlighting effective physical activity initiatives that, if scaled up, could



CREATING TRAFFIC

Cycloparks steps its online offering up a gear with Legend, substantially increasing website traffic and online bookings by giving customers a website that's informative and easy to use

The Kent-based operator of world-class cycling facilities and fitness services has undertaken a website and marketing communications project with Legend Leisure Services, to redesign its online customer journey and implement a fully integrated system that encompasses everything a customer needs, including web bookings, membership, reception and payments.

Since it went live in July 2016, there has been a dramatic increase in visitors, page visits and online bookings.

THE CHALLENGE

In early 2016, recognising the increasing popularity of cycling as a great British sport and wanting to capitalise on the busiest period in its calendar year – the summer holidays, which also coincided with the 2016 Olympic Games – Cyclopark sought to undertake an initiative to revitalise its online customer journey.

Cyclopark offers a wide range of cycling activities, from a world-class BMX track, road track and mountain bike trails, to a skate park and cycling and other fitness classes.

However, its website poorly defined the extent of the offering. Customers had difficulty finding information and booking activities online. In addition, Cyclopark wanted to increase return visitors and turn repeat visitors into long term members through defined customer marketing.

Lenette Howard, Marketing Manager, Cyclopark, comments: "As our main customer facing presence, we knew that our website could work far more effectively for us. We wanted to give visitors a true feel for

the depth and breadth of our offering, and make the online customer journey slick and easy – from finding information, to asking for help, to booking and paying online. In addition, we wanted a single system that brought everything customer-focused under one umbrella."

As an existing user of Legend Club Management Systems, the move to Legend as its website developer was a logical one. "Legend has great industry knowledge," Lenette says. "They understand how our customers act and what they need from a website. Plus they offered us the ability to fully integrate bookings, membership and our website for a seamless customer experience."

THE SOLUTION

The first phase of the project was to identify key objectives and model the various customer journeys. Legend developed a fully device-responsive website optimised to include best practice guidelines. These included live timetables, membership options; a chat function for those visitors seeking additional, immediate support; the option to subscribe to a newsletter that integrated with Cyclopark's Mailchimp marketing automation tool; and a fully bookable online system.

In addition, employing data driven strategies using the wealth of CRM data, online sources and behavioural insights, Legend implemented a range of customer journeys, aimed at increasing customer retention and cross- and up-sell opportunities. Different communication channels including email and text messaging were also



Cyclopark's new website clearly conveys all that's on offer



“Cyclopark’s new website and customer journeys went live in July 2016. Since then, website traffic has increased substantially.”

considered to optimise engagement. Not only are the journeys automated as far as possible, saving time, but they can also be adapted to respond to customer engagement. This approach maximises the effectiveness of messages, making sure customers receive them at exactly the right time and with the most appropriate information.

Capturing prospect data from the website also allows opportunities for retargeting customers with abandoned baskets to ensure that no customer goes unnoticed.

“Legend’s engagement has been second to none,” Lenette says. “The solution they have developed looks and feels fresh. The website offers everything we – and more importantly, our customers – wanted, and we are now making the best use of the data we have for everyone’s benefit. Moreover, with deadlines to get the new website live looming, we trusted that Legend had our best interests at heart – and the support they have offered us throughout this project has proven that to be the case.”

CONCLUSION

Cyclopark’s new website and customer journeys went live in July 2016. Since then, website traffic has increased substantially. Users are up 28 per cent compared to the

same time last year; sessions are up 33 per cent and page views are up 57 per cent. Online bookings have increased by 40 per cent, demonstrating that customers are now able to view live activity timetables and book online much more easily than before.

“Although it’s too early to measure the impact on customer retention and average usage, automated data driven customer journeys using email, text and the website, all support our overall customer strategies – improving service, improving retention and increasing usage. And it’s largely due to Legend that we have been able to achieve this,” Lenette concludes.

Ingrid Hay, director, Legend Leisure Services, adds: “In today’s increasingly competitive environment, in order to truly engage prospects and customers, a website needs to tell a story from first view.

“Moreover, customer journeys need to be seamlessly woven together so that each touchpoint and message is relevant and consistent. We are very pleased to have been able to work in such close collaboration with Cyclopark to deliver these solutions, and are delighted with the business benefits already being achieved.”



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CREATE FANS NOT CUSTOMERS



This year's keynote address at SIBEC was given by **Chris Brindley**. We sat down with him to explore whether his learnings as MD of Metro Bank could be applied to the fitness sector

What's your mission for the Metro Bank business, Chris?

We set out to 'create fans, not customers'. We knew from the outset that the other banks were offering really poor service to their customers. One of Metro Bank's aims in becoming the first high street bank to open in over 100 years was to revolutionise the way banking was done in the UK. We decided to consider what customers would enjoy from us that other banks weren't offering. Some of these things include...

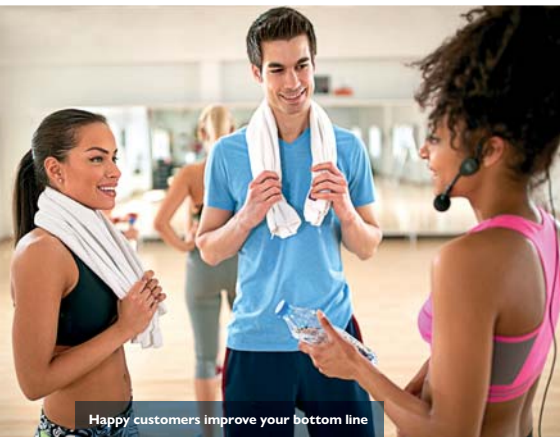
Our opening hours are 8.00am–8.00pm Monday to Friday, 8.00am–6.00pm on a Saturday, and 11.00am–5.00pm on a Sunday – yes, a Sunday. We also open on bank holidays, opening 362 days a year. We think and act like a retailer, not a bank, and our hours reflect that. We don't have branches, we have stores.

We love dogs! Not only do we allow dogs into our stores, we also provide two dog bowls with fresh water and dog treats are available in every store. We have dog bandanas in different sizes for our doggie fans to wear and

we even have a chief canine officer, Sir Duffield II, who even has his own Twitter handle @SirDuffield.

We open accounts and print cards in all of our stores, so if your card isn't working for any reason, we can replace it immediately – you don't have to wait days for a replacement. The majority of personal current accounts are opened in the store within 15 minutes, and that includes a chip and pin debit card with your personalised security pin code.

We also have drive-thru banks, so you don't have to find somewhere to park,



Happy customers improve your bottom line



**TREAT YOUR
CUSTOMERS AND
COLLEAGUES
BRILLIANTLY AND
PROFITS WILL
FOLLOW. DON'T
MAXIMISE PROFITS
AT THE CUSTOMER'S
EXPENSE**





Acknowledge different customer motivations: In leisure, for instance, some are there to compete, some to socialise

and all our stores have customer toilets and baby changing facilities. In a bank, I hear you ask? Well, only in Metro Bank.

How do you get buy-in at every level of the business?

We pick and develop amazing people. We recruit for attitude and train for skill. You don't apply to join Metro Bank – you audition. We have our very own 'M Factor' to help us recruit people who are obsessed with putting the customer at the heart of everything we do.

Our culture and values are based on the pneumatic 'AMAZE-ING':

A = Attend to every detail

M = Make every wrong right

A = Ask, if you aren't sure. It takes one person to say 'yes' and two people to say 'no' to a customer. If someone isn't sure, we ask them to bump up the issue to the most senior decision-maker around

Z = Zest is contagious, share it!

E = Exceed expectations

The ING is for our leaders and stands for:

Inspire, Nurture, Game change.

We're obsessive about always thanking and recognising our colleagues for going above and beyond and providing an unparalleled level of service. Not only are stories of colleagues exceeding expectations shared on our internal social network Yammer, but they're also publicly praised. Praise brings more of the same.

How does Metro Bank measure the impact of the approach you've taken?

There have been lots of great outcomes. Firstly, we've opened

hundreds of thousands of accounts, both personal and business. We've grown deposits and lending many times faster than the other banks. In terms of customer experience, we have one of the highest Net Promoter Scores around and have won multiple awards, including *Moneywise's* 'Most Trusted Financial Provider' and *CityAM's* 'Bank of the Year 2016'.

What could leisure operators learn from your experience?

Most leisure operators understand the need for flexible opening hours, spotless facilities and great customer experience. But perhaps they could challenge themselves to see if they have any stupid rules which affect customers and front-line staff. We're always on the lookout for these, and encourage our colleagues to bring them to the leader's attention. We even have a 'No Stupid Rules' mailbox for people to tell us.

We're also obsessive about 'surprising and delighting' our customers – about doing the unexpected, wonderful thing that will put a smile on our customers' faces, so they become our fans and tell their friends and family about Metro Bank.

It's also important to recognise that all people are different and have different motivations, so having an individual and personalised approach is much better than 'one size fits all'. In leisure, some like competitive activity while others prefer social activity. Some fear activity based on past experiences. You have to recognise this in your customers.

What advice would you give leisure operators keen to offer outstanding customer service?

Every day, walk a mile in your customer's shoes. Encourage your colleagues to be obsessive about how everything looks and what customers feel. Never become complacent about service. Continue to innovate, but don't use technology just to save costs.

Put your customer first and think seriously about what they really want. No customer ever said: 'I'd like to communicate with my bank through an automated voice response system', yet this is what most banks do. We have real people who answer the phone at Metro Bank, because our customers have asked for that.

What single piece of advice would you give a leisure facility manager keen to improve the financial performance of the facility?

Treat your customers and colleagues brilliantly and profits will follow. Profit is a by-product of motivating your people to deliver an enjoyable and memorable customer experience. This concept is known as the 'service profit chain'.

Also, never look to maximise profits at the customer's expense. That's why, at Metro Bank, we provide free coin-counting facilities and charge no fees for using our cards in Europe. Customers have a lifetime value, but in my experience, many organisations only look at their customers in the short term – and that results in only short-term results. ●



IHRSA 2017

The countdown for IHRSA 2017 has begun, with the event set to take place on 8–11 March in Los Angeles, California, US. **Kristen Walsh** gives a glimpse of what's to come



IHRSA 2017 will be held at LA LIVE, the city's sports and entertainment district

This year, IHRSA's 35th Annual International Convention and Trade Show heads back to America's west coast, after a successful 2016 event in Orlando, Florida. This March, the LA LIVE campus in Los Angeles, California will once again be the site of IHRSA's annual gathering of health club and fitness professionals from around the globe.

SHARING WISDOM

We're very excited about the keynote speakers lined up for this year's event.



Seth Mattison, founder and chief movement officer at FutureSight Labs, is an internationally renowned expert on workforce trends and

generational dynamics. He advises many of the world's leading brands and organisations on the key shifts in talent management, change and innovation, leadership and the future of work.

Mattison offers actionable content that can immediately impact business performance. He blends his own wide-ranging experience with cutting-edge research to develop fresh perspectives on strategic issues.



Martin Lindstrom – author, change agent and brand futurist – is recognised as one of the world's leading brand experts, having

pioneered such things as the introduction of brands on the internet (1994), the use of five senses in branding (2004), the introduction of neuroscience in advertising (2007) and the exploration of the next generation of subconscious communication (2010).

Lindstrom was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by TIME magazine, and is the author of several New York Times and Wall Street Journal best-selling books. He's an advisor to numerous Fortune 100 companies, including McDonald's, PepsiCo and American Express.



'joke' to a multi-million dollar, highly exclusive t-shirt brand. Earle will share

Johnny Earle is a branding expert and founder of Johnny Cupcakes. Over the past decade, Johnny Cupcakes has grown from a

the story of how, at age 19 and with a learning disability, he took his brand from the trunk of his rusty car to some of the world's most sought-after retail locations. With a focus on the power of details, experience and loyalty, Earle's presentation provides a comprehensive blueprint for getting any small business, passion or idea off the ground, while also expanding the way existing creators think.



Soraya Darabi is an impact investor and co-founder of Zady.com. She began her career as the first-ever manager of digital partnerships and

social media for the New York Times; her strategies are still in place today. Since named as one of Fast Company's 'most creative people in business', she's a leader in next-generation digital communications and e-commerce, and has helped numerous brands and companies of all sizes to anticipate, understand and maximise emerging digital trends. In her keynote, Darabi will explore strategies for creating a customised engagement plan, to help your organisation attract the current and next generation of consumers.

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

► TRADE SHOW

The two-day IHRSA International Trade Show is the place for health club operators to discover the world's newest and best fitness products, technologies and services, showcased by more than 350 exhibitors from around the globe. Be the first to see and try out the latest strength and cardio equipment – much of which will be making its world debut on the IHRSA trade show floor.

► FINANCIAL PANEL

When conceptualising the first IHRSA Financial Panel 20 years ago, Rick Caro – president of industry consultancy Management Vision and former president of the IHRSA board – knew the audience would benefit most from the experience of outside experts.

"Club leaders spend too much time discussing the same topics," he says. "Outside experts can be helpful in giving us a well-rounded picture."

"I wanted financial experts who would give us a new perspective on analogous industries, trend information and, most importantly, the current

state of the health club industry and where it could be going in future."

The panel was so successful that it has been a mainstay of the IHRSA International Convention and Trade Show ever since and returns in 2017.

► IGNITE!

This fast-paced, 75-minute event will allow selected speakers to prepare 20 slides, each shown for 15 seconds, giving all presenters just five minutes of fame. IGNITE! presenters will have the chance to share their personal and professional insights on a host of wide-ranging topics that can be informative, enlightening, humorous or just plain fun!

► EDUCATION TUTORIALS

The tutorial programme is designed to assist attendees who are facing challenges in their day-to-day operations. Attendees will be grouped according to their particular challenges and placed with an industry professional who will facilitate practical 'solution discoveries'. These groups will be limited in size to maximise interaction.

► NETWORKING ROUNDTABLES

The opportunity to network with club operators from around the world is one of the most requested IHRSA Convention activities each year. Facilitated by a moderator, these roundtable discussions provide attendees with the chance to connect and share knowledge and ideas on a variety of critical topics.

► WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS

These hands-on, half- and full-day workshops and supplier seminars – presented by a variety of IHRSA associate members that are also

exhibiting at the trade show – allow you to dig deeper into the programmes and products that can boost the success of your club. Learn more about products and services that you can then 'test-drive' on the show floor. ●

REGISTER TODAY

For the full agenda, to register for the event and for hotel information, visit

ihrsa.org/convention
Registration fees increase after Monday 23 January.

IHRSA's discounted hotel rooms will be subject to availability until Friday 3 February. After this date, the official IHRSA room blocks will be released and the hotels will charge significantly higher rates.

If you have any questions, please contact intl@ihrsa.org



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. Locate an IHRSA club at www.healthclubs.com

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



Visitors will get the chance to see and try out the latest group classes



Demos take place on the show floor

GIRL POWER

Leighton Park School and Queen Anne's School are encouraging girls to develop lifelong fitness habits with new equipment from Matrix

Two schools in the south-east of England are hoping a specialised offering will help to empower young women and encourage them to achieve their fitness goals.

The sites have both been refurbished to include Matrix Fitness kit and designed to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment without compromising on the standard of equipment.

NEW CHOICES

Leighton Park in Reading is a co-educational day and boarding school for 11- to 18-year-olds that recently invested in its sports facilities by creating a new and improved fitness centre. The school emphasises that healthy eating, fitness and exercise are important aspects of overall

More girls at the school are choosing fitness-based activities as part of their games afternoons and extra-curricular activities

Jeremy Belas, Leighton Park



student wellbeing and support academic studies and achievement.

The fitness centre is used to support sport studies, but can also be used by students as part of their extra-curricular activities or their own fitness programmes. New equipment was installed to encourage female students to participate in physical exercise, with a range of Matrix treadmills, rowers, bikes and elliptical machines all on offer.

Students also benefit from all-weather surface tennis courts, a floodlit AstroTurf for sports such as hockey, basketball and netball, a covered swimming pool and a gym and weights room.

Jeremy Belas, director of sport and senior enrichment co-ordinator at Leighton Park, says: "Traditionally, the school has always provided weight training, but this held very limited appeal to the girls in the school. Nigel Williams, our head, specifically wanted to create a new facility that would encourage the girls to come into the gym and try exercising in a different way.

"Our Matrix-installed Fitness and Cardio Centre has certainly achieved this, with more girls at the school choosing fitness-based activities as part of their games afternoons and extra-curricular activities, and working out using the high-end functional equipment."

REACHING GOALS

Also encouraging young women to participate in exercise is Queen Anne's School in Caversham, an independent boarding and day school for girls aged 11-18 years. The school occupies a 35-acre campus and benefits from a new 140sq m gym, with the original gym having been converted into a dance/aerobic studio.

Queen Anne's aims to meet each individual pupil's needs through a wide range of activities and teaching styles. It looks to promote an understanding of realistic goal-setting within PE, as well as an ability to identify personal strengths and weaknesses.

The school boasts a fully-equipped sports centre including a new fitness suite, two dance studios, a squash court, four badminton courts, a climbing wall and a large room for Zumba and yoga.

The new fitness suite features 35 pieces of Matrix equipment including a range of cardiovascular machines with individual consoles, indoor spinning bikes and Aura strength equipment including a Multi-Functional Trainer.

Ed Hellings, director of finance and administration at the school, says: "As a leading independent girls' school, we needed a gym that not only promotes health and wellbeing to our girls, but also reflects the standard expected by the girls themselves and their parents."



Girls at Leighton Park are getting involved in fitness at school

We needed a gym that not only promotes health and wellbeing, but also reflects the standard expected by the girls and their parents

Ed Hellings, Queen Anne's School



MATRIX

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WEB: www.matrixfitness.co.uk

A smiling man with short brown hair and a light beard, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with light blue accents, is looking towards a woman whose back is partially visible on the left. They are in a gym setting with exercise equipment in the background.



MATRIX

TOTAL SOLUTIONS PARTNER

As a Total Solutions Partner, we believe providing industry-leading commercial grade fitness equipment to our customers shouldn't be the end of the Matrix journey, it's just the beginning.

At Matrix, we can provide your facility with a bespoke package of marketing, training, service and even construction solutions to suit you.

For more information, contact the Matrix Marketing team on 01782 644900.

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Up the pace

Kate Corney finds out what's hot on the cardio circuit. For more information, log on www.fitness-kit.net and type in the company name under 'keyword search'



Climber Excite integrates with the 'mywellness' cloud

TECHNOGYM'S STAIRWAY TO FITNESS

Technogym has designed a space-efficient stair climber to combine effectiveness, ease of use and design.

The climber has been designed for both first-timers and advanced users. The goal-orientated routines B-Side, Sweat It Out and Body Buster are designed to shape the lower body, burn calories, increase muscle performance, strengthen the cardiovascular system and improve coordination and balance.

Climber Excite integrates with the 'mywellness' cloud where personal training data is automatically saved and can be viewed from a Unity 3.0 console or from the user's personal devices.

Technogym has also introduced the newly updated Excite line, a range of cardio equipment now featuring the new Unity 3.0 console and with wireless connectivity through Bluetooth. Unity 3.0 offers a Races feature which allows people to design their own interactive virtual competition. The upgrade also includes a Speed Shift function which lets users flick between speeds easily for interval training, as well as new colour options across all the machines.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **TECHNOGYM**



The new Matrix rower features magnetic resistance

MATRIX REWORKS ROWING

Matrix Fitness has relaunched one of its hero products – the Matrix rower. Mark Zabel, vice president for global marketing at Johnson Health Tech, which owns Matrix Fitness, says of the reworked machine: "Attention was given to every detail, and we're confident that the new rower from Matrix offers the finest rowing experience out of water."

"We set out to engineer a rower for multi-modality circuits, health club cardio floors, specialised rowing classes and elite athletic training facilities."

The traditional fan has been replaced with quieter magnetic resistance and a flywheel, the footprint is now smaller and the rower can easily be upended and repositioned. The seat has been widened for greater comfort, and can be locked in place to provide a stable base for rehabilitation or older clients.

The new, self-powered, adjustable backlit console can be seen in dark classes, and programme keys allow users to easily switch between settings.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD **MATRIX**



The EFX 800 series has a patented CrossRamp

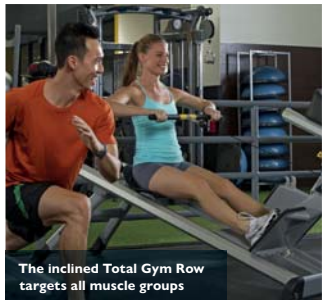
PRECOR SERIES HITS A NATURAL STRIDE

Precor has launched the 'natural feeling' Experience Series EFX 800. The series incorporates a patented converging CrossRamp, which is designed to mimic a person's natural stride path.

Three independent research studies and rigorous testing have optimised the elliptical design, says Precor. Studies examined the diversity of stride paths and the impact of ramp angle on the body.

Other features include a personalised workout with touch screen console, a modernised design and sleek frame. The machine has a covered ramp, rear cover and pivot joints for easy cleaning. Its panels detach without tools and lights show when it needs attention.

[fitness-kit.net](#) **KEYWORD** **PRECOR**



The inclined Total Gym Row targets all muscle groups

ETHICS LEISURE IS INCLINED TO ROW

Ethics Leisure has launched the Total Gym Row Trainer which is set on an adjustable incline and allows for adjustable bodyweight resistance.

The Row Trainer is designed to target all muscle groups simultaneously and ensure a smooth consistent load through the entire range of motion.

Rowing at an incline provides an extra cardio and strength challenge. It also allows for additional exercises including a side-to-side row and biceps curl.

The Row Trainer accommodates both beginners and advanced athletes. It requires 12 sq ft (1.1 sq m) of floor space and folds up for compact storage.

[fitness-kit.net](#) **KEYWORD** **ETHICS LEISURE**

ZERO JOINT STRESS WITH OCTANE'S RUNNER

Octane Fitness – a Nautilus, Inc. brand – is now processing orders for its newest offering. The Zero Runner or ZR8000, which soft launched at LIV 2016, is designed to eliminate repetitive, stressful impact on the body and give a comfortable way to walk, jog or run.

With no belt, deck or motor, the Zero Runner is also designed for low cost operation, maintenance and service. Eleven workout programmes, including interval training and distance and calorie goals, provide plenty of variety for users.

Octane's Cross Circuit routine combines cardio intervals on the Zero Runner with strength and stretching exercises off the machine.

Independent hip and knee joints on the Zero Runner are designed to facilitate natural motion – including walking, jogging, hill work and running – with no impact on the body.

[fitness-kit.net](#) **KEYWORD** **OCTANE**



The runner eliminates repetitive stress on the body

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Sustained aerobic exercise appears to benefit the brain the most

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The aerobic advantage

A new study shows that sustained aerobic exercise might be better for our brain than anaerobic exercise

Exercise is good for the brain – many studies have shown that physical activity can increase brain volume and reduce age-related brain deterioration. A recent study has gone further, looking at the effects of different types of exercise.

The study was carried out on rats, and specifically examined adult hippocampal neurogenesis (AHN) – the creation of new brain cells in an adult brain. Cell growth in the hippocampus is likely to improve learning and memory.

Past studies have found that the number of new brain cells in rats doubles or triples in response to sustained running on a wheel or treadmill. This new study, led by Dr Miriam Nokia, a research fellow at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, aimed to test this result against two anaerobic forms of exercise: resistance training and high intensity interval training (HIIT).

"The majority of studies have looked at how aerobic exercise affects AHN," Dr Nokia said. "We wanted to also study the effects of anaerobic exercise and HIIT training, as these forms of physical activity are very popular among humans."

Exercise types

To test the differences between these types of exercise, 88 rats were divided into four groups and given different exercise tasks. One group had a running wheel in their cages, allowing them to run at will. Another group was not allowed to run, instead engaging in resistance training by climbing a wall with tiny weights attached to their tails. The HIIT group was placed on treadmills and required to alternate between sprinting for three minutes and walking for two minutes for a total of 15 minutes sprinting. A control group was sedentary, with no exercise.

After seven weeks of testing, the rats were examined for evidence of hippocampal neurogenesis and very different levels were found. The running group showed a much higher level of neurogenesis than the sedentary group, supporting previous studies.

Interestingly, the researchers found a much lower level of neurogenesis in the HIIT group than in the running group, while the anaerobic group showed no

difference from the sedentary group.

"According to our current results, voluntary and sustained aerobic exercise is most beneficial for the brain, at least in terms of adult hippocampal neurogenesis," Dr Nokia confirmed. "It was surprising that the effects of HIIT and resistance training on AHN were so modest."

Human effects

So what can these results tell us about the effects of exercise on the human brain?

Dr Nokia explained: "Adult neurogenesis has been confirmed to take place in the human hippocampus. In addition, it has been suggested that in response to aerobic exercise, similar changes in blood flow take place in the hippocampi of both rodents and humans. It is thus plausible that aerobic exercise would be beneficial for adult hippocampal neurogenesis in humans."

Dr Nokia is mindful that there is still much we don't know about how exercise affects the brain. She would like to see further research on the effects of long-term anaerobic exercise on the brain. ●

It was surprising that the effects of HIIT and resistance training were so modest

Nokia, M.S. et al. Physical exercise increases adult hippocampal neurogenesis in male rats provided it is aerobic and sustained. The Journal of Physiology. Vol 594, Issue 7, 2016.

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