

health club management

OCTOBER 2011



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Fitness First estate

the weight is over

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the diabetes epidemic

INTERVIEW

NEIL KING

The commercial director
of SLM on getting a
million people active



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exercise is medicine

You don't have to spend hours in the gym to get clear health benefits, according to a study published in *The Lancet* in August. Indeed, just 15 minutes' activity a day can add three years to your life expectancy.

The study, conducted in Taiwan, tracked 400,000 men and women for an average of eight years. Based on weekly exercise routines, they were placed in one of five categories – inactive, low, medium, high or very high – with life expectancy calculated compared to the inactive group. Even those in the 'low' category – who exercised just 92 minutes a week, or 15 minutes a day for six days out of seven – were found to be significantly better off than the inactive group, with a 14 per cent reduced risk of all-cause mortality and an additional three years' life expectancy. Their cancer mortality rate was 10 per cent lower and their risk of dying from cardiovascular disease 20 per cent lower. This held true across all age groups, both sexes, and even among those with cardiovascular disease risks.

The study also backs up the latest UK activity guidelines which state that, while shorter bursts do reap rewards, health benefits are directly proportional to the volume of exercise (intensity x duration) that we

do, and that reaching higher activity levels will achieve further benefits (see *HCM* Aug 11, p3): in the Taiwanese study, every additional 15 minutes of daily exercise, beyond the minimum 15, further reduced all-cause mortality by 4 per cent and all-cancer mortality by 1 per cent.

This '15 minutes a day' preventative message is one all operators can and should use – a compelling argument in favour of the basic offering available in all gyms, and a golden opportunity to negate once and for all the "don't have time to exercise" plea. After all, who can't find 15 minutes a day to reduce their risk of cancer? Weight loss might currently be

We may need to accept a sliding scale of 'exercise is medicine', from specialist facilities delivering 'exercise as treatment' through to 'exercise as prevention' – a compelling message for all operators

the top reason quoted for joining a gym, and it will no doubt continue to be significant, but we need to diversify our message, both to drive higher usage among members and to finally bring in non-gym goers. The onus is on us to give disease prevention an immediacy, as many people still fail to think sufficiently long-term about their health, but the opportunity is there to make exercise far less discretionary.

But the value of physical activity is not limited to prevention; it also has a vital role to play in managing existing conditions and improving survival rates (see diabetes and cancer features, p50 and p60). And with the latest World Cancer Research Fund data showing the number of new cancer cases worldwide to be 12 million a year, up 20 per cent in under a decade, there's a strong argument in favour of doing more in this area. But can all operators really take this next step, or should we first focus on getting it right at a few select sites to prove our credibility? As Fausto di Giulio says (*HCM* Sept 11, p22): "If we fail to offer the right product, all of our efforts in co-operating with physicians will lead to a situation whereby we demonstrate the inadequacy of the fitness industry to the very audience we're trying to win over."

Rather than over-promising and under-delivering, we may have to accept that 'exercise is medicine' will not yet be delivered consistently across the sector. A sliding scale may be required, ranging from 'exercise as treatment' – specialist facilities with the necessary skills, systems, culture, programmes and technology – through to 'exercise as prevention', which remains a highly compelling message for all operators.

Kate Cracknell, editor
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welcome to HEALTH CLUB MANAGEMENT



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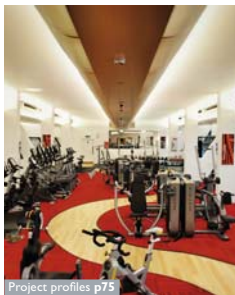
With the diabetes epidemic continuing to fill the headlines, what can the fitness industry do to help? Kate Cracknell investigates



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write to reply



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



A more reasonable fee would encourage more PTs to engage with the scheme

boroughs must reconsider the personal trainer park fee

I was interested to read the Everyone's Talking About article on paying for parks (HCM Aug 11, p28). One of our roles at the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs) is to help safeguard and promote the interests of people who are using the services of fitness professionals. To some extent, the licensing will aid this as residents will be able to guarantee they are being trained by fully insured and accredited professionals.

Our concern, however, is the huge expenditure small business owners will face. For many personal trainers (PTs), the fee of £350 per London park is simply not feasible: freelance PTs use parks in addition to rented gym space, not instead of, and often use many parks, not just one. In introducing this high fee, the council is therefore alienating a large

number of fitness professionals who could otherwise benefit the borough.

In addition, consider how difficult the regulation will be to police. How do we differentiate between two friends training in a park and a paid-for PT session?

REPs is working to find a compromise with the boroughs and it seems many have not considered the variances in the services offered in parks. If councils took a more unified approach, and worked with REPs to apply a fee that is fair to all individual businesses, the scheme would gain much more support. I would suggest a reconsideration of the fees to a more reasonable sum for professionals to pay – a move that will simultaneously encourage more to engage and pay the fee.

jean-ann marnoch
registrar, reps

new guidelines reinforce fitness industry's position

I was interested to read your editor's letter about the new guidelines for activity (HCM Aug 11, p3). We see the progression of the guidelines as a positive step for the industry that gives us an opportunity to provide more specific advice to customers about their activity levels. They put into black and white what we have always known: this report reinforces our position.

Thirty minutes five times a week is an ideal target, and we can now add that vigorous activity is better than moderate, but let's get our customers used to moderate activity first. The point endorsed by the revised guidelines is that any activity is better than none.

As Kate says, "we have all learnt the 5 x 30 of moderate physical activity mantra by heart" – the trouble is, the public is still largely unaware of this. With over half of the UK population now overweight, the message about even moderate activity helping to prevent a plethora of health problems is clearly still not being heard.

We need to continue the message of moderate activity being beneficial and build on this; perhaps, in 10 years' time, everyone will understand that a mixture of moderate and vigorous activity will not only make them feel better but will make them fitter and healthier too.

michelle bletsos
group fitness development manager, slm



New guidelines offer an opportunity to provide more specific advice

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health club award winners



2011 Health Club Award winners celebrate their success at the gala dinner

The winners of the first ever Members' Choice Health Club Awards were revealed at a gala dinner at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole NEC hotel on 21 September. The awards, supported by *Health Club Management*, rewarded winners in four Grand Prix categories and 14 regional categories.

Grand Prix categories saw gold awards presented to Nuffield Health Fitness & Wellbeing for best national chain and QHotels for best medium-sized chain. Vibralfit Fitness Clinic, based in Carlisle, picked up the title of Best Club in the UK (fewer than 2,000 members), while Spelthorne Leisure Centre, part of the Everyone Active (EA) group, won the Best Club in the UK (2,000 members or more).

Laura Kerby MD of Consumer Wellbeing at Nuffield Health, says: "These awards mean so much because they are voted for by our members. It's a real testament to the hard work and professionalism of our teams who deliver a great customer experience for every member.

"We provide a unique, health-focused service that's based on providing great facilities with expert support, all tailored to our members' needs. It's this personal approach that our members value, and that has led to our clubs being recognised by these awards."

Stuart Russell, manager of Crown Spa Health Club & Spa – which won a regional gold award – says: "I would like to thank all the members who voted for us. Our aim is to offer a five-star health club and spa facility – winning an award like this is proof we are delivering."

The awards are based exclusively on member feedback and are specifically designed to rate the level of customer service, facilities and value for money provided by clubs by asking members to complete an online questionnaire.

In this inaugural year of the awards, more than 230 entries were received – from small independents, public leisure centres, hotel clubs and some of the best-known brands in the industry. The results of the competition were based on responses from 16,000 members across the UK, producing half a million pieces of data. All shortlisted facilities receive a confidential member feedback report.

Deadline for entries to next year's Health Club Awards is 31 December 2011. For information, please visit www.healthclubawards.co.uk



The full list of Grand Prix winners:

Best Club in the UK (fewer than 2,000 members)

- Vibralfit Fitness Clinic GOLD
- Everybody Health And Fitness Swaffham SILVER
- West Lindsey Leisure Centre BRONZE

Best Club in the UK (2,000 members or more)

- Spelthorne Leisure Centre (EA) GOLD
- Nuffield Health Barrow SILVER
- Grange Paddocks Leisure Centre (EA) BRONZE

Best Medium Chain (10-30 sites)

- QHotels Leisure Clubs GOLD
- Pure Gym SILVER
- The Gym Group BRONZE

Best National Chain (More than 30 sites)

- Nuffield Health Fitness & Wellbeing GOLD
- Everyone Active SILVER

The full list of regional winners:

Scotland

- Pickaquooy Leisure Centre GOLD
- Nuffield Health Aberdeen SILVER
- Pure Gym Glasgow BRONZE

Northern Ireland

- Pure Gym Belfast GOLD

North West

- Vibralfit Fitness Clinic GOLD
- Nuffield Health Barrow SILVER
- Ladies Only Rochdale BRONZE

North East (No Clubs Shortlisted)

Yorkshire & Humber

- Crown Spa Health Club GOLD
- The Fitness Village, Doncaster SILVER
- Nuffield Health Guseley BRONZE

Wales (No Clubs Shortlisted)

West Midlands

- Chesford Grange Leisure Club (QHotels) GOLD
- Nuffield Health Telford SILVER
- Nuffield Health Cannock BRONZE

East Midlands

- West Lindsey Leisure Centre (EA) GOLD
- Nuffield Health Nottingham SILVER
- Amber Valley Training BRONZE

East of England

- Everybody Health And Fitness Swaffham GOLD
- Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre (EA) SILVER
- Cambridge Belfry Leisure Club (QHotels) BRONZE

South West

- The Gym Bristol GOLD
- Centurion Fitness Centre SILVER
- Nuffield Health Plymouth BRONZE

Southern

- Nuffield Health Portsmouth GOLD
- Fareham Leisure Centre (EA) SILVER
- Nuffield Health Newbury BRONZE

London

- Nuffield Health Wandsworth GOLD
- YMCA Club London SILVER
- Nuffield Health City BRONZE

South East (North)

- Spelthorne Leisure Centre (EA) GOLD
- Grange Paddocks Leisure Centre (EA) SILVER
- Fanshawe Leisure Centre (EA) BRONZE

South East (South)

- Nuffield Health Surbiton GOLD
- Ashford International Leisure Club (QHotels) SILVER
- ActiveZone Guildford BRONZE



All smiles: Gold award winners with their trophies

edited by tom walker. email: tomwalker@leisuremedia.com

nuffield unveils london refurb

Olympic rower Alex Partridge has helped officially unveil Nuffield Health's new-look health and wellbeing centre in Covent Garden, London, following a £2.5m overhaul.

Covent Garden Fitness and Wellbeing Centre has undergone a two-phase refurbishment, the second of which comprised a £500,000 transformation of the venue's wet facilities. The centre now offers a bespoke hydrotherapy and spa area with sauna and steamroom, with visitors able to benefit from hydrotherapy facilities in the 20m swimming pool area.

Work on the £2m first phase of the renovation was completed in December 2010, with a full overhaul of the branding and the construction of a new health clinic. Three new-look studios, upgraded changing facilities and a new 100-station gym – which



The new swimming pool at Nuffield's Covent Garden club in London

was predominantly supplied by Life Fitness – have also formed part of the overall scheme.

ViPR, TRX and Power Plate also supplied equipment to the gym at Covent Garden Fitness and Wellbeing Centre. The club will focus on everything from nutrition to sport injury prevention and rehabilitation.

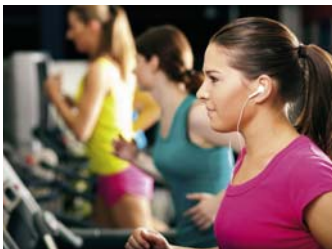
budget chain klick fitness begins roll-out

Klick Fitness, the budget arm of Fitness First, has entered the UK market and was scheduled to have nine clubs operating by the end of last month.

The chain opened its first site in Wakefield on 5 September and its second in Bromborough, Merseyside, on 15 September.

The other locations encompass two sites in Manchester and one each in Aintree, Bradford, Ipswich, Sheffield and Stoke. Each Klick Fitness site offers a group exercise studio and functional training areas for small groups.

Jason Worthy, head of central operations for Klick, told *Leisure Opportunities* that the company is looking to open more clubs under



Klick, the budget arm of Fitness First, opened its first clubs last month

the Klick banner. "This is a market that we expect to grow very quickly," he says.

Memberships will be available at a monthly rate of £9.99 and an annual rate of £99.99, including a certain amount of classes.

the lc completes £80,000 extension programme

An expanded free weights area and a new group cycling studio have been unveiled at The LC in Swansea, following an £80,000 expansion.

Additional weights and benches have been provided in the free weights area, while the group cycling studio features new bikes,

disco lights and a sound system. Technogym supplied the gym equipment.

LC general manager Nic Beggs says: "The investment reflected conversations we had with our members and it's been great to see these suggestions come to fruition."

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olympians back new campaign

A new 'social fitness' campaign, which combines play and physical activity, has been launched and backed by two former Olympians.

Steve Backley and Roger Black have been recruited to act as virtual coaches as part of the scheme, which has been devised by the play systems manufacturer ProLudic.

The new programme is set to provide users with exercise routines, challenges and group games – all accessible online – to be carried out on a range of play equipment.

Sessions by the Olympians can be accessed at a Sports Legacy Zone by scanning QR codes, which smartphones can use to trigger virtual coaching advice and additional information that is 'pushed' directly to the handset.

Play and physical activity sessions will be available for all ages and abilities, from entry-



Steve Backley (left) and Roger Black helped launch the new campaign

level participants right through to providing expert tips and training programmes for sports coaches and teachers.

The campaign is scheduled to run throughout 2011-12 and will also include seminars, research papers and advice for communities on how to fund new play areas.

abbeycroft partners with liberté fitness

Abbeycroft Leisure has announced that it has teamed up with Liberté Fitness in a bid to provide members with outdoor exercise classes.

The new classes are to be overseen by personal trainers and will run all year round.

Matt Hickey, Abbeycroft Leisure's fitness manager, says: "We recognise that not everyone wants to exercise indoors all the time. Working with Liberté, we will be offering our members access to their popular outdoor classes at a reduced rate."

Liberté Fitness was founded by Papillon Luck in 2009 and currently offers classes in parks and on beaches throughout London and East Anglia. Luck says: "The benefits to training outside with us are immense.



The outdoor initiative will be operated all year round

"We have a loyal following and we're looking forward to welcoming Abbeycroft members and offering them the chance to supplement their normal indoor training regime with a new sociable and fun technique."

glasgow's whitehill pool in line for 'legacy' revamp

Glasgow City Council (GCC) has agreed to press ahead with a £635,000 revamp of the city's Whitehill Pool as part of the legacy from the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

The facility is to benefit from improvements to ensure it can meet local demand when Tollcross Leisure Centre temporarily closes in late 2011 to receive its own revamp next year.

GCC has approved the refurbishment of Whitehill Pool's upper floor, which will create an enhanced and expanded Glasgow Club Gym and community space.



The scheme is for kids aged between two and five

sportacus joins forces with change4life campaign

Public health minister Anne Milton has revealed that Change4Life has recruited superhero television character Sportacus to encourage children become more active.

The healthy lifestyle scheme has partnered with television programme *LazyTown* in order to reach out to young people aged between two and five years.

It is hoped the collaboration will encourage kids to be more active, with Change4Life packs featuring the *LazyTown* characters to be sent out to 36,000 Sure Start Children's Centres during September.

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fight science to launch new gym

Fight Science, a provider of mixed martial arts and combat sports training founded by light heavyweight champion Nick Chapman, is to open its first gym in Aldershot.

Life Fitness has been signed up as Fight Science's partner in establishing the purpose-built facility, which will be located in a listed venue that formerly housed an Army boxing gym.

Fight Science Gymnasium will feature the Life Fitness Elevation Series Inspire cardiovascular series, as well as an extensive range of Hammer Strength equipment. The facility will provide bespoke training for combat athletes and will cover principles such as strength and conditioning, nutrition, physiotherapy, sponsorship and technique. However, members of the local community will also be encouraged



Fight Science was founded by MMA champion Nick Chapman

to make use of the new facility, with regular membership and 'pay as you go' options.

Chapman says: "Our goal is to offer our athletes the very best that science and development in sporting performance has to offer."

motive8 unveils new Leeds fitness studio

Motive8 has announced the opening of its second training studio at Holbeck Urban Village in Leeds, with an additional two sites also being earmarked to open in the coming months.

The company's first private studio – offering small classes and PT – was opened in London; the move to Leeds marks the start of the company's northern expansion.

Founded by Yorkshire-based businessman Nick Sadler in 1998, Motive8 is now finalising the details for a second site in the Leeds area, while a third is due to open in 2012. In addition to its new Leeds training studio, Motive8 has also revealed that it is working on four more gym design and installation projects and a further six maintenance contracts.



The independently-owned Motive8 chain was founded in 1998

Sadler says: "Over the last 13 years, [Motive8] has enjoyed great success and has expanded to become a market-leading brand in the area of residential gym design. We are also experiencing rapid growth in the corporate market."

power plate studio owners looking to expand

The owners of the £90,000 Repose Studio in Essex have announced plans to expand their business in eastern England, anticipating that demand for their new retreat-style fitness concept will continue to grow. The newly-opened independent Power Plate Studio in

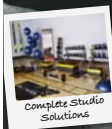
Buckhurst Hill, Essex, is the first dedicated Power Plate Studio in the area.

Co-founder and owner Glenys Reynolds says she is currently seeking sites for another two studios in surrounding neighbourhoods to expand the concept.

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endorsement scheme for fitness industry degrees

Higher education institutions are being urged to submit undergraduate courses in sports development, sport management, fitness, playwork and sports coaching for endorsement through a new national scheme launched by SkillsActive.

The new Higher Education Endorsement Scheme has been developed following a consultation period and pilot scheme involving over 80 experts, including academics, employers and students. It's the first time the sports and fitness sectors have partnered to offer industry endorsement to enhance the employability agenda for graduates hoping to work in the sectors.



DLL has renewed its agreement with Keiser

david lloyd leisure extends deal with keiser

David Lloyd Leisure has extended its equipment procurement deal with Keiser UK for a further year.

Paul Batty, head of procurement at David Lloyd Leisure, says: "We were keen to continue working with Keiser because of the M3 Bike's strong performance.

"It helps us deliver high quality classes for both our instructors and class participants, with excellent feedback."

The deal will see David Lloyd Leisure clubs become the first in the UK to receive the newly updated M3 Indoor Cycle.

evoenergy launches free solar panel scheme

EvoEnergy has announced its new scheme to provide free solar panel systems to gyms and health clubs. With the high cost of powering these facilities, solar panels provide the opportunity to generate free renewable electricity.

The company is able to install solar panels on eligible roofs completely free of charge. EvoEnergy will also maintain the systems at no additional cost.

The scheme aims to encourage the uptake of renewable energy projects and help health facilities to lower their carbon emissions.

technogym's olympic campaign

A major new campaign inviting members of the public to pledge their support for the athletes taking part in the 2012 London Games is to launch nationwide in January 2012.

Team GB and Paralympics GB, working with official Games supplier Technogym, revealed the 'Our Greatest Team' initiative at this year's Leisure Industry Week in Birmingham last month.

Individuals will be invited to make a pledge to improve their health and wellbeing in support of British Olympians and Paralympians, which will take a variety of forms – including physical activities.

Meanwhile, the health and fitness sector will also be able to participate in the campaign, helping to establish a Pledge Community Hub network throughout the UK. Using Technogym's online platform, it is hoped that



Scheme will encourage people to pledge to undertake physical activities

the campaign will connect people who have made individual pledges with participating facilities in a bid to create a Games legacy.

Participating venues will be able to make use of the Our Greatest Team branding and web tools, which includes use of the Olympic logo, and link the public to fitness establishments.

premier unveils new level 4 qualification

Health and fitness training provider Premier Training International (PTI) has announced the launch of its new Level 4 Exercise for Specialist Populations (ESP) Diploma. The course, which was unveiled at this year's Leisure Industry Week in Birmingham, is a nationally accredited QCF programme.

Designed as a progression from the Level 3 Certificate in Advanced Personal Training, it is hoped that the new course will reflect the industry's closer links with the medical sector.

Candidates will be required to have completed a Level 3 qualification to be eligible for the new course, and will gain 20 REPs points for each of the qualifications taken within the diploma.



The course will offer a progression from the current Level 3 courses

PTI chief executive officer Debra Stuart explains: "Expectations for fitness industry professionals are at an all-time high and nowadays Level 3 qualifications often aren't enough to make graduates stand out from the crowd."

pulse secures contract for isle of wight facilities

Pulse Fitness has secured a contract to equip three new fitness clubs and provide support services for the Isle of Wight Council.

The contract – valued at around £450,000 – will see Pulse install its latest Fusion cardiovascular range that offers many

entertainment and motivational features, along with a selection of the inclusive resistance equipment and SmartCentre software.

The three centres covered by the deal are Medina Leisure Centre, Heights Leisure Centre and Westridge Squash and Tone.



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in brief...

fitlane signs sixth site

French operator FITLane has signed its latest site. Now under construction, the new club in Juan les Pins, Antibes, will join the five existing full-service clubs in the portfolio, all located in the south of France: in Cannes, Cannes la Bocca, Mandelieu, Nice and Sophia-Antipolis.

catalunya signs up to ereps

EHFA has signed a memorandum of co-operation with the Catalunya government to join EREPS. The agreement, signed on 22 September, is designed to protect and promote professional standards in the region.

Catalunya already operates a licensing system for sport coaches and fitness professionals. Prof Alfonso Jiménez, chair of the EHFA Standards Council, says: "There are already 6,000 licensed trainers in this region of Spain who can now also start to become EREPS members."

utep opens upgraded centre

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) opened its student recreation centre in August following a US\$32m upgrade.

Improvements include a new gym, a sports court and a climbing wall.

The new facility was built onto the university's existing swimming and fitness complex, which itself is currently undergoing renovations and is scheduled to re-open in early 2012.

Access to the facility is covered by student activity fees; staff and family members can join for an annual fee.

youth sports body for the us

A new National Youth Sports Health & Safety Institute launched in the US last month.

The new organisation will be the recognised national leader and advocate for developing, advancing and disseminating comprehensive research, education, recommendations, guidelines and policy to enhance the experience, development, health and safety of children and adolescents involved in sporting activities.

orangefitness heads to tatarstan

Strata Partners, one of the leading fitness operators in Russia, opened its latest OrangeFitness health club on 27 August.

The new facility is located in Naberezhnye Chelny in the Republic of Tatarstan, Russia – a new region for Strata Partners.



Strata Partners has opened its 14th OrangeFitness premium health club

The club measures more than 3,000sq m and offers a state of the art gym equipped by gym80, Hoist and Precor. There are also numerous group exercise studios and extensive children's programming. Other facilities include a martial arts area, swimming pool, tennis courts, full-size football pitch, basketball and volleyball courts, and sauna/steam room and massage.

"We are very proud to re-start the active development of the Strata Partners estate in this new region. Tatarstan and Naberezhnye Chelny, as an industrial and oil region, have a lot of potential for fitness club operators. We hope to open more clubs in Tatarstan in 2012 under the CityFitness brand," says Anastasia Yusina, Strata Partners' president.

Strata Partners now has 33 clubs: 14 premium OrangeFitness sites and 19 mass market CityFitness facilities.

fresh fitness expands in denmark

Danish low-cost health club group Fresh Fitness, led by Rasmus Ingerslev, took over three clubs from sister company SATS on 1 August.

The takeover brings Fresh Fitness to a total of six clubs in Denmark – all in the Copenhagen area.

Fresh Fitness opened its first site in Denmark in October 2010 (see *HCM* March 11, p32), and is already among the five biggest health club groups in the country, with an ambition to grow to a 20 per cent market share within five years.

Fresh Fitness in Denmark is a partnership between Ingerslev and SATS, which operates its own Fresh Fitness clubs in Norway (see p64).



Fresh Fitness now operates six clubs in Denmark, as well as clubs in Norway

british military fitness launches sunfit

A week-long 'fitness holiday' based at Las Playitas, Fuerteventura – Sunfit Outdoor Fitness Holidays – has been unveiled by British Military Fitness (BMF).

Sunfit has been designed for individuals or groups and offers a range of fitness classes and seminars led by a combination of BMF instructors and others selected by the training company.

Guests can choose from activities such as cycling, mountain hiking, aerobics and boxing, as well as nutritional education.

BMF events manager Sarah King explains: "Each session will be designed specifically for beginner level right through to the more advanced level. There will definitely be something for everyone.

"Also, don't worry if you are thinking of signing up as an individual: 70 per cent of all those who take part in our events have signed up alone, so it's a great way to meet new people."

The first Sunfit holiday took place last month, with the next in December.



Independent operator SpecForce Fitness aims to roll out globally over the next 15 years

specforce launches in auckland

Independent club SpecForce Fitness opened in Auckland, New Zealand, last month.

Owned and operated by Scott Cottier, the 1,500sq m club offers a large gym and group fitness area supplied by Cybex, Proteus, Keiser, Concept2, Fitness Imports and HQH Fitness.

The concept is based on circuit training, with a focus on social interaction and motivating the individual. The club aims to help members progress through regular fitness testing and body weight functional exercises using minimal equipment, with an emphasis on correct technique.

Other exercise options include wrestling, boxing, yoga/pilates, suspension training and self-defence. There is also

social group fitness training with an on-site DJ, plus team training for kids.

The range of equipment includes functional options such as climbing ropes, chin-up bars and SMAI boxing bags, as well as group cycling bikes, rowers and treadmills. The resistance training offer includes power squat cages, weight benches, a full range of dumbbells, Olympic bars and weight plates.

Cottier is joined at the new club by Dan Temple, with both men ex-army and NZ Special Forces. However, although it caters for elite athletes, SpecForce targets everyone from kids to the police and fire service.

Cottier aims to open one club a year for the next 15 years, throughout the world.

fitness first's middle east expansion

Fitness First is set to launch in Abu Dhabi, UAE, with the opening of two new health clubs.

The first site, scheduled to open on 15 October, is located at the Marina Mall and will include a ladies-only section covering 1,157sq m. The venue will offer fitness equipment supplied by Life Fitness, in addition to personal training and a range of group exercise classes including BodyPump, BodyCombat, yoga and Zumba.

Meanwhile, the Dalma Mall club will be operational from 1 December.

Covering a total area of 1,999sq m, the facility will encompass ladies-only (983sq m) and men-only (1,019sq m) areas.

Fitness First – which is part of the Landmark Group in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region – has also identified three new sites for Dubai, all of which will be operational by the end of the year. This will bring the total number of outlets in the Middle East to 23, and in the UAE to 17.

The launches are part of Fitness First's plans to open nine new clubs across the Middle East by January 2012.

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holmes place adds to european sales team

Holmes Place Europe has recruited a number of regional sales managers across Europe as it continues to improve on its sales performance in 2011.

Stephen Brady (DLL), James Beck (DLL), Nikki Afgan (Esporta, Virgin Active), Michael Walker (Esporta, GLL) and Simon Hayes (Esporta) have all settled into their respective regions across Europe, with the goal of inspiring their teams and members to further success.



Ian Kendall spent eight years at the Oldham trust

kendall to leave oldham community leisure

Ian Kendall, chief executive of Oldham Community Leisure (OCL), is to step down at the end of the year after eight years with the trust that operates 14 facilities on behalf of Oldham Council.

"During my eight years at OCL there have been many highs – and some lows – but overall it has been a fantastic experience," says Kendall.

"Over the years, I have recognised that at OCL we don't sell sport – we sell health improvement. I am choosing to step down now to allow a new team to focus on retaining the Oldham partnership, by building on what has already been achieved. I feel the time is right for the team to influence their own direction of travel."

Ken Blackburn, chair of OCL, says that under Ian Kendall's leadership, the trust has tripled its income, halved staff sickness levels and invested more than £0.25m each year into improving facilities. "Ian has led a team of committed professionals who have responded to his strong leadership, as well as his sense of humour and ability to get the job done," he says.

"The culture change within the organisation during the last few years has been incredible. Ian has always demonstrated a 'can do' attitude in leading OCL to the strong position it finds itself in today."

orban steps down from nsa

Florence Orban, chief executive officer of the National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure, stepped down from her role at the end of the business year on 30 September.

Orban joined the sector skills council for sport and active leisure, SkillsActive, in June 2005 as business development director, before launching the Skills Academy in 2008. Since its establishment, the academy has provided training to more than 28,000 people – including 5,000 young unemployed people through the Future Jobs Fund.

Orban has also overseen the launch of the NSA's activepassport scheme, which aims to provide a confirmed online record of an individual's skills and qualifications and has seen 20,000 people sign up.



Orban joined SkillsActive in June 2005 and was the NSA's first CEO

"I am grateful for the opportunity I was given to shape and lead the work of the National Skills Academy and enjoyed the challenge of establishing a new organisation, building a new team and testing a new concept," says Orban.

dc leisure ceo joins imspa board

DC Leisure chief executive officer Steve Philpott has joined the board of the newly-formed Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (IMSPA).

During his career in the active leisure industry, Philpott has also been director of the Fitness Industry Association and chair of SkillsActive's Sports and Fitness Employers Group.

Philpott, who is also currently a governor and a founding trustee of the Register of Exercise Professionals, took up his appointment on 26 September.

IMSPA board chair Marc Newey says: "Here at IMSPA we aim to represent all of the one



Industry veteran Steve Philpott has joined the board of the institute

million professionals working within the sector with one unified voice, and this is certainly an area in which Steve can add real value."

gll appoints former paralympics chief

Phil Lane, the former CEO of the British Paralympic Association, has been appointed as the new head of sport and Olympic legacy at leisure trust Greenwich Leisure (GLL).

In his new role, Lane will develop a sports strategy for GLL combining the organisation's corporate objectives, the needs of local

communities and the priorities of national governing bodies.

He has also been tasked with outlining ways in which to develop GLL's Sport Foundation, which provides funding to young athletes, as part of the leisure operator's Olympic legacy strategy.

PEOPLE PROFILE

INDEPENDENT
OPERATOR FOCUS

jason ziel

Personal trainer Jason Ziel owns and operates the Healthworks Fitness Studio in Stratford-Upon-Avon, which he set up with his father in 1994

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

Since I was 21 - so 18 years.

How has your career progressed

I began as a fitness instructor for The Metropolitan Club, a hotel-based chain. I was promoted to assistant manager and then worked as part of the management team at the Cardiff club, which was the first private/public operation in conjunction with the Welsh National Tennis Centre.

Within that time I took a year out to travel and worked as a multi-activity instructor for PGL holidays and a PADI Divemaster in Muscat, Oman.

My father and I had been participating in sport for many years and we became aware that the health club concept was a growth market and that our hometown was perfect to expand the number of facilities offering such services.

You set up Healthworks in 1994 with your dad - was it your first business venture?

It was my first venture but my dad had been in business for many years. Healthworks was conceived not only out of opportunity but also in response to increasingly dictatorial demands and constraints from existing suppliers in an established motor trade business. We terminated the vehicle sales operation and opened Healthworks, reaching capacity in 13 months.

At Healthworks, you don't believe in one-off inductions and then promoting PT. Why not?

This is an emotive point shared by all of us who work at Healthworks. While it may increase revenue for the club, I believe removing gym floor instructors and replacing them with PTs can undermine your service to members. There's often so much competition for clients that individuals can feel they are sales targets rather than members. That said, I'm not

against external PTs using a club, as they provide a reliable revenue stream.

If a member needs help and advice, we operate a minimum of four sessions (induction plus three programme show-rounds). For most, this is enough to make them feel comfortable to exercise at the club. If they need more support, we keep the process going. We let them have a number of sessions by themselves and then book in a 'programme check', which allows us to identify any exercises they may be performing incorrectly. More importantly it's a prime opportunity to build a relationship with that member.

How can the fitness sector fit within preventative healthcare?

Apathy towards general health, the sheer volume of conflicting information from the media and lack of education to the public ensures this will be a challenging role.

There should be a move from fitness instructors and personal trainers to 'prescriptive' trainers'. These would be highly qualified individuals who provide specific exercise and health schedules rather than general routines, and who would work in conjunction with other health professionals.

What's the number one weakness in the fitness industry?

The perception of many entering the industry that it's just about getting qualified and becoming an instructor or PT. They're not prepared for the commitment they need to make to clients if they want to retain them as customers. We have the ability to have remarkable and life-changing effects on people. They trust their health and vulnerability to us, and fortunately for those professionals that succeed there is a high earning potential in good health.

If you have any stories for inclusion, please email them to us at newsdesk@leisuremedia.com

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Rob Beale
Group Health & Fitness Manager
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industry mourns loss of zhirnov

• joe moore • ihrsa president & ceo

Dmitry Zhirnov, director of cycling and personal training for World Class in Russia, passed away on 18 August following a tragic cycling accident.

Dmitry – or Dima as he was known to friends and colleagues – was leading an outdoor race cycling class on a downhill course when he spotted a leisure cyclist

around a blind curve. He yelled to his client behind him to turn right to avoid the cyclist, but Dima crashed in order to save both the lives of the leisure cyclist and his client, neither of whom were hurt.

The accolades that have poured in for Dima attest to his expertise, humility and never-ending desire to learn. Tatiana Kolovou, while working for Star Trac's cycling education team in 1998, recalls "landing in Dima's studio having been hired to teach this world-class cycling instructor how to teach his classes". She continues: "Anyone with Dima's experience and pedigree would have shut out a 'foreign' non-competitive cyclist and educator, but he opened his arms to me. I still remember those classes as some of the most memorable of my career."

Many of the hundreds of people at Dima's memorial service compared him to the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. Says former colleague Slava Chichvarin: "He had the same open smile, big heart, and lifelong dedication to a single cause."

Devoted to his family, admired by all who met him, and dedicated to improving the health and lives of his clients, Dmitry Zhirnov was one of the great heroes of our industry – one we should all seek to emulate.



Dmitry Zhirnov: A lifelong dedication to improving the health and lives of his clients

a life in fitness

Dmitry Zhirnov joined World Class at its inception in 1993, going on to develop – and become manager of – the Cycle division for the whole chain in 1996. For the last six years, he held the role of director of the gym division for both World Class and Fizkult – Russian Fitness Group's premium and mass market health club chains.

Following his passion for outdoor sports – mountain biking, cycling, skiing – Zhirnov led the company's ventures in this field, as well as developing the training programmes that are used today across the estate.

A charismatic presenter, speaker and trainer, he taught and mentored staff across the industry.

ask the experts..... pool or no pool?

ihrsa.org/industryleader

"Pools are expensive to build and maintain. Proactive programming is needed to turn this investment into a revenue stream from increased member sales and fee-based programmes.

"A single pool presents programming challenges based on water temperature; most clubs with thriving aquatic revenue streams have two or three pools, each with a different water temperature based on different programming needs.

"Proper engineering and design of the pool(s) is a must to avoid operational costs and issues, such as smelling the pool in the main club entry lobby or a corrosive effect on building components."

Hervey Lavoie, architect and president of Ohlson Lavoie Collaborative



Programming is needed for a profitable pool

"How profitable are the programmes at other pools in your area? Visit pools with similar demographics to confirm viability.

"Are you handling families for swimming lessons? You would want a

warm water pool. Will you offer adult programmes – aerobics, Zumba, walking? Are these fee-based classes? Are you adding fun elements like a water slide? What activities/events can you add to enhance the member experience?

Are you catering for swimmers who would prefer a cold water lap pool?

"Are you using a chlorine or salt water system? Is the pool inside or outside? Can you cover the outdoor pool to minimise heat loss? Who will be certified to manage the pool chemicals and testing? Who will manage, train, hire and run the aquatics programme? Do they have the appropriate training/knowledge to do so?

Whitney Benedetti, aquatics/activities director, Rochester Athletic Club, US



Five cities were visited in Poland in 2010, with a possible Poland/Ukraine tour planned for 2012

ihrsa world tour continues

In the late 1990s, IHRSA began its first World Tour, with educational events on several continents. The idea behind this concept was to take IHRSA education out to international markets, increasing awareness of IHRSA and extending the international health club community that IHRSA has become (now with 9,000 clubs in 75+ countries).

This outreach project was revitalised in 2008 as the IHRSA Road Show. Four events took place in 2008 in Scandinavia, eight locations were selected in France in 2009, and five cities in Poland were visited in 2010. In addition, three Road Shows

have been held in the Middle East, hosted by Kuwait's five-star Al Corniche Club.

IHRSA's first Road Show in Slovenia will take place on 25-27 November 2011, at the Hotel Golf in Bled.

IHRSA is also evaluating a 2012 Poland/Ukraine tour in conjunction with the European football championships, for those interested in indulging their passion for the sport while participating in one or more industry events. Tickets, local hosting and organising will be included in the package. Speakers and sponsors are being contacted – email hbm@ihrsa.org for details.

events diary

Visit www.ihrsa.org/calendar

6 October 2011

IHRSA webinar: Seven Secrets to an Effective Marketing Plan

27-30 October 2011

11th Annual IHRSA European Congress – Milan, Italy

30 October-1 November 2011

ChinaFit / IHRSA China Management Forum – Qingdao, China

25-27 November 2011

First IHRSA Road Show – Slovenia

14-17 March 2012

31st IHRSA International Convention & Trade Show – Los Angeles, US

'couch potato' arthritis sufferers

A new study from Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine shows that more than half of women and 40 per cent of men with arthritis are virtually couch potatoes, despite mounting evidence that physical activity is key to improving their health.

Researchers asked more than 1,000 people aged between 49 and 84, and with radiographic knee osteoarthritis, to wear an accelerometer for one week to measure physical activity during waking hours.

This is the first study to use a device to objectively measure the physical activity of people with arthritis and determine if they meet federal guidelines. Past research relied on self-reported accounts of exercise.

The study was detailed in the August 2011 issue of *Arthritis & Rheumatism*.

news in brief

three decades of success

Sporting in Mülheim, Germany, celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. In 1981, owner Volker Schlüter began renting the first floor of a tennis centre with his partner, Frauke, and two staff, and operating it as a part-time fitness facility. In 1989, a kids' club was added – then a novelty in the German fitness scene but now one of the most important pillars of the club. Sporting was the first club to earn the RAL quality seal. Frequent updates, additions and enhancements in recent years have resulted in an expansive, high quality club that is well-suited for the coming years.

vivafit expands to cyprus

Vivafit, the largest fitness network in Portugal, has entered the Cypriot market through a business agreement with two young entrepreneurs, Bulut Erkal and Gizem Mentes. The first facility in Cyprus is expected to open in Nicosia by the end of October.

The master franchising agreement foresees the opening of 10 Vivafit gyms in the next three years, as well as expansion into Turkey.

"Our presence in Cyprus represents not only the beginning of Vivafit's expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean, but it is also a reinforcement of the brand's potential to go worldwide," says Vivafit CEO Pedro Ruiz.

Vivafit currently operates in Singapore, India, Spain and Uruguay, as well as in Portugal.

About IHRSA

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

To learn how IHRSA can help your business thrive, visit www.ihrsa.org. Locate a quality IHRSA club at www.healthclubs.com

european congress heads to milan

The European Congress convenes this month.

Kristen Walsh looks ahead to the event

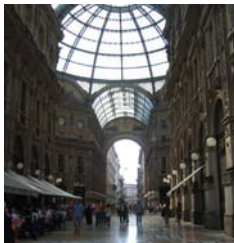
Milan, Italy, will be the venue for IHRSA's 11th Annual European Congress, to be held on 27-30 October 2011 at the ATA Hotel Expo Fiera. The event will feature seminars presented by an array of speakers from within and outside of the fitness industry, with a dual focus on improving operational performance and seizing new opportunities.

"With more than 400 industry business professionals in attendance, the annual Congress offers one of the best networking opportunities for the industry in Europe," says Joe Moore, IHRSA president & CEO.

"The seminars and networking opportunities are designed to spark conversation among delegates and engage them in new ways of thinking about the future of their business," adds Hans Muench, IHRSA Europe director.

speaker line-up

Attendees should prepare to be motivated to take their businesses to the next level. "Every year, the IHRSA European Congress is a source of inspiration to set the strategies to achieve our vision," says Anthony Barquisseau, CEO of My Sportezzy / Domyos Club in France. "From the speakers to all the people who attend the event, IHRSA is definitely meeting its promise of 'Success by Association!'"



Milan plays host to this year's Congress



Milan offers historical buildings, monuments, churches and abbeys that are well worth exploring

Highlights will include general sessions by business executives and educators, with thought-provoking commentary on trends shaping business and the fitness industry. Scheduled general sessions and speakers at the Congress include:

Leadership: The Art of Engaging People – Santiago Alvarez de Mon, professor of Managing People in Organizations, IESE Business School

Building Equity and Business Value through Effective Product and Brand Development – Simon Bolton, professor and director, Centre for Competitive Creative Design, Cranfield University, and co-founder of Creative Resource Lab

Driving Positive Change: Transforming Diesel in the UK – Jonny Hewlett, managing director, Diesel UK and Ireland

Competing in the NEW NORMAL Era (sponsored by Technogym) – Andrea Guerra, chief executive officer, Luxottica

There will also be concurrent educational sessions aimed at decision makers on both the executive and operational level; a Sponsor Showcase providing attendees with the opportunity to talk one-to-one with leading suppliers in a relaxed environment; tours of some of Milan's premier health clubs (sponsored by Technogym); and simultaneous translation of all sessions into Italian, French, Spanish and Russian.

visit milan

Milan is universally recognised as the economic capital of Italy, but it is also a city of art. Historical buildings, villas, monuments, modern architectural buildings, churches and abbeys all offer a variety of styles and striking details that are well worth exploring.

Visit www.ihrsa.org/congress or send an email to intl@ihrsa.org for more information or to register for this event.

event sponsors

The 11th Annual IHRSA European Congress is sponsored by the following companies: American Council on Exercise (ACE), Anytime Fitness LLC, Fit Interiors, Fitness Equipment Depot Worldwide, GANTNER, Johnson Health Tech Co Ltd / MATRIX FITNESS, Keiser, Kommuniera Communications AB, Les Mills International, Medical Fitness Association, Merrithew Health & Fitness™, milon industries GmbH, MYZONE™, Polar Electro Oy, Precor, QualiCert - Qualitop International, Retention Management, Slim Belly, Star Trac Europe, Technogym SpA, wellink and Zumba Fitness LLC.

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joint investment programme



David Stalker, CEO of the FIA, reports on the new Joint Investment Programme, with government funding to help the fitness industry meet its skills agenda

Health Club Management is the FIA's Public Affairs Media Partner



vanguard

The government has pledged at least £270,000 to help the health and fitness industry meet its skills agenda, as outlined in the TwentyTen Commission – the industry consultation which led to the development of a three-year strategy for the sector.

The investment in training will help employers to work in new areas, or improve their offering in existing areas, including behaviour change, customer service, delivering community programmes, lower back pain management, management of obesity, working with older adults, working with pre and post natal women, and working with people with disabilities.

Underpinning the submission have been the major initiatives the industry is currently implementing, such as the recent guidance produced by the FIA and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy detailing how fitness professionals and physiotherapists can work together to manage lower back pain.

repositioning the sector

Over the last 24 months, our industry has migrated from being a peripheral player to become an integral part of the government's public health agenda.

What proved critical in securing this funding has been the repositioning of what we do and the major role we could



Funding will boost areas such as disability fitness

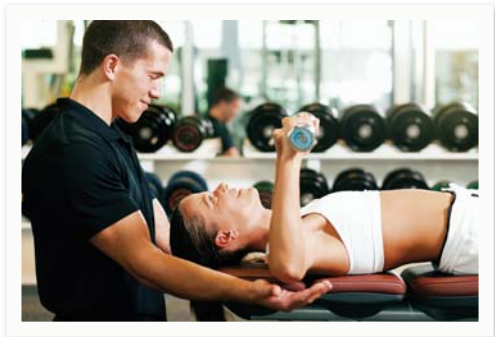


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/CONCEPTS

The government's investment will help drive the professionalisation of the fitness industry workforce

play in improving the health of the nation – a major government issue. The onus is now on us to upskill our workforce and build our skills sets, across the board, to ensure that we really do exploit the tremendous opportunity of working with the 50 per cent of the population that is currently not sufficiently active to derive any medical benefits from it.

We have to continue to develop a compelling, holistic experience for seasoned exercisers as well as the old, young, disabled and activity novices. Their experience starts from the moment they set foot in our facilities, through to participating in an exercise class or using the gym.

professional workforce

Commenting on the successful submission, SkillsActive chief executive officer Stephen Studd says: "I'm delighted by the success of our first Joint Investment Programme bid and pleased we can continue supporting employers during these challenging financial times by accessing public funding for training.

"The government has acknowledged that we have an important role to play in

growing the economy, which is a real win for our sector.

"I would like to sincerely thank all of those employers from our sector who committed to working with us and grabbing this unique opportunity to invest in their workforce. We look forward to working with them and the lead provider for the Joint Investment Programme, once appointed, to deliver this training and continue our mission to professionalise the workforce."

accessing funding

The Joint Investment Programme is a strand of the Growth and Innovation Fund. Work has already commenced on securing a lead provider. SkillsActive and the FIA will contact employers who have expressed interest in accessing the new funding over the coming weeks.

Any employers and/or exercise professionals wishing to access the fund and receive up to 50 per cent towards the cost of staff training in specialist Level 4 qualifications or Level 3 awards in Customer Service and Behaviour Change should contact gif@skillsactive.com

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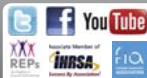


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tyne bridge zipline

If you're looking for a charity challenge that offers an adrenaline rush, then the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's Tyne Bridge Zipline could be the answer. Starting from the Newcastle side of the bridge, 25m above the River Tyne, participants will launch themselves off the edge to slide 220m across the river onto the Gateshead side. Minimum sponsorship is only £100 and funds will go towards the RNLI charity, which has saved more than 139,000 lives at sea since 1824. Details: www.rnli.org.uk



Zip across the River Tyne and raise money for the RNLI

6 NOVEMBER 2011

bonfire burn 10k

While others are looking forward to eating toffee apples and watching fireworks, around 600 runners in the Bonfire Burn challenge, near Cambridge, will be focusing on 'feeling the burn' in a 10k race. The multi-terrain circular route starts in Impington – a town just outside Cambridge – and will include a stretch on the newly launched Guided Bus Bridleway, as well as the city's Science Park near Milton. Details: www.bonfireburn10k.co.uk



600 runners will take part in the 10k

PHOTO: WWW.SUNRISEPICTURES.COM

Swim the 22 miles in teams of six



SUMMER 2012 relay race across the english channel

Diabetes UK is looking for participants to join teams of six to swim relay across the English Channel next summer (date to be announced). The distance, from Dover to Cap Gris Nez in France, is 22 miles and will take approximately 15 hours. Participants should be regular pool swimmers who are already capable of swimming 1,500m (60 lengths of a 25m pool) preferably in front crawl. Entry is £95 and sponsorship is set at £1,150. Details: www.diabetes.org.uk

13-17 JUNE 2012 euro cities cycle

This open charity bike ride takes in three of Europe's most vibrant cities – London, Amsterdam and Brussels – and participants will also view the rural scenes of England, the Netherlands and Belgium along the way. The route, which is nearly 300 miles long, will be varied – it will pass through English suburbia, Essex wetlands, Dutch hamlets, tulip fields and Belgian cities. On top of that, participants will also be given the chance to explore historic cities en route. The return journey will be on Eurostar. Registration costs £149 and in addition, the minimum sponsorship is £1,360. Details: www.acrossthedivide.com



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OCTOBER

16-17 Professional Beauty Manchester**Venue** Manchester, UK**Summary**

The UK's biggest beauty exhibition outside London features more than 300 exhibitors, alongside seminars from industry experts.

Web www.professionalbeauty.co.uk

26-28 FSB 2011**Venue** Cologne Exhibition Centre, Cologne, Germany**Summary**

An international trade fair for amenity areas, sports and pool facilities. An opportunity for authorities, operators, planners, construction companies, sport clubs and architects to gather information about products and solutions in the fields of games and sports, leisure and relaxation, fitness and wellness.

Web www.fsb-cologne.com

27-30 IHRSA European Congress**Venue** ATA Hotel Expo Fiera, Milan, Italy**Summary**

The annual IHRSA European Congress provides club owners, operators and industry suppliers with the chance to gather to discuss the European market, its challenges and opportunities, and the impact the industry has – and can have – across Europe. All in a setting that encourages interaction, discussion and professional connections.

Web www.ihrsa.org/congress

28-30 The Yoga Show**Venue** Olympia, London, UK**Summary**

All things yoga under one roof, including free yoga and pilates classes, pilates reformer and one-to-one equipment sessions, children's yoga, demonstrations and lectures.

Web www.theyogashow.co.uk



The Yoga Show:
Free classes



FSB takes place in Cologne, Germany

30 October – 1 November | ChinaFit/IHRSA China Management Forum**Venue** Sea View Garden Hotel, Qingdao, China**Summary**

An event that promises to bring together leaders from the Chinese and international health and fitness industry for education and networking opportunities. IHRSA and ChinaFit have had a mutually supportive co-operation since 2006. Also, this year the annual IHRSA Asia-Pacific Forum is on hiatus.

Web www.ihrsa.org/chinafit

NOVEMBER

2-5 SIBEC Europe**Venue** Hilton hotel, Malta**Summary**

SIBEC Europe creates a one-to-one meeting forum between the major operators from the private, local authority and trust markets in health, fitness and leisure, and the leading suppliers. It will bring together over 200 delegates covering more than 35 product categories, who will have over 1,500 scheduled meetings.

Web www.sibec.co.uk

12-13 | APPI 3rd Annual Pilates Conference**Venue** Royal College of Physicians, Regents Park, London, UK**Summary**

Held in the UK for the first time, this event will also be the first ever UK conference for the global pilates industry. It's organised by the Australian Physiotherapy and Pilates Institute (APPI) and is expected to attract 300 physiotherapists, pilates instructors, studio managers, fitness professionals and pilates enthusiasts.

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activity guidelines

The Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of the four home countries have issued new guidelines based on the most recent research evidence. What impact will this have on our industry?

Five a day, check. Thirty minutes' moderate exercise three times a week, check. But now I have the option of swapping 150 minutes' moderate activity for 75 minutes of vigorous activity – and even if I manage that, by sitting at a desk all day I'm negating the effects? Help!

The new physical activity guidelines, coupled with media coverage that only picks out soundbites, could send the population into total confusion about what they should be doing. Worse still, it could make them feel they're so way off target that they'll give up trying.

It is the perfect time for the health and fitness industry to step in, decode

the guidelines and present them in a way that helps people understand what they should be doing and, more importantly, how they can fit this into their busy lives. So what should we focus on?

This is the first time that the CMO guidelines have mentioned the early years and older adults: no-one is too old, or too young, to reap the benefits of being active. Indeed, the importance of balance and co-ordination work among older people is specifically referenced. Is it time for the health and fitness industry to do even more to effectively cater for these demographic groups?

And how should we respond to new guidance that 75 minutes' vigorous

activity – spread across the week in bouts of 10 minutes or more – can have comparable benefits to 150 minutes' moderate intensity activity? The report also recommends strength training and recognises the damaging effects of too much sitting. So how can the industry maximise the impact of these guidelines?

There are a couple of grey areas.

What does activity for under-fives mean, for example – sport, or just playing in the park? And where does moderate activity stop and vigorous begin?

However, overall the guidelines would seem to present a number of messages for the fitness sector to latch onto. We ask the experts for their thoughts.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE NEW CMO GUIDELINES? EMAIL US: HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM

john searle

fia • chief medical officer



It is no longer up for debate: these guidelines provide the industry with evidence-based statements on how much physical activity people must undertake. This is a landmark document for many reasons, but not least because they mention fitness and leisure centres as one of the many facilities which can support individuals to

meet the guidelines. They also acknowledge the importance of resistance training and vigorous forms of activity, both of which our sector is perfectly placed to deliver. The industry needs to realise we provide a service that the entire population needs.

To implement the guidelines we need to do two things: communicate the message that everyone needs to be active, and develop tailored programmes for individuals who currently don't exercise or consider using the fitness sector.

The new guidelines could open up the sector to a portion of the population we have not previously met, and we will have to amend our offer for their needs: for example, older adults requiring resistance training to improve their balance. Properly implemented, these guidelines could help our operators take one step closer to becoming hubs of the community.”

ian wakefield

impsa • business development manager



In order to maximise the impact of these guidelines, the industry needs to be more innovative and think outside of the box. There needs to be a joined-up approach across the sector, involving schools, community groups, health workers, sports clubs, youth clubs, insurance companies, patient groups and employment organisations.

As young children are specifically mentioned in the guidelines, we need to look at engaging parents and providing activities they can do with babies and young children. Many facilities offer crèches which currently only offer a babysitting service – these could be actively used to encourage physical activity.

We also need targeted, considered campaigns and policies to make sure that non-sporty people aren't too intimidated to try a new sport. Use of social networking sites will become increasingly important to help us achieve this. Young people have grown up with technology, and we need to use it as best we can to get them active.

Most importantly, in order to deliver the guidelines, we need professional, motivated and enthusiastic staff: professional bodies, such as IMSPA, can help in this respect.”



Regular activity, avoiding too much sedentary time, is recommended, with benefits from just 10 minutes' exercise

kevin yates

leisure connection • head of retention and marketing



I think the new CMO guidelines are even more confusing than ever. The 150 minutes of exercise is extremely difficult to break down. The public needs a campaign they can relate to: for many, 150 minutes will seem like climbing Everest, whereas the '5 x 30 minutes' message was easy to understand.

Leisure Connection offers services for the entire community and we won't be changing this in light of the new guidance. We rarely break down our marketing to target specific age groups: everyone needs to be encouraged to proactively manage their health and fitness.

In order to make a difference to the nation's health and fitness, we need to be working with organisations and groups from outside the sport and fitness industry to ensure we're all delivering one consistent, joined-up message. The 'Five a Day' campaign is a great example of how a clear and simple message can have a positive impact on behaviour.

People are dubious about government messages and campaigns; they trust celebrities. We need to be working with ambassadors at a national and local level to take central messages and deliver them at a grassroots level."

sarah marsh

nuffield • head of integrated health



I think the exciting part of these guidelines is the inclusion of early years and the older population. As an industry, we're still not doing enough to engage with older people.

These guidelines reinforce the need for parents to be active, both for their own health and to set a good example for their children going forward. In response to the early years element, Nuffield will ensure that children's day plans in our crèches and nurseries include as much activity as possible. We will also continue to offer activities for families to be active and exercise together.

Meanwhile, by recommending vigorous activity, the CMOs acknowledge that people are time-short and that shorter, sharper bursts of exercise can be effective and fun. For this reason, we've started running lunchtime express classes in our busier city clubs.

If these guidelines are implemented properly, the industry will benefit from longer-term retention: supporting members when they have children, helping families to exercise together and offering activities to continue into an independent old age. We need to offer our members the right programme for wherever they are in their lives."

NEIL KING

The commercial director of management contractor SLM talks to Kate Cracknell about its goal of one million active customers

It was a startling set of data that shaped the current SLM business plan, according to commercial director Neil King.

"We segment our customer base – not only our Everyone Active members but also 'pay as you go' users – into different activity blocks. 'Multi-active' customers are those who visit our centres eight or more times a month; 'active' come between one and seven times a month; 'lapsed' haven't been in the last month but have been in the previous three; and finally 'inactive' customers haven't attended in the last three months.

"In May 2009, we had a customer base of about 600,000 – and only 3.3 per cent were multi-active. Meanwhile 20.7 were active, 21.3 per cent lapsed, and 54.7 per cent inactive. That data wasn't 100 per cent accurate, as it relied on people swiping their Everyone Active cards through the turnstiles on entry and we only had about a 60 per cent capture rate at that stage. However, it did give us a shocking insight into our customers' activity behaviour and a valuable starting point against which to benchmark ourselves.



"We knew we needed to understand our customers better – who they were, how often they were coming to us, what activity they were doing – so we could communicate at a personal level with each individual to encourage them to become more active, more often."

At this point, SLM was already partway through a three-year business plan. Launched in April 2008 following the official launch of its customer-facing Everyone Active brand the previous month, the plan focused around a pledge to build SLM's customer base to one million people, all on a single database. That goal was duly achieved, thanks both

to improved data capture methods and to a number of new centres taken on under the Everyone Active brand; by May 2011, SLM had reached 1,059,743 customers.

Even more ambitious is the company's new pledge, sitting at the heart of its current three-year plan: to get one million active members by March 2014. "We hope to grow to two million members, with 50 per cent of those in either our multi-active or active categories," explains King.

a digital solution

By May 2011, the stats had already improved – 7.1 per cent multi-active customers, 32.9 per cent active, 20.8 lapsed and 39.2 inactive. But, stresses King: "We still need to improve further."

Integral to this is an understanding and acceptance of the way people exercise. Says King: "Based on our research, people simply don't go to a leisure or health club five times a week – fewer than 1 per cent of our customers come to us that regularly. Yet we have the challenge of trying to get people to be active five times a week – '5 x 30'.

"Those activity guidelines might have changed recently [see p30, and *HCM* Aug 11, p3], but the essential message hasn't changed. The new guidelines



Basildon Sporting Village opened on 30 April – the next month, SLM confirmed it had passed the one million member mark



Everyone Active's new goal is to have one million members categorised as active or multi-active by March 2014

just put more meat on the bones, allowing us to be more specific in our messages to customers."

He continues: "We're a commercial company and we'll do whatever we can to encourage customers to visit us twice a week – the eight times a month that will categorise them as 'multi-active' – but at the same time we appreciate that it's not just about our centres. It's about activity generally. We therefore aim to give people the tools they need to be active another three times a week, whether that's riding a bike down the river on a Sunday, doing an activity with their children or going for a jog."

For an operator wanting to maintain its relationship with its customers, maintaining some level of involvement in the whole spectrum of a customer's activity – both within but also beyond its facilities – is key. So how does Everyone Active aim to achieve this?

"Our newest initiative has been the creation of a digital activity solution: MyEveryoneActive. This gives each customer a personal online activity space where they can plan, record and share the activity they do," says King. "We launched it in May knowing it still needed some refinement – we're already

onto phase two – but we wanted to incorporate users' feedback.

"It's a free-to-use service for both our customers and people who don't visit our centres. However, if people are a member of our leisure centres, they can book activity through it which will then appear in their personal activity planner. Once they've been in, swiped their card and told us they've done that activity, that's again fed into their activity planner. The system also sends you a daily email reminder of your day's workout plan and posts updates on Facebook.

"Customers often ask us how much exercise they should be doing, so we've created an algorithm where every single activity has a points value and people have a weekly points target to achieve."

encourage & reward

King continues: "The communication model behind our CRM is incredibly important, and we've identified key points where we need to interact with and encourage our customers, reminding them of the decision they

made to become more active. Some of those touchpoints are relatively standard, while others will relate directly to an individual's activity levels.

"We're also launching a rewards model in November for customers who are meeting their activity targets. Rewards range from free activity sessions in our centres to added value offers such as 'enrol your child on our summer holiday camps and get another child half-price'. There will also be third-party deals through partners such as Thomas Cook and Red Letter Days, and special digital content via MyEveryoneActive – a training plan to support someone in preparing for a marathon, for example.

"At the moment, there are over 300 training plans on MyEveryoneActive that people can choose from, but these are one-off workouts. From November, they will have some longevity to them, with 80 different six-, eight- or 12-week training plans available. Some of those will be sport-specific – training to do your first triathlon, for example; others will focus on weight loss or strength and conditioning. When you select one, that training programme will automatically drop into your activity planner and, on ▶



► a daily basis, you get an email reminder telling you what you're doing that day."

MyEveryoneActive currently relies on people verifying their own completed activity but, says King: "We'd also like to launch a telematics product that customers could purchase – we're aiming for a price point of around £40 – which they'd wear and which would register their activity, transmitting this wirelessly to their activity planner."

He continues: "The reporting vehicle behind MyEveryoneActive will allow us to track what people are doing within and outside of our centres, helping us to join up the whole process. And critically for us, we'll be able to report that data to our local authority partners, giving them a much better idea of how active people are in their communities."

"We believe the Olympics Legacy could be a digital one, tracking

SLM has about 50,000 kids aged eight to 14 in swimming lessons, and now aims to encourage more to try out dry-side activities too

people's participation in activity, with MyEveryoneActive being part of that."

rebranding

It's been this focus on driving the active participation agenda that has led SLM to the brink of a rebrand. Driven by the desire for a name that reflects its mission, it is dropping the SLM label altogether and adopting its now well-established – but currently only consumer-facing – Everyone Active brand across the board. The aim is for this process to be completed by early 2012.

"We spoke about doing this as far back as 2008," says King, "but the

Everyone Active brand had only just been launched. The previous brand – Banana Fitness – polarised opinion, and Everyone Active was very much in line with the then fairly new '5 x 30' message. However, we didn't want to come across as the new boys on the block to our local authority clients and prospective clients. Now Everyone Active is a strong brand in its own right."

Other current projects of note include a new venture into weight management: "Everyone Active is an activity expert. Like it or not, we're not weight management experts: we've tried and failed many times to get a weight management product up and running.

"It's bizarre that we find it so difficult, because 80 per cent of those who join our gyms state weight loss as their primary or secondary goal – yet we don't have a great weight management solution. We're currently talking to one of the big supermarket chains about a national partnership whereby they'd provide the nutritional expertise and we'd provide the fitness expertise, with both face-to-face sessions in our centres and a digital solution delivered via MyEveryoneActive."

There's also a strong focus on NGB collaboration and partnership. "We're having some interesting conversations with Triathlon England and eight or nine other national governing bodies where there are obvious links to the facilities you find in a leisure centre – gymnastics, trampolining, basketball and so on. There's an opportunity to have a more structured approach to the way we deliver some of these activities. ►



MyEveryoneActive, a new digital product, allows for the tracking of members' activities both within and outside of centres

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► “Engaging with the NGBs will help us ensure we have a solution ready and waiting for people whose interest in a particular activity is sparked by the Olympics. Not only that, but Sport England is also now releasing its new four-year plan: for the first time, the strategy includes operators and not just the NGBs. We’re now being seen as part of the solution when it comes to sports development.

“A lot of the NGBs’ funding currently relies on engaging with young adults aged between 16 and 24, while our agenda to date has been more focused on children aged between eight and 14 – we’ve been working closely with the ASA and now have about 50,000 children of that age in swimming lessons. So there’s a lot to be gained from working with NGBs: we can provide access to the younger age groups for them, while they can help engage our older groups.

“We’re currently talking to Triathlon England about its schools triathlon series, for example, looking to engage the large number of children participating in wet-side activities in dry-side activities too. We feel there’s synergy between Everyone Active’s objectives and what Triathlon England is trying to do.”

driving participation

So where does King see Everyone Active as sitting in the market? “That’s a fascinating question. The local authority offering has vastly improved over the last 10 years and I think that impacts on where we sit in the marketplace – we have some absolutely first-class facilities in our portfolio nowadays. Not only that but, while we’ve kept our pricing models pretty steady, all around us other people’s pricing models have changed dramatically. Where before we

SLM says stronger collaboration with NGBs will bring benefits to both sides, as well as access to a wider age range of youngsters

could say we were the cheapest, now it’s about value for money.”

Certainly Everyone Active would appear to be delivering that, winning FLAME Leisure Centre Operator of the Year 2011 – the second year in a row that it has won the award. “For me, it’s about having a very clear brand vision – a clear understanding of what we’re trying to do. I believe we have to do two things well: we have to be a first-class leisure operator and we need to be first-class at using customer data. If we can pull those two things together, we end up with a first-class business.”

Interestingly however, while leisure centre operation will remain at the heart of the business, there is now also a possibility of diversifying into new areas. Driven by, as King says, “a need among local authorities to seek value in all of the services they offer their communities”, recent tenders have encompassed services such as theatres and libraries.

“We’re a management contracting company with a good infrastructure behind us and expertise in managing services,” says King. “We’re not experts at running libraries or museums, but we know people who are and we can employ them. While we continue to see ourselves primarily as a leisure operator, there’s no doubt at all that we could manage other types of services.

“We’d also then be able to talk to our customers about a broader range of services – talking to library customers who don’t yet use a leisure centre about the facilities on offer, for example.

“The thing that always amazes me is how many people are out there who at one time have been a member of a leisure centre or health club, but now aren’t. Clearly at one stage they considered a more active lifestyle and we did something to turn them off. The industry really has to think of ways to re-engage with that group of customers.

“People are so diverse, from being incredibly physically fit right through to the extremely unhealthy end of the scale. We may not be able to engage with everyone on that spectrum, but we certainly have to be engaging with more than we currently are.

“The FIA is encouraging operators to consider that, and I think its TwentyTen Commission is a really good plan – but I don’t think that it has yet been understood by everyone in the industry and it needs to be cascaded out more.

“Essentially it’s all about going through the 12 per cent ceiling, and when you look at the five points on the plan, a lot of it’s already in progress: the skills agenda is being addressed via initiatives such as SPeLGi; exercise is medicine is gathering pace under Dr John Searle and the new research institute in Greenwich (see HcM Aug 11, p24); and the concept of leisure centres being activity hubs in the community is certainly one that we’ve focused on at Everyone Active.

“But I’m not sure everyone has picked up on all this. There are some really good issues in there that need reinforcing if we’re to really drive the participation agenda and go beyond the 12 per cent population penetration. With Everyone Active’s goal of one million active customers, we hope to play a part in achieving that.”



kate cracknell
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WORLD
FOCUS

GETTING FOCUSED

With the launch of its budget arm, Klick, last month and with the closure of 18 German sites in August, changes are afoot for Fitness First.

Critics say the group is playing catch-up, trying too late to grab a stake in the low-cost sector as its clubs struggle to compete. But CEO Colin Waggett says the group is simply sharpening its focus. Here, we find out more about Fitness First's strategy at home and away.

OVERVIEW

"Our major growth focus as we look forward is on the major conurbations," says Waggett. "About three quarters of our business comes from 21 key cities around the world: London,



Fitness First is the largest privately owned health club group in the world and currently operates 540 clubs worldwide, with over 1.4 million members in 21 countries. In the UK alone, there are 159 Fitness First clubs with over 400,000 members. Jo Talbot talks to CEO Colin Waggett about the group's property strategy

Frankfurt, Berlin, Bangkok, Singapore, Sydney, Brisbane and so on. Since about 2004, the absolute vast majority of our new club openings have been in those major conurbations.

"That's distinct from, say, the late 90s and early 2000s, when there was a much broader expansion strategy – particularly in the UK, where we have lots of clubs in much smaller towns.

"How do we then segment our portfolio? We recognised that convenience, price and service were the main drivers of club choice, so we pick the best locations in each catchment area we want to be in, but then we flex our price point according to the location and the service offering. In the UK, we have clubs that are priced at £25 a month, £75 a month and pretty much everything in between. We offer Blue, Platinum and Black Label clubs, as well as the new budget arm Klick, in order to charge the appropriate price for the appropriate catchment area. That's what we've been doing for some considerable time.

Fitness First UK members pay between £25 and £75 a month depending on the type of club and its location

"But underlying that, the essence of all our Fitness First clubs remains the same. Our brand is about energy, passion and it's all about fitness, as distinct from some of our competitors who might offer a broader range of wellness services, or racquet operators."

At the same time, he says, the chain is focusing on differentiating itself in terms of service, investing heavily in improving the calibre of its staff, as well as in functional training and group exercise.

THE BUDGET ARM

Nine Klick Fitness clubs opened last month, mostly in north-west England and all converted from existing Fitness First sites: Aintree, Bradford, Bromborough, Ipswich, Sheffield, Stoke, Wakefield and two in Manchester. Membership is £11.99 a month or £119.99 a year.

Critics like Colin White, commercial leisure analyst at Edward Symmons LLP, say Fitness First is being reactive not proactive, joining the low-cost market late and converting clubs that aren't working to Klick Fitness rather than building new clubs. He says: "They're not looking at the catchment area and asking 'is it right?'" A low-cost club



Fitness First is ploughing money into high-demand activities such as group exercise

needs a vast catchment with little competition. Fitness First clubs need around 2,500 members, whereas Klick would need around 7,000."

But Waggett vehemently disagrees. "We're being very selective and converting clubs we think are perfectly suited to the low-cost format, based on demographics and ease of conversion. Others remain as Fitness First. A few clubs we close or sell. It's a carefully targeted portfolio strategy.

"As for joining late, the budget sector has only a 4–5 per cent UK market share, so it's pretty early stages and it's clearly going to grow. Our strategy has been to observe it, see how it's growing and performing, and then to look at our portfolio to see which locations might trade better under this new format.

"Time will be the judge of whether we've got it right. We're certain we have."

Fitness First aims to differentiate the clubs in terms of service, with Klick promising excellent staff, constant cleanliness and an exciting, fun environment including a large investment in functional training kit.

"What I think separates the winners from the losers is whether you can

The budget sector has just 4–5 per cent of UK market share, so it's early stages and it's clearly going to grow

actually execute on the basics that people really want," says Waggett.

He continues: "What we're doing in these clubs is stripping them back to the bare walls and starting again, and in doing so doubling, in some cases tripling, the size of the training space. Some people say we're just taking one name down to put a different name over the door and charge a lower price. That's a long way from the truth: we're investing a serious amount of money in these clubs."

Klick's initial north-west portfolio was selected due to the local demographics, with a likely demand for the low-cost product, and has been concentrated in that region for ease of management. Unlike the rest of the Fitness First portfolio, the locations are not focused on major cities. A decision regarding roll-out will be made once the success of the first wave has been evaluated.

THE UK PORTFOLIO

There are currently 152 Fitness First clubs in the UK: 112 Blue, 25 Platinum and six Black Label, plus nine Klick clubs.

Approximately five new clubs will now open each year, mostly in London; two clubs have already opened in the city this year – in Spitalfields Tower and in the old Highbury football stadium.

"London is where we believe the market demand is strongest for our kind of product and where we see overall our best returns," says Waggett. "We already have 60 clubs in London and I can certainly see an opportunity for at least another 60."

Whether these are Blue, Platinum or Black Label clubs will depend on location and demographic, although there is expected to be a move towards higher-end developments to meet forecast demand. ▶



▶ Waggett is also keen to boost Fitness First's network to encourage reciprocal members. He explains: "One of the important parts of our proposition is reciprocal membership. If you buy a Black Label membership, you can access any club in the portfolio; if you buy a Platinum membership, you can access all Platinum clubs and all Blue clubs. So getting a mix of clubs, especially Black Label clubs with pools in, adds value to the overall network. Well over half of our members in London choose a membership option that allows them to access more than one club."

Around 75 per cent of Fitness First's business comes from 21 major cities around the world, including London



There are no plans for imminent sales, despite a history of selling: Fitness First sold six clubs to FitSpace four years ago, retaining a shareholding, and sold eight clubs to énergie nearly three years ago.

"This is business as usual in terms of running a 150-strong portfolio," says Waggett. "We've closed some, we're converting some, we invest in some and we add some." Indeed, the entire Fitness First portfolio is currently undergoing the biggest refurbishment programme to date.

Another major focus of investment is on improving the company's staffing. "Global focus over the course of the last 12 months and the coming 12 months is on raising the calibre of staff through recruitment and training," says Waggett.

"We've introduced internal certification programmes to ensure that everyone who passes through the business has the right level of customer service training; we survey all our staff every year to find out what they think of us; and we're putting big improvements into our employee engagement as well.

"I'm absolutely convinced that the competitive landscape will be heavily defined by who has the right people."

In addition, Fitness First is ploughing money into what it sees as high-demand activities – specifically functional training and group exercise. "We've put freestyle zones in 20 clubs, and by this time next year we should have them in 120 clubs. We're putting them everywhere we have space. We're also investing in group-ex programmes: Strictly Fit, Get Fit with Mel B, and Zumba."

In response to critics who have suggested that Fitness First will be swallowed up by the low-cost sector, Waggett says: "It's an absurd suggestion to say the budget sector is going to kill all other parts of the industry. Because Travelodge now exists, does this mean that all three-, four-, and five-star hotels have closed down? It will grow the market quite dramatically because it makes it more affordable to more people."

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

Fitness First's biggest international market is Australia, where it has 95 clubs, followed by Germany with 67 clubs.



Fitness First's UK portfolio includes six Black Label clubs, one of which is located in London's Baker Street



Throughout south-east Asia, there are operations in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and India.

Waggett says: "Our expansion strategy internationally is for major conurbations. We'll open in the region of 30-40 clubs next year and all of those will be in the top cities of those major countries." The largest number will be in Asia, followed by Australia; Germany will receive about the same number as the UK (three-quarters in Asia/Australia and the rest split across the UK and Germany).

But while Fitness First will continue to grow in Germany, there has been some rationalisation, with 18 outlying clubs closing and the focus shifting towards the development of higher-end clubs in the country's main cities.

Meanwhile there have been exits from other European countries. In November 2010, Fitness First sold its 57 Benelux clubs to HealthCity International, specifically to redirect resources and management focus into Asia. A proposed takeover by HealthCity of all 45 Fitness First clubs in France, Spain and Italy was then announced in May of this year.

"We're not in the business of planting flags in as many countries as possible. We have an expansion strategy, and when we looked at the markets and the portfolios in those various countries, we decided we'd rather focus our precious capital and management resources elsewhere – in countries where we saw the best long-term growth opportunities."

He adds: "Potential for growth in Asia is just colossal. For example, we have 11 clubs in Singapore, two of which opened in the last 12 months, and we already know where we want to put the next 11."

Other Asian markets are currently under review, but Waggett prefers not to reveal details at this stage.

Expansion of the business overseas is managed by locally placed teams which decide where to locate the clubs and also what type of club they should be – Blue, Platinum or Black Label. "All the clubs are centrally reviewed and approved by the board, but the local management team are the ones who find the sites and decide which format. However, the brand guidelines are consistent," says Waggett.

There are no imminent plans to expand Klick overseas.

RAISING THE BAR

Waggett sums up: "I see quite a considerable change in our industry for the next few years. I think there will be a scramble for space in the budget market, but after a while it will settle down."

International expansion plans for 2012 are to open 30-40 clubs, all in major conurbations

Beyond that, I believe what customers want is a raising of the service bar in our industry. It's been written about and talked about ad nauseum and it's a question of actually making it happen.

"Those who are successful in making that happen will thrive and those who aren't, won't. That's not that dissimilar to any other sector as it matures – take retailing or hotels, for example. People don't do anything that's materially different from the others, but those that give a disappointing experience fall by the wayside.

"We're offering exactly what our members are asking for: more time and effort giving people the results they want, as well as value for money. The right service for the right price, in the right location."



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SMALL BUT MIGHTY

Small group training is firmly on the radar of many fitness operators – but how can this be turned into a robust, profitable venture? Ruth Bushi reports



Programmes with a start and end date allow for camaraderie

As an effective bridge between personal training revenues and group exercise, small group training is having its moment in UK facilities; LA Fitness, for example, now talks directly to its members about 'small group training' rather than categorising sessions under labels such as 'kettlebells' or 'weight loss'.

Yet growth to this point has been sporadic. The term 'group PT' has fallen in and out of ACSM trend predictions several times over the last five years; this year it was knocked off the list, replaced by one of its own modalities: 'boot camp'.

According to PTA-Global co-founder and industry consultant Robert Cappuccio: "PT revenues in the US have been subject to a subtle but consistent fall. Group training has fared the opposite, but it's still very much in its infancy."

POSSIBLE FRAMEWORKS

So what does this mean in practice? Some commentators are offering advice

based on prior experience of similar models, but with no established rules specifically for small group training at this point, the industry is still feeling its way; operators are fleshing out frameworks for themselves, based on their own specific customer profile and site portfolios (see case studies, p44 and p45).

PT business consultant Nic Jarvis feels that customer needs – their goals and motivations – are not met by small group training when it's driven by equipment rather than by outcome: catch-all classes labelled simply 'kettlebells', for instance – rather than 'kettlebells for weight loss', or even 'functional fitness' – will, he feels, most likely die out in a year's time. The equipment, explains Jarvis, has to be part of a total solution.

"Small group training doesn't need to be functional. It can incorporate a number of modalities, but it must have specificity," Jarvis cautions. "Choose key equipment as your programme tools, but engage your participants with a compelling

direction – whether that's weight loss, ski-fitness or improving a golf handicap."

"Develop a programme with a start and end date," adds Greg Sellar of GRAVITY UK. "This creates a progressive programme with continuity, and allows for member camaraderie and socialising. Meanwhile facilities benefit from a programme that's easier to manage on a small group schedule, and a simpler way to track and compensate trainers."

Sellar also advises 'waterfalling' programme start days, allowing you to sell each week and integrate new members. The key, he underlines, is "full sessions, not more sessions, with an affordable launch pricing structure. For instance, if you have four to six participants, charge each participant half the cost of one individual PT session."

If affordability is the name of the game, then ViPR's revenue model puts this into perspective, making worthwhile revenues seem highly achievable: by running four different ▶



The ViPR website offers programming suggestions and revenue predictions for small group training

► types of 30-minute sessions twice a week – two vitality, two performance, two reconditioning and two circuit-based sessions – £400 a week can be generated with just five clients per session, each charged £10.

The membership structure is also vital. "I've seen local gyms starting to offer small group training along the boot camp model, but I think they're going about it the wrong way," says SussexBootCamps co-founder Ben Davies. "Essentially they're offering

circuit classes, but without the structure that successful boot camps have. Gyms are offering circuit classes on the PAYG model, whereby members can just turn up as and when they like, on a per-class basis. But without booking a number of sessions in advance, for a fixed cost, there's no buy-in from the client."

Launched in 2008, SussexBootCamps now has 240 members, 150 of which have chosen six- or 12-month contracts (the shortest option is a fixed-term four-week course). The business further

encourages loyalty by including mindset and nutritional support in the member package. Growth in membership comes despite fees of £138 a month, compared to local gyms that charge £80 and council facilities charging £50.

STAFF BUY-IN

It's clear there are still differing views over what constitutes a successful small group training model. But whatever the model it will be your staff who ultimately secure its success; the onus is on the operator to hire, train and retain the right people.

As far back as 2009, programming consultant Robert Esquerre had identified the attributes of the 'hybrid trainer' in *Fitpro* magazine – attributes that include cueing, communication and presentational skills; professional coaching skills; and the ability to develop and support team dynamics.

"Don't just hire on coaching skills," explains FitPro's sales and service trainer Lesley Aitken. "A hired instructor who, two months into the job, can't be a team player is no good for the business." Use your interview opportunities to test behaviours in specific situations, and look for soft skills, she advises: "Relationships with customers = retention = referrals = revenue."

Once you've hired the right instructors, ensuring their buy-in to your small group culture is key to success, according to Davies: "I worked in local gyms for five years and decided I didn't want to replicate that model in my business: instructors are poorly paid, they don't buy in to the culture, they go off sick... We pay our instructors well and they're committed and give 100 per cent." Having

THE STUDIO MODEL: SANDWELL LEISURE TRUST

Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) maintains nine affordable leisure centres for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. It introduced Circuit30 small group training to the studio timetable in July 2011. This allowed it to take advantage of the dynamics of group fitness, building familiarity with the equipment among participants before introducing it to the gym.

Gym development officer Paul Badhams had identified that some 60-minute studio classes were running at 50 per cent capacity, and that they could be replaced by two half-hour classes. Having identified those sites with a strong group fitness offering, Circuit30 was then launched selectively and positioned directly on the studio timetable as an open-ended model – members can turn up as and when they choose, paying on a per-class basis. Haden Hill Leisure Centre, for example, offers the class back-to-back twice within an allocated hour, priced at £3 per participant per session.

"We thought the public would expect a 30-minute class to be half the price of

an hour-long class [£3.90], but we wanted to price it as a premium offering," says Badhams. This is partly to offset costs, but also to reflect the "ultimate workout" claim. Adds Badhams: "Because it's just 30 minutes, we wanted people to get a sense that it would be more physically challenging."

Unlike other models, SLT has launched small group training without a training specificity or the typical fixed, short-term structure; Circuit30 is open to the public on a first-come, first-served, 'pay as you go' basis. "I think those factors are great for some operators, but they weren't relevant for us due to our customers' less rigid usage patterns," adds Badhams.

It's too early yet to see the income and footfall results for Circuit30, but classes will stay on timetables as long as this can be justified by footfall. SLT also plans to launch ViPR30 and Kettlebells30 models. The long-term plan is to create functional fitness zones on the gym floor with TRX, ViPR and Powerbags, expanding the offering off the back of a successful first step in the studio.



Booking packages in advance can help ensure buy-in from clients

THE GYM FLOOR MODEL: DC LEISURE

DC Leisure is one of the country's largest operators, managing facilities for 31 clients across more than 100 venues. It introduced the small group model 18 months ago and, says regional fitness manager Mark Knight, has already seen a 35 per cent rise in income from small group training sessions versus this time last year.

"People want more functional training, and more enjoyment when working out," explains Knight. He says it's already proved popular with members who might not want to pay PT fees, or who are too intimidated to join established group fitness classes. "Early on, we assumed it would appeal more to more athletic members, but the user profile has actually been very varied."

Equipment choice has been a driving factor for the Strategy Group, with packages including the simply titled 'Kettlebells Course' and 'ViPR'. Another factor in choosing equipment-led

programming has been the availability of recognised, high-quality training: the Strategy Group chose ViPR, for example, due to the amount of available programming materials, plus bundled instructor training packages.

Packages run in four- to six-week blocks, with between six and 10 participants per class, and are priced at £20-30 per participant for the course (price varies according to site, with sessions open to both members and non-members).

As with SussexBootCamps and Sandwell Leisure Trust (see p44), DC Leisure relies on in-house staff to deliver small group training. Knight adds that it's important not only that instructors buy in to company culture, but also that they understand – and are able to manage – participant flow between the gym floor and studio, with small group training and its kit again identified as the bridge between the two.

the same instructor each week is essential to building programme loyalty, he adds.

As to whether there's staying power in small group training, US commentators have the benefit of experience. Erin Carson of RallySport Health and Fitness Club in Boulder, US, employs 30 trainers – about half of whom lead small group training sessions. "The one key lesson UK clubs can take away is that it is the right thing to do for the fitness industry, in all clubs," says Carson. "However, many an owner or group fitness manager has made a significant equipment purchase towards the goal of having a 'smashing' small

group training programme, only to find that trainers were not motivated."

With the costs equation clear to clients (it's cheaper than one-to-one PT sessions) and to clubs (more revenue than one-to-one PT sessions), if instructors aren't also rewarded, they won't buy in. And that, currently, is the potential weak spot in the small group offering. Whether through training, fees or development opportunities, the benefits to instructors must be as compelling off the gym floor as small group training is on it.

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Nick Coutts

The former CEO of Holmes Place Iberia, now CEO of start-up venture Fitness Hut, talks to Julie Cramer about exceeding expectations at every level

Why did you decide to launch your own chain of fitness clubs?

For a long time I'd wanted to work on a brand that was my own creation. In my last couple of years as CEO of Holmes Place Iberia, I'd become disillusioned. The wheels had fallen off the Spanish and Portuguese economies and we were under a great deal of pressure to deliver results in a challenging economy. One thing became very clear to me: a higher-end, higher-priced fitness product was no longer right for this type of environment.

How would you describe Fitness Hut?

The brand will be based on a premium low-cost model, but we are not going into the market solely to be the cheapest on price. We want to exceed expectations at every level – in terms of the design, quality of equipment, fitness instructors and class schedules, as well as the club's social element.

Nevertheless, we'll be a third of the price of the high-end brands and half the price of the mid-market chains. Fitness offers in Portugal have always been very expensive – people can pay €55 a month just for a municipal club, and these are not the same quality as in the UK.

Who's involved in Fitness Hut?

There are three directors: me and two of my former colleagues from Holmes Place. Andre Groen is expansion and development director, concentrating on the design and

Each Fitness Hut club will have three fitness studios and a full programme of classes



build, and JP Carvalho is in charge of sales and marketing. My focus is on the product.

Our financing bank is Banco Popular, and we also have backing from a Portuguese private equity and real estate firm, EDGE Capital, which also happens to be the landlord of our first Fitness Hut site.

What stage are you at?

Our first club in central Lisbon is scheduled to open this month, with a further two sites due to open by the end of 2011. After that, we're aiming to open between six and 10 clubs each year – starting in the greater Lisbon area and also in some other Portuguese cities.

What was the inspiration behind the brand?

I spent a lot of time researching the concept, going to events like SIBEC and IHRSA and talking to as many people as possible. I love hearing about new ideas and networking with others in the industry. I did a tour of European clubs in Holland, Germany and the UK, where the premium low-cost idea has been pioneered. But I wasn't just looking at budget models. I also visited unique and inspirational clubs – places like The Third Space in London.

What can members expect?

We're really looking to blow people's socks off when they walk through the door! We haven't scrimped on the equipment and have put a lot of money into designing an inspirational space – both for the members and the people who work there. The interior design is a little bit urban, but not too aggressive, with a mostly blue and white colour scheme and accents of orange.

We've put in high quality, top of the range pieces of equipment such as Keiser Infinity and Star Trac's eSpinner, as well as some exciting one-off pieces of kit like Jacobs Ladder. Inspired very much by the CrossFit phenomenon (see *HCM* Jan 11, p40), we've also invested in an extensive range of functional training equipment including sand bags, TRX, BOSU, Powerbags, kettlebells, Powerbands, battling ropes, Plyoboxes, climbing ropes and even JCB tyres.

Each club will be a minimum 1860sq m (20,000sq ft) with 650–740sq m (7,000–8,000sq ft) for the gym floor. There will be three group fitness studios, as we felt it was really important to offer a full schedule and range of classes. There's also a sprint track, a fight zone, and a functional training area that can be used by the personal training community.

What's the deal for personal trainers at Fitness Hut?

Our aim is to build a truly excellent community of PTs who can operate their own profitable businesses. We'll interview



I feel that the brands trading solely on price are not going to make it long term

them, check their certifications and qualifications and they must follow a Fitness Hut code of conduct – but we won't define what pricing they set.

Some personal trainers may charge customers £25 an hour and some £80 – customers can choose what type of service they want and what they are prepared to pay. We'll help to promote the trainers within the clubs as well as on our new online community, Fitness Net (see information box, p48) that we are currently creating.

What other elements define the Fitness Hut brand?

We've made a big investment in technology. There are no membership cards, for example – just pin code access. However, we've avoided the high security turnstiles with floor to ceiling grills you see in some budget clubs – we don't want people to feel like they're being processed.

In the club, we'll have projection walls and have paired up with film companies to show a range of inspirational films while people work out – films linked to nature and extreme sports, such as off-piste skiing and big wave surfing.

Like the gym space, the changing rooms also have a luxury finish, with wooden lockers and up to 18 showers in both male and female areas. In northern Europe people tend to go home to have their showers, but in this climate, good changing facilities are essential.

Who are your target customers?

When you're looking to recruit up to 4,000 members, you can't just appeal to the regular exercisers. You need to attract those who have never considered joining a club before.

The brand is targeted primarily at a younger age group – around the 25- to 35-year-old range.

For instance, we'll have a DJ pod situated in the gym area, with live sessions once a week where the DJs can practise their sets and entertain the club members. The social element of fitness clubs is very strong in Portugal and club parties are always very well attended.



The brand is targeted primarily at a younger age group – around the 25 to 35-year-old range

As you expand the brand, what are you looking for in potential sites?

We look for attractive, modern buildings in areas of dense population. Parking needs to be good and the club should also be easy to walk to. We want one to two floors, lots of natural light and good ceiling heights.

Because of the economy, we're able to negotiate much more attractive shell rents. Overall we'll be spending around €1.5m on each club fit-out and equipment.

How are you marketing Fitness Hut?

We've hired a corporate sales team to present the product to large companies. We're on social media and are currently promoting Fitness Hut in two large shopping centres, where people can join on the spot. We're selling them an unknown



The club interiors will have an urban feel, using a white, blue and orange colour palette

product, so we're offering a money-back guarantee if it doesn't live up to their expectations after a few visits.

Our pricing is very flexible – people can pay two weeks at a time and cancel with a week's notice. Basic membership will be around €6.60 a week, but with add-ons an average membership will be around €28–30 a month.

How do you see the wider fitness market evolving?

The general consensus is that the market will continue to polarise. Either you're at the high end or the budget end, or you're niche. I think clubs stuck in the middle will struggle in the years to come.

There's a big splurge and dynamic expansion going on in the UK at the moment, and the men will be sorted from the boys. But I do feel that the brands trading solely on price are not going to make it long term.

Any sights set on international expansion?

Spain will be next, starting next year, and Brazil would be another logical step. If a concept has done well in Portugal, it usually makes for easier financing in Brazil. The fitness market there is currently hugely overpriced – but rents, build costs and taxes are also high. However, in terms of potential, São Paulo alone is a vast market. After that we might consider the UK and Europe.

What was the scariest part of branching out on your own?

I'd been with Holmes Place for most of my career and was used to taking a regular salary. When I left, I soon realised that, if I didn't get out of bed in the morning, nothing was going to happen! But when I look back, I'm amazed at how much has been achieved in just a year – from developing the concept to getting bank finance and opening the first site.

And what's the best part?

It's great to feel liberated and empowered and work with people you want to work with. We've shaken off our old

FITNESS ON THE NET

Coutts and his team are currently developing a Portuguese website called Fitness Net, due to go live in late 2011. Says Coutts: "I want to create a platform where all personal trainers can share opinions and develop critical mass – an organic database that's constantly growing, but that's self-managed/policed via peer group and end-user feedback."

"Fitness Net will be a space where all key stakeholders within the industry can meet, contribute ideas and leverage benefits from one another. Only suppliers pay a fee for registering."

Fitness professionals will be able to display a profile, upload exercise videos, promote themselves to clubs and end-users, contribute to forums and benefit from attractive deals on services from registered suppliers – services such as accounting, medical insurance, mobile phone deals and so on.

Clubs can have a profile, advertise job vacancies, search the PT database and, for an additional fee, use the new "Marketing Wizard" to create high-quality marketing material for a budget price.

Fitness fans can have a profile page, contact PTs directly, ask fitness questions and access online nutritional stores. The site uses google maps, so all parties can zero in on areas of geographical relevance, and all registered users will receive a bi-weekly email newsletter.

stresses, but of course there will be new challenges to come. Fortunately Andre, JP and I know each other well enough to talk directly, challenge each other, and not go off in a huff if we disagree.

The Portuguese economy is in a bad way – are you optimistic about the future?

It is tough and there have been lots of business closures. However, I really believe we've created a concept that's right for now, and that we're not just going to survive in this economy, but thrive.



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a weighty matter

We all know that, in principle, the fitness industry can help address the growing issue of diabetes – but how exactly? Kate Cracknell reports on a selection of European initiatives with clear opportunities for the health and fitness sector

Diabetes statistics continue to dominate the headlines: a major international study published recently in *The Lancet* indicates that almost one in 10 adults now suffers from Type 2 diabetes – an estimated 347 million people worldwide. That's double the figure of 30 years ago.

If the condition is not diagnosed early enough or left untreated, it can lead to devastating complications such as stroke, heart disease, kidney failure and blindness. Given that diabetes is linked to lifestyle factors such as obesity, there's a huge opportunity for the fitness industry to help reverse this worrying trend – but how can we go about this in practice? We take a look at some recent initiatives that offer specific opportunities for the health and fitness industry to get involved.

engaging the public

The 2011 Healthy Lifestyle Roadshow – run by Diabetes UK in partnership with MEND – draws to a close this month following six months of touring around England. Visiting a total of 35 locations, the roadshow aimed to identify some of the estimated 860,000 people across the UK with Type 2 diabetes, but who are not aware of their condition.

The roadshow – which will also run from April to October 2012 – raises awareness of risk factors for Type 2 diabetes, as well as the symptoms. Diabetes UK staff are on-hand to offer free diabetes risk assessment tests, which predict a person's risk of developing Type 2 diabetes in the next

10 years: if this risk is moderate to high, they are referred to their GP for further advice or tests. People are also offered advice on how to make healthy lifestyle changes by adopting a diet that's low in fat, salt and sugar, and by taking regular physical activity.

Diabetes UK staff carefully encourage people to the stand who they feel might be at risk, and over 200 assessments are completed per location, with an average of 108 people referred to their GP. People are also able to register for MEND's weight management and healthy lifestyle programmes, which is where local leisure centres come in.

For each roadshow location, MEND partners with a local public sector leisure centre operator, which must commit to running MEND's More Active Health programme – a six-week scheme backed by Diabetes UK and designed to promote all aspects of a healthy lifestyle – for which MEND provides funding. The operator sends staff to cover the two days of its local roadshow, talking to visitors and those undergoing assessments about the benefits of increasing physical activity levels, as well as drawing their attention to what's available in their local leisure centres.

Jonathan Scott, partnership development manager at MEND, explains: "The roadshow is a fantastic way to promote your facilities to the public. Not everyone who visits the stand undergoes a risk assessment, so in addition to driving people towards More Active Health, it also offers a chance to market your other activities – walking

Seal of approval:
JUST FIT was
the first operator
in Germany to
receive a Quality
Seal for Diabetics

groups, mother and baby sessions and so on – to drive participation. Everyone is encouraged to take part in more physical activity as a way of either reducing their risk of developing diabetes, or keeping it low."

Results have been very positive, with the leisure operators noting increased footfall to facilities and exercise sessions. Initial data also suggests an adherence level of around 65 per cent to the six-week More Active Health scheme.

MEND is now looking for leisure centre partners for the 2012 roadshow. It's supported by the Big Lottery Fund, which has awarded £413,722 to support 70 roadshows during 2011 and 2012.

**"THE EVIDENCE IS IRREFUTABLE...YOU
CAN'T HAVE A DIABETES PROGRAMME
WITHOUT EXERCISE AT THE HEART OF IT"**

diabetes 'membership'

Nuffield Health, recognising that it had the clinical knowledge to educate those with Type 2 diabetes, developed a



12-week programme in co-operation with Diabetes UK. Launched in 2009, this is now offered at 35 of its Fitness and Wellbeing centres, with 200 clients already having gone through the scheme.

The Diabetes Programme, which is bought as a standalone 12-week membership, is marketed specifically to diabetics. However, as Nuffield's head of physiology Chris Jones explains, once on the course it takes a broader approach: "It's about total wellbeing as opposed to just being about diabetes, which quite often has a stigma attached. We want to focus on the positive, not simply the negative. We support clients to achieve their broader health aims, knowing that by doing this, we'll probably also help them manage their diabetes.

"The evidence that exercise can help diabetics manage their condition is irrefutable – you can't have a diabetes

programme without exercise at the heart of it – and we've also incorporated a nutrition component looking at simple dietary changes. We look at other lifestyle factors too – like stress, sleep, hydration – as these may contribute to how well people manage their condition.

"There are five key touchpoints with a senior wellbeing advisor throughout the 12 weeks: a full health MOT (see *HCM* Sept 10, p32) at the beginning and end, to help clients understand their condition and to allow us to measure the effects of the programme. There's also an initial exercise programme session, an exercise re-programme after a month, and another session after two months to discuss the various dietary and lifestyle changes the client has made.

"Overall, the emphasis is on building self-efficacy and long-term change, educating and supporting the participant

so they are able to continue a healthier lifestyle following the programme."

Rory Maccoll, a senior wellbeing advisor at Nuffield's East Kilbride club, adds: "There's a black hole between people being diagnosed with diabetes and being sent off to live their lives. My role is to take them through things, step by step, to increase their self-confidence and help them control their lifestyle.

"About 50 per cent of those who sign up for the course in our club have completed the programme, with many able to lower their medication as a result. Many have also stayed on as members; I take responsibility for them as PT clients, so I can continue to look after them."

level 4 qualifications

Accredited Level 4 qualifications in obesity and diabetes are available through three training bodies: Weight ▶

► Management Centre (Discovery Learning), Fitness Wales and Active IQ.

Weight Management Centre's course has already produced over 200 graduates, with about half of these from the health and fitness sector; the remainder have a clinical background. The course takes an in-depth look at the causes of obesity and its links with Type 2 diabetes, as well as looking briefly at the auto-immune disease that is Type 1 diabetes, examining the management of both conditions via healthy lifestyle changes.

A large section of the course is devoted to weight and obesity management, including a Level 4 component in human nutrition and behavioural change techniques such as motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioural therapy. "We do provide specific exercise programmes for both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, but as with all management of chronic conditions, the key is effective client assessment. This ensures any exercise programme is suitable for the ability of the client and the stage of their condition," says director Alan Jackson.

"Similarly, on the dietary side of things, diabetics – just like non-diabetics – have a variety of likes and dislikes when it comes to food; while dietary approaches to diabetes are relatively standard, unfortunately people aren't. The course guides students to work around dietary preferences and provide an optimum diet for obese and diabetic people."

"WE HELP INSTRUCTORS TO SEE AND WORK WITH THE PERSON, NOT THE CONDITION - A HUGE NECESSARY SKILL"

Meanwhile, launched in July – and with Premier Training offering the first course this month – Active IQ's new certificate also focuses on nutrition. Ben Pratt, R&D manager at Active IQ, says: "The qualification looks at exercise and nutrition, but with nutrition more heavily weighted as it has a larger role to play in causing obesity and diabetes.

"We don't focus on typical calorie counting and fat reduction – in the long term, this will not result in significant weight loss or maintenance of lower body weight. The qualification bases its primary approach on the scientific fact that carbohydrates stimulate insulin, which in turn stimulates fat storage.

"Regarding exercise strategies, we focus on supporting weight loss via an alternative style of training, similar to intervals, which increases post-exercise metabolism and drives up the level of fat burning in the hours that follow.

"The qualification also looks at behavioural change and the support PTs need to offer clients to build lifelong habits. We encourage this to take place on a one-to-one basis, to respond to individual circumstances and needs."

Fitness Wales – whose first Level 4 course in obesity and diabetes will run in late 2011/early 2012 – has more of a focus on physical activity and psychology. Sarah Bolitho of Fitness Wales explains: "We have deliberately stayed away from including nutritional/weight loss advice other than standard, government-approved healthy eating recommendations. Most individuals with obesity or diabetes who are referred into an exercise scheme are under the care of a multi-disciplinary team including dietitians, diabetes nurses and so on, so it's important for fitness/referral professionals to observe boundaries where advice is concerned and avoid confusing the client.

"Our course includes a mix of theory and practical sessions, from behaviour change and lifestyle coaching to activity sessions such as chair-based activity, circuits, gym, group exercise, walking and relaxation. This offers different entry levels to activity and covers all relevant considerations such as weight restrictions on machines, fitness levels, mobility issues, timing of medication and so on. We also give a sample of each class as a handout so instructors have something they can immediately teach.



Food first: Many training courses focus on nutrition, although all include exercise components too

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



Reaching the public: The Healthy Lifestyle Roadshow is run by Diabetes UK and MEND

“Key to the course is the issue of stigma and prejudice, which is still pervasive around obesity. We want instructors to leave the course with a more open and accepting attitude, as it’s the fear of being stigmatised that often puts people off seeking help from the fitness industry – an industry that’s perceived to be full of beautiful, thin people. We help instructors to see and work with the person, not the condition – a hugely necessary skill.”

enhanced certification

In the Netherlands, fitness association Fit/vak – in conjunction with local universities and sports medicine associations – has developed a new protocol for both fitness instructors and health clubs wanting to work with people with diabetes, as well as those in a ‘pre-diabetes’ stage – ie obese and overweight people.

Fit/vak project manager Dyon Voogt explains: “Unfortunately, at the moment, most people in the Netherlands start their exercise prescription programme with specialist physical therapists rather than at health clubs. Fit/vak is trying to address this by improving the quality of the offering at clubs.”

In the new protocol, instructors must be qualified to at least Level 4 in diabetes and obesity – able to effectively train, evaluate and communicate with this audience. In addition, a special category of qualification for Level 4 has been introduced: a national level, pre-diabetic specialist qualification.

Meanwhile, clubs must meet a range of criteria, including having a defibrillator on-site, staff trained in first aid, suitably qualified and EREPS-registered instructors, and appropriate CV and resistance equipment.

All Fit/vak members are accredited by the organisation at a ‘Basic’ level, but the new protocol has allowed for a higher ‘Plus’ level to be introduced. Launched in September, and externally audited by an independent organisation, the ‘Plus’ certification involves an assessor going on-site to ensure that the protocol is being implemented absolutely to the letter.

The expectation is for 50 clubs to achieve this higher level quality seal by the end of 2011, with 150 by the end of 2012 and 350 over the next three years.

diabetes quality seal

In Germany, a health club owned by operator JUST FIT was the first in the country to be awarded a Quality Seal for Diabetics, developed by the German Diabetics Society and independent technical testing agency TÜV Rheinland (see *HCM* July 11, p14). The remainder of JUST FIT’s 14-strong estate will now also be certified.

The stringent list of criteria that clubs must meet to achieve this certification encompasses four areas: staffing requirements (the need for diabetic specialists in-house, for example, qualified both at a basic and a professional level), necessary equipment for tests (blood glucose, blood pressure,

urine etc), emergency management systems (emergency procedures and responsibilities, first aid, and a diabetes emergency kit on each floor of the gym including apple juice/Coca-Cola and dextrose/glucose), and the training offer.

In terms of the training offer, clubs must – under the management of qualified staff specialising in diabetes – either run courses for no more than 15 people, or else offer one-to-one sessions. Blood glucose and blood pressure measurements are mandatory before and after the first workout – in addition to taking a full medical history – to determine the individual programme recommendations; voluntary testing is also available for ketone (via blood/urine tests). All results must be fully documented and assessed for possible implications, and no clients can be taken on without approval from a GP.

Frank Böhme, founder of JUST FIT, says: “In addition to specialist technical know-how, our trainers also need strong pedagogical and psychological skills. Motivating these clients requires a level of professional empathy that trainers only gain after several years of experience. The sensitive management of the client by an experienced coach – in a methodical mix of education, communication and medical training therapy – determines the long-term success and helps avoid a premature termination of exercise therapy.”

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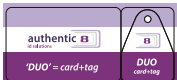
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How can operators ensure they get the IT system they need?
Stuart Dyson offers a 'survival guide' for the software buyer

spoilt for choice

IT-related purchases
can account for up
to 10 per cent of
business outgoings

Software forms an intrinsic part of life today: it's what lets us get cash from an ATM, make a phone call and even drive our cars. The average company spends around 5–10 per cent of its total outgoings on IT-related items, making it one of the largest expenses for business, with a big chunk regularly allocated to new software projects intended to create a better future for the organisation and its customers.

And it's important to get it right. When one of these projects fails, it can impact an organisation's prospects and, if the failure is large enough, can steal the entire future of the business. It can happen to anyone: large or small companies; in commercial, non-profit and government organisations; in any country; and without regard to size or sector (including our own). The cost to

shareholders and taxpayers runs into billions of pounds a year.

Since 1994, The Standish Group has published its annual CHAOS report on IT project success. Based on responses from IT managers in a wide range of industry segments, and representing some 8,380 applications, the report conclusions provide some sobering statistics. In the 2009 report, only 32 per cent of projects were deemed to have been 'successful' – that means they were delivered on time, within budget and with the required features and functions in place. A further 44 per cent were classed as 'challenged' – a combination of being late, over budget and/or with less than the required features and function. Depressingly, 24 per cent of projects were cancelled prior to completion, or they were delivered and never used.

No wonder, then, that this jaundiced view of IT projects can often lead to dysfunctional buying practices among operators, and equally dysfunctional selling practices from suppliers. This can result in a poor fit between customer, supplier and solution. So what can you do to choose the right software and keep your IT project on track?

lose the tender

A tender is probably the perfect tool for commodity-based items, but with complex leisure management software, the situation is different. Tender documents are often too long and complex, making it difficult to understand the total requirement – but at the same time, their length leads to a reluctance to change them, even if they're wrong.

Not only that, but IT requirements in tenders tend to focus too much on the system itself rather than how it will be used. Ask all your potential suppliers if they have a feature for BACS processing and the answer will be a resounding 'yes'. Ask them how they expect the BACS solution to behave and the answers may be less convincing.

An alternative approach is to use scenarios that describe the behaviours ▶

24 per cent of projects were
cancelled prior to completion,
or delivered and never used



What looks good on paper can quickly become impractical under real life usage

► required for a system. Formally known as 'use cases', these scenarios can be as light or as detailed as circumstances require, making them much easier to articulate and, more importantly, to modify. For example, a use case might describe the perfect scenario required for a successful check-in, but then go on to map the 'extensions' – all the many things that could go wrong, and which the system needs to be able to handle gracefully. In this situation, scenarios based on 'forgot card', 'lowes money', 'out of hours' and so on can all be used to measure the best fit of your prospective system.

Nigel Maglione, chief finance officer of Sports and Leisure Group, successfully applied this agile approach when implementing a new leisure management system for the operation of its 11 PlayFootball Centres. He explains: "With over 2,000 individual player visits a week, combined with a range of scenarios unique to our small-sided football model, we needed a flexible way to describe our requirements. Taking things in small steps enabled us to quickly identify what we really needed and what business processes we were prepared to change. This way, we could also get valuable input from actual users and not just people who thought they knew what was required."

By writing your requirements as scenarios rather than features, you can keep your selection process on

track – particularly during product demonstrations where you, rather than the salesperson, are then able to drive the agenda.

avoid feature shopping

During a software demonstration, it can be all too easy to get dazzled by slick features or to be wooed by 'the more features, the better' approach. It's much better, however, not to allow yourself to be distracted by the things you will probably never use.

The Standish Group's *CHAOS* report asked the question: "Of the functionality which was delivered, how much of it was actually used?" An astounding 45 per cent of respondents said the functionality was never used, and a further 19 per cent said it was rarely used. In other words, even on so-called 'successful' projects, there can be significant wastage.

It comes back to the difference between what the system does, versus how it does it in relation to your desired business process. Once you have your main scenarios described, categorise them into 'must have', 'should have' or 'nice to have'. This will enable you to draw a line of minimum functionality below which you will not drop.

Armed with the list of requirements based on your particular operating scenarios, ask the salesperson to demonstrate how the system will behave in these circumstances, starting

with your 'must have' list. This will quickly filter out those companies which can't fit your needs.

get into a dialogue, not a monologue

Many operators want an arm's length relationship with potential suppliers, expecting detailed written proposals and prices based on a lengthy requirements document. However, these are the very companies who often end up with the wrong system; the best solution can only be investigated jointly, through open and honest dialogue.

It's important to set aside sufficient time to allow suppliers to speak to key stakeholders so they can ask questions, seek clarifications and challenge stated assumptions: the results can often bring up surprising information that may change your requirements.

Sean Maguire, managing director of leisure management software supplier Legend, is clear about the need for such dialogue: "The customer is expert in its requirements and needs to describe the problem well, while the supplier is the technology expert and needs to solve the problem in the best way possible. Once the solution is proposed, the parties can debate it openly and reach a good decision together."

But if you don't have the internal resources to manage this dialogue, don't be afraid to involve third party experts, says John Treharne, CEO of budget club



**One step at a time:
Give your IT project
room to evolve to
meet changing needs**

operator The Gym Group: "Understand what your business needs and produce a clear brief. If you aren't an IT expert, which most gym operators aren't, get specialist help and advice. It will save you money, time and headache later on."

reduce the risk by thinking small

Industry veteran and technology expert Rob Gregory believes the increase in IT complexity is forcing a move to smaller steps within a project: each step dictates the next stage, with flexibility required along the way to accommodate learnings and changes in technology. Rather than mapping the project out from the word go, savvy operators are realising that you don't have to move a mountain to make progress, and that taking one step at a time can be an effective way to keep staff on-board as you progress, as well as preventing a system from becoming obsolete before it's even completed.

"Constant change in such areas as social networking and cloud computing has increased complexity for all parties. This has challenged suppliers and made it difficult for operators to keep abreast of, and understand the impact of, all these changes," says Gregory. "A key realisation recently has been regarding the need to separate projects into smaller pieces to reduce risk."

If you want further reassurance before jumping in with a supplier, you could ask for a sample site configuration. This will involve the proposed supplier taking your requirements and scenarios and building a system for you, but without it going live. You can then run your scenarios as a compliance check and to make sure that your minimum requirements are met.

If you're happy that the proposed system fits your scenarios to the

desired level, the next stage is to run a pilot. This will help you to iron out all the operational aspects and agree on the specific success criteria that would dictate a 'go' decision. You'll often be amazed how what looks good on paper can quickly become impractical under real life usage.

The good news is that businesses do seem to be latching onto some of this 'smaller thinking' – a trend that is borne out by the latest edition of the CHAOS report, which indicates that project success rates have seen a greater than 100 per cent improvement since the first study in 1994. Asked for the reasons for this improvement, the chair of Standish, Jim Johnson, observed: "The primary reason is that projects have got a lot smaller. Doing projects with iterative steps, as opposed to all project requirements being defined upfront, is a major step forward."


achieving objectives

With increasing pressure on time and budgets, there is even less margin for error when it comes to project success. If you can state your requirements as scenarios, get into an open dialogue and keep things small, you have all the tools you need for choosing the right supplier and working together for a successful project, with objectives achieved and operational value delivered.

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software news round-up

Gladstone

A new iPhone app will allow members to make bookings via their phone, as well as linking to Facebook so members can tell friends what they've booked and where. The app will be fully branded for Gladstone customers and registered with the operator's name and logo in the Apple iPhone App Store. The product is also fully integrated with the operator's back office and online booking system to avoid duplicate bookings.

A new Learn 2 Swim course management module will simplify the swim school administration process, reducing the pressure on receptionists. It will allow operators to register people on courses, manage accreditation and ease the movement of pupils between the different swimming levels, as well as access tailored reports.

Finally, new Contact Manager will become a core part of Gladstone's Plus2 software. It will administer the sales process – from lead through to qualified prospect to new member – allowing sales people to manage their prospects throughout the sales cycle, and managers to produce sales forecasts and bookings reports.

fitness-kit.net GLADSTONE



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/AMONANANT

Gladstone's new iPhone app allows members to make bookings via their phones



Xn Leisure's self-service kiosk has seen an average 55 per cent uptake

Xn Leisure

Xn Leisure has launched a total solution for self-service, including online booking, membership, self-service kiosks and controlled access through access control turnstiles. The new product is designed to boost the efficiency and customer service levels at reception – the first point of contact for information, bookings, payments and interaction with customers. The kiosk automates tasks such as checking in for activities and making future bookings, allowing the reception staff to focus on customer service. In sites that have already installed the self-service kiosks, there's an average of 55 per cent customer uptake, with usage figures in excess of 80 per cent in some locations.

fitness-kit.net XN LEISURE

MINDBODY

MINDBODY has joined forces with Constant Contact to provide new subscribers with a free email marketing account integrated with their management software, including unlimited emails to up to 500 contacts, email templates, analytics reporting, surveys, an anti-spam checker, live support and social media integration.

Meanwhile, based on a user's GPS location and updated daily, the MINDBODY Fitness app allows people to find, book and pay for group exercise classes in their area at the touch of a button. Classes can be narrowed down by day or time, and the search radius can be adjusted to search for classes further afield. Fans of a specific club, instructor or class can store preferences for the future.

fitness-kit.net MINDBODY

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the search engine for leisure buyers

log on to www.fitness-kit.net and type the company name under 'keyword search'



Gift-runner allows you to see if a recent treatment led to an upsell of a voucher

Ez-Runner

Gift-runner, a voucher website linked to Ez-Runner's management system, allows operators to monitor customer spending patterns online and in-club. Want to see if a recent treatment led to an upsell of a voucher? Or send promotions to customers who bought certain products or treatments? Forgotten an anniversary and need something quick? Gift-runner lets your customers buy for themselves or their loved ones while leaving the operator in ultimate control: you decide what to sell, they decide who gets it.

fitness-kit.net EZ-RUNNER

iGo Figure

The iGo Figure membership and business management software is now integrated with the EU's SEPA (Single Euro Payment Area) standards through its partnership with Harlands Group. This makes it possible for health and leisure club owners throughout the EU to process one-off and monthly payments directly from within the iGo Figure software. Payments are processed electronically without the need for a visit to the bank to process direct debit payments.

fitness-kit.net iGO FIGURE

Clarity

Clarity Leisure is staging a series of roadshows this month to launch several new software releases. The leisure bookings iPhone app offers new levels of customer access and convenience, enabling users to book activities and invite friends direct from their smartphones. Meanwhile ClarityLive Theatres is the new theatre management module that complements the company's leisure offering to provide public sector operators with a complete leisure and cultural services solution. Clarity will also be launching its new, hosted leisure management system, which reduces client dependence on in-house ICT resources and provides a fully scalable, flexible and cost-effective IT environment.

fitness-kit.net CLARITY

Legend

Legend Club Management Systems has launched a new invoicing and debt management solution. Designed to help operators eliminate the traditionally high manual debt management and collection process, the new software has – according to Legend – been proven to save up to 80 per cent of debtor-related admin time. It automates the credit control and reporting process and allows the credit control team to focus on other business-critical issues such as debt resolution and customer service. A fully integrated system available over the internet, statements and reminder notices can be sent by email to members, who can simply click on a link in the invoice or statement to make a secure, instant online payment.

fitness-kit.net LEGEND

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MOVE MORE

Hitting national headlines this August, the launch of Macmillan Cancer Support's 'Move More' campaign revolved around the publishing of a report that highlighted physical activity as a hidden 'wonder drug' for people who are living with cancer.

Moving one step beyond accepted scientific wisdom that has already shown how adopting a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risks of developing cancer, the new report suggests that not only can regular exercise – around 150 minutes a week – prove beneficial for people during treatment, but that it can also help to reduce recurrence.

exercise is medicine

Professor Robert Thomas – author of *Lifestyle after Cancer* and chair of Macmillan Cancer Support's Physical Activity Expert Advisory Group – collaborated on the report, having conducted a comprehensive evidence review of world studies. He explains that thousands of controlled trials – registered on the Cochrane Reviews database – underline how exercise can improve wellbeing among cancer sufferers,

As new evidence emerges underlining the benefits of exercise for cancer sufferers and survivors, Neena Dhillon asks how fitness facilities can play their part

reducing associated problems such as fatigue, obesity, anxiety, constipation, osteoporosis and blood clots.

Supported mainly by cohort studies, evidence is also emerging that physical activity can have an anti-cancer effect, improving long-term outcomes and preventing relapse. Figures quoted in Macmillan's report – part of its Improving Cancer Survivorship review – suggest that breast and prostate cancer patients can reduce their risk of dying by 30 to 40 per cent if they achieve recommended levels of activity, compared to those doing under an hour a week, while bowel cancer sufferers achieving six hours a week could reduce their risk of dying by up to 50 per cent.

Meanwhile a US study involving 816 colon cancer patients, whose disease had

been removed but showed indications of spreading to the local lymph nodes, noted that increased physical activity during and after additional chemotherapy was associated with a lower chance of the disease returning. In practical terms, this equated to a 35 per cent difference in relapse rate for individuals in the highest quintile of regular exercise compared with the lowest.

"This improvement in survival is likely to be a result of a combination of weight control, reduction in insulin-like growth factors and improved psychological outlook," adds Thomas.

activity prescription

Other professionals are in agreement with points made in the Macmillan report. Last year, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) stated that exercise is safe both during and after most types of treatment and that survivors should avoid inactivity – a recommendation now mirrored by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES).

Dr Eric Asher, medical director at The Third Space Medicine – the medical offering at premium health club The



ALL PHOTOS © MIKEY FORTINGLAND

Third Space, in London's Soho – believes the new advice is remarkably sensible, particularly in terms of psychological wellbeing: "When you exercise you breathe better, use muscle, promote blood flow, build up the immune system – all of which is important during a fight against cancer. The decision to exercise also reflects a health-giving mindset."

For fitness industry professionals, the call to exercise may seem logical, but until now those in treatment have often been encouraged to put their feet up. A recent Macmillan survey of 400 UK health professionals showed that one in 10 doctors and nurses still believe it is more important to encourage patients to rest rather than undertake physical activity. The same survey indicated that more than half know little or nothing

Opinion varies about which types of exercise are suitable for particular cancer patients

about the benefits of exercise, while only six per cent talk to all their cancer patients about being more active.

Then there are the scientists who argue that it's impossible to prove that exercise could be a major underlying cause behind improved recovery rates. There are certainly going to be challenges in communicating the message that sufferers need to move more during treatment, building up to two-and-a-half to three hours of vigorous exercise a week.

Not surprisingly, opinion varies as to which types of exercise are suitable, especially as cancers create strains on different parts of the body. "Whole body,

aerobic exercise such as brisk walking, jogging, cycling or swimming is good for individuals because of the metabolic and psychological effects, while gentle resistance training and stretching is also helpful," comments Dr Sarah Dauncey, medical director at Nuffield Health Wellbeing. "The type of cancer and previous medical interventions may affect the exercise prescription given, however. For example, radiotherapy and chemotherapy can affect the way the heart and lungs work, while other interventions can compromise the immune system or bone health, all of which needs to be factored in."

Meanwhile Asher points out that vigorous, not violent, exercise should be advised to avoid sudden pulling/jarring of the body. "Pilates, swimming, cycling, tai ▶

Group exercise clearly addressed the side-effects, with the active group feeling less tired, less depressed and more willing to return to active life

Active patients may cost the NHS £1,500 less per person than inactive patients, one cancer study estimates

► chi – these are activities that are unlikely to cause injuries, while improving wellbeing, helping to modulate pain pathways and counteracting the wasting of muscles. Certain individuals need to be cautious about placing unhealthy stresses on bones,” he says.

So professional advice is key here and Macmillan’s report notes that physical activity should be incorporated into standard NHS care, comprising brief interventions by GPs and primary care nurses to set out goals and provide information, supported by cancer rehabilitation services that include physiotherapy, exercise on referral, commissioned schemes in leisure centres and other sporting. And it is at this stage that fitness facilities have their chance to play a part in helping over two million people living with and beyond cancer in the UK (forecast to hit nearly four million by 2030) to get fit.

specialist skills

Dr Anna Campbell, director of CanRehab, led a Glasgow-based study



Leisure centres could have a key role to play in cancer survivorship



published in the *British Medical Journal*, which followed 200 breast cancer patients through and post treatment. Half of the women participated in group exercise, while the other half did not.

“Group exercise clearly addressed the side-effects, with the active group feeling less tired, less depressed and more willing to return to active life,” Campbell says. This has resulted in the formation of ActiveABC, a city-wide referral scheme funded by Glasgow City Council that sees GPs, oncologists and surgeons assessing breast cancer patients for a 12-week group exercise scheme in council-funded leisure centres.

Campbell has trained the staff in each of the four facilities running the programme, which comprises circuit-based strength training twice a week. Participants are also encouraged to use other facilities alongside these sessions, such as swimming pools and yoga classes.

“We have estimated that these women end up costing the NHS £1,500 less per person than non-active patients thanks to fewer GP visits and fewer nights in hospital,” Campbell continues. “We are trying to show that the NHS should provide exercise referral schemes as part of its cancer care package, with better links established between PCTs and leisure centres/health clubs.”

While many of the Glasgow participants have later gone on to attend classes in the leisure centres, Campbell says that it was important for them to be part of a cancer group initially because they learned from each other while going through similar experiences.

Most importantly, she believes exercise instructors require specialist training when working with individuals

during and after treatment, because there are side-effects specific to cancer types that can affect mobility – for example, swelling associated with lymphoedema. Other doctors confirm that the lack of a suitable qualification in the past has reduced the number of patients they could safely refer.

As a SkillsActive-endorsed provider, CanRehab is one of the first UK training providers to offer a REPs Level 4 Cancer Rehabilitation qualification, which includes 35 hours of training over four months covering cancers, treatments, side-effects, contra-indications and guidelines. Exercise referral specialist The Wright Foundation is also due to gain its endorsement for its Level 4 cancer qualification imminently.

Bournemouth-based leisure trust BH Live is another organisation showing tangible results, with a physical activity-based survivorship project delivered and funded in partnership with Macmillan and The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The 12-week plan comprised the referral of post-treatment breast and colorectal cancer patients by specialist nurses to the Littledown Centre, where GP Referral-qualified staff with enhanced skills relating to cancer services provided a personalised plan of activity. This involved unlimited use of facilities and classes within the centre, four one-to-one assessments and goal-setting sessions, plus bespoke group sessions responding to post-treatment needs. Participants reported significant physical and health gains (eg blood pressure, weight reduction) as well as improvements in quality of life.



BH Live project leader Layne Hamerston says that a new eight-week programme is currently underway, including talks, introductions to group-based activities such as tai chi, Zumba, Nordic walking, and bespoke classes such as body reconditioning.

In the long term, Hamerston says BH Live is looking to establish Littledown Centre as an integrated rehabilitation hub. "We believe leisure facilities have the potential to play a key role in the future of cancer survivorship. Programmes such as the ones we have piloted show how cost savings can be made in the post-treatment phase; partnerships involving healthcare providers, charities, leisure centres and patients are important to the future of delivering such community programmes."

new markets

Funding remains a complex issue, and one that may need to be addressed from government level down. But what is clear is that commercial health clubs with a holistic approach are open to becoming part of the process. Asher, for example, says he would be comfortable for The Third Space's PTs to prescribe remedial exercise if there were initial and ongoing communication with the individual's healthcare professional.

And at Nuffield Health Fitness & Wellbeing Centres, there are embryonic plans to initiate a wellbeing programme that would be suitable for

Four million people in the UK are forecast to be living with and beyond cancer by 2030

cancer survivors and others suffering health problems, involving tailor-made prescriptions for individuals. Dauncey says that partnering with local health services or charities will be vitally important "to ensure consistent messages and easy pathways into exercise services", but that Nuffield's physiologists and fitness staff – all qualified to at least REPs Level 3 – are capable of developing prescriptions and motivating survivors.

Nuffield's Health MOT – carried out with all new members – also alerts staff via a questionnaire if new members are being treated or recovering from cancer, and prompts them to follow up with a call to GPs where appropriate.

In the US, meanwhile, an inspiring case study is to be found at West Coast Athletic Clubs (WCAC), where an over-subscribed Cancer Wellfit programme for individuals in treatment or within nine months of diagnosis is run in two locations in California: Santa Barbara and Goleta. Providing free, full membership to the club for 10 weeks, the programme is built around two strength training sessions each week, supervised by Wellfit-certified trainers.

"We experimented with other exercises, but found that for a group of between 10 and 14 participants,

strength training in a standard weight room worked best because it allowed trainers to safely take members through a routine, personalising workouts from the outset and introducing new equipment as progress is made," says Cancer Wellfit director Paula Lilly.

Funded by WCAC and the Santa Barbara Cancer Center, the 17-year-old programme is a powerful way of the club giving back to the community. There have been some associated benefits, however, with 40 per cent of participants becoming fee-paying members post-programme.

This is something that clubs should take into account when considering whether to participate in referral schemes and invest in staff training. As Thomas concludes: "Organisations such as The Wright Foundation have been carrying out research to assess the conversion rate of people who, after completing an initial 12-week programme, end up joining the same gym and creating a new income stream.

"At the same time, wealthy survivors will be looking to pay for personalised sessions with trained PTs. These are groups who have never exercised before and never attended a gym, but who are committed to staying fit because they feel as though they have been given a new lease of life."



neena dhillon
healthclub@leisuremedia.com



Olav Thorstad (right) joined SATS after spending many years as a member of SATS clubs



SATS' CEO is capitalising on the chain's past achievements, its new budget brand, and ambitious product development initiatives. Patricia Amend reports

OLAV THORSTAD

WHAT LED YOU TO JOIN SATS?

I'd been a member of SATS for many years, so it was a product I knew very well. I joined the company three and a half years ago as the country manager for our Norwegian operation. Then, in June of 2009, I became CEO. My professional background in retail, as well as my interest in sports and an active lifestyle, served me well in tackling this unique opportunity.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE HISTORY OF SATS TO DATE?

In 1995, three club businessmen – Vegard Liven, Aksel Gresvig and Bjørn-Sigurd Johansen – formed SATS, which stands for 'Sport Aerobic Training Centre' in Norwegian. They began with just one gym in downtown Oslo. By 1998, they had 49 clubs in Norway, including several franchised units operating under the name Spenset.

At the end of 1998, SATS was sold to McCown De Leeuw & Co, the American private equity firm, via its European subsidiary Euro Fitness Holding. McCown had been one of the early investors in 24 Hour Fitness Worldwide and, at that time,

SATS BY NUMBERS

- Number of SATS clubs: 113 in total – comprising 38 in Norway, 53 in Sweden, 10 in Finland and 12 in Denmark
- Number of Fresh Fitness clubs: Nine – three in Norway and six in Denmark
- Number of SATS members: 285,000
- Number of employees: 5,500 (approximately 1,400 full-time)
- 2009 revenues: US\$243.4m • 2010 revenues: US\$246.9m
- 2011 revenues (projected): US\$274.5m
- 2009 EBITDA: US\$19.7m • 2010 EBITDA: US\$27.8m

owned it, so SATS became part of 24 Hour. By 2001, SATS had more than 100 clubs in Scandinavia.

In 2002, SATS was bought back by its original founders, with financial assistance provided by Nordic Capital – a Scandinavian investment company. Four years later, it was purchased by Tryghetsgruppen, a privately-held Danish company that's a majority stockholder in publicly-held insurance group Tryg. Tryghetsgruppen has a long-term view with respect to its ownership of SATS, so it's willing to invest in new clubs and upgrade existing sites.

AND SINCE YOU BECAME CEO?

Today, SATS has a total of 113 facilities and more than 285,000 members in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. Our clubs range in size from 1,200–3,500sqm (13,000–38,000sq ft). We offer studio training with free weights, plate-loaded and traditional strength training equipment and a wide variety of cardio options. We place a strong emphasis on classes, including some that we design ourselves, as well as well-known programmes such as Zumba and, from Les Mills International, BODYPUMP and BODYBALANCE.

TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR SATS-BRANDED CLASSES

The most popular are SatsCore, SatsCycling and SatsPowerStep. But perhaps the most original are: SatsCorePulse, offering high intensity interval training on the Reebok coreboard; SatsEnergy, which combines cardio training with drills from other sports such as running, athletics, soccer and American football; and SatsCore, a core workout that we've been offering for four years.

SATS is committed to helping more people work out more regularly, and we've observed that members feel safe and secure within the defined structure of group activities. Since



SATS has 113 facilities, offering a wide range of strength and CV training options, as well as a strong emphasis on classes



OLAV THORSTAD

A native of Norway, Olav Thorstad was an accomplished water polo player in high school and college, representing Norway in national championships and European Cup competitions.

Professionally, he holds a BSc with a major in economics from the Norwegian School of Management in Oslo and has an extensive background in strategic marketing and product and brand management, having worked for a number of large corporations including Coca-Cola Norway and the retailer Norgesgruppen.

In 1997, Thorstad joined SATS as a club member; a decade later he became country manager of SATS Norway, going on to become CEO of SATS Nordic Services in June 2009. He is now responsible for the company's operations in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark.

In his free time, he enjoys running, cross-country skiing and working out in SATS facilities. Thorstad is married and has three children.



our classes are designed by our staff of 13 experts, and taught by instructors we've trained ourselves, we're able to guide participants in the right direction. This ensures high quality in both content and delivery, which produces a more positive experience for our members.

HOW HAS THE RECESSION AFFECTED YOUR MAJOR MARKETS AND SATS' PERFORMANCE OVERALL?

Fortunately the recession hasn't hit the Nordic market as hard as it has other countries: our EBITDA was US\$19.7m in 2009 and US\$27.8m in 2010, while the 285,000 members we now have represents a net growth of approximately 10 per cent over the last two years. We achieved these results despite the fact that, due to health concerns, we eliminated all of our tanning beds in December 2009, incurring a net loss of several million dollars. We expect our financial results to improve further this year.

HAS THERE BEEN ANY SHIFT IN THE CONSUMER MINDSET AND HOW IS THE MARKET RESPONDING?

We're finding that people are more concerned about cost, and several low-priced operators have appeared in our markets. As a result, last September, we launched our own low-priced brand – Fresh Fitness – to target this segment of the population (see *HCM* March 11, p32). We already have six facilities in Denmark (see p16), as well as three in Norway, and we'll reach double figures by the end of the year.

These clubs are 1,200–1,300sqm (13,000–14,000sq ft) in size and have approximately 100 pieces of strength and cardio equipment, plus two studios – a 'Cycle Cinema' and a group exercise studio – that offer an extensive line-up of 220 sessions a week. Compared to our SATS facilities, the Fresh Fitness sites have fewer employees, smaller locker rooms, fewer showers

and no personal training, sauna, pool or childcare. Monthly fees are approximately US\$25 in Denmark and US\$34 in Norway, compared to US\$65 and US\$110 respectively for SATS clubs.

The Fresh Fitness concept is fully-owned by SATS except in Denmark, where we have a joint venture with a very competent local partner, led by Rasmus Ingerslev.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE REST OF 2011 AND INTO 2012?

We're opening some new clubs this year and investing heavily in refurbishing our existing ones.

We'll also be trimming the organisation, preparing it for new challenges and making it possible for us to continue introducing new, high quality products. The opportunities are numerous but, at the moment, we see great possibilities in areas such as providing tailor-made corporate solutions and increasing the penetration of personal training. We'll never stop striving to create a unique and clearly differentiated position in our markets.

Financially our business is heading in a positive direction, and we expect that trend to continue.

WHAT'S YOUR OWN FITNESS REGIMEN?

When I was young I played water polo, participating in national championships and European cups; I even had the pleasure of spending a year playing in the US. Now I do interval training on the treadmill, group training and weight training at a SATS club. I like to run during the summer and cross-country ski during the winter, and last November I competed in the New York marathon for the first time.

The original version of this feature appeared in *Club Business International*, August 2011



Murray Rudkin,
managing director
of Life Fitness UK,
outlines the diverse
training offering
available through the
company's Solution
Partner programme



PERFECT PARTNERS

What's the latest news from Life Fitness?

This is a really exciting time for Life Fitness. We have many new cutting-edge product lines and we are totally committed to supporting our customers in every area of their business.

We have put a lot of resource into our overall customer training offering, as we understand that, with the vast number of products in the gym today and the retention issues our customers face, we need to support them through coaching and product training, as well as working closely with each customer to deliver tailored courses to suit their specific sector or business.

Our internal employees are also provided with an online training process keeping all staff, from sales right through to customer support, knowledgeable about the products and new technology recently introduced.

Tell us about your partners

As the number one brand of fitness equipment worldwide, Life Fitness understands the needs of the health and fitness sector and has developed the Life Fitness Solution Partners programme – bespoke business solutions for fitness facilities offering services including design and build, business intelligence, customer training, management solutions, customer marketing and finance solutions. The Solution

Partners have all received the Life Fitness seal of approval and offer bespoke, tailor-made packages.

Life Fitness recently
launched an internal
education programme
for its sales staff
through P^TontheNET



Why did you decide to create these partnerships?

Life Fitness knows that, in order to help our customers succeed, we have to understand and support the needs of their whole business. This is why Life Fitness developed the Solution Partner programme: to deliver support where it's needed, whether you're a brand new site or an established one, offering services from design and build right through to marketing expertise, staff training, sales campaigns and customer intelligence.

How did you go about creating these partnerships?

Having spent years developing and refining our Solution Partner programme, we can reassure our customers that any recommendation we make is based on an existing relationship and contractual agreement between Life Fitness and our partners. They are all in place to meet the total business needs of our customers, and many of them work with Life Fitness to provide a seamless solution, providing one point of contact and making the whole experience less painful.

Tell us about your internal training

Life Fitness recently launched an internal educational programme for the sales team through P^TontheNET (PTN). This programme enables staff to access product training manuals and exams, broadening their knowledge of the products and allowing them to demonstrate their understanding of the key features and benefits.

In addition to this, the UK office-based staff are provided with information and workbooks on health and general wellbeing, in a bid to increase awareness around some of the key issues faced by the fitness industry.

This programme provides the continuous development and ongoing training or guidance needed in a large organisation such as Life Fitness.



Life Fitness has many new products and a total commitment to supporting its customers, says Rudkin



You offer 'customer training' – what is this?

Partnering with PTN, Life Fitness customers also have access to our e-learning portal with the following features:

- Life Fitness product education modules for facility staff to learn how to effectively use Life Fitness and Hammer Strength products.
- Ready-made Life Fitness Academy programmes specifically for Life Fitness and Hammer Strength equipment.
- Latest news and information about Life Fitness and Hammer Strength products.
- Six months' free access to thousands of professional fitness and training articles, an extensive exercise video library, and free continuing education credits (CECs) with exams – all with a special discount for PTN memberships thereafter.

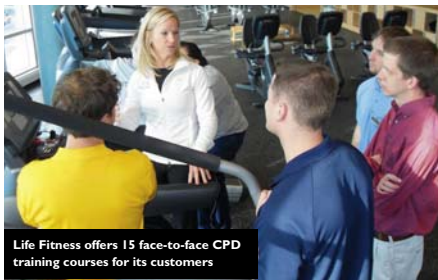
The Life Fitness customer modules are designed to teach Life Fitness and Hammer Strength product fundamentals to our customers. Each module presents in detail product story lines, features and benefits, as well as proper usage and product specifications.

Although the Life Fitness area of PTN will always be available (free of charge), the full PTN membership is also provided to our customers (for those who are not already signed up) free of charge for six months, and a special discount will be applied to those wishing to continue their full membership thereafter.

Why did Life Fitness decide to offer this to its customers?

It is not unusual for gyms to have a high turnover of staff and, for this reason, we understand that providing a low-cost, easily accessible and highly educational training programme will be invaluable to our customers.

We also know that, to support the breadth of our product portfolio, we need to have an alternative delivery mechanism rather than purely relying on face-to-face training.



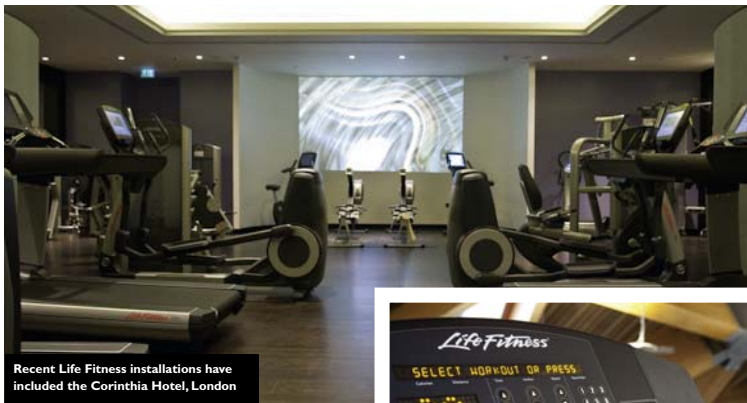
Life Fitness offers 15 face-to-face CPD training courses for its customers

You now offer 15 CPD courses to your customers – what are they?

While the e-learning portal is a fantastic training tool, we also recognise that it is not a replacement for good old-fashioned face-to-face training. This is why we're continuing to develop our CPD courses to support not only our products but also to provide training on application of those products too.

We have 15 courses that will be accredited later this year, and these consist of our six core modules (Cardiovascular, Dual Adjustable Pulley, Signature Series, Hammer MTS, Hammer Ground Base and Optima Series Strength) along with a range of workshops to support our smaller accessories, such as Hammer Dumbbells, Hammer Barbells, Swiss Ball and Medballs.

In addition to these product-based courses and workshops, we are also working with our training partners – Devolution Training and KLS Ltd – to develop more customer-specific training, really focusing on the different sectors that each individual club operates within. An example of this would be ▶



- ▶ our one-day Small Group Based PT workshop, which will enable gyms to offer group personal training to their members, and ultimately increase revenue and use the small accessories space within their facility. This is a great solution for smaller gyms, or for clubs whose local communities prefer group training.

When did you start doing this, and why?

The Life Fitness Academy has been delivering CPD-accredited courses for over seven years. We recognise the importance of providing these educational materials to support the introduction of new and existing products. The Life Fitness Academy has regular contact with our customers, gaining invaluable insights into the challenges they face.

You have also been granted a CPD licence by SkillsActive. What has this meant for your training offering?

This licence means that we can now work even more closely with our customers to deliver relevant and bespoke training courses, and still provide the credits needed to keep REPs status as an instructor or personal trainer. It means that we can really drill down into the wants and needs of our customers to provide the very best solution for their businesses, and at the same time enable them to keep their fitness staff on the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs).

Why might a club want a tailored training programme?

Tailored training is beneficial to our customers on many levels, firstly because it allows them to follow their own path rather than following an industry standard that may not be in line with their offering. Secondly, it means that they can really start to address some of the issues and challenges surrounding their membership base or target audience.

A recent example is the University of Brighton, where one of our partners, KLS Ltd, delivered a bespoke programme around the Dual Adjustable Pulley and special populations, including people with disabilities and older adults. They were also asked to deliver a training programme on inductions for special populations. This service is great for fitness facilities looking to break into different markets and appeal to a much wider audience.



Tell us about your newest training offering: industry qualifications.

Through another of our Life Fitness Solution Partners, Devolution Training, we are able to offer industry-recognised qualifications up to 30 per cent cheaper than other training providers. These courses include NVQ Level 2, Level 3 and Exercise to Music, plus the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) courses – qualifications such as performance enhancement specialist, corrective exercise specialist and many more.

The key differentiator for Devolution Training is its capacity to train on-site (for a minimum of 12 participants). This will undoubtedly save our customers both time and money on travel and expenses.

Why did you want to offer industry qualification training?

Staff training is an important part of any business, and we are pleased to be able to help our customers develop and upskill their fitness teams. We are trying to take away some of the pain that can be associated with setting up or running a fitness facility, and if we can offer competitive and convenient services through our partners, then it helps to maintain good relationships all round.

Why is Life Fitness so dedicated to training its customers?

Life Fitness is the global leader in the fitness industry, and we are committed to all of our stakeholders in providing the 'best product, best customer support and best global execution' – so we will continue to seek exciting new ways to strengthen our proposition and build lasting relationships with our customers.



BESPOKE BUSINESS SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR FITNESS FACILITY

At Life Fitness we understand the importance of supporting our customers in being successful. The Solution Partner programme has been carefully developed to ensure that we can offer the best service for all areas of your business.

Our Partner programme offers bespoke business solutions for your fitness facility. So, whether you are brand new, or fully established, Life Fitness Solution Partners can help with elements such as design and build right through to business intelligence, customer training, sales and marketing campaigns, facility management and finance solutions.

For more information on the Life Fitness Solutions Partner programme, email us at life@lifefitness.com

LIFE FITNESS

SOLUTIONS

PARTNERS

DESIGN & BUILD

BUSINESS
INTELLIGENCE

CUSTOMER
TRAINING

MANAGEMENT
SOLUTIONS

CUSTOMER
MARKETING

FINANCE
SOLUTIONS

LifeFitness

WHAT WE LIVE FOR

E: life@lifefitness.com / www.lifefitness.com

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research round-up

Meditation may have long-term implications for health and could help delay the ageing process, according to new research

stop the clock

It's well documented that meditation leads to improvements in perception and wellbeing. Small trials involving short courses of meditation have also indicated that it can influence physical responses such as lowering blood pressure, slowing disease progression in HIV patients and improving the immune response in cancer patients.

Now research from the Shamatha Project – the most comprehensive long-term study of intensive meditation to date* – is the first to link positive wellbeing with cellular ageing.

three-month retreats

The Shamatha Project, which focused on 60 meditators, was co-ordinated by Clifford Saron, a neuroscientist at the Center for Mind and Brain at the University of California, Davis, US.

Half of the participants attended a three-month retreat in the spring of 2007, while the other half, a control group, abstained from meditating at that time. The groups switched places in the autumn.

While at the retreat, participants took part in meditation sessions for about six hours a day. They practised a mix of mindfulness meditation, in which people are aware of their own thoughts and surroundings, and compassion meditation, in which people extend feelings of love and kindness to others.

Over the three months, the groups were subjected to a variety of tests, mostly looking at the control of emotions and changes in cognitive function. Yet Elissa Epel, a psychologist from the University of California, San Francisco, was also interested in finding out what impact the meditation had on telomeres.

Telomeres are DNA structures at the end of chromosomes, which shorten every time a cell divides. When they fall



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Activities that increase your sense of wellbeing may impact on your physiology

below a certain length, the cell cannot divide and eventually dies. This cell loss causes wrinkling and ageing. An enzyme called telomerase, however, can rebuild and lengthen telomeres.

meditation effect

Epel found that, at the end of the three-month retreat, telomerase activity was one-third higher in the white blood cells of participants on the retreat compared to those in the control group. In an article in UK newspaper *The Observer*, Epel said that in theory this could stop and maybe even reverse cellular ageing: "If the increase in telomerase is sustained long enough, it's logical to infer that this group would develop more stable and possibly longer telomeres over time."

At the retreat, the psychological state of participants was also assessed. Three psychological qualities in particular resulted in higher telomerase activity:

a higher feeling of perceived control (over life and surroundings); an increased sense of having a purpose in life; and decreased neurotic feelings such as being anxious, tense or in a bad mood.

Saron concludes: "The take-home message is not that meditation directly increases telomerase activity and therefore a person's health and longevity. Rather, meditation may improve a person's psychological wellbeing, and in turn these changes are related to telomerase activity in immune cells, which has the potential to promote longevity in those cells."

"Activities that increase a person's sense of wellbeing may have a profound effect on the most fundamental aspects of physiology."

To that effect, simply doing something we enjoy or which makes us feel less stressed – whether that's meditating, exercising, gardening, reading or painting – may help us age well and live longer.

*Jacobs TL, et al. Intensive meditation training, immune cell telomerase activity and psychological mediators. *Psychoneuroendocrinology* (2010).

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webracing packages and new bike

WebRacing software, from InStyle Fitness, allows users of exercise bikes, rowers, cross-trainers and treadmills to enter a virtual world in the form of a live on-screen avatar and compete against other users via the web. Fluid Rower and SportsArt will launch full WebRacing packages later this year, while Instyle Fitness showcased the wireless WebRacer bike at LIW.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

instyle



flexcast digital interface by zoom media

Zoom Media has launched its patented FlexCast digital media interface. FlexCast offers digital programming that is completely customised to audience preferences and the business needs of operators. Operators can choose TV, their own programming, digital signage, music, personal trainer biographies, interactive group exercise timetables and in-club promotions, all managed centrally.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS

zoom media

Wherever you are in the world, find the right products and services 24/7 by logging on to Health Club Management's free search engine www.fitness-kit.net



p80 touchscreen console from precor

Precor's P80 console incorporates a capacitive touch-screen that allows users to interact with the software in a similar way to using an iPad screen. It offers an upright viewing angle to ensure correct user posture, new simple to use motion controls and high quality graphics to draw members deeper into their workout. Each console also features an ethernet connection to enable networking.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

precor

full install now available from sound dynamics

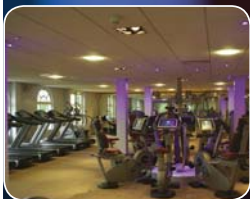
Sound Dynamics has added a full, nationwide audio and visual install service to its portfolio. Whether it's a portable sound system for aqua/aerobic classes or a full install, the company prides itself on offering great value for money and service levels.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS

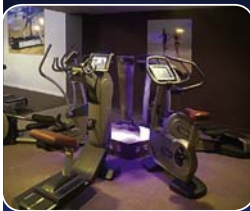
sound dynamics

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practical and fashionable

Workwear Express offers a range of sportswear for gyms and health club staff that is comfortable, flexible and on-trend.

The range includes shorts and trousers with moisture management finish, and tops with cool-dri moisture control fabric. All clothing can be customised with a company's logo and prices start at £5.07 for a T-shirt.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS

workwear express



bespoke uniforms and a personal service

A personal account manager and a tailor-made online ordering system are just two of the features Beat Concepts offers its corporate wear clients. The company – which has supplied the leisure industry including Fitness First, LA Fitness and Esporta for many years – makes bespoke uniforms and works with its clients to ensure every order is taken care of, from initial design to manufacture and individual club deliveries.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS

beat concepts

fitness-kit.net

the search engine for health & fitness buyers



Wherever you are in the world, find the right products and services 24/7 by logging on to *Health Club Management's* free search engine www.fitness-kit.net



fairtrade uniforms from leisurewear direct

Are you a responsible employer? Then demonstrate this through your choice of staff uniform.

Leisurewear Direct offers a range of T-shirts, polos and sweatshirts that meet the Fair Labor Association standards – all available in a wide range of colours. There's also a minimal administration procedure, as orders are made by staff name, with the uniform delivery then comprising individually named packages.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORDS

leisurewear direct

technical fabric range from p81

P81 has launched a range of breathable, moisture-wicking uniform options using bespoke technical fabrics. Specially suited to the health and fitness market, the range varies from textured moisture-wicking polo shirts to smooth, tight-fitting skins designed to keep the body at its optimum performance temperature – fabrics used by many of the high street sports brands.

Club branding and low minimum order quantities are available.

The British Gymnastics Association recently used P81 for its team kits, which needed to offer good value



for money but with no compromise on appearance, quality, durability or comfort. P81 designed a fully bespoke kit in breathable, technical fabrics and styles to suit all ages and sexes. The range included tracksuits, polo shirts (gents and ladies) and a kit bag.

fitness-kit.net KEYWORD

p81



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Kylemark offers Cooltex, Microfibre and Coolplus fabrics in its purpose-made leisure uniforms – across many styles of poloshirt, T-shirt and active wear that can all be embroidered or printed with a company's logo.

"The importance of having smart, well-dressed staff who are easily identifiable to the customer is a crucial factor in the success of any business," says Ruairaidh Macleod, MD of Ayr-based Kylemark Corporatewear. "In addition to this, leisure staff require technical garments that allow them not just to look good but be comfortable."

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD** kylemark

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The company also offers a bespoke uniform design service and a low minimum order volume. "Our ability to source and produce high quality customised uniforms will leave your



fitness teams looking professional and on-brand. But it's the influence of our technology that really makes the difference," says Geraldine Tuck, sales and marketing director.

fitness-kit.net **KEYWORD** d2f



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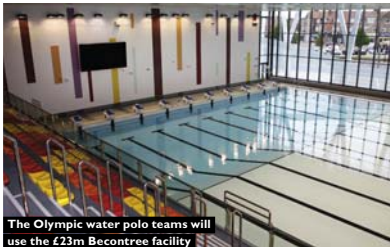
SUPPLIER SHOWCASE

WE TAKE A LOOK AT RECENT PROJECTS FOR GLADSTONE AND MATRIX

SYSTEM REFRESH

SUPPLIER: Gladstone

CLIENT: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham



The Olympic water polo teams will use the £23m Becontree facility

“The opening of our new £23m Becontree Health Leisure Centre provided an ideal opportunity to review and upgrade our membership systems across all three of Barking and Dagenham’s leisure centres,” says Andy Knight, of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

“Becontree Health Leisure Centre is a state of the art facility that’s been chosen as the Games-time training venue for the Olympic water polo teams; modern technology to assist both us and our visitors with their on-site experience is a must.

“We have been successfully using Gladstone’s systems for more than nine years, but the previous configuration – based on our sites’ requirements from a long time ago – was not appropriate for our current needs, as the way we sell and the types of products we offer are now completely different.

“Gladstone carried out a full business review to determine how we could streamline our selling process, to reduce transaction time and make it simpler for our staff to use. Gladstone’s software experts discovered a number of issues that were significantly slowing our systems – not least 15,000 expired memberships! In addition to this, more than 50 per cent of the products and services on the system were redundant, and we had 66 subscription types, most of which were no longer available.”

Richard Grazier, sales and marketing director for Gladstone Health and Leisure, adds: “The business review started with a system and technical audit, so we could highlight the pitfalls of the current operation and make recommendations to improve the processes. From this, an upgrade to the latest version of Plus2 was made, along with a system rebuild and reconfiguration.

“The key was to ensure that the system would remain familiar to the staff. The simplicity of the new system, which has created an obvious path to follow, means it’s difficult for staff to deviate from the correct way of carrying out transactions.”

Knight adds: “Gladstone backed this up with staff training to ensure that everyone follows the same procedures. That training also means we’re now using more of the 50 available user fields. Meanwhile, the archiving software module means we can closely manage the removal of historic data – we can keep it for analysis, but without slowing our system.

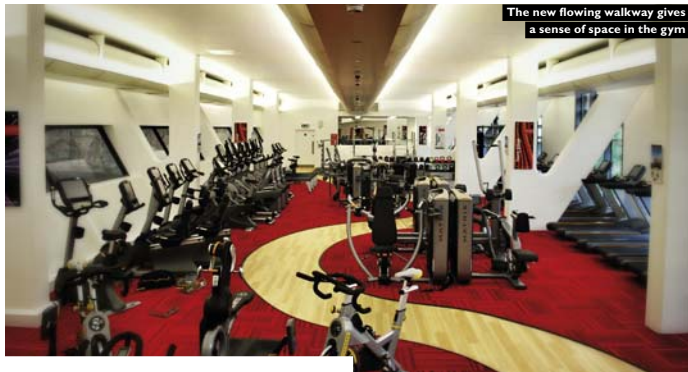
“At Becontree Health Leisure Centre, we also opted for a kiosk entry solution with smartcard fast-track entry, which enables high accuracy activity reporting.

“In a nutshell, the rebuild and reconfiguration has provided us with a clean and simple to use system that’s still familiar to the staff.”

For more information, visit www.gladstonemrm.com

The new site needed technology to suit modern user needs





The new flowing walkway gives a sense of space in the gym

LEADING BY INNOVATION

SUPPLIER: Matrix Fitness
CLIENT: Imperial College London

Matrix Fitness has been working closely with Imperial College London to create a top of the range gym at Ethos, its flagship sports centre in South Kensington.

The project, which began in early 2011, challenged Matrix to develop a state of the art facility that would meet the needs of the gym's diverse range of users, which includes around 14,000 students and 2,500 staff, as well as 600 private members.

Matrix's London region area manager Andy Milne explains: "The brief from Ethos was to create more space, introduce new technology and innovation, develop a speed circuit and create a number of zones. The overall

objective: to create efficient workout solutions for people of all fitness levels.

"We conducted several site visits and had meetings with Imperial College to discuss the options, working very much in partnership with both the gym and the design company, Concept Design.

"This close working relationship was essential to the success of the project. For example, following discussions about the old design having rigid walkways, we created a flowing walkway throughout the site,

giving the illusion of more space and allowing users to see more of the gym at one time."

He continues: "The reconfigured layout is a series of zones that represent the journey people take when striving to improve their fitness. The Speed, Burn, Tech, Tone and Functional zones allow people of all fitness levels to work out effectively and in less time – essential for a gym that has up to 17,000 users.

"Other time-saving solutions will include the MX Circuit, which we'll be installing shortly. This is a pneumatic circuit that reduces the need to adjust equipment for different levels of fitness and size, so users can move through the equipment at a greater speed. Ethos will be the first university site and gym in London to have these facilities.

"In the meantime, the gym has a CV equipment circuit with a traffic-light signal system. This allows users to set their own workout, exercising independently of a gym instructor, for an intense burst of activity in a short amount of time."

The CV equipment also offers Virtual Active™ by Matrix – a fully interactive, cinema quality, video-based entertainment programme that allows gym users to select a route in an iconic destination, experiencing gradual terrain changes underfoot and hearing ambient noises while they are working out. Members can also take part in their own virtual indoor cycling session using the new MyRide console.

Neil Mosley, head of Sport Imperial, explains: "Ours is a busy centre, but we want to offer the best possible service to our members, so we needed an innovative solution that would allow people to get a thorough workout in the most time-efficient way. Matrix Fitness has helped us to achieve this goal, improving the experience for our existing members and allowing us to accommodate new ones."

Jon Johnston, MD of Matrix Fitness and a former student at Imperial, adds: "This has been an exciting and rewarding project for Matrix. We hope that the gym's growing number of members, from elite athletes to fitness novices, are proud of the new centre."

For more information, visit www.matrixfitness.co.uk



Dr Tim Brabants MBE at the official launch event



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lightweights

GRAPE NEWS: WINE CAN AID WEIGHT LOSS

It's commonly believed that alcohol causes weight gain because it's high in sugar, but now scientists from Spain suggest that a daily glass of a less-fattening alcoholic drink such as wine won't cause people to pile on the pounds – and that it could even help in losing weight.

Researchers from the University of Navarra analysed 31 existing studies and found that, while heavy drinkers gained weight, the data did not clearly show that moderate drinking was linked to increases in weight.

The study, published in *Nutrition Reviews*, also suggested that more research should be carried out on different types of alcohol. It reported that: "Light to moderate alcohol intake, especially wine intake, may be more likely to protect against weight gain, whereas consumption of spirits has been positively associated with weight gain." Details: www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/VEITLUD



FEET FIRST WITH NEW UK WORKOUT

Leave your trainers at the door to take part in a barefoot group exercise class – a session that's made its way to the UK from the US.

willPower & Grace combines foot conditioning, cardiovascular exercises and tips on how to land to reduce injuries. The idea is that joint flexibility and blood circulation will increase if the feet aren't restricted by trainers. The exercises also help address foot imbalances, which can in turn impact on posture and problems in the knees and hips in particular.

The class was created in the US by Stacey Lei Krauss and is offered in select Virgin Active clubs in the UK.

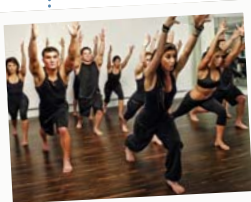


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IRONING BORED? THEN TAKE IT TO THE EXTREME

As motivation to exercise begins to dwindle in the third quarter of the year, health clubs might think about setting up an outdoor activity group with a difference – Extreme Ironing.

This bizarre sport involves taking an ironing board to an unusual, or downright odd, location and ironing an item of clothing – with a picture taken to verify the achievement. Some of the venues include cliff tops, ski-slopes (while skiing), motorways, mid-air (while parachuting) and even war zones. Attempts have also been made to set and break an underwater ironing world record in the US.

The so-called sport was created by Phil Shaw, owner of a UK knitwear factory with a love for rock climbing, in 1997 and is now popular worldwide.

more than just a pizza topping...

People hoping to keep cholesterol levels low through fitness might also consider eating cooked tomatoes, according to a recent study review.

Researchers at the University of Adelaide have found that the compound lycopene – an antioxidant that gives ripe tomatoes their red colour – can lower the bad cholesterol LDL by 10 per cent. It was also found to be "comparable to the effect of low doses of medication

commonly prescribed for people with slightly elevated cholesterol".

According to researcher Dr Karin Ried, over 25mg of lycopene is required to help lower LDL, high levels of which can lead to heart disease.

That's the equivalent of 50g of tomato paste or half a litre of tomato juice. If eaten whole, cooked tomatoes are apparently best as they're more easily absorbed than raw ones.



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