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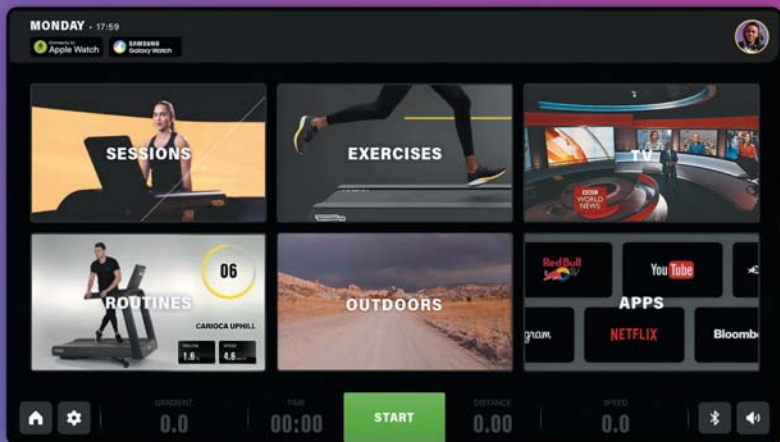
🔹 The Xercise4Less deal has accelerated JD Gyms' growth plans by three years 🔹 p40



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Keep fighting

A new report from Deloitte and EuropeActive shows how much our fate is tied to government support and must spur us on to recommit to ramping up lobbying for essential status

New research from Deloitte and EuropeActive, out this month (see page 58), dramatically highlights the impact of government policy on the prospects of the health and fitness sector across Europe.

This is the eighth edition of the *European Health & Fitness Market Report* and the authors note that this is the first time the sector has contracted in size.

The changes are especially marked given we came off the back of a record-breaking year in 2019, when the industry in Europe reached €28.2bn in turnover. This dropped to €18.9bn in 2020 – a 32.9 per cent fall.

The report reveals that the impact of the pandemic has been uneven across Europe, with government pandemic responses, legal frameworks, and tax regimes having a major impact on trading in the sector during 2020.

Lockdowns ranged in extent from Sweden, where there were no closures, to the UK, where operators lost more than 50 per cent of trading time across the year.

This uneven lockdown response saw UK operators such as Nuffield recording drops in revenue of 46.5 per cent against SATS in Sweden with 18.5 per cent.

Member numbers were also impacted by the pandemic in 2020, however, Germany, where contracts tie consumers into ongoing payments, saw operators faring better than in many other countries, for example.

As highlighted by the report, VAT rates on health club fees have also played a part in the success of the sector, with varying rates being reported, from a low of 0 per cent for Swedish public sector providers to 27 per cent in Hungary, with other nations ranged in between.

Deloitte points out that where VAT on fees has been reduced and that reduction has been passed on to consumers, there have been increases in participation.

Ireland is cited as an example – VAT was reduced from 13.5 per cent to 9.0 per cent, prompting a corresponding increase in 'personal exercise in gyms and leisure centres' from 11 per cent to 13.8 per cent and showing how powerful government support can be.

During lockdowns, huge energy went into lobbying for essential status and VAT breaks. This has inevitably



PHOTO: THE GYM GROUP

Government policies have a huge impact on participation

Now's the time to be uniting and recommitting to lobbying for essential status and VAT breaks for members

waned a little since trading recommenced, however, the Deloitte report highlights how important it is that we keep fighting until governments recognise the full impact they have on participation and the success of the sector.

COVID-19 variants are driving infection rates and we have another long autumn and winter ahead in Europe, so now's the time to be uniting and recommitting to this essential lobbying.

Let's get behind EuropeActive, ukactive, and the other 24 European fitness associations and ensure our voice is heard and that we get the support and recognition we need to be able to optimise our valuable work.

Liz Terry, editor
lizterry@leisuremedia.com

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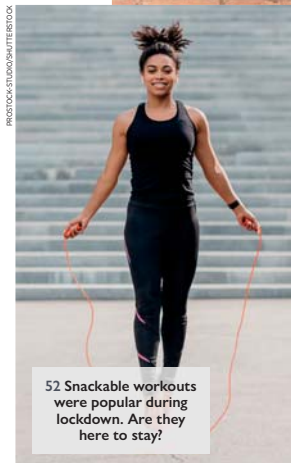


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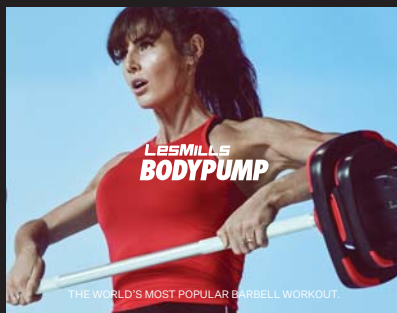
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Write to reply



PTs are likely to find themselves on the front line when it comes to working with people with disordered eating

Dr Bunmi Aboaba

COVID-19 lockdowns have triggered a spike in mental health issues, which for some manifested in disordered eating.

Statistics from eating disorders charity, Beat, show an 140 per cent increase in demand for their helpline services between February and November 2020.

There are also more reports of health club members asking their instructors for help with non-hunger eating and food-related issues.

Professionals working in health and fitness have a pivotal role to play in the fight to help people overcome

these self-sabotaging tendencies.

Getting help early is the key to success, the NHS has seen a million people seeking help with obesity, while eating disorder helpline services are overwhelmed and GPs can't cope.

It makes sense to have specialist training available for personal trainers and fitness professionals in the health and fitness industry.

This is partly because PTs are likely to find themselves on the front line when it comes to working with people with disordered eating. They're also well placed to encourage a client to utilise other support, such

as therapists, nutritional support, friends and family and, if necessary, doctors and medical services.

A health and fitness professionals' attitude towards helping people build healthy relationships with food and their body can play an important part in their recovery.

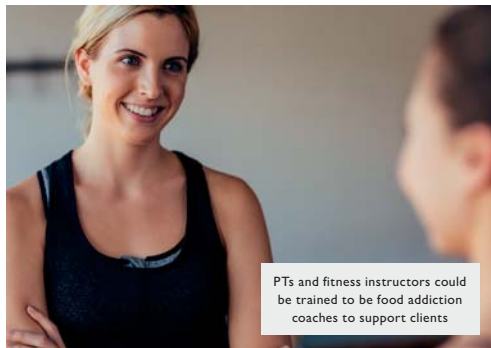
Another strong reason for PTs to upskill in this area is that they interact with clients regularly and so are in a position to identify disordered eating patterns – sometimes in the early stages – and use coaching skills to prevent someone from developing a full-blown eating disorder.

Referral from the NHS GP services to specialist PTs could be a gamechanger and also increase the standing of fitness instructors and the industry in the eyes of the public.

My mission is to create an army of food addiction coaches, armed with the facts, strategies and techniques to create transformation and fulfilment with effective, results-based methods and compassion.

Helping a member or a client change their relationship with food, while healthily increasing their physical activity levels is the way forward.

We need a paradigm shift in the way we approach disordered eating and as health and fitness professionals, together we can do just that.



PTs and fitness instructors could be trained to be food addiction coaches to support clients

SHUTTERSTOCK/ALACORN



SHUTTERSTOCK/PIRELLA GÖTTSCHE LOWE

“
The recent customer Experience Survey received over 50,000 responses from individuals having visited at least one of 1,183 sites since reopening in April

Moving Communities must prompt more equal access to opportunity

David Monkhouse Leisure-net

The Moving Communities team welcomes Martyn Allison's comments in the previous issue of HCM (Issue 5 2021, page 78, 'Aiming for Equality').

Martyn articulately sums up the value of the Moving Communities data collection and dashboard to the sector and raises some very valid points.

In delivering on the Moving Communities initiative, we have taken the National Benchmarking Service and enhanced it, both with added content – such as the Social Value Calculator – and also with greater coverage across England.

There are now 1,200 sites and 254 local authorities submitting data to the platform and the recent Customer Experience Survey received over 50,000 responses from individuals having visited at least one of 1,183 sites since the re-opening on April-21.

This represents 267 operators, and 158 local authorities.

These participants are not just 'members' – many are pay and play customers as a result of the fact that sites are requesting all



visits be booked as part of their COVID-19 safe procedures.

Our two-page infographic can be downloaded in full from www.movingcommunities.org and shows data based on the first seven weeks of Moving Communities. This indicates that a greater proportion of participation in leisure centres has come from people living in more deprived areas, when compared to the same time period in 2019.

While there is still higher total participation by people from less deprived areas, the distribution across the Index of Multiple Deprivation

(IMD) deciles, is more balanced than it was before the pandemic.

We have a desire to drive change via the data and insight that our platform is generating. The data and insight provided so far by Moving Communities is highly encouraging, especially when analysing the return of participants from deprived areas.

It is key to note, however, that the data is from a short seven-week period and is, therefore, subject to change, especially as wider behavioural trends develop across society and restrictions associated with the pandemic are gradually lifted.

As further data becomes available, it's vital that greater focus is placed on using qualitative and behavioural research to understand quantitative data in more detail, as well as informing how the sector invests into and engages with local facilities and communities.

● Find out more: Data and insights are shared on our website, www.movingcommunities.org, on LinkedIn @Moving_Communities and Twitter @MovingCommunit1

Virgin Active had its rent bill wiped clean as part of a court-approved restructuring, before the government extended its pandemic rent moratorium



SHUTTERSTOCK/ALTA BARTON



While tenants have been told to pay their rent if they are in a position to do so, there is seemingly no recourse if they refuse

Alastair Lomax TLT LLP

The UK Government is in an invidious position. The pandemic has set two key components of the UK economy – commercial landlords and their tenants – at loggerheads, and policymakers have had to walk a tightrope as they attempt to provide a balanced route forward.

The recent announcement that the government's rent moratorium would be extended was music to the ears of many commercial tenants, particularly businesses in the health and fitness and leisure sectors, which have endured some of the toughest and most prolonged restrictions so far during the pandemic.

However, this blanket approach to the extension of the moratorium has been met with dismay by many landlords, who were hoping to see more nuanced solutions that were tailored to those sectors which have been hardest hit, in order to avert a scenario where tenants might exploit the moratorium by deferring rent payments.

Landlords in which UK pensions are invested may wonder when it will be their turn to receive support.



While tenants have been told to pay their rent if they are in a position to do so, there is seemingly no recourse if they refuse.

The Government has stated that if commercial landlords and tenants fail to come to an agreement over unpaid rent, then binding arbitration will be put in place. However, it is still unclear how arbitration would operate, who would manage it and who would pay the costs of it.

Binding agreements are already part of the CVA and Restructuring Plan procedures – both also the subject of criticism among many landlords. Which begs the question,

why would either party see arbitration as preferable or likely to provide a better outcome?

More detail is also needed around whether arbitration would be voluntary, or made mandatory in certain circumstances – for instance, by tying it to a tenant's ability to continue to avail the benefits of the moratorium, or where agreement cannot be reached in a given timeframe. It will also be intriguing to see whether it will offer a more attractive route for debt-laden commercial tenants than the potentially quicker 'fix' of a formal restructuring, CVA or other insolvency process.

With tensions between landlords and tenants rising, it's important for both parties to understand that coming to a mutually beneficial arrangement is in their best interests. The latest announcements have halted a potential avalanche of insolvencies and job losses; the key to further safeguarding thousands of businesses and jobs now, however, is through all participants working together. Litigation – and perhaps arbitration – should be a last resort. ●



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*This is a new concept –
our first wellness club and
Amsterdam's new jewel.
Everyone is welcome*

Gerhard Kamphuis

Club manager, SportCity Cornelis Schuyt



The building housing
SportCity was formerly a
Christie's auction house



The new club focuses on offering a warm welcome to members of the local community

What's the concept of SportCity Cornelis Schuyt? How is it different from the other SportCity clubs?

SportCity has 25 clubs in the Netherlands, but this is a new concept, our first wellness club and Amsterdam's new jewel. It's warm and comfortable and everyone is welcome. If it works well we might open more.

We have all the elements of a boutique experience, but on a larger scale: an emphasis on personal service, top trainers, a beautiful fit-out, towel service, high class changing areas, cutting edge technology, great lighting and the incorporation of technology to enhance training methods – heart rate training, for example. The building itself is also iconic: it was formerly the Christie's auction house.

As a result, the fees are more than the usual SportCity membership at €89 for four weeks if you join for two years, €99 for one year and €129 a flexible membership for a four week block. This gives access to the gym and classes, small group training, an individual programme, a quarterly scan on the InBody body composition analyser and the use of towels and toiletries.

A separate membership to the InBody composition analyser will also be offered, in collaboration with medical partners, so patients can come and have their measurements checked. This could also be an add-on for members.





We have corporate members and athletes, including members of the Dutch soccer and hockey teams

What does the club incorporate?

Personal service is integral to our concept, so there is a high emphasis on PT. As we take a holistic view of health, we also offer physiotherapy, sports massage and a nutritionist. These services are available as an add-on to the membership.

The wellness area includes a sauna and steamroom and high-end changing rooms. We also have a vegan café, The Grand Café, run in partnership with HartBiet, which serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. The healthy menu has been put together by nutritionists and food is labelled with calorie and nutritional information.

There are four studios: the Christie's studio for Les Mills classes, boxing, Latin dance and cycling with Technogym Group Cycle. The Zen studio holds a variety of yoga classes, Pilates and meditation and there are two studios for PT and small group training with a maximum of four people.

We have a gym with equipment from Technogym, including the Biocircuit, a guided cardio and strength training experience.

How has COVID-19 impacted your plans?

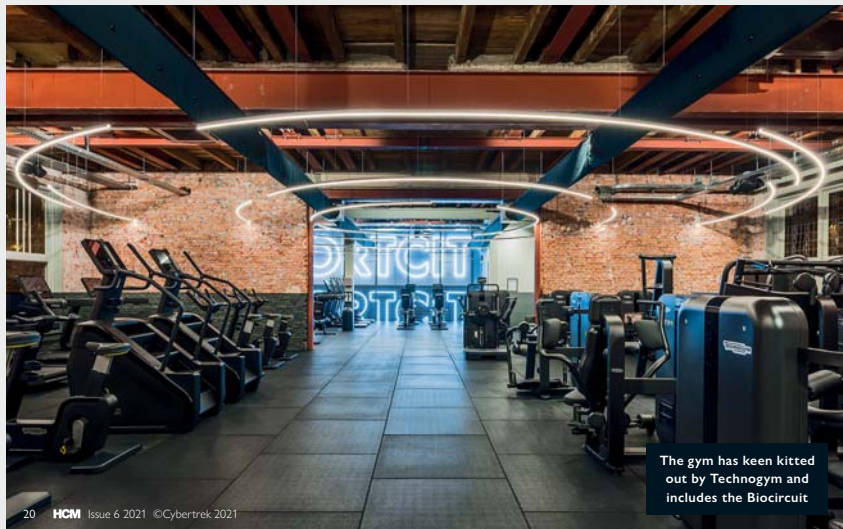
We managed to make it through the pandemic because SportCity is owned by a large company, which also owns the accessible fitness chain, Fit for Free. Despite this, the second lockdown was tough and the company had to make cost savings.

The launch was meant to be in 2019, but was delayed by COVID-19. We first opened on 7 December 2020 and had to close for lockdown eight days later. We only reopened on 19 May.

Fortunately, we're now able to run group exercise classes and limitations on numbers have been lifted, however, members still have to stay 1.5m apart while they're working out. Group classes, yoga, wellness and showers are all now open.

Members have to reserve a time slot to work out in the gym and we give each member their own cleaning supplies to clean the equipment after they use it.

To keep them engaged, we offered Zoom classes during the lockdowns and we'll definitely keep this going, as well as organising yoga in the park



The gym has been kitted out by Technogym and includes the Biocircuit



PHOTO SPORTCITY

Kamphuis is building a community of members who want to train at a every level



PHOTO SPORTCITY

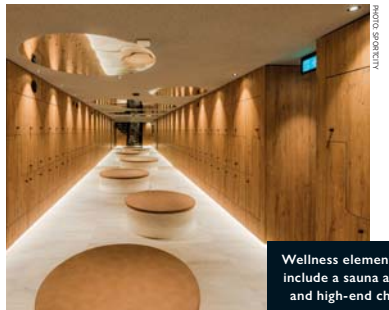


PHOTO SPORTCITY

Wellness elements at SportCity include a sauna and steamroom and high-end changing rooms



PHOTO SPORTCITY

when the weather is good and delivering running groups. This would have been the case even without COVID-19, but the pandemic has underlined the fact that this is needed. I really want to build a community and being outside helps to do that.

Who are your members?

The club aims to be welcoming to all and tuned in to the local community. It's in a upscale residential area of Amsterdam, with wealthy people living locally, as well as a large expat community. We have a lot of corporate members and athletes, including members of the Dutch soccer and hockey teams. Other Sport City clubs tend to be 50:50 women to men, but we currently have 60 per cent men and the most common age group is 35 to 55, however, the club has only just opened, so this may change as the membership develops.

Many of the people who have joined are used to working out and have a healthy lifestyle but want to take it to the next level. In order to guarantee the high level of service, membership may be capped eventually to ensure a quality experience, but this level has not yet been set.

Talk us through the member journey

A high level of service is central to the concept, so the member journey is important. On the first visit they're measured on the InBody analyser and shown the Biocircuit.

On the second appointment, they do a small group training class and on the third appointment they're given a programme, then we meet them every three months to review goals and check in with them every week. Most members come 0.8 times a week. We hope to inspire them to come more often. ●



We'd never want KX or KXU to evolve into a chain: every location has to be unique, with a 360-degree approach to wellness

Graziano Arricale

CEO, KX and KXU



What was your journey to joining KX?

My background is in restaurants and private members' clubs. Hospitality is in my blood – my whole family was in the restaurant trade – so it was perhaps inevitable I ended up in this industry.

I began my career with Sir Terrence Conran at Conran Restaurants – then D&D London – before working for Richard Caring for nearly six years running The Birley Clubs, opening Annabel's together.

I became CEO of KX in January 2020.

KX opened in London in 2002. How would you describe the concept?

The KX mission is to be the finest wellness members' club in the market. It's a home away from home for our members. Designed as a luxurious refuge from the outside world, no detail has been spared. As soon as our members enter the club, we want them to unwind.

We take a holistic, scientific approach to health that spans exercise, nutrition and medical; we don't believe focusing on one element in isolation works. Our offering ensures every aspect of our members' physical and mental wellbeing is carefully considered: there's a gym, a restaurant that also offers home delivery and food packages, a spa and medical services.

The restaurant is for the use of members only, although they're permitted to dine with guests, while the spa – located in a separate part of the club and with its own reception – also offers treatments to non-members. The majority of members use the spa

PHOTO: KX LONDON



KX is a private club with high-end fitness and wellness services, based on personalisation

frequently, with our team prescribing treatments, but we see a lot of non-member business too.

KX is a community and every membership application has to be approved by our committee. Our excellent team knows each and every face and name, as well as our members' dietary and training preferences, and we're careful not to have more than a certain number of members at any given time. We want to avoid the club ever becoming crowded, so members always have space, can partake in class and get a table.

Tell us more about the gym

We have a large gym floor that's complemented by six studios: Red Fit, a private training room, pilates and yoga studios, a cycle studio and a dojo. We offer around 80 classes a week, all of which are complimentary for members, including yoga, cardio, dance, barre, resistance conditioning, pilates, combat and cycle.

We run classes we know work, and that our members love, but what makes KX really special is the quality of our trainers. They're the very best in their field, often having competed professionally before moving on to teach the next generation.

The majority of our members opt for personal training, but regardless of whether you do, we still make it a priority to tailor a bespoke programme

Members use the club facilities to work and meet with clients



PHOTO STEVEN JOYCE



KX offers 80 classes a week as part of its membership, including Pilates



for each and every member. Everyone receives a Wellness Assessment on joining KX: a comprehensive lifestyle, exercise and nutrition analysis, blood health, cellular stress and body composition test, as well as a movement screening, which allows our team to make personalised recommendations.

We take the time to get to know every member, helping them achieve their goals – and ultimately live a healthier, more balanced life – using evidence-based training and nutrition.

What about your programmes and packages?

Red Fit is one of our signature concepts, combining moderate cardio exercise with Photobiomodulation Therapy (PBMT). Benefits include increased energy, improved detoxification, and reduced stress and inflammation. It's low intensity but incredibly healing, reducing cellular stress and improving antioxidant levels in just three sessions.

KX20 is a 28-day body transformation programme that applies the most effective forms of exercise and nutrition to safely promote fat loss and create lean tissue in the shortest timeframe possible. It includes 20 PT sessions, as well as optional food delivery. It's mostly used in the run-up to a big event – a wedding, for example. [The rate for the KX20 programme is £3,340].

KX is the birthplace of the 7-Day Sirtfood Detox, which has been widely covered in the press over the last several years

Meanwhile, our nutritional packages are popular when it comes to helping people get back on track after a period of indulgence – with our restaurant team delivering directly to members' homes.

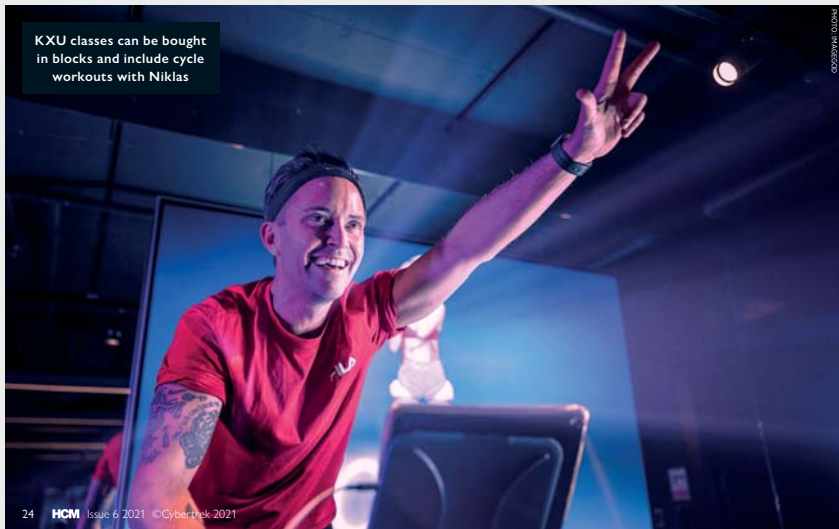
KX is also the birthplace of the Sirtfood Detox, which has been widely covered in the press. The diet was developed following a trial programme at KX by nutritionists Aidan Goggins and Glen Matten.

Sirtfoods – a group including strawberries, buckwheat, rocket, walnuts, kale, green tea, capers, red wine and cocoa – are said by the pair to stimulate sirtuins, influencing the body's ability to burn fat.

During the trial at KX, Goggins and Matten reported those on the diet lost 7lbs a week on average, while maintaining their muscle mass.

Sirtfoods are also said to have the ability to clear out toxic materials from inside cells, restoring health and vitality.

KXU classes can be bought in blocks and include cycle workouts with Niklas





KXU is pay as you go, with everyone able to book classes and appointments via an app

How significant is the medical aspect of what you do?

The pandemic has only affirmed the importance of KX's holistic approach to wellness.

We began offering members rapid COVID-19 testing during the pandemic, and this has ultimately led to the birth of KX Medical. This discreet medical concierge service will be available to all our members and will launch later this year.

You have other clubs, starting with KXU in Sloane Square

KXU opened in 2017 with the goal of making KX's holistic approach accessible to all.

KX is a club – many members work from our restaurant or clubroom, entertain business associates in the restaurant and so on – and the monthly fees reflect this. Its members tend to be slightly older and more established.

KXU has a lower price point and is geared towards a younger crowd. As at KX, fitness, nutrition and spa services come together under one roof. Unlike KX, however, KXU is pay as you go: there are no strings attached, with everyone able to book classes and appointments via the app.

The class formats are also different at KXU, with popular options including The Games and HIIT & Run. The majority of KXU customers visit regularly, with classes available to purchase in blocks of five, 10 and 20; the price per class ranges from £20 to £22 and PT is also available, with sessions starting from £75.



KXU has a lower price point and is 'geared towards a younger crowd'

How did you respond to lockdown?

Within the luxury sector, particularly when it comes to private members' clubs, you can't simply shutter the business and wait for the storm to pass. It was extremely important that KX members could still rely on our experts to take care of their health from home.

Shortly after the first lockdown, we began offering virtual personal training – and later outdoor one-to-one sessions – and the restaurant has offered home delivery and bespoke food packages throughout.

The spa was able to remain open for essential medical services, such as osteopathy, physiotherapy and we were able to offer 24-hour turnaround COVID-19 testing.

We absolutely intend to carry on providing these services. Many of our members travel frequently, and the pandemic has highlighted to us just how important it is to be able to provide the same standard of service remotely.

We also launched on-demand for our KXU members during the pandemic. At £20 a month, it's been very popular among KXU regulars who wanted to work out with their favourite trainers, in trusted formats that they know work for them.

If there's the demand, we will absolutely continue to offer this. However, we've found the majority of our customers have been keen to get back to in-person training. Ultimately, KXU is a community – people want to come together.

How is COVID impacting your bottom line?

We froze all membership fees during lockdowns, so there was of course a financial impact.

We were, however, fortunate that the business was in a great place prior to the outbreak of COVID and the vast majority of members, and indeed staff, were ecstatic to be able to return, which was wonderful to see.

KX reopened on 12 April, with group exercise resuming on 17 May. We also opened a terrace outside KX, to allow members to really take advantage of the restaurant. It's proven incredibly popular and we're looking to make it a permanent addition.

We've also taken significant steps to keep the club as safe as possible, including introducing Thor UVC technology – the most powerful, hospital-grade steriliser worldwide.

Are your members looking for something different now?

The pandemic has led to a huge shift in the way we live our lives. We've been forced to withdraw from social life, with people spending the majority of their time at home with just immediate family. When it comes to returning to the gym, as well as restaurants and bars, I'm sure many will be extremely cautious at the outset.

That being said, as an industry we have the opportunity to do things better than ever before. At KX, the pandemic has affirmed the importance of our holistic approach to wellness. I think the future of medicine will be much more preventative in terms

of nutrition, testing and diagnostics. I hope to see regular testing and quarterly full-body MOTs for rapid detection and quick treatment becoming the norm.

What are your projections?

I predict this year will mark the start of the roaring 20s – never again will we take restaurants, gyms or the ability to come together and socialise for granted. I'm excited for the future of both brands.

KX is an esteemed brand with enormous potential both in London and internationally, and I intend to do it justice.

Tell us about your venture in NYC

We were approached by Casa Cipriani regarding a New York collaboration in 2019 and we couldn't say no. The Battery Maritime Building in Lower Manhattan is a really special piece of architecture, restored by Marvel Architects and with design by Thierry Despont. It sits on the water's edge, boasting incredible views over the East River and the Brooklyn Bridge.

We've partnered with Casa Cipriani as part of the development of this first social membership club from the Cipriani family, which also includes 47 luxury guest rooms and suites – and we'll be opening a KX gym, wellness café and spa to cater for members and hotel guests.

In the café, we'll be offering a slimmed-down version of the London menu, including health shots, delicious bowl food – watercress and spinach soup, beetroot and chickpea salad and so on – as well as more substantial dishes, including our very popular vegan burger.

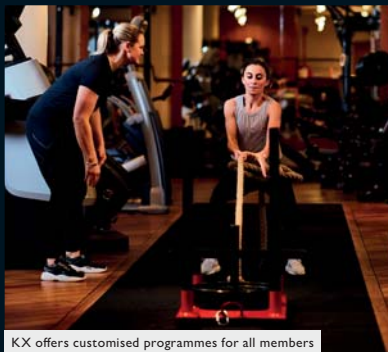
KX membership options

Unlimited access to KX club facilities and member services.

- Available for one year, or on a six, three or one month basis
- Access to gym
- Unlimited group fitness classes
- Wellness consultation including blood tests and body composition, and bespoke training plan
- Access to the spa
- Use of members' only restaurant and clubroom
- Changing rooms with robes, slippers, lockers, laundry service and skincare products
- Steamroom, sauna and hot and cold plunge pools

Individual membership: from £615 per month, plus joining fee.

Joint membership: from £575 per person per month, plus joining fee.



KX offers customised programmes for all members

PHOTO: STEVEN JONES

Casa Cipriani

KX's new home in New York City is quite an address. KX New York will form part of the first Casa Cipriani, a lavish new private members club and venue, currently on-site from property developers, Midtown Equities and Centaur Properties, in partnership with high-end hospitality group, Cipriani.

The partners are working with Marvel Architects and Thierry Despont to restore the city's historic Battery Maritime Building, a Beaux-Arts structure with classic iron-riveted construction and the last of New York's old East River ferry terminals.

The 15,000sq ft KX spa and gym will service club members and their guests, while Casa Cipriani will also have 47 guest rooms with an average size of 600sq ft and views of the Brooklyn Bridge and Statue of Liberty.

The building will be fully managed by Cipriani.



PHOTO: KAT CIPRIANI



The Battery Maritime Building in Lower Manhattan was originally built in 1909

At the spa, all KX bespoke face and body treatments and laser facials will be available.

Overall, we've attempted to replicate KX London, while at the same time doing our best to ensure the interior is sympathetic to the magnificent Battery Maritime Building itself. Our holistic, 360-degree approach to wellness – what KX is all about – will stay the same, and is an excellent fit for New York City.

Would you consider further international projects?

We'd definitely consider embarking on new projects in the States, although we don't have anything planned in the immediate future.

In terms of other international markets, all I can say is, one thing at a time! We need to focus on getting the new Manhattan club open first.

Rumour has it more openings are imminent?

I can't say anything right now – only that my team and I are passionate about the KX and KXU brands.

What I will say is that we'd never want KX or KXU to evolve into a chain: every location has to be unique.

Our ethos will remain consistent – a 360-degree approach to wellness that incorporates exercise, nutrition, spa and medical services – and it will be this that unites all our locations. Only when all these elements come together can powerful, long-term change be created.

What motivates you personally?

I've always been passionate about great hospitality. Members' clubs, restaurants... these are all spaces that provide people with the opportunity to connect and that's what life is all about. ●



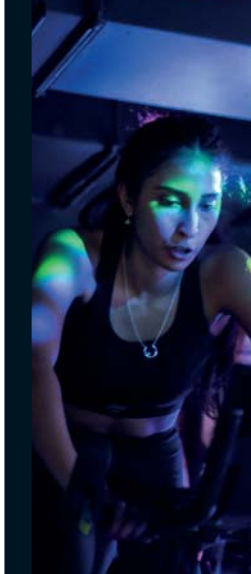
*We decided to build a facility
that encompasses all the
parts of gyms we've loved*

Mahrya Abdulla & Shahnaa Moosa

Owners, Retrofit



Mahrya Abdulla and Shahnaa Moosa are entrepreneurs building their Retrofit brand



Tell us about Retrofit

It's a new boutique club in South Kensington, London, with a gym and 'Retrocafe' at street level and boxing, cycling and yoga studios below ground.

My husband Shahnaa Moosa and I raised a £400,000 loan to fund the development. The club is around 9,000 sq ft and has a membership capacity of between 800 and 1,000.

What's the dream?

We've always shared a passion for fitness, but trained in completely different ways at different gyms across the UK and in different parts of the world.

At the beginning of 2020, we decided to build a facility that encompasses all the parts of the gyms that we've loved. With this in mind, Retrofit London was born as a boutique-style fitness club where casual gym goers and hardcore athletes can train under the same roof with the best equipment.

What makes you different and special?

An affordable premium service. There's a plethora of low budget operators in the area, and on the other end, very highly priced operators, so our goal is to bridge the gap between the two and provide a luxury facility at an affordable price.

Our member journey and community feel sets us apart from similar providers. We're also proud to have one of the first Technogym Skillbike Studios in London and one of the first Technogym Biocircuits in England.



PHOTO: TECHNODIN

The Retrofit model is to create an 'affordable premium' service

What are the membership rates?

We create bespoke personalised packages for our members. We have a flexible monthly contract, which gives members full access to the gym, as well as group exercise classes. We also offer a PT membership, priced depending on each individual's needs and goals. In short, there's an option for everyone!

What were your priorities when deciding on gym layout?

The project actually began pre-COVID and our initial priorities were working with our contractor, Fit Out Management, to maximise functional space, while maintaining a natural flow-through.

COVID-19 restrictions meant adjustments had to be made, such as prioritising a one-way system. This resulted in changes to the equipment layout and the removal of some pieces to allow a safe distance to be kept when training.

It was also important to us that members had an area where they could relax and socialise, so we added our Retrocafe, where members can grab a smoothie or healthy snack.

How will you evolve the offering?

We aim to replace our equipment every five years to make sure we have the latest and best technology on the market. As a club, we'll be doing



- ▶ monthly challenges, for our staff and members, to develop member relationships and motivate. We're always on the lookout for pieces of kit we can add to improve our member journey. Feedback is something we take very seriously and when our members request something, we listen.

Tell us about the secondary spend

It represents about 10 per cent of our turnover – this includes our café and two treatment rooms, one of which we're renting out to The French Touch Physio and members get a £10 discount per session. The other will soon be rented to a sports massage therapist.



The aim is to offer a safe and inclusive environment and create a personalised service



Who's your typical customer?

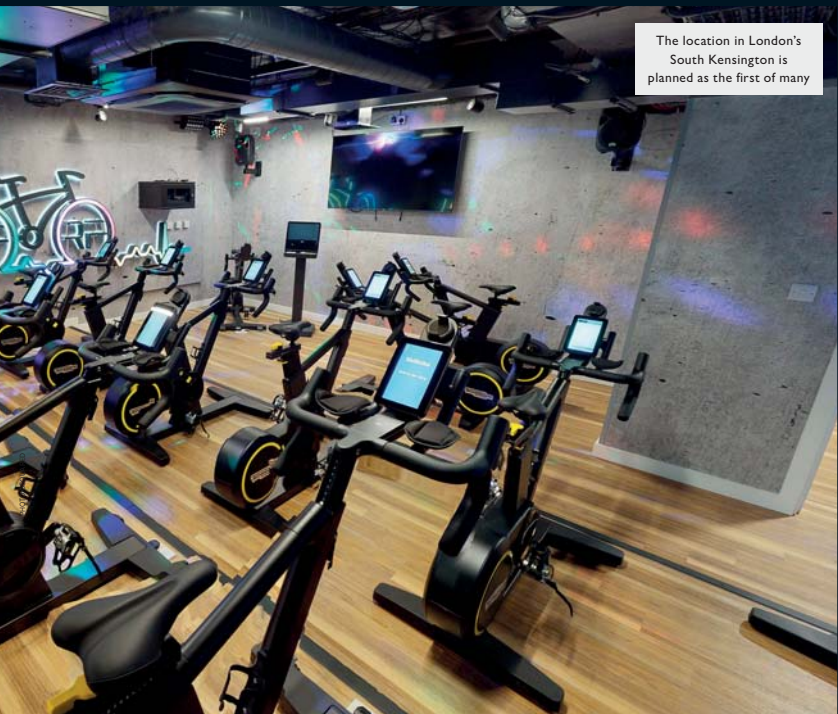
We don't have a typical customer per se. Our members range from 20 – 70-years-of-age, with the majority being in between 30 and 40 and are working professionals who either live or work in the South Kensington area in London.

What are your business goals?

To provide a safe, inclusive environment for members, where we can break the boundaries of indoor training, together as a community. We aim to create a bespoke personalised service, so each and everyone's fitness goals are achieved.

Do you plan to expand?

Yes. This is just the beginning. We aim to expand our business, first around London, and then around the rest of the UK.



The location in London's South Kensington is planned as the first of many

PHOTO: TICONOGAM



In today's world, physical health and mental health have never been more important and fitness is pivotal to both of these



How and why did you get into the industry?

In today's world, physical health, as well as mental health, has never been so important. Fitness is pivotal to both of these. It's not just about going to the gym to do a workout anymore, it's about maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and getting members feeling confident and happy in their own skin.

What's the secret to you working together as a couple?

Quite simply, it's a shared passion. We have separate workloads and each have our own

roles within the company – most of the time it's as though we've had separate working days which we can discuss at the end of it.

What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs who want to open their own health club?

Patience is a virtue! Be prepared to change and adapt the way you approach the business, as the fitness industry is always growing and changing. It's important to stay ahead of the game and think of fresh ideas to separate yourself from competitors. ●

F45 heading to the stock market - plans 23,000 studios

Australian HIIT chain F45 Training has filed a notification to list on the New York Stock Exchange.

The franchised studio operator hasn't announced a date for the initial public offering (IPO) – nor the number of shares or their price – but does reveal that the funding raised through the listing will be used to repay debt and to fuel future growth.



We believe there is a significant opportunity to meaningfully expand our franchise studio footprint by 7,000 in the US and 23,000 globally
F45 Training

Founded in 2012, F45 is part-owned by actor Mark Wahlberg and currently has nearly 1,500 studios in 63 countries.

In 2019, Wahlberg and FOD Capital, a fund managed by Michael Raymond, invested in F45 through MWIG, a private investment vehicle.

F45 announced its plans to list on the US-based NASDAQ stock exchange in June 2020, after securing a deal with Crescent Acquisition Corporation, a special purpose acquisition company.

The agreement was ended in October, with F45 CEO Adam Gilchrist saying the public markets at the time "were not the right option for F45".

Those concerns, however, now seem to have been eased. "We believe there is a significant opportunity to

PHOTO: F45 TRAINING



F45 currently has nearly 1,500 studios in 63 countries

meaningfully expand our franchise studio footprint in the United States," F45 said in the filing, adding that it plans to open up to 7,000 studios in the US and 23,000 globally.

"Prior to COVID-19, we had seen the pace of our

US growth accelerate, with average net franchises sold per month increasing from 12 in 2017 to 32 in 2019. "Due to COVID-19, that figure decreased in 2020 to 10."

More: http://lei.sr/u5E5U_H

Barry's signs content partnership with Forme Life

Forme Life has signed an exclusive partnership with boutique fitness operator Barry's, the latest sign of the blurring of boundaries between the at-gym and at-home fitness experiences.

The partnership deal is the first time Barry's has aligned with an at-home, connected fitness platform and marks the debut of the recently announced Barry's X digital offering.

The deal will also see the Forme units – mirrored displays with voice control and touch screens – being sold in Barry's locations in the US.

Forme was launched in 2020 by Trent Ward and industrial

PHOTO: FORME



The deal is the first for Barry's with a digital platform

designer Yves Béhar and is marketed as a "complete home fitness studio concept".

Through the mirror displays, designed by Béhar, users can access a variety of live and

on-demand personal training sessions as well as recovery, including sound baths.

Ward said: "Barry's provides the most engaging boutique fitness experience in the



PHOTO: FORME



Barry's provides the most engaging boutique fitness experience in the industry
Trent Ward

industry and we could not be more excited to partner with them to bring their content on Forme."

More: http://lei.sr/r8G8R_H

Peloton launches Corporate Wellness platform

Peloton is expanding its reach within the online fitness market with the launch of a new Corporate Wellness platform.

The service will be made available to businesses and organisations operating in the US, the UK, Canada and Germany – with Australia to be added “later this year”.

Businesses which sign up as Peloton Corporate Wellness partners will be able to offer employees subsidised access to Peloton Digital and all access memberships, as well as exclusive benefits on connected fitness products.

Corporate wellness partners will receive access to tailored features and will be able to measure the impact the service



PHOTO: PLOTON

“
The new service is
the natural extension
for us to be able to
scale our offering

William Lynch

has. They will also benefit from Peloton's 'brand and marketing expertise, knowledge of member engagement, and community-building tools'.

Peloton's president, William Lynch, said: 'Introducing Peloton Corporate Wellness is the latest step to making



Peloton partners can offer employees subsidised access

the Peloton experience more accessible.

“The new service is the natural extension for us to be able to scale our offering.

“Together with our Corporate Wellness partners, we're now able to share the experience with millions more,

while also driving stronger culture and community within the workplace.”

Companies that have signed up to the new service in the US include Wayfair, Samsung, SAP and Accenture Interactive.

More: http://lei.sr/c5v4j_H

China's Supermonkey health club chain valued at US\$1bn

Chinese health club chain Supermonkey has finalised a series E funding round, valuing the company at nearly US\$1bn.

The latest round was led by a sub-fund of CICC Capital – the investment platform of China International Capital Corporation.

The company's valuation is the latest sign of the hotting up of the Chinese fitness

market, driven by increased wealth among the population's expanding middle class.

Founded in 2014, Supermonkey initially launched as a 24-hour, self-serve gym concept in the city of Shenzhen.

It has since grown rapidly, however, and has added group classes to its offering.

Supermonkey currently operates 150+ sites across China's main urban markets – including Shanghai and Beijing.

Its success has been partly credited to its flexible concept, which offers short-term memberships.

More: http://lei.sr/G4s2k_H



Founded in 2014, Supermonkey has grown rapidly in China



The chain was
launched as a
24-hour, self-serve
concept and currently
has 150 sites

Technogym launches app with revenue-sharing option for gyms

Technogym has launched a new app featuring an AI-powered digital coach.

The Technogym App is designed for health clubs looking to tap into the increased demand for digital fitness solutions in a post-lockdown era.

The app will be marketed as a solution for clubs and studios which do not have the integrated Technogym

Mywellness platform, but wish to offer their members a library of on-demand video training experiences.

There's also an in-built revenue sharing model for clubs using Technogym App.

Members access a promotional rate for premium services and the club will receive a portion of the subscription paid by its members.

At the heart of the app is Technogym Coach, a digital trainer based on AI.

Technogym Coach provides the user with tailored workouts called "Precision Programs", which are adapted by the AI to match personal goals, progression, time and the available equipment.

The personalised programmes can be adapted

PHOTO: TECHNOGYM



At the heart of the app is Technogym Coach, a digital trainer

to meet the needs and preferences of the user

"Technogym App represents a great opportunity for operators to attract new members to their clubs thanks to the credibility of the Technogym brand built

up over 37 years, available in the best hotels and corporate facilities in over 100 countries and official supplier of eight Olympic Games," Technogym said.

More: http://lei.sr/y8Y8v_H



Technogym App represents a great opportunity for operators to attract new members to their clubs thanks to the credibility of the Technogym brand built up over 37 years

Technogym

Glofox to offer clubs and studios 'instant access' to financing

Glofox will begin offering health clubs, gyms and fitness studios instant access to financing, following a deal struck with Stripe Capital.

The club management software provider will use Stripe Capital to offer eligible fitness businesses flexible financing and help them to bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The service will particularly look to assist businesses which are looking to grow and scale their operations – whether buying new equipment, growing their staff, or upgrading their in-studio experience.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ROJIAN MELNKOY



The service will look to help operators bounce back

According to Glofox CEO Conor O'Loughlin, eligible businesses can access funds almost instantly, and repay the amount with a fixed percentage of daily sales.

"As the fitness industry bounces back, we're the first provider to offer embedded financing to our customers," O'Loughlin said, adding: "Stripe enables us to implement and

launch these capabilities quickly so that we can support our customers to re-invest as they relaunch their businesses."

More: http://lei.sr/n8q7K_H

PHOTO: GLOFOX



As the industry bounces back, we're the first provider to offer embedded financing

Conor O'Loughlin

David Lloyd recruits Tom Watson for Team PB scheme

David Lloyd Clubs has enrolled former Labour Party deputy leader Tom Watson to help raise the profile of its new Team PB programme.

The six-week programme aims to motivate, encourage and support people to realise their health goals, specifically with the pandemic and its physical and mental effects in mind.

Team PB has been designed particularly those in mind who have been significantly impacted by the pandemic in some way – and are dealing with various mental wellbeing, nutritional and physical challenges.

Watson, who spent four years as Jeremy Corbyn's



“
Putting what I've learned into practice has been quite literally life-saving for me

Tom Watson

deputy in the run up to the 2019 general election, is one of six volunteers from across the country taking part in the pilot programme.

Between summer of 2017 and September 2018, Watson famously lost seven stone – and reversed his



Watson will share his Team PB 'stories'

diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes – after overhauling his diet and exercise regime. He has since featured as a speaker at ukactive Summits and is currently training to become a PT.

Watson said: "I've been on a life-changing health

journey over these last four years and learning about the importance of good physical and mental health and putting what I've learned into practice has been quite literally life-saving for me."

More: http://lei.sr/T9AG6F_H

Gymbox and WeWork sign deal for exclusive collaboration

Gymbox has signed a partnership agreement to provide members of flexible workspace provider WeWork with both in-person and on-demand fitness classes.



“
The demand for flexibility in where, when and how we work out has increased immensely

Marc Diaper

WeWork members will gain access to an bespoke package of Gymbox workouts, with classes covering seven branded categories – from Sweat and Strength to Holistic.

As well as an exclusive class timetable – offered both at Gymbox's studios and WeWork's wellness spaces – the partnership will see the creation of tailored digital class content which members can access from anywhere.

Marc Diaper, Gymbox CEO, said: "The demand for flexibility in where, when and how we work out has increased immensely."

More: http://lei.sr/7v8d9_H



WeWork members gain access to a bespoke Gymbox package

RSG Group's Gold's Gym in Berlin is 'gym of the future'

Rainer Schaller Global Group (RSG Group) has opened a huge flagship Gold's Gym club in the German capital city Berlin.

Marketed as the "gym of the future," RSG said the 55,000sq ft "campus" is the group's proof of concept, meeting point and "inspiration for all future Gold's Gym locations".



PHOTO: RSG GROUP



Our Berlin flagship represents the contemporary redefinition of the brand
Rainer Schaller

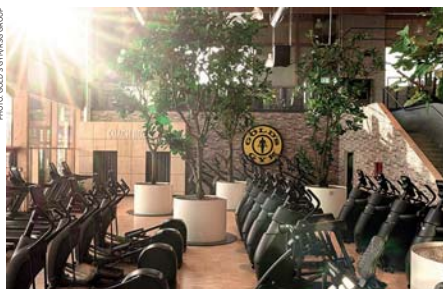
The company-owned club was designed with insight gained from a Gold's Gym social media partnership with fitness veteran Lou Ferrigno, which surveyed the public for what they wanted in the "perfect gym."

It features a huge gym floor with CV and resistance areas, group training zones and a functional fitness space.

Among the club's special features are a carbon and climate neutral design, including sustainable construction materials, real plants and trees throughout the interior of the gym and a "Green Power" area featuring spin bikes that generate clean energy.

The environmentally-friendly solutions make the Berlin flagship the world's

PHOTO: GOLD'S GYM/RSG GROUP



The club's interiors features real plants and trees

first commercial gym with a LEED Platinum certification.

RSG acquired the iconic franchised chain in July 2020 for US\$100m after being selected as the winning bidder in a court-approved auction process.

Rainer Schaller, founder and CEO of RSG Group, said: "Our Berlin flagship represents the contemporary redefinition of the brand and product concept to the highest degree."

More: http://lei.sr/s7M3p_H

Therme Group to build Germany's largest health and wellbeing resort

Therme Group's strategic partner Wund Holding, operating as ThermenGruppe Josef Wund, has unveiled plans for the creation of Germany's largest wellbeing resort in Bad Vilbel, Frankfurt.

It's the latest location to be announced as part of Therme Group's global development programme, following planning approval for Therme Manchester in 2020.

Located on the banks of the Nidda river, the project builds on Therme Group and Wund Holding's shared vision of creating the world's most-advanced wellbeing resorts which address the

PHOTO: THERME GROUP/WUND HOLDING



The huge resort is set to open its doors to visitors in 2023

vital modern-day need for accessible wellbeing for all.

The project name is yet to be released and construction is set to begin within a year, with an opening scheduled for 2023.

Combining hundreds of water-based activities with wellbeing treatments and fitness, the resorts are designed to offer a unique experience suitable for all ages.

PHOTO: THERME GROUP/WUND HOLDING



This wellbeing resort will help to revive a thermal bathing culture in the area
Robert Hanea

Robert Hanea, Therme Group CEO, said: "This wellbeing resort will help revive a thermal bathing culture in the area."

More: http://lei.sr/n257Z_H

Sky Pool opens in London's Embassy Gardens project

A swimming pool suspended 35m (115ft) above the ground and forming a bridge between two buildings has opened as part of a residential project in Nine Elms, south-west London, UK.

Designed by HAL Architects, the 25m Sky Pool spans two buildings at the Embassy Gardens development, located opposite the new US Embassy.

The pool has transparent walls and floor, which allows passersby to observe the swimmers – and those in the pool to see the ground.

The pool is constructed in clear acrylic. The sidewalls of the pool are 180mm thick and 3.2metres deep. Its base is 360mm thick and the whole

“
Sky Pool is made of acrylic and is located 10 storeys up – there's nothing else like it

HAL Architects

pool weighs 50 tonnes and contains a total of 150 tonnes of water, 100 tonnes of which is carried by the acrylic 'bridge'.

HAL Architects describes Sky Pool as a "world-first".

"Sky Pool is made of crystal-clear acrylic and is located 10 storeys up, between two apartment buildings – there's nothing else like it," the architects said.

Pool consultant Devin Consulting was responsible for the water engineering

PHOTO: EMBASSY GARDENS/HAL ARCHITECTS



The 25m pool is suspended 35m above the ground

on the project, while Barr + Wray designed, supplied and installed the filtration system for the unique pool.

The inspiration for the design – for which Hal partnered with Eckersley O'Callaghan (structural engineering) and Reynolds

Polymers – came partly from the Barton aqueduct, the first navigable aqueduct in England.

Access to the pool is restricted to residents of Embassy Gardens and their guests.

More: <http://lei.sr/z7k9y.H>

Accor to introduce avant-garde wellness sanctuary at SO/ resort

Accor's lifestyle brand SO/ Hotels & Resorts will unveil the first SO/ property in Spain in July 2021.

The 151-room hotel will be home to a 2,500sq m

wellness offering with an SO/Fitness space.

Built on the four key pillars of sleep, food, sport and spa, the SO/ Wellness concept will include an SO/ Fit members gym, designed by FitnessDesignGroup.

It will include yoga and meditation studios, a dynamic functional fitness area, a spinning studio and lap pool.

Emlyn Brown, Accor's global VP of wellbeing, said: "Wellness is intrinsic to lifestyle hospitality and as a lifestyle brand, SO/ requires a wellness experience that matches the persona of our guests."

More: <http://lei.sr/w6C7f.H>



PHOTO: ACCOR

“
As a lifestyle brand, SO/ requires a wellness experience that matches the persona of our guests

Emlyn Brown

PHOTO: ACCOR/OPTEL



Wellbeing and fitness re core to SO/'s philosophy

Report: exercise should be prescribed for depression

People with depression should be prescribed exercise and then monitored for the first 12 weeks of their regime – similar to the way physical therapy is used to help people recover from injuries.

The recommendation comes from a new report, compiled by the John W Brick Mental Health

Foundation and called *Move Your Mental Health*, which summarises data from 1,158 studies and reviews 20+ types of physical activities in relation to mental health outcomes.

Out of the 1,158 studies, 89 per cent (1,029) reported "significant positive relationships" between physical activity and mental health outcomes.

When examining only randomised controlled trials – 56 per cent of the studies reviewed were randomised trials – the vast majority (87 per cent) reported positive effects of exercise/physical activity on mental health outcomes.

Overall, three to five 30-45-minute exercise sessions per week appear to deliver optimal mental health benefits.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/WSELOSTOCK



Exercise was deemed beneficial for mental health

The report states that high-frequency exercise (3-5 times per week) is better for reducing depressive symptoms than low-frequency exercise (1 time per week).

Lead author Cassandra Vieten, from the John W Brick

Mental Health Foundation, said: "Research overwhelmingly supports a beneficial role of exercise for addressing mental health issues, particularly depression and anxiety."

More: http://lei.sr/x8q4k_H



PHOTO: WWW.CASSANDRAVIENTEN.COM



Research supports a beneficial role of exercise for addressing mental health

Cassandra Vieten

Rigorous exercise could increase risk of MND in some people

Frequent strenuous exercise increases the risk of developing motor neurone disease (MND) in people with certain genetic profiles.

Research from the University of Sheffield, UK, shows a causal relationship between exercise and MND, with high-intensity physical activity likely to contribute to motor neurone injury, but only in individuals with a predisposing genetic profile.

Individuals with a mutation in the C9ORF72 gene – which accounts for 10 per cent of MND cases – have an earlier age of disease onset if their lives include high levels of

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MARQV



Some athletes are genetically predisposed to developing MND

strenuous physical activity.

Many of the 30+ genes known to predispose to MND change in their levels of expression during intense physical exercise.

Pamela Shaw, senior author of the study, said: "This research unravels the link between high levels of physical activity and MND – we studied the link using three

PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD



Three different approaches indicated that regular, strenuous exercise is a risk factor

Pamela Shaw

different approaches and each indicated that regular strenuous exercise is a risk factor associated with MND."

More: http://lei.sr/T2z7Z_H

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The Xercise4Less deal has accelerated our growth plans by three years

Alun Peacock has been MD of JD Gyms since 2013, developing the gym chain for retailer, JD Sports, which has 2,600 retail outlets in 20 territories and is a FTSE100 company

ALUN PEACOCK

With the full refurbishment of the former Xercise4Less estate well underway, the MD of JD Gyms is already contemplating further acquisitions. He talks to Kate Cracknell

The last time *HCM* talked with Alun Peacock – for an article published in *HCM* August 2017 – he was confident the JD Gyms concept, originally launched in February 2014, had been proven.

Club number 11 was about to open its doors and the brand – part of JD Sports' global retail business – was aiming to have a 16-strong portfolio by the end of that year.

Fast-forward to mid-2021 and, in spite of COVID-19, JD Gyms' growth has accelerated to 74 gyms. That growth has been achieved both organically and via the acquisition of sites from Ben Dunne, Helio Fitness, DW Fitness and – most notably – the Xercise4Less chain, bought out of administration last year for £24.2m, with the deal completing just a few days before the first lockdown ended.

He brings us up to speed on the JD Gyms story.

What's the JD Gyms model?

Very simply, we offer our members a premium fitness experience at a low-cost price point.

The vast majority of JD Gyms sites sell at a £19.99, no-contract price point, but offer a higher-end experience with cutting-edge interior design, inspirational layouts, what we consider to be the best range of equipment on the market, over 300 classes a month and saunas in the changing rooms.

There's a real X factor when it comes to the atmosphere in our gyms. It's difficult to put your finger on, as it's the sum of all parts – everything from lighting to air quality to music, the people around you and the type of workouts they're doing, to the team buy-in at every gym, that injects the personality and creates a true club feeling.

We have an innovative group exercise offering too. Take JD Burn, for example, our signature HIIT programme. These classes are housed in a bespoke third studio or, in those gyms where space doesn't allow, we design our main studios

to be hybrid; at the flick of a switch, we can alter the whole atmosphere via lighting to ensure JD Burn feels different from our other classes.

We're regularly told our product is worth more than we charge, but obviously we've done our homework on this. We understand this price point suits us from a demand elasticity perspective. It's not about what it's worth. It's about where we think the price point needs to be to get the best returns.

We certainly don't operate with a 'yeah, but it's only 20 quid a month' mentality. It's just not in our psyche. We want to be as good as, if not better than, other offerings on the market, irrespective of the price the members are paying.

What's your member profile?

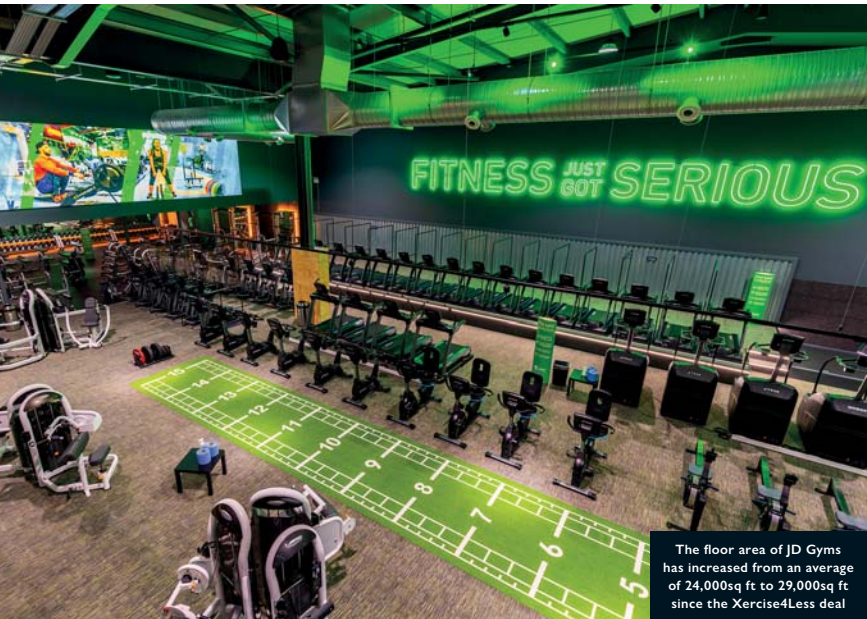
Like most chains, we attract members of all ages and abilities. We get the 'newbies' and the less confident gym-goers, and we help them get immersed in no time. But in the main, we tend to attract a younger, fitter, more frequent attendee than you find at a lot of other gyms: a significant number of our members visit every day, and in some cases more than once a day.

We know we aren't for everyone, though: some people want a smaller, more intimate gym; others want

“
I've long admired aspects of the Xercise4Less model and when it came on to the market, strategically, we were determined to get it
”



Members are loyal to the brand, says Peacock, and see fitness as an 'absolute priority'



The floor area of JD Gyms has increased from an average of 24,000sq ft to 29,000sq ft since the Xercise4Less deal

a swimming pool. With our design and fit-out – and of course our strapline, **Fitness just got serious**, which is emblazoned in huge green neon lights in every gym – we attract a higher proportion of those who are serious about their training. We cater for those who want a large, best-in-class, atmospheric gym with the provision to train exactly how they want to. And we have the space to do it – prior to the Xercise4Less acquisition, our average club footprint was 24,000sq ft. Now it's around 29,000sq ft.

What was the state of play at JD Gyms pre-COVID?

If we rewind to just before we last spoke, 2016 had been a transformative year for us. We'd opened six sites that year, all of which were successful from the off, reinforcing our early beliefs that we were creating a winning formula with which to expand the brand.

We'd also started to get a real foothold and presence in the market, with people starting to understand what we were about. The JD brand is so incredibly well-known and recognised as a major retailer, but we were making real headway into 'Hey, JD does great gyms too...'

By March 2020, we were trading from 30 sites, with a 'quality over quantity' approach to our growth that meant all our sites were successful. Our organic pipeline was firing well – we'd turned the burners up on it – and were constantly on the lookout for potential acquisitions. There was real momentum in the business.

Then along came COVID-19...

COVID took us all by surprise. I don't think there's anyone in the sector who would have predicted what we as a nation, never mind an industry, would face.

I'll never forget sitting with my team, hearing the PM saying gyms must close. We'd pulled together an action plan, but didn't expect to be deploying it so soon.

We sent all our members a text message within the hour saying: 'Don't cancel your direct debit – we'll automatically freeze it.' We were very proactive in our comms throughout and were pleased with how few members cancelled. We retained faith throughout that we would have a buoyant membership base to re-open with – our younger, fitter members who are loyal to our brand and to whom fitness is an absolute priority.

In spite of our members' appetite for fitness, though, our approach to supporting them during lockdown

JD Gyms aims to attract people who are serious about training and who visit regularly – some more than once a day



PHOTO: JD GYMS

Now we've established ourselves in the fitness market, we're planning brand extensions from JD Gyms and aiming to diversify into other areas

JD Gyms has been working with Eleiko to develop specialist zones on the gym floor



PHOTO: JD GYMS

A former rugby player, Peacock trains in the nearest branch of JD Gyms to wherever he is each day



PHOTO: JD GYMS

wasn't in the shape of online workout content.

Our members are very tech-savvy and there was already a plethora of free content available online. The weather in that first lockdown was also glorious, so people were running and cycling and doing bootcamps in their back gardens using whatever they could get their hands on. They weren't finding it hard to stay active.

Instead, we asked ourselves the question: 'How can we really help our members? Where can we add real value?' At that point, people were nervous about what was going to happen financially, and we felt there was a bigger win to be had focusing on this.

In addition to freezing all direct debits, we quickly implemented a discount platform and gave every member access to it, with discounts at key supermarkets including Sainsbury's, Tesco and Morrisons; at John Lewis, Selfridges, Argos; and 10 per cent off at all JD Group stores. The platform was available to all members – all you had to do was not cancel your membership – and it was incredibly successful for us from a retention perspective.

Tell us about the X4L acquisition

We've explored many potential acquisitions over the years, but have always been very selective in what we've actually taken through to completion.

Of the 30 sites we were operating by the time lockdown hit, 26 had been built organically. We have to be absolutely confident any acquisitions will dovetail well into the unique product we build.

I've long admired aspects of the Xercise4Less model and recognised its success over the years. We'd heard whispers of the business experiencing difficulty, so when this was confirmed and it came on to the market, strategically, we were determined to get it.

Although underinvested by the time it came up for sale, we were attracted to the strong locations and large sites; we were confident they would work for the JD Gyms product. There were lots of other great raw factors too for the majority of sites: big studios, large car parks and excellent property deals, alongside high member numbers and strong awareness. We knew that in remodelling these sites and applying JD Gyms' magic dust, we'd enhance the member experience and be able to grow the yield accordingly.

The acquisition of Xercise4Less has accelerated our growth plans by three years and has given us a strong presence in Scotland, as well as a footprint in south-east England. It's bolstered us across Wales, the North West, North East, the Midlands and Yorkshire too.

In bringing the business back out of administration, a number of poorer performing, unprofitable Xercise4Less sites needed to be released.

Transforming the Xercise4Less estate has meant huge investment in the look and feel of clubs

PHOTO: JD GYMS



before

after



PHOTO: JD GYMS



The Stoke on Trent Xercise4Less before (left) and after as a JD Gyms site (right)

before

after



PHOTO: JD GYMS

Coincidentally, the majority of these overlapped geographically with our existing estate. Having acquired 50 sites, we immediately closed 11, consolidating those members into their local branch of JD Gyms.

Tell us about the rebrand

I wouldn't call it a rebrand. It's a complete transformation. This isn't just about the name above the door and a lick of paint. It's everything we talked about earlier: the atmosphere, the quality, the equipment provision. It's a significant undertaking and we've adopted a phased approach; we simply couldn't do a full refurbishment on all 39 clubs overnight.

We 'made good' and rectified underinvestment as quickly as we could, though, with phase one involving repairs to all essential pieces of equipment, some cosmetic repairs and a few new touches – creating modest functional areas, for example. This was done as a blanket investment across all 39 clubs in the space of two months.

They were still Xercise4Less at this point, though, and we kept the price point at £9.99 as – where

It's not a case of if but when we make the next acquisition

JD Gyms lost very few members during lockdown – Xercise4Less hadn't fared quite as well. We needed to build the membership back up and add more value before we could put up the price.

The original plan was then to go through a second stage everywhere, at which point the clubs would be rebranded. However, the second lockdown hit us in November and we seized the opportunity to completely transform the first seven sites where the leases had been secured with the landlords.

It was challenging, because access to labour



Xercise4Less
Rugby (left) before
the makeover and
afterwards (right)



Rotherham Xercise4Less
above, with JD Gyms
Rotherham on the
right after the refit

and materials was incredibly difficult during lockdown, but we re-opened all seven sites as fully trading JD Gyms by mid-December 2020.

Then, of course, along came lockdown number three – particularly challenging given two of our newly rebranded sites closed again within 48 hours of opening. This lockdown didn't come as a complete surprise, though, and we'd lined everything up to complete a further 12 rebrands during this window. We now have just 20 to go which, with all leases now secured, we'll do by the end of this year.

How has re-opening gone?

This time around, brilliantly. The market is incredibly buoyant, and we've seen sales numbers and attendance better than those of a January/February peak across both brands.

There remains, however, a very distinct difference in baseline performance across the two brands.

The original JD Gyms estate, along with the 19 conversions and the new organic sites – we've opened five clubs since March 2020 – are all performing

above or in line with every KPI and expectation. There's no compromise on performance at the converted Xercise4Less sites in any way, shape or form, even though we've now upped the yield to the standard JD Gyms' £19.99 no-contract price point.

What are your growth plans?

Our organic growth has continued since the first lockdown began, albeit at a slower pace; the whole pipeline slowed due to COVID, with the commercial property market just not moving as it usually would.

The Xercise4Less acquisition, plus the five new JD Gyms, brings us to 74 quality locations currently: 35 JD Gyms, 19 Xercise4Less conversions, and [as at 11 June] 20 Xercise4Less-branded clubs.

We have another six organic sites set to open this year and are actively expanding into territories where we don't currently have a significant footprint. The model travels really well and we're emerging as a national player.

Meanwhile, where some might let things bed-in after such a big acquisition before looking at anything else, if



"I'm fortunate, proud and privileged to be in the seat I'm in", says Peacock



SHAO GUOZHU

anything it's had the opposite effect on us. It's quickly made us a more significant business in the JD Group and has given us an even greater appetite for growth. It's not a case of if but when we make the next acquisition.

Anything else on the radar?

We're constantly evolving and thinking about what the next iteration of JD Gyms will look and feel like – not because we're dissatisfied with what we have now, but because I'm a great believer in 'if you're standing still, you're going backwards'.

One example: we've formed an exciting partnership with Eleiko over the last 18 months to dual-brand our functional spaces. Together we're creating huge functional playgrounds – a real talking point and almost a gym within a gym. We'll continue to develop our gym floors to stay ahead of trends.

And now we've established ourselves in the fitness market, we're already looking at opportunities to diversify. The clubs will remain our primary focus at this stage, but we are planning brand extensions from JD Gyms. I'm not yet ready to tell you what they might be, but we aim to diversify into other areas over the coming years.

What's the secret of JD Gyms' success?

In short, passion and perfection. I drive the team to live and breathe what we do and we all collectively strive for perfection.

It's our mission to continue to innovate and we apply this ethos across everything we touch: brand, product, location choice, marketing, service standards, daily operations.

We have a lean but effective head office team where everyone is accountable for their parts of the business, and everyone understands what each other is accountable for. This interdependence helps us drive exceptional performance: we all thrive on doing our bit and knowing the victory couldn't have happened without each one of us doing exactly that.

As an ex rugby player, team winning mentality is ingrained in me – there's nothing like looking around the



We're innovating in ways we feel others aren't and performing at a level beyond expectation

changing room, into the eyes of your teammates, after winning a match – and these values, that same collective sense of victory, also run through my incredible team, in the boardroom and on the gym floor.

We want to be put under pressure. We understand we're working in a business that, for us, is best in class. We're innovating in ways we feel others aren't and performing at a level beyond expectation. That sort of environment isn't for everybody, but my key team wouldn't have it any other way and I'm really proud of everything they achieve.

And that's the mindset I'm always on the lookout for. If we find the right people, very often we'll shape the role around them. It's how all of my senior team came on-board, rather than in response to a specific job ad.

What motivates you?

It's impossible not to be motivated. Look at what I'm leading and what we've created.

I completely immerse myself in our product, too: I train in our gyms most days, with colleagues and alongside our members. I'm not inspecting the gym floor, I'm using it. I live it and breathe it, I touch it and feel it. I get excited to get my kit on and have a quality workout wherever I am across our estate that day.

I'm fortunate, proud and privileged to be in the seat I'm in, working in an industry I love, in an incredible business that we've created from scratch – building, operating and training in the most exciting gyms – while surrounded and supported by my key team. What more motivation could anyone need? ●

A man with a beard and extensive black and grey tattoos on his arms and neck is looking upwards with his right hand raised. He is wearing a light grey t-shirt. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor space with large windows and other people's hands raised in the air.

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The snackable trend is seeing people breaking up their day with short workouts to avoid being sedentary

Everyone's talking about Snackable workouts

Another by-product of the pandemic, snackable workouts have become a thing, but are they here to stay? Kath Hudson rounds up views

Snackable workouts are named in HCM's Fitness Foresight report as one of the top 20 trends for 2021, while research into the exercise habits of almost 20,000 Americans in the 50 largest US cities, via the *Mindbody Wellness Index*, also reflects the popularity of short workouts that can be squeezed

into little pockets of time between Zoom meetings and homeschooling.

One of the by-products of the pandemic so far has been blurred work:life boundaries. As offices and schools shut their doors and everything was brought into the home, many people lost their daily routine and their usual windows for a workout. And when gyms reopened, workout

slots were typically time limited to allow for additional cleaning time.

So will short workouts be an enduring trend? Do consumers just want online workouts to be bite-sized, or are they looking for group exercise classes in-club to be shorter too? We ask our panel of operators and suppliers what they've noticed and how they're responding.

“
Snackable
workouts are an
incredibly smart
way to train

Michelle Dand

David Lloyd Clubs

We've seen a strong demand for snackable workouts over the past 15 months, sparked by the change in how members accessed their fitness content while our clubs were closed.

Snackable workouts are an incredibly smart way to train, as they fit into our busy lives and provide a good escape from working at home.

Our snackable content lives within our @home app which we launched at the start of lockdown one. One of our most popular classes was our 28-day ab challenge:

10 minutes a day across 28 days. Led by one of our experienced instructors and programmed to ensure progress, members loved how easy it was to fit into their days and how effective it was.

We also offer 20-minute HIIT and holistic sessions, which are incredibly popular, as they provide an effective workout which is easy to fit in before breakfast, or while the kids eat dinner. It's the convenience of having a personal trainer in your pocket, available whenever it suits you.

However, I think the best thing about the snackable trend, is that it's encouraging people to cross genres and do something different to complement their existing training. For example, cyclists are using our 10-minute Stretches for Cyclists session, and runners are using the Yoga for Runners programmes. These are people who typically wouldn't cross genres in clubs and are generally not willing to switch out their regular Cyclone cycle class for a full-length Spirit class. The convenience of these shorter workouts enables them to get the benefit, without needing to commit to a full-length class in club.

Snackable workouts are encouraging people to cross genres, says David Lloyd's Michelle Dand



Members are hungry for the immersive class experience

Hannah Curtis Nunn

Gymbox

During lockdown we definitely saw an appetite for 30 minute classes online, as well as bite-sized classes, which teach skills and build progression over a few classes – for example Muay Thai moves, or how to do a handstand.

However, since we've been able to offer group exercise in the clubs again, people have definitely been keen to take part in longer classes. Members are hungry for the immersive class experience, with

an instructor, lights, music, energy and the sense of community, which they missed out on while exercising at home. Our skills-based classes, which use equipment and expertise which people don't have at home, have been especially popular, such as Olympic lifting and aerial classes.

We're also noticing an appetite for outdoor workouts and we have a couple of partnerships to cater for this demand. For those who have caught the running bug, for example, we're working with Track Mafia, to run classes which teach good form in order to remain injury free and build performance and then in partnership with Steel Warriors – which builds

street gyms out of confiscated knives – we've been offering calisthenics and animal movement classes at three London sites.

What we're noticing is that members are coming to the club two or three times a week for a long workout and are then supplementing this with shorter workouts at home, which they can fit in around their daily routine. We're constantly working on ways to get our online and off-line offerings to complement each other. For example, with our new class, Pixel Whip, members can learn the choreographed moves online, so they know how to do it when they come to the club.



Curtis Nunn says members will learn the choreography for new class, Pixel Whip, at home before bringing it into the gym



Les Mills is not yet seeing a demand for snackable workouts



We find people who work out more frequently opt for longer workouts

Martin Franklin

Les Mills Europe

We're yet to see the trend for snackable workouts among our users. In fact, we're seeing a strong preference for the longer, comprehensive full-body workouts. Our most popular workouts on Les Mills on Demand (LMOD) remain our classic 55-minute classes.

Over the course of last month, the top 15 workout videos on LMOD were predominantly 45 to 55 minutes, with some 30 minute workouts too. Two of the top 30 minute workout videos were Les Mills Tone releases, which is a new



PHOTO: LES MILLS

The classic 55-minute classes remain the most popular on Les Mills on Demand, says Franklin

offering, combining the optimal mix of strength, cardio and core training.

Typically, we find people who work out more frequently opt for longer workouts, while people who struggle to fit exercise into their days pick the shorter workouts when they're able to exercise.

As the industry re-opens and workout habits continue to evolve, consumers want the flexibility of

being able to work out when and where they want, be it at home, outside or in an exhilarating live class experience. Most typically it's a combination of these, as the modern consumer expects a truly omnichannel fitness experience.

According to our 2020 customer satisfaction survey, 61 per cent of LMOD members in the UK also pay for a gym membership.



Snackable workouts
are ideal for those
who are experiencing
burnout at home

Sunil Rajasekar

Mindbody

Mindbody predicts the trend for snackable workouts is here to stay. Our research shows nearly four in ten Americans work out for half an hour or less. Snackable workouts give people the opportunity to squeeze in a workout when they might not have otherwise been able to before. Shorter sessions are

proving effective and convenient when wearing the many hats parents and professionals are asked to wear in these times.

Because snackable workouts require a smaller time investment, shorter sessions may also make virtual workouts more of interest for those reluctant to go digital. Consumers who aren't taking advantage of virtual workouts say they're boring (28 per cent) or that they get too easily distracted when they're exercising at home (24 per cent).

Snackable workouts are ideal for those who are experiencing burnout at home, bringing quick and attainable movement and energy into the workday. We've seen many of our customer studios shift to offering a hybrid model as state lockdown restrictions are lifted, offering virtual programming alongside the in-studio classes.

"Snackable workouts are here to stay," according to Mindbody president and CTO Sunil Rajasekar



Different exercise snacks can be used throughout the day to break up time spent being sedentary

Tom Cowan

Exercise physiologist

Half an hour should be short enough for many people to find the time to fit exercise into their schedule, allowing them to be active most days and meet the World Health Organization guidelines of completing at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic exercise a week.

Any form of cardiovascular exercise, such as cycling, swimming, jogging or brisk walking, lasting 10 minutes or more, counts towards this 150 minute a week goal. So the move towards exercise snacking makes it much easier for people to cram exercise into busy schedules, improve adherence and achieve their health and fitness goals. It's also a good option for those suffering from conditions such as chronic fatigue.

A 2014 study showed that doing 12 minutes of high intensity exercise before each of the three main meals improved glycaemic control for individuals with insulin resistance and studies have shown significant reductions in blood glucose, as a result of increased glucose uptake into the muscles for up to 24 hours after HIIT.

However, although short HIIT workouts are popular and effective, it doesn't have to be the case that a short workout is high intensity. Different types of exercise snacks could be used throughout the day to break up the amount of time spent being sedentary. Two short workouts a day, with rest time in between, can actually lead to achieving more in each session and more health benefits.

However, if people are opting for shorter workouts they do still need to have a well rounded exercise programme, incorporating resistance training, cardiovascular training and flexibility. It's a good idea to have different exercise snacks at different times of the day, focusing on different components of fitness and different muscle groups, which can contribute towards the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise a week and strength exercises for all of the major muscle groups. ●

Snackable workouts can help people to meet the WHO weekly exercise target, says Tom Cowan



State of EUROPE

The European Health & Fitness Market Report, published this month, gives deep insights into the impact of the pandemic on the sector. Liz Terry highlights some of the key findings

Deloitte's annual report into the European Health and Fitness market in partnership with EuropeActive – now in its eighth edition – has assumed extraordinary significance this year, given it details the impact of the pandemic on health and fitness businesses across the continent, laying bare for the first time the full extent of the destruction wrought by COVID-19 on the sector.

In introducing the report, the authors note this is the first year since records began where the market was not measured as having increased in size.

As such, the report becomes a benchmark from which the industry can rebuild and track a new course, as we consider the wider opportunities for growth as revealed by the disruption.



Strong direction in this regard is given in the Foreword by Andreas Paulsen, CEO of EuropeActive, who says: “EuropeActive’s recovery strategy will focus on helping our businesses recover and come back stronger after the pandemic in order for our sector to regain and expand our positive impact on the health and wellbeing, as well as the economy, of Europe.”

What's inside

The 128 page report includes all the major market numbers, country comparisons and also individual country reports, giving insights into macro economic factors, such as population size, disposal income, fitness club memberships and – usefully – average health club membership fees as a percentage of disposable income.

Deloitte has also tracked the current situation with VAT around Europe, showing how differing government approaches have either supported or burdened the sector. In Romania for example, VAT on gym memberships is set at 5 per cent, while in neighbouring Hungary, it's 27 per cent – the highest in Europe.

RSG Group held onto 91 per cent of its members during pandemic mandated closures





The Gym Group saw a 50 per cent fall in revenue during 2020 due to the UK's extensive lockdowns

PHOTO: THE GYM GROUP

Norway wins the VAT race overall, with VAT set at zero on health club memberships.

A number of other governments have chosen to give the health and fitness sector VAT breaks, including Ireland, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the rest of Scandinavia.

The *European Health & Fitness Market Report* also has a whole section detailing the major European operators and their status in 2020 in terms of borrowings, turnover and development plans.

Primary findings

Clubs, studios and gyms across the continent had a total of 54.8 million members in December 2020 – a significant fall from the 64.8 million members recorded in 2019.

This loss of roughly 10 million members represents an average drop of 15.4 per cent across Europe – although losses hit UK operators harder than those in many other countries, with The Gym Group, PureGym and Nuffield reporting falls of 27 per cent, 27.8 per cent and 26 per cent respectively, versus European operators such as Basic-Fit (10 per cent fall), RSG (9 per cent) and SATS (9 per cent).

This is mainly explained by the lengths of government mandated lockdowns experienced Europe, with Deloitte research showing the UK



We have identified
our sector's foremost
goal as becoming a
publicly recognised
solution for health and
wellbeing in Europe,
enabling us to
grow our market and
expand our impact



The report shows that health club revenues fell by nearly a third across Europe in 2020, from record levels of E28.2bn in 2019 to E18.9bn, with the top 15 operators alone achieving E2.6bn

suffered the greatest number of lockdown days in Europe, while at the other end of the scale, Sweden did not experience any closures.

The report also shows that revenues fell by nearly a third (32.9 per cent) across Europe, from the highest ever recorded level of €28.2bn in 2019 to €18.9bn in 2020.

Again, the UK was hit hardest, with Nuffield, Virgin and The Gym Group reporting falls of 46.5 per cent, 47.7 per cent and 50 per cent respectively, versus Basic-Fit (26.8 per cent), RSG (23 per cent) and SATS (18.5 per cent).

Deloitte found that the top 15 European fitness operators by themselves, achieved total revenues of €2.6 billion in 2020.

The total number of fitness clubs declined by only 1.4 per cent in 2020 to 62,775 – a relatively small loss, considering pandemic lockdowns forced clubs to close for an average of between 40 to 50 per cent of their operational days during the year.

This robust result is attributed both to the high levels of government support received by the sector and also operators' ability to raise funds to support their balance sheets.

Among the other key findings in the *European Health & Fitness Market Report* is that the

Basic-Fit retained 90 per cent of its members during 2020 and raised E337m in funds

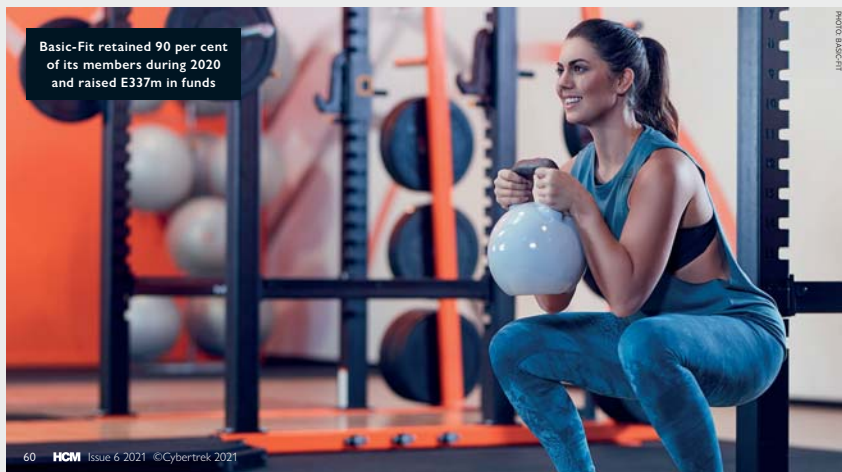
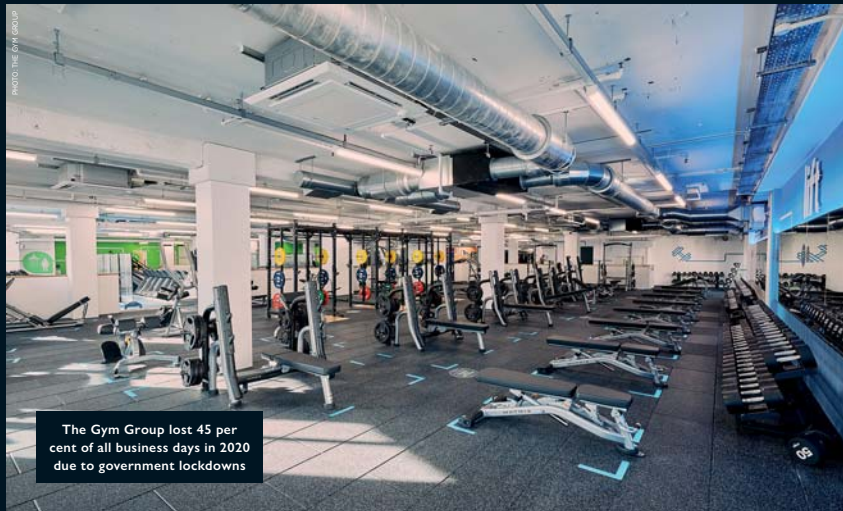


PHOTO: BASIC-FIT



The Gym Group lost 45 per cent of all business days in 2020 due to government lockdowns

confidence of investors in future growth opportunities within the fitness sector remains high. "This is demonstrated by the large sums that were invested in the various segments of the fitness ecosystem during 2020 and early in 2021, both in existing companies and start-ups, both online and offline," say co-authors, Karsten Hollasch and Herman Rutgers.

Mergers and acquisitions

In spite of the pandemic, and in some cases because of it, 2020 was a busy year for mergers and acquisitions across the European health and fitness market, with 16 M&A deals reported.

Some were standard business transactions, while others – such as JD Gyms' purchase of Xercise4Less (see our interview with Alun Peacock on page 42) were the result of them entering administration. The market has also seen six M&D deals already in 2021.

In total, deals saw 835 clubs changing hands in 2020, with 19 Fitness World clubs in Poland being sold twice – once to Pure Gym in January and then out of administration to insurance company, Medicovert, in December.

RSG's acquisition of Gold's Gym – a major coup for the European operator and one which has given RSG global reach – was not counted, as at the time

all Gold's Gyms locations were outside Europe, although RSG has wasted no time in bringing the Gold's brand to Europe, with a major new flagship having opened on 4 June in the German capital. Watch out for our interview with RSG CEO, Rainer Schaller, in the next issue of HCM.

The opportunity going forward

Andreas Paulsen's comments serve to set direction for the sector when he says: "The COVID-19 health crisis represents a transformative opportunity for our industry. This has led EuropeActive to identify our sector's foremost goal as becoming a publicly recognised solution for health and wellbeing.

"When considering our recovery post-COVID-19, it's clear our market opportunities as providers of essential health and wellbeing services are vast...our post-pandemic renewal as a sector should, therefore, focus on how we, individually and collectively, ensure this great transformation.

"Scientific research and evidence are on our side and the rest is very much in our own hands".

● The *European Health & Fitness Market Report* is compiled by Karsten Hollasch and team at Deloitte Deutschland, with co-editor, Herman Rutgers and published by industry body EuropeActive. Buy the report: www.HCMmag.com/EHFM20

Life in our years

A new report from [ukactive](#) sets out the key role the health and fitness can play in getting our ageing nation active, as Liz Terry reports

Older people gave insights into the kinds of physical activity offerings they want

Recent figures from Sport England show COVID-19 has widened health inequalities amongst older people, with more than a third of over-55s saying their strength has declined since the outbreak of the pandemic

Dame Carol Black, chair, Centre for Ageing Better

Older adults have revealed what they want from the fitness and leisure sector in order to encourage them to increase their levels of participation, with the findings outlined in a report published by ukactive at the end of June.

This report – *Life In Our Years* – was produced based on evidence gathered by the ukactive Research Institute, with the aim of reversing the trend of older adults being underrepresented when it comes to participation.

ukactive says this is the most comprehensive consultation ever undertaken for the over-55s, with a sample of more than 100 adults aged 55- to 90-years-of-age taking part in focus groups and giving their views on current practice.

Researchers asked them to share details of measures they felt would incentivise them to exercise more in the nation's gyms, health clubs, studios, pools and leisure centres.

Key takeaways include that the sector should focus on 'ability rather than age' in both the delivery and marketing of activities, as well as making exercise easy, accessible and social, to incentivise people to take part with friends.

The challenge we face

Only 54 per cent of adults over the age of 55 complete the World Health Organization's recommended 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week, with just over a third (34 per cent) doing less than 30 minutes a week, which classifies them as 'inactive'.

COVID-19 has been particularly damaging for older adults. In the UK, it has also exacerbated the pressures on the NHS and on social care organisations and ukactive says this means fitness and leisure facilities have an essential role to play in reducing the burden on health systems.

Sport England's latest *Active Lives Survey* bears out this trend, showing that the number of adults aged 55 to 74 achieving the recommended activity levels fell by 1.3 per cent between November 2019 and November 2020, while those aged 75 and over were logged as having a decrease in activity levels of 2.9 per cent.

ukactive says the report's recommendations are important for the UK's recovery from COVID-19, as the fitness and leisure sector helps build resilience for older adults against many health concerns, including COVID-19 and possible future pandemics. ▶

In announcing the publication of *Life In Our Years*, Huw Edwards, CEO at ukactive, told HCM: “We recognise there are some excellent programmes and practice in the sector already and this came across clearly in the consultation and focus group sessions, but now we must grasp the opportunity to improve our offer to those aged over 55.”

Outcomes

By investigating the activity sector’s current offering and comparing this with older adults’ perception of these services, the ukactive Research Institute has built a list of six themes based on insights to help the sector encourage more older adults to take part in physical activity.

The main themes to emerge from the research were the importance of accessibility, atmosphere, social interaction, workforce engagement, promotion, the categorisation of programmes and class offerings and long-term physical health support following the pandemic.

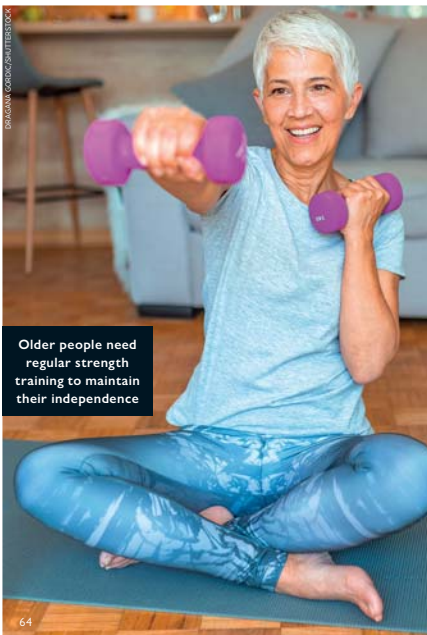
Based on these six themes, nine recommendations have been made to enable operators to improve participation levels among older adults and to play an increased role in improving their health and wellbeing.

Connecting with the health sector

In the introduction to the report, Sir Muir Gray flags up the importance of collaboration between the activity sector and the health sector, saying: “This report is an opportunity to drive the development of strong and irreversible partnerships with health agencies, including the NHS. The activity sector must also be involved in the new Health and Care Partnerships.

“Looking forward, this report, and the adoption of the recommendations contained in it, can become the catalyst for developing robust pathways from GPs and allied health professionals to these facilities and to sports medicine and rehabilitation services, such as geriatric medicine – an agenda that has

DRAGANA GORIC/Shutterstock



Older people need regular strength training to maintain their independence

9 Recommendations

- 1 Make activity easy and accessible.
- 2 Focus on strength training as early as possible to enable people to maintain their independence.
- 3 Create and build an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere to increase the likelihood of repeat usage and foster a sense of belonging and community.
- 4 Make activity more social, to incentivise people to come through your doors.
- 5 Prepare the workforce to support health needs specific to the older adult, through developing their interpersonal and communication skills and knowledge of common health conditions.
- 6 Categorise activities by ability or intensity, not by age.
- 7 Make communication and promotion clear to help build consumer confidence and help people make informed activity decisions.
- 8 Consider the changed physical and mental health needs of older adults post-COVID-19.
- 9 Build an evidence base to understand the impact the sector is having on older adults’ health and to attract investment into the sector.

6 Themes

- 1 Create easy and accessible offerings that utilise customer feedback to make necessary adaptations to scheduling (eg, flexibility in frequency, booking options and range of activities), while supporting the needs of older adults that are centred around maintaining strength.
- 2 Create, build and maintain a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere to increase the likelihood of repeat usage through fostering a sense of community and rapport between the workforce and customers and maintaining high standards of safety and facility upkeep.
- 3 Maintain and increase socialising opportunities through your offerings in order to support physical, mental and social health, improve experience and drive attendances.
- 4 Prepare the workforce with the people skills to deliver high quality offerings primarily with knowledge on communication and interpersonal skills and an understanding of common health conditions and how to adapt exercises to individual health needs.

HEDGEPOD/SHUTTERSTOCK



- 5 Appropriately communicate offerings to maximise attendance by a) categorising people by ability or intensity, not age; b) providing clear and detailed information about ability levels and what offerings include and c) advertising intergenerational mixing.
- 6 Ensure offerings support physical health and integrated health care systems in the long-term, by providing sessions that address changes in physical ability, support physical rehabilitation of older adults from COVID-19, and continue a digital-hybrid approach.

the overwhelming support of the older people who contributed to this report.”

In welcoming the report, Dame Carol Black, chair of the Centre for Ageing Better, said: “Physical activity is more important than ever for people in their 50s and 60s.

“COVID-19 has widened health inequalities among older people and more than a third of over-55s say that their strength has declined since the outbreak of the pandemic.

“A loss of physical strength and capability puts people at much greater risk of falls and ill-health in later life. We need urgent action to reverse this trend, or it will have serious consequences.

“The Centre for Ageing Better looks forward to working with ukactive to improve the fitness and leisure sector’s offer,” she said.

Edwards said: “This research found that our sector has the opportunity to do more, by fine-tuning the ways in which it targets, delivers, monitors and evaluates programmes for older adults.

“The sector is perfectly placed to support older adults in maintaining their independence, reducing health inequalities and easing pressures on the social care system.

“Increasing participation levels among older adults can improve cardiovascular health and overall strength, which in turn

ensures over-55s can live in better health and maintain independence for longer.

“Not only are there commercial opportunities to engage with a new audience, there are also other opportunities to innovate to help those who are most vulnerable, by linking to healthcare pathways.

“Increasing engagement with older adults offers our sector an opportunity to cement its reputation within government as an essential service, diversify its membership base and position itself as a socially-driven industry,” he concluded.

Dr Matthew Wade, head of R&D at ukactive, said: “Research shows being physically active and undertaking strength training can help older adults live healthy and independent lives.

“By including them directly in this research, the findings provide us with the opportunity to help the sector satisfy the demand from older adults by providing physical activity options that they want.” ●



Life in Our Years has been published by ukactive in partnership with Egm

Download a copy here:
www.HCMmag.com/lifeinouryears

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Shaping up

Although the diversity of COVID-19 responses around the world makes comparisons a challenge, as gyms open up, it's possible to identify patterns of member behaviour, as Paul Bedford explains

Reactions to the pandemic vary widely by nation, from Taiwan, with its previous experience of SARS and robust track and trace system, to Sweden, which has largely remained open throughout. This means it's challenging to find a global benchmark for the performance of health clubs following reopening.

However, by tracking gym, health club and studio performance during the first 12 weeks following a reopening, we've been able to observe a surge in attendances from 58 per cent to 81 per cent during the first seven weeks of trading, as existing members return and new people join.

When tracking the data of our clients, we're seeing a spike in visits in the first one to five days, with many members visiting 3-4 times per week, even if that was not their visit frequency pattern before the lockdown. After 10 days, visit patterns begin to revert to pre-pandemic levels. This is similar to data presented recently by Egym for the German market.

It's not possible to provide a single member return percentage globally, because health clubs around the world are operating in widely differing conditions and under different restrictions, but by tracking visit frequency data for the operators in our data set, we find that most have seen an average of 70 per cent of customers recording at least one visit in the first 10 days after a reopening.

In contrast, a few public sector operators in the UK have seen this figure as low as 27 per cent – likely for a variety of reasons, such as facilities being used as vaccination centres, which could be off-putting for some users, providers being unable to re-open all services, and limitations on class numbers.



Where they're allowed to operate group exercise classes, our clients are reporting they're running at capacity, but that can be anything as low as 25 per cent of pre-pandemic numbers due to social distancing restrictions.

David Connell, director of sport at the University of Hertfordshire Sports Village, UK, gives an example, saying: "Where we're allowed to operate group exercise classes we're operating at capacity, but we're finding this is around 40 per cent of our pre-pandemic numbers, due to necessary social distancing requirements."

Having found other ways to exercise, some users in the UK have also simply decided not to return until after the summer (September).

Our clients based in Australia, Hong Kong and the UK that have been open for at least six weeks have seen up to 79 per cent of customers recording a minimum of one visit, but that still leaves a group of 21 per cent of people who didn't cancel during extended lockdowns, but who have yet to return.



“Operators should encourage staff to have conversations that inspire members to re-establish their goals”

These people aren't sleepers – just customers who've failed to come back yet. They're likely to be those at high risk, who believe they would be vulnerable if they returned, or who are caring for people who are.

Enticing them back will require tactical reassurances around safety measures being implemented, as some customers say they're not likely to return until all restrictions have been lifted.

Workplace habits

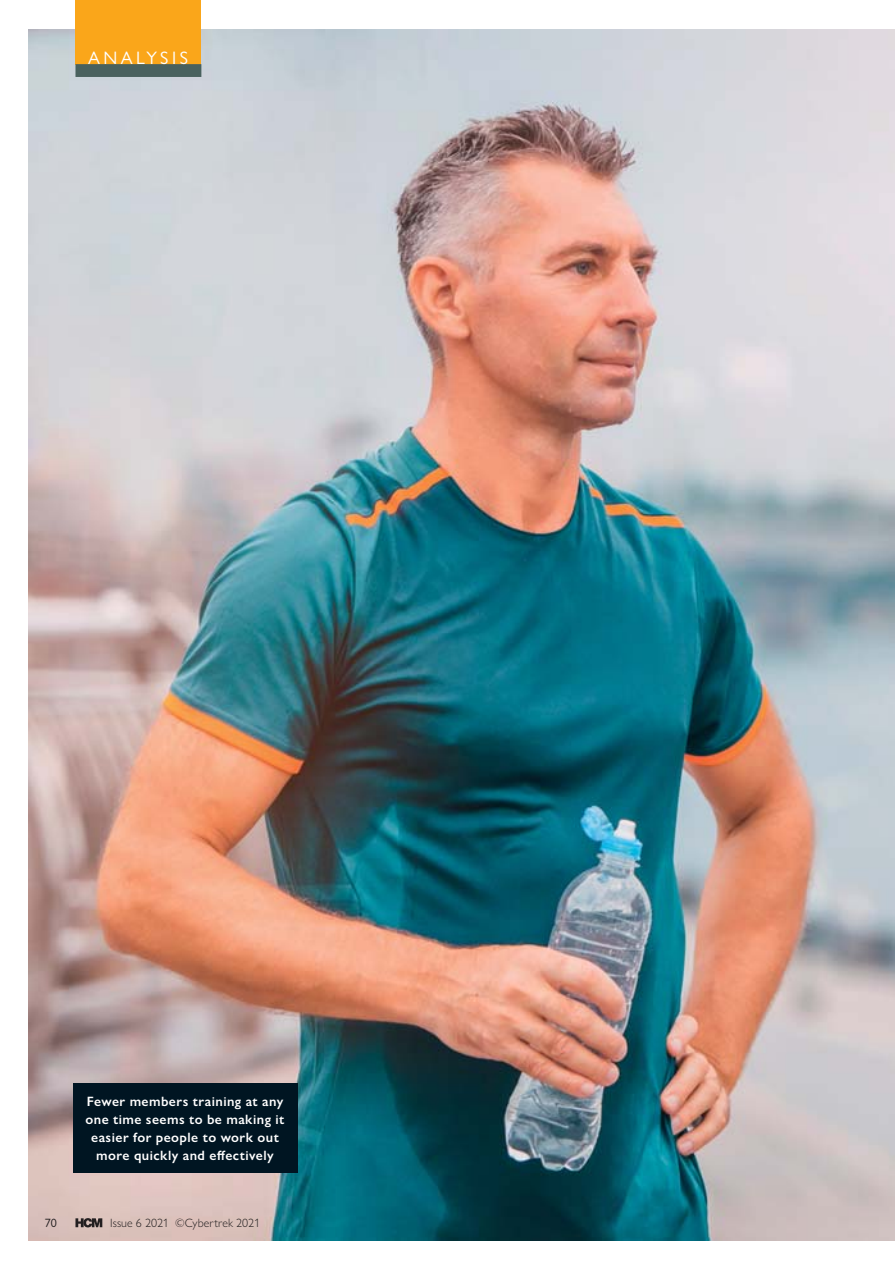
The pandemic has not only affected how we work out, but also how we work. Health clubs in city centres or the business districts of major cities have noticed that workers who would usually train around their commute aren't working out in the same volumes, because less of them are commuting. But although the volume of customers visiting is lower in cities, visit frequency remains where it was pre-pandemic for those still going to the gym before and after work.

Visit frequencies remain the same for people still going to the gym in the city, but a decline in commuters has impacted volume

Analysing data from our US and UK clients by age, we can see the 18-34 age group has returned quickly, but has yet to establish a consistency in workout schedules.

It's not clear why this is, but with so many alternative activities; shopping, bars, restaurants, public gatherings and some travel also reopening, it's likely to be due to there being an abundance of options available now after an extended period of restrictions. Some may also be struggling to get into group exercise classes, while others may have migrated to online and/or outside workouts.

This age group responds well to challenges, so consider starting a series of eight – 12-week events and encourage them to join in. Promote group exercise wherever possible, as well as trialling new types of exercise. ▶

A full-page photograph of a middle-aged man with short, graying hair, looking off to the right. He is wearing a teal athletic t-shirt with orange trim on the sleeves and collar. He is holding a clear plastic water bottle in his right hand, with his left hand on his hip. The background is a blurred outdoor setting, possibly a park or waterfront.

Fewer members training at any one time seems to be making it easier for people to work out more quickly and effectively



Usage is being spread evenly, with a third training regularly in the morning, a third during traditional off-peak times and a third training after 5.00pm

► Shorter workouts

The 35-54 age group has also returned and appears consistent in terms of visits, making up the majority of those visiting 2-3 times per week.

Entry and exit data from low cost operators, where members have to sign in and out again as they leave, shows a pattern of shorter workouts in this age group. We have no data to suggest these shorter workouts are higher in intensity, it simply appears that customers are training more efficiently and have less desire to dwell (see our feature on snackable workouts on page 52).

This trend is likely to be replicated in high-end clubs that have been unable to reopen their restaurant and bar areas. Fewer members training at any one time could also be making it easier to work out more quickly and effectively.

Operators should recognise, congratulate and incentivise this group's frequency behaviour and also encourage staff to have conversations that inspire them to re-establish their goals, as some of these may have changed. They should also set targets with them for the next three months.

Older customers

Customers over 55 years of age appear to be finding it more difficult to re-establish regular exercise patterns within their health club, and it's not clear why this is.

This age group makes up the majority of those recording no visits in the first 10 days of reopening. It's important to note that these are live members who – pre-pandemic – were visiting regularly and were not sleepers.

As I've said earlier, reasons for non-attendance can include not feeling safe to return, caring for others and waiting for all services to resume.

Reach out to these customers in an attempt to identify their barriers to returning and address these. There's also value in creating news stories to share with the local press, as well as positive video testimonials from customers of a similar age about their experiences of returning to the gym, to encourage others to make the move.

Think about running a campaign where a member brings a former member in with them – 'Be a friend – Bring a friend back'. This age group is more likely to turn up with someone they know.

Changing times

What has been seen is a greater diversity of visit times. With so many working from home, people are choosing to exercise during the day, avoiding traditional peak times and navigating reduced access to equipment due to COVID-19 restrictions.

We've also seen an increase in visit frequency at traditionally quiet times of the day. Pre-pandemic, visits were generally around 15 per cent during the morning and 20 per cent during the day, with everyone else turning up in the evening.

Post lockdown – of the 24-32 per cent who are visiting twice per week – usage is being spread evenly, with a third training regularly in the morning, a third during traditional off-peak times and a third after 5.00pm.

Some operators intend to keep it this way by permanently running a booking system for gym



Consumers are more interested in exercising outside, says Bedford

Facilities need to up their game

► sessions, even once government restrictions end. It will be interesting to see how this benefits retention figures, as members have to commit to attending and are less likely to just 'slack off' on the day.

Stuart Martin, MD of Active Nation, (see our interview on page 74), said: "We've been reviewing the viability of maintaining a booking system for gym sessions for a while now. We reached out to our customers with a short survey. The sample that came back from 4,582 respondents was 68 per cent in favour of retaining the Gym & Swim booking. We'll now look at timetabling both booking and free times after full reopening."

The extended lockdowns mean new exercise behaviours and routines have been formed and health clubs can no longer consider they have sole ownership of the exercise experience; customers around the globe reported engaging in a wider variety of fitness offerings and operators must accept they have to share revenue with other offerings, or take steps to provide a wider offering themselves to satisfy consumer habits.

However, this idea has been growing for some time – at the 2016 Retention Convention, Arron Williams (special projects director for Life Fitness at the time), reported an emerging trend of customers having a base

health club membership and supplementing this with visits to boutique clubs on an ad hoc or weekly basis.

As well as taking online fitness classes, anecdotal evidence suggests health club members are reporting a greater appreciation for exercising outside – weather and pollution permitting.

So, the pendulum has swung. Gyms have reopened, and while there will be some customers that never return, there will also be demand from people who have never been before.

Facilities need to up their game – people have seen beautiful boutique studios on Instagram and used apps from the likes of Apple and Peloton and their expectations have been raised, so operators must enhance the experience – not just what the club looks like, but the equipment, the music, the instructors and most importantly, the engagement. ●

Data sources: The data presented is sourced from Retention Guru Ltd clients in China, Hong Kong, Australia, the UK and USA which are predominantly trading using traditional health club models. It also includes UK public sector and educational establishments.





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Martin and Vesey are invested in Active Nation making an impact by getting people more active by whatever means works for them





We're positioning ourselves away from the noise in the sector. We don't want to fight over the same people. We're about the 85%, not just the 15%

Stuart Martin & Diane Vesey

Active Nation is on a mission to change lives for the better – and prove it.

The charity's MD and commercial director talk to Kate Cracknell

What's the Active Nation elevator pitch?

Stuart: Active Nation is a campaigning charity whose mission is to persuade the nation to be active. We don't even care how you do it – just get moving! We want to become influencers of activity.

We're very purpose-and value-led and are all about encouraging people to live healthier and happier lives.

We've found the inclusion of the word happier in our mission statement to be really important, particularly during the lockdowns. Whenever we've used this – in social media posts such as 'WARNING! Exercise can cause health and happiness' – engagement has gone off the scale.

How has the charity changed?

Stuart: When I joined Active Nation in 2011, it was already working to do things differently, focusing on persuading people to be active, however they chose to do that.

We won a couple of big contracts after I joined, but by 2015 the marketplace had changed

and became dominated by two or three big players. I'd be at sector events, chatting to industry colleagues, and people would ask: 'Are you winning any business?' My response was always: 'Well, first define winning.' Because the way things are now... the market appears to be based on price, not social impact.

Leisure centres and leisure contracts remain important to us, but it has to be good business. If you're going to be paying extortionate amounts to secure contracts and the margin isn't there, quite simply that isn't good business. Especially because – as a charity – we want to be left with enough of a margin to reinvest and be able to do good.

We still have three large leisure contracts – Lincoln, South Derbyshire and Southampton – but our diversified growth strategy has also seen us acquire our own small budget fitness clubs, a studio and a trampoline park. We now own around 30 per cent of our facilities, and the commercial operations enable us to generate



Active Nation has invested in its own budget fitness clubs and is open to collaborating with franchises



PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION

PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION

We need to get better at demonstrating our impact. We're creating a health score that covers physical and mental health so we can do this

greater surpluses, which in turn allows us to do even more good in our communities.

Even in our leisure contracts, we're positioning ourselves away from where all the noise is in the sector. We don't want to fight over the same pool of people. We're about the 85 per cent, not just the 15 per cent who already belong to gyms.

We have an alpine leisure contract in Rushmoor, for example, including skiing. And in our leisure contract in Southampton, 50 per cent of what we do is outdoors: sailing, sea kayaking, hockey and football fixtures and so on – even climbing trees! There are 75 acres of outdoor space, so this is also where Active Warrior, our obstacle course race, was born in 2016.

We're now looking to kick things on further still, and Diane is already looking at new initiatives.

We don't just manage facilities in the communities where we work, either. We're a key partner in delivering health, wellness, nutrition, activity and sport on behalf of our local authority partners.

How important is diversity?

Stuart: Slightly more people come to us for fitness than for other activities, but those who do other activities are more engaged. In a piece of research we did a few years ago, we found



Martin says the National Leisure Recovery Fund emphasised support for gym and swimming at the expense of all other activity

70 per cent of gym-only subscribers had left 12 months later. Meanwhile, 70 per cent of those doing multiple activities had stayed.

That's why I got really riled by the National Leisure Recovery Fund: the £100m made available via Sport England to support publicly-owned leisure facilities through the COVID-19 crisis. The fund classified sport and exercise into primary and secondary activities, and none of the secondary activities – which is pretty much 50 per cent of what we do – qualified for any support from the fund.

You're going to get me on my soapbox now, but I think that's an absolute disgrace, because it's basically saying gym and swimming is more important than any other activity. This mentality is why we've only engaged with 15 per cent of the population over the last 30 years.

Tell us about your social good mandate

Stuart: We genuinely want to make a difference, so when we speak about ourselves, it isn't with a focus on price. We focus on people's stories, showing how we've made a lasting impression on them and helped change their lives for the better.

Diane: We need to be better at communicating to the public at large that we're a charity, so



Fifty per cent of the south coast contracts are for outdoor activities, such as sea kayaking which has been booming since the end of lockdown



We actively want to operate where we don't have facilities. We want to operate where we will never have a facility

I'm currently working on how we can bring more attention to this. We want people to realise their 'donation' can make a big impact.

Ultimately we want to shout about the fact we're a charity, then be able to turn round and say to all of our supporters: 'Look what we've been able to do with your backing.' We want to make it clear we don't have shareholders to pay, and show how the surpluses we make are reinvested to do good for the wider community. **Stuart:** Our supporters already understand our cause, but we want to ramp this up to a new level.

Football would be a good analogy – fans' loyalty and passion for their team runs through their veins and that's the kind of response we're working to create with Active Nation.

People will drop in and out of our activities, they'll choose their payment terms and how they support us across the years, but our aim is that they'll always understand our purpose and will continue to support what Active Nation stands for.

How has the pandemic affected you?

Stuart: Looking at the positives, Active Nation has weathered the storm pretty well, working with our partners and opening all venues at the first opportunity. That in itself is a success, I think.

We've also had record months in some of our activities. Sea kayaking, for example. We've managed that contract for 10+ years and £10,000 was the highest ever monthly revenue – until August 2020, when it hit £35,000. We couldn't get boats on the water fast enough. Donutting down our ski slope was similar – totally booked up. And at our trampoline park, we're not just inundated with this year's birthday parties, but also the catch-up birthday parties from last year.

All our numbers have been 300 per cent better coming out of the third lockdown than coming out of the first. Even with April 2021 only starting on 12th of the month for us, it was record-breaking.

Our problem has been catering for the demand with the restrictions we have in place – we could fill our space two or three times over. People

PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION



PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION



PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION

Running leisure centres is part of Active Nation's core mandate and the aim is for customers to feel thoroughly engaged



just want to get out and get involved again with the social aspect of what we provide.

So while COVID has been horrible, I'm always keen to look at the opportunities. I see this as a catalyst to be flexible and do things differently, so we've been looking closely at what to *accelerate*, what to *introduce* and what to *dump*.

What have you accelerated?

Stuart: Active Nation on Demand, created in partnership with Wexer, is a good example of something COVID-19 has accelerated. Digital has been on our radar for a while, so this complete at-home, at work, in-school, any time, anywhere solution – with hundreds of different activity options – wasn't just done as a bolt-on to help us ride out the storm. It's central to our hybrid in- and out-of-venue model. What COVID-19 did, though, was bring the launch forward.

Interestingly, COVID-19 also did a lot of the hard work for us in terms of changing consumer behaviours: it has altered the way we live, the way we work, the way we move – and it's done so for good. On-demand isn't going to simply disappear now facilities are open again.



PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION

Active Warrior events were conceived and are run by Active Nation, with potential to grow

I can see Active Nation on Demand having even more registered, active users than any of our venues



We had up to 1,750 people taking part in a single online session during lockdown, but we expect on-demand to get even bigger and better. The heights to which we plan to take Active Nation on Demand... I can see it having even more registered, active users than any of our venues.

And what have you introduced and dumped?

Stuart: Here's an example of 'introduce'.

Throughout the lockdowns, restrictions meant we had to introduce booking across all our activities, including gym sessions. The transformational idea now is that we're planning to maintain this moving forward. We'll have a few free sessions where you can just turn up, but generally everything will be booked.

Normally, that level of change would meet with a lot of resistance, but once again, COVID has done the difficult part for us. Our supporters have already realised – and told us – they get a better experience when they book, with better service and a higher likelihood of achieving their goals, because they've committed to their activity. They feel safer, too. We just need to keep communicating these benefits, so booking is seen not as a hassle but as a benefit and even a selling point for Active Nation.

Booking is good for us, too, because it allows us to manage the business more efficiently and effectively. We don't need receptionists or access control any more, for example. Now, we can have a *maitre d*-type set up, where we're ready with our iPads to greet supporters we know will be coming in. We can resource our team and open our venues based on supply and demand, rather than just waiting for people to rock up.

And then 'dump' – the best example is our KPIs. We'll still have them, but if we're seeing COVID-19 as a catalyst for change, I don't want



Vesey and Martin are looking for creative ways to get people active – with or without facilities



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WARNING!

Exercise can cause
health and happiness

PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION

Martin reports that adding the word 'happiness' to any marketing sees engagement going off the scale

us to be getting the same results as we were pre-COVID-19. We're, therefore, working with our local authority partners to review all our KPIs. How will we measure participation now? What type of membership does the end user want if we're all living differently, working differently, exercising differently?

Are you moving away from contract management?

Stuart: Leisure centres remain very important to our business, and of course we want to grow subscriptions and participation. However, we know we can't do it all within our facilities. There's only so far you can take growth in that channel.

The good news is that Active Nation's purpose – getting people moving in whatever way they choose – means it can exist without facilities. We've said that for a long time, but now we're pushing it even further. Not only can we exist without buildings, but we now actively want to operate where we don't have facilities. We want to operate where we will never have a facility.

Diane: I've only been with Active Nation a month, but I already have some ideas around where we can take the charity. One of the ideas on the table would be for us to provide services, leaving it to each individual to decide how much they can afford to pay.

I'm still in the early stages of my thinking in this respect, but we're already looking not only at how we engage more people – those who might never come to a facility – in the areas where we manage the leisure contracts, but also at how we can move into regions where we don't manage the facilities and there's no brand awareness.

Certainly digital will be at the forefront of this non-facility-based growth strategy, but I think we'll need to look at some new partnerships too. We're just starting to scope out who those partners could be.

With my experience in franchising, this could be an opportunity worth exploring. Are there franchises out there we could align with, take on, operate, help them grow via a 'powered by Active Nation' approach? We have a wealth of



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me, every day
– to be active*

experience, knowledge and skill sets within the charity that can be built on to further our reach.

I also have experience in running large-scale events and this could get us some good traction. Active Warrior, for example, was already trialled outside of its home territory before COVID, and it's easy to see it could become a UK-wide concept.

Stuart: Workplace wellbeing is also a big area of interest moving forward. I want to bring an Active Nation wellbeing solution to organisations.

Has COVID changed government perceptions of our sector?

Stuart: We're not close to being seen as an essential service yet. The fact that off-licences and garden centres could open during lockdown, but gyms couldn't, just shows you where we are in the eyes of government. We need to educate them so they realise we're part of the solution, not part of the problem.

There was a brief moment, when prime minister Boris Johnson got COVID-19 then came out of hospital saying he needed to lose weight and get fit... I really hoped that would filter down. But we're still stuck in the same group as hospitality. We have to get much better at lobbying.



Alpine Snowsports in Southampton is part of the Active Nation portfolio

PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION

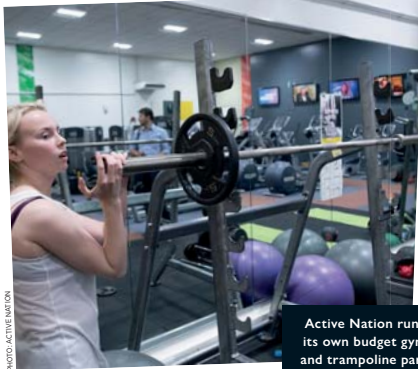


PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION

Active Nation runs its own budget gym and trampoline park

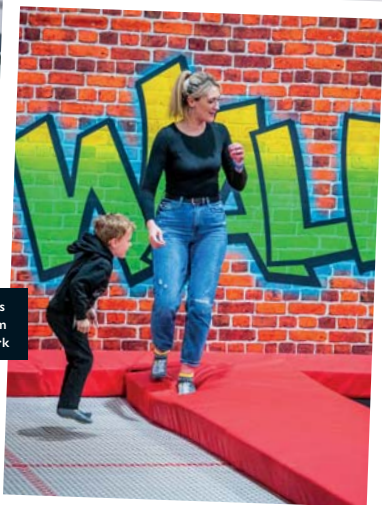


PHOTO: ACTIVE NATION

We also need to get better at demonstrating our impact. We should be using industry conferences not only to share ideas on getting people active, but to challenge each other to credibly report back on the difference we've made in the previous 12 months.

At Active Nation, we're creating a health score – one that covers physical and mental health – so we can do this. People will be able to ask me: 'Stuart, you had 100,000 supporters last year and 50 per cent of them had a health score of 20. What's the situation now?' And I will be able to answer: 'It's now 200,000 people and 70 per cent have a health score of 25.'

To assist with all of our initiatives, we've ripped out our old CRM system and have worked very closely with Hedgehog and its Elan solution to ensure we can gather exactly this sort of credible data, all in one place.

We have to be better at working together as a sector, too, especially on the venue side, where we're currently all competing with each other. It may be, for example, that we could partner with other operators, so our supporters could be on our digital platform but could also go to a facility that's not managed by us – and vice versa. These are the kinds of things we should be looking at if we really, really want to help people.

What drives you?

Stuart: If you want to persuade people to be active, you have to be active yourself. I get up at 5.30am every day to do a workout and in our organisation, everyone is active. You have to lead by example.

I know I give our HR department a headache, but if you aren't active as an employee, you're no good to me. When I first started at Active Nation, one of the stats I was given showed our most active leaders to be our most commercially successful, and our least active leaders to be the least commercially successful. None of the inactive individuals are still with the business today, by mutual consent. Active Nation just wasn't a good fit for them.

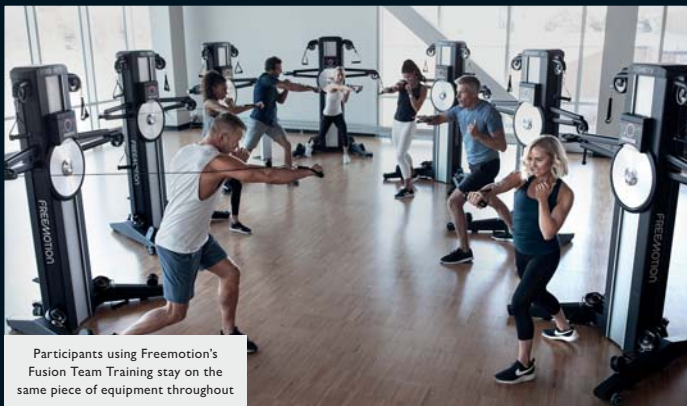
I believe in this so much that we made 'being active' a business KPI – one we treat as seriously as surplus. Everyone who joins our team gets a Myzone belt on day one. They're then given 30 minutes in their day – on me, every day – to be active, and they're asked to hit the World Health Organization's guidelines for physical activity. That equates to 1300 MEPs [Myzone's effort-based measurement units] every month.

What are the five year goals?

Stuart: The danger is that we try to do too much. That's always been my concern. However, I do think there's a huge opportunity to meet the needs of the 85 per cent, and I'm trying hard to position Active Nation into areas that aren't just about keeping the fit people fit. We want to make a difference to real people. ●

Suppliers talk to *HCM*
about how they're forging
new offerings to meet the
evolving needs of members

Fusion Fitness



Participants using Freemanotion's Fusion Team Training stay on the same piece of equipment throughout

PHOTO: FREEMOTION

By combining power and metabolic training, participants build muscle and burn calories in record time

Tony Ali

Freemotion Fitness

We've developed Fusion Team Training, a new approach to small group training which fuses cardio and strength to create an engaging, high-energy and motivating experience.

Designed for five to 15 participants, classes deliver the expertise of personal coaching with the motivation of a group dynamic. For members, this provides a lower-priced entry point to receive personalised coaching,

consequently allowing operators to provide an offering to maximise revenue through small group training.

By combining power and metabolic training, participants build muscle and burn calories in record time – perfect for today's time-conscious, omnichannel fitness consumers.

Participants train on their own Freemanotion Fusion Cardio Strength Trainer for the duration of a class, so there's no need to share equipment or wipe down multiple stations, giving users control over their workout environments.



PHOTO: FREEMOTION



PHOTO: PRECOR



PHOTO: PRECOR

As fusion fitness evolves, it's becoming increasingly tech-driven

Pete Bolam

Precor

Numbers of hybrid customers – those who spend on at-home and outdoor fitness, as well as the gym – have been growing during the pandemic. Hybrid customers are attracted to fusion fitness, as they often don't want a one size fits all gym.

Precor's Queenax rigs are enabling a range of fusion training options – for example, we've installed custom-made rigs for Aneurin Leisure Trust, including

the UK's first self-standing wall, which divides one large space into two zones – fusion functional and strength.

As fusion fitness evolves, it's also becoming tech-driven. We now offer Advagym by Sony for the Queenax, giving operators the option to fully digitise the experience.

Aneurin Leisure is using Advagym, adding sensor pucks to the Queenax. These offer 'how-to' videos, so members can visualise their workout options, all by touching their phone to the sensors, as well as logging every rep and exercise.

Ben Hackney-Williams

Myzone

I love innovations from fitness professionals that know which elements of workouts and delivery methods complement each other best.

Myzone has created the MZ-Remote+ platform, which is a timetable of live and professionally produced classes integrating heart rate feedback on-screen.

Whether it's cardio, boxing, HIIT, yoga, or strength sessions, operators can implement a timetable of hybrid fitness activities that allows them to meet members where they want to be.

I can't wait for the first Cardio Club to land, where a PT is leading a class full of people in the gym, at home and outside, all putting in the effort together – running, cycling, circuit training, and simply moving, with their heart rate recording on their chest, arm, or wrist. That's the best example of fusion fitness I could imagine.



PHOTO: MYZONE

Operators can implement a timetable of hybrid fitness that allows them to meet members where they want to be



Myzone has launched the MZ-Remote+ which enables heart rate recording anywhere

PHOTO: MYZONE



PHOTO: PULSE FITNESS

The Trakk app enables operators to stay connected to members wherever they choose to exercise

Richard Sheen

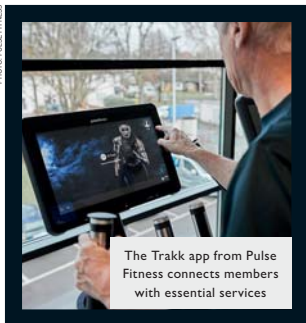
Pulse Fitness

We've developed Trakk, an app enabling operators to stay connected to members, wherever they exercise, by setting personalised goals to keep them engaged.

The app offers access to a library of 150 free, curated workout videos. Users can also devise their own workouts and use ready-made workout plans.

Trakk connects wearables and mobile devices with access control, payments, interactions with equipment

PHOTO: PULSE FITNESS



The Trakk app from Pulse Fitness connects members with essential services

and bookings to aid retention and increase secondary spend.

Technology is transforming the fitness industry and the fusion between in-gym and at-home workouts is here to stay. By integrating with Trakk, operators can create personalised programming for members.

Better programming and a more holistic approach provides added value, keeping members motivated and connected.

Paul Ferris

Speedflex

Speedflex falls into the fusion fitness category, combining strength and HIIT training.

The USP of Speedflex is its inclusivity. A free motion bar generates personalised resistance, so every participant – from professional athletes to deconditioned people – can train at their optimum level.

Regardless of age or fitness level, all participants in the same session are getting the same great workout. There aren't many concepts on the market that can be offered to an operator's entire membership base, but Speedflex ticks that box.

As our industry opens up, concepts such as Speedflex are well placed to help members ease back in by allowing participants to work out at a high intensity while keeping the impact low.

Many won't have been in a gym environment in a while, so it's important for operators to be mindful of this and have the right programming in place.



PHOTO: SPEEDFLEX

Regardless of age or fitness level, all participants are getting the same great workout

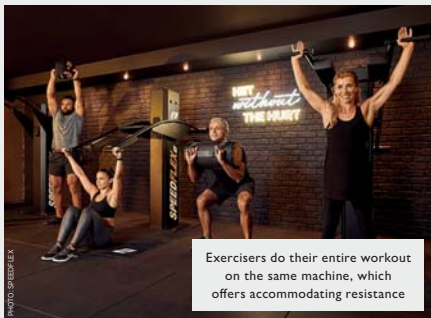


PHOTO: SPEEDFLEX

Exercisers do their entire workout on the same machine, which offers accommodating resistance

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The more welcoming, inclusive, and accessible fitness is, the better for everyone



ICG Connect from Life Fitness turns group cycling into an immersive event

Anoushka Moore

Life Fitness

ICG Connect is a friendly, competition-based indoor cycling experience delivered through a 'Coach by Colour' system which gives everyone an equal chance to contribute and maximise their workout.

The ICG Connect digital platform delivers data visualisation and gaming by tracking group cycle performance and providing team competition, while also celebrating individual achievement.

Working as teams within the whole group or competing as individuals, coaches can use ICG Connect to keep sessions fun, fresh, and immersive.

Indoor cycling has become a place where many feel comfortable exercising and the features in ICG Connect turns a cycle class into an immersive and engaging group exercise event.

After a year of separation, a connected indoor cycling experience is an undeniable hook with enormous potential for any club.



PHOTO: LIFE FITNESS

The Ultimate Group Fitness Solution from Les Mills fuses digital, live streaming and outdoor

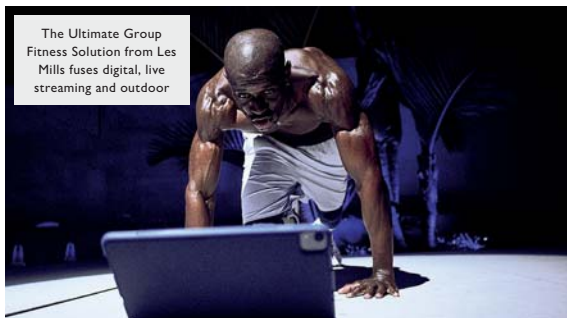


PHOTO: LES MILLS



Now's a good time for clubs that haven't tried livestreaming to give it a go

Martin Franklin

CEO, Les Mills Europe

Fusion fitness – combining gym and home routines – is here to stay and now's a good time for clubs that haven't tried livestreaming to give it a go.

The live experience is best, but livestreaming comes a close second, as it brings 'in the moment' energy and

maintains the important connection between instructors and members.

We've pulled together digital, live streaming and outdoor options to create our Ultimate Group Fitness Solution. This 360 degree package is designed to support clubs' recovery, by combining at-home and digital to keep members engaged, while priming them to return to live classes as the sector recovers. ●



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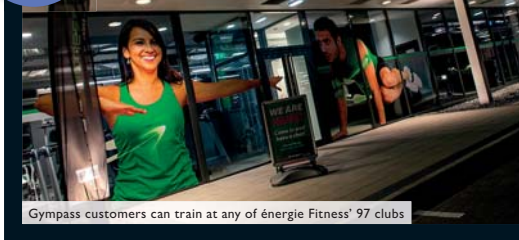
Visit gympass.com to learn how you can become a partner.

Gympass



"We're delighted to be working with Gympass to help power their business partners and staff with positive énergie"

Adam Margolin, énergie Fitness



Gympass customers can train at any of énergie Fitness' 97 clubs

Rebuilding with Gympass

Gympass has supported the sector throughout lockdowns and is now powering ahead helping clubs to rebuild their footfall by securing new members

During lockdown, it fell to online platforms and virtual training sessions to keep consumers engaged in exercise. Gympass led the way by rapidly building its online offering to include on-demand classes, meditation apps, healthy recipes, one-to-one therapy and online access to PTs.

Set against the backdrop of a growing national awareness around the importance of prioritising physical and mental health, there's no doubt that Gympass helped keep its members motivated and focused.



"We pride ourselves on offering convenient, affordable, inclusive and accessible sites to corporate workforces"

Eamon Lloyd, Gympass

When the doors reopened, Gympass saw encouraging data from its customer database showing 97 per cent of those that logged on during the first week headed directly to their local fitness facility to re-ignite their pre-pandemic routines, and the recovery has continued to pick up pace as group exercise timetables resumed.

Maintaining momentum

Once this 'honeymoon' period ends, operators will need to do all they can to ensure people continue using their facilities.

Gympass helps by offering corporate employees access to its operator partners' gym and studio facilities. By keeping in touch with its members directly and via supportive corporate communications, Gympass is well-placed to keep physical activity at the top of people's minds and inboxes.

New partners

A number of new operator partners – including énergie Fitness – joined Gympass during lockdown in anticipation of its potential to support footfall to its facilities and the moment restrictions were lifted,

Gympass' corporate customers were able to train at any of énergie Fitness' 97 clubs across the UK and Ireland.

Across all its operator partners in the UK, Gympass now gives its users access to a total of 2,600 bricks and mortar gym facilities.

"By working with Gympass we can reach a wider array of big corporations, helping them to improve performance, enrich their culture and reduce the risk of losing serious work hours to sickness," says Adam Margolin, head of marketing at énergie Fitness. "We take the health and wellbeing of members very seriously and we're delighted to be working with Gympass to help power their business partners and staff with positive énergie".

Eamon Lloyd, head of partnerships for UK and Ireland at Gympass said: "We pride ourselves on offering convenient, affordable, inclusive and accessible sites to corporate workforces. All our new partners, including énergie Fitness, share our ethos and combine top-class facilities with great levels of customer service to help members get the most out of their facilities." ●

● www.gympass.com

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Exceeding expectations

A new Anytime Fitness franchise chose to work with Precor for its entire set-up, with great results

Anytime Fitness Addlestone is director Nimesh Vatsa's first franchise, alongside business partner Dipen Patel. The site, which opened in May 2021, is fully equipped by Precor and includes the company's Resolute selectorised strength line, as well as a mix and match blend of cardio kit in the company's Black Pearl colourway.

"Precor ensured things ran smoothly from the start," says Vatsa. "Their approach has always been a personal one; it didn't feel heavily sales-led, or as if their sole objective was to push kit on us. Part of our decision to partner with Precor was the support they offered while we were securing a site, which was a turbulent period for us."

"Precor's design mock-ups were also very powerful in influencing our decision. The process was hugely

collaborative and visualisations were turned around quickly. Precor included a fly-through video, which we've since used with great success in our pre-sales marketing and across social media. This contributed to us achieving a database of 4,000 prospects."

Resolute Strength

Vatsa selected Resolute Strength to get ahead of the curve, making the club the first Anytime Fitness franchise to carry the line. "We saw this as an opportunity to offer our clients something with a premium look and feel coupled with robust and long-lasting design," he says.

Precor also provided the new business with a leasing solution through Precor Customer Finance and Vatsa says: "In challenging economic times when lots of lenders were pulling back, we



PHOTO: PRECOR

Anytime Fitness Addlestone is fully equipped by Precor



"When lots of lenders were pulling back, we got a deal over the line with the minimum of fuss"

Nimesh Vatsa, Anytime Fitness Addlestone

got a deal over the line with the minimum of fuss."

When it came to installation, Precor helped the team overcome barriers to ensure the site met its opening date. "I've not come across an installation that hasn't had challenges; you're pulling together a complicated site with lots of dynamics," says Vatsa. "But whatever the issue, Precor was responsive, pragmatic and quick to find a solution. One unforeseen challenge caused us to lose 12 hours of working time, but thanks to a great working partnership between Precor and its installation partners, it didn't make a huge impact. "We're always trying to go above and beyond for our members and Precor has done the same for us. They're enabling us to exceed our member expectations."

● www.precor.com

ANYTIME FITNESS ADDLESTONE



Precor provided design mock-ups for the new gym

Product innovation



Steph Eaves rounds up the latest launches in health and fitness

Reebok and Les Mills' 'official shoe of fitness' comes with custom workouts, explains **Kate Lennon**



● The new shoe has been designed to support the foot during intensive classes

To launch the Les Mills co-branded Reebok Nano X1 shoe, Les Mills and Reebok joined forces to release the Les Mills x Reebok Nano Series of workouts. Featuring Les Mills Grit, Bodypump and Les Mills Core, the workouts are also available on Les Mills On Demand.

The co-branded shoe has been designed to support the foot during physically challenging classes and is being promoted as the ideal shoe for tackling the Nano Series workouts.

Les Mills' Kate Lennon said: "Our Nano Series project has been based on innovation – seeing workouts re-imagined with the 'official shoe of fitness'."



PHOTO: TESMILLS

Launching with Reebok allows us to bring more people into fitness

Kate Lennon

Launching this campaign through our partnership with Reebok allows us to ultimately grow the market and bring more people into fitness.

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

Virtuagym and YPT's app supports PTs in running their businesses, explains **James Lorey**

Your Personal Training has created a personal training management app called Your Wellbeing, designed to

support PTs in running and managing their businesses.

The app was developed in partnership with software provider Virtuagym and supports both PTs and gym operators.

Your Wellbeing can be white-labelled to reflect the look and feel of the PT's own business and allows them to dedicate more time to training clients by offering an integrated payment system and the facility to design workout packages for clients.



PHOTO: YPT

● The Your Wellbeing app can be white-labelled

James Lorey, from Your Personal Training, said: "Unlike many other apps, Your Wellbeing takes a one-stop-shop approach; it's a technical solution that covers everything a PT needs to grow their hybrid business." The

app can support invoicing, payments and reports, while also being used to write clients' programmes, set individual challenges, build a community and offer advice.

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



PHOTO: YPT

This app covers everything a PT needs to grow their business

James Lorey



PHOTO: ABC

The platform enables operators to create and monetise their own content

Bill Davis



PHOTO: ABC

● The platform integrates with the ABC ecosystem

ABC+ provides the tools to create a total fitness experience, tells **Bill Davis**

ABC Fitness Solutions has launched ABC+ to support operators in delivering hybrid fitness solutions and their own branded apps.

The platform enables operators to create and monetise their own content, as well as using content from

the ABC+ library to create new revenue streams.

ABC+ also has digital tools for in-app messaging, workout-of-the-day challenges and one-to-one video calling with coaches and staff.

The mobile solution is available on Android

and iOS and integrates with the ABC ecosystem, which provides clubs with reporting to monitor KPIs.

CEO Bill Davis says: "We're helping operators deliver branded services to members, while creating deeper relationships both in

and outside physical locations.

"ABC+ provides the tools needed to create a total fitness experience that adds value for members and revenue for operators.

fitness-kit.net/keyword/ABC

New Eleiko Öppen Collars secure barbell weights in seconds, says **Erik Blomberg**

Eleiko's Öppen Collars have been designed to easily secure barbell weights, for improved performance and safety.

The collars feature a patent-pending, open-sided design – a fresh take on a strength training staple that's traditionally constructed as a full circle.



PHOTO: ELEIKO

We upgraded every aspect of the experience

Erik Blomberg



PHOTO: ELEIKO

● The new collars can be secured easily with one hand

Named a finalist in the iF Design Award 2021, the product has been designed with the intention of making collar use accessible for everyone.

Traditional collars can be heavy and hard to put on – an inconvenience some users may be tempted to skip. With the Eleiko

collar, lifters place each collar next to the weights and press the lever down to lock them into place, securing them quickly with a single-handed operation.

Magnets allow users to stick the collars on stands, racks and benches for easy accessibility, while rubber components offer a secure

grip and absorb shock when the barbell is dropped.

CEO Erik Blomberg says: "We considered the entire training session from finding and storing collars to the lift itself, to upgrade every aspect of the experience." ●

fitness-kit.net/keyword/Eleiko

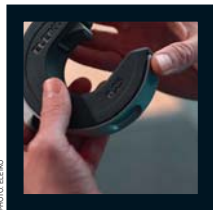


PHOTO: ELEIKO

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Good gut microbes develop when people eat a wholefood diet and correlate with positive health markers



Feel it in your gut

If you're involved in advising your customers on how they can optimise their diet for health, research from King's College London will give powerful guidance

A recent study, published in *Nature Medicine*, monitored the gut microbiome composition, diet and cardiometabolic blood markers of 1,100 participants from the US and UK, making it the world's largest research project investigating individual responses to food.

The key finding was the identification of 15 'good' and 15 'bad' naturally-occurring gut microbes that correlate with key markers of health status in a positive or negative fashion, including inflammation, blood pressure, blood sugar control and weight.

Whole and unprocessed

Results showed diets fuelled by fibre-rich, whole and unprocessed food support the growth of good microbes, while diets containing a higher concentration of processed

Diets fuelled by fibre-rich, whole and unprocessed food support the growth of good microbes

foods with added sugar and salt, promote the bad gut bacteria that are associated with illnesses.

This indicates we have control over our gut microbiome and can positively impact our future health outcomes by changing what we eat, explains Dr Sarah Berry, study co-author and epidemiologist at King's College London.

Control over health

"Surprisingly, findings also suggested that, due to the personalised nature of the microbiome, a personalised approach to what you eat for your unique biology is the best way to positively impact your health," she adds.

"I'm excited to share this research, says Berry, "as our findings show

how little of the microbiome is pre-determined by genes and, therefore, how much is modifiable by diet, how we may be able to improve it by diet and how this may impact our subsequent health."

Berry told *HCM* there are many determinants when it comes to how we respond to food, in addition to our microbiome, including what we eat, how we eat, time of day, sleep, exercise and our genetics.

"Therefore, microbiome testing alongside the measurement of other determinants of our responses to food will enable a truly personalised approach to nutrition in future," she concludes. ●

● Find out more: www.HCMmag.com/microbiome



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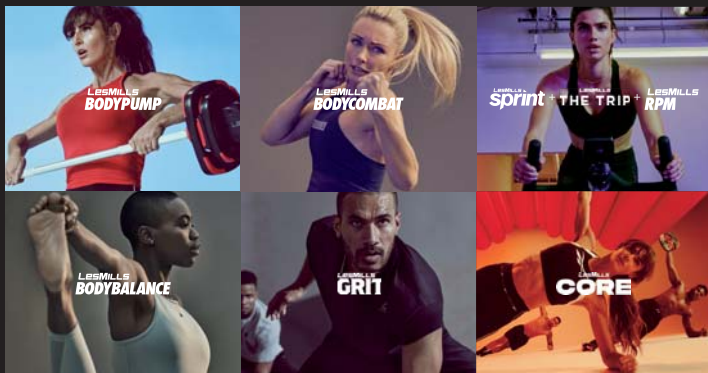


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*Source: Feb 2021 LMOD customer satisfaction survey

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