

# health club management

JULY 2010

INTERVIEW

## STEVE KASS & TOM JOHNSTON

of American Leisure on global leadership  
in the provision of lifestyle services

## CORPORATE OUTREACH

AN UNTAPPED MARKET  
FOR HEALTH CLUBS?



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publication  
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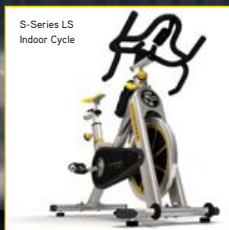
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## making connections

I visited a new osteopath a while back and got into a discussion about non-returning patients. He was philosophical, saying he firmly believed patients and therapists 'found each other' and needed to have a harmony in terms of their styles and preferences if they were to work together.

He had loyal patients who'd been visiting him for years and some that only came once, but he believed that was OK, because they would be likely to go on to find a therapist elsewhere with whom they felt connected.

His attitude put into words something I realised I'd always been vaguely aware of, but had never articulated. It struck me I'd been doing that very thing – trying different therapists until I found one I felt comfortable with and who worked for me. It's not a right or wrong thing, all the people I'd visited were technically competent – it's something less tangible. More about trust, instinct and 'fit'.

As it turns out, I've been going back to this particular therapist for a while now and getting great results. However, his comments got me thinking about how we connect with our customers in the

health club – especially in areas where we work one-to-one with them – and the vital importance of these connections to our success in terms of customer satisfaction.

It's difficult to overestimate the importance of a strong relationship in terms of loyalty to a club. These intangibles are challenging to manage, but there's a great deal we can do operationally to increase the likelihood of success and ultimately retention.

Starting with recruitment, you can ensure you have different personality types on your team. This way, you're more likely to be able to match customers with trainers they feel

comfortable with and this in turn will mean more of your potential customers will join and stay.

If everyone on the team is a noisy, bouncy extrovert, then some members will run a mile, so mix it up and match the right member with the right instructor – especially if they're mentoring them regularly.

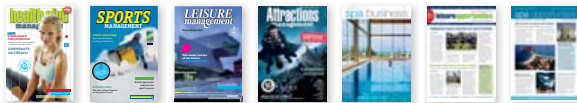
Ongoing staff training can help your team extend their range of styles so they're more likely to be able to empathise with different types of people and adjust their approach accordingly. There will always be extremes that are hard to accommodate and putting a new member with the wrong instructor is likely to lead to them heading for the door, so managing your team so there's a fit is vital.

In *Health Club Management* September 2009, we looked at the importance of customising exercise prescription and how Myers Briggs personality type indicators can be used to refine this task. "Giving your customers an exercise plan that matches their personality type increases the likelihood that they'll continue to engage with it over the long term," according to OPP's John Hackston. "If staff can be trained in how to pick up on the differences in others, as well as making changes in their own behaviour, they will be able to make a significant impact on retention levels."

In this issue, the issue of creating bonds with customers is examined on page 65, where our panel of experts give their views. We'd be interested to hear your ideas and experiences, so write and let us know how you're managing this important part of your business so we can share best practice.

**Liz Terry, editor**

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# welcome to HEALTH CLUB MANAGEMENT



Get in the Zumba groove p46



Maggie's night hike p25

## contents

### 06 letters

The FIA on promoting VAT exemption for fitness facilities, and a look at why clubs and leisure centres might be losing their sense of fun

### 10 news round-up

Anytime Fitness announces UK plans, Harlow Leisurezone opens and Pure Gym plans expansion

### 16 international news

DiR expands into yoga, SHOKK opens its first site in Qatar, the Australian music usage verdict is announced, and a re-opening for Tel Aviv University's refurbished gym

### 18 fia update

The FIA's CMO looks back on his first year in the post, and the FIA announces discounted VPL licence

### 22 people news

DC Leisure appoints group health and wellbeing manager, and Pure Gym names new group ops manager



Ceilidh workouts p75



Meeting the rehab demand p63

### 25 competitive edge

Events include the Great Scottish Run, Maggie's Night Hike and a *Men's Health* competition

### 27 diary dates

Upcoming dates for the diary include the FIA's FLAME Conference, the World Leisure Congress and Leisure Industry Week

### 28 everyone's talking about... is fitness still fun?

Has the more serious, healthcare-focused element of the fitness sector's offering taken the fun out of things? Kath Hudson asks the experts

### 30 interview steve kass & tom johnston

Rhianon Howells talks to the CEO and COO of American Leisure about delivering lifestyle services and becoming a truly global company

### 34 enduring appeal

Mike Hill visits the Sydney Olympic Aquatic Centre in Australia to see what London can learn about fulfilling its Olympic legacy promise

### 38 making it personal

FitPro's education manager Laura McStay investigates the different approaches to exercise prescription

### 42 fitness-kit.net special studio equipment

Including the new LIVESTRONG by Matrix range and the 20th anniversary of the Reebok Step

### 43 viva españa

Karen Maxwell looks at the life-changing approach of the RFH Fitness fitness camp in Andalusia

### 46 in the groove

We talk to the founder of Zumba



Yoga leads to mindful eating p64



How to improve member relations p65



Making the most of your data p56



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### buyers' guide:

For suppliers of products and services in the health club and spa markets, turn to p71



## 51 money talks

The many member payment options now available mean clubs can focus on what really matters – helping their members achieve their training goals

## 54 safe not sorry

A look at the health and safety implications for fitness operators of the recent court case brought against Holmes Place Health Clubs

## 56 data mining

Exercise management systems are one of the most useful tools available to fitness clubs, so why aren't more managers using the data they collect?

## 60 mending members

Harley Street osteopath Nick Potter gives his thoughts on the opportunities for health clubs and leisure centres to tap in to the market for prehab and rehab

## 63 liw preview rehab round-up

Details of ways in which suppliers can help operators to deliver rehab

## 64 mind over matter

Practising yoga is more likely to lead to 'mindful eating' than other forms of physical activity, says new research

## 65 creating bonds

Julie Cramer investigates ways in which operators can enhance their relationship with their members

## 68 corporate outreach

Is corporate wellness a market that more health club operators should be tapping in to?

## 75 lightweights

Samurai fitness classes, ceilihd workouts and evidence that exercise enables to people to continue their love lives into their 80s



# 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](mailto:healthclub@leisuremedia.com)

## monitoring and interventions in kids' fitness, diet and health

In reference to your feature on testing kids' fitness (*HCM* May 10, p24), I would like to share with you what's happening at Pent Valley Leisure Centre, winner of the 2009 FLAME Award for 'Educational Club of the Year'.

Generally, schools do not assess the health and fitness of students when they start at the school. They're just put into PE lessons and off they go. At Pent Valley, we decided to change this.

With effect from September 2009, we began an initial three-year plan to carry out a formal, comprehensive induction on every child under the age of 16 attending Pent Valley Technology College. This means doing just over

1,000 inductions with PAR-Q, blood pressure and resting heart rate, height, weight and body composition. These measurements are reviewed every six months while the child is at the school and interventions planned as required. Every child gets a personalised exercise programme designed by a Level 3 instructor, which is linked back into PE.

The school, governors and parents are totally behind the scheme, which also links to the Healthy Schools initiative and our cashless catering system, which allows parents to monitor what their child is consuming while at school.

We're looking at health, fitness and diet as we feel this is the way forward for the children of Pent Valley. If anyone wants more information, please contact me on +44 (0)1303 277539 or by emailing [stuart.wise@pent-valley.kent.sch.uk](mailto:stuart.wise@pent-valley.kent.sch.uk)

**stuart wise**  
centre manager, pent valley leisure centre



PICTURE: WWW.STOCK.COM/PALLI\_BAO

### Industry must prove it can save the Treasury funds in the long term

#### we need evidence to prove the vat business case

I read with interest the concerns of Peter Roberts, MD of Pure Gym, with regards to VAT and the potential for its increase in the near term (*HCM* June, p28). With this increase now confirmed in the recent budget, I thought it would be helpful to outline the FIA's position on this matter.

Physical activity and exercise is increasingly seen as a healthcare provision. It's our belief that, in time, this will lead to a reclassification of fitness services, under the Sixth Directive of the EU, to be exempt from VAT. However, the £156bn deficit that confronts the new Chancellor will require a dramatic cut in public expenditure and an increase in the fees received by the Treasury through taxation. Whatever we read in the press, pressure to increase National Insurance and income tax is likely to follow the VAT hike.

To strengthen our case for exemption, we will need to prove that a reduction in VAT will be passed on to the public, that it will lead to a direct increase in participation, and that this increase in participation will lead to a beneficial health outcome for the individual – one that saves the Treasury funds in the long run in terms of healthcare saving.

The FIA is working hard to collate the evidence to prove this case for the whole industry. We wish those segments that are already VAT exempt to remain so, and would like to find ways for the rest of the industry to join them.

**david stalker**  
executive director, fia



Measuring up: A Pent Valley student has his body composition measured

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## we must change our focus from sales to retention

I read with interest Liz Terry's comments in her 'remember the fun' letter (*HCM* May 10, p3). See also p28, this issue.

While I agree with the observations, I think that as an industry we can hardly be surprised at the way we currently deliver our product. Quite rightly, Liz points out that classes with well established, extrovert instructors who develop a team spirit are likely to be the main areas of liveliness in a club. However, the reason for this is because we allow them to get on with their job. Customers will visit a class and may return should they enjoy it – but the instructor has only to focus on delivering a great session.

A GM, meanwhile, is responsible for creating an engaged and motivated team that will deliver engaged and motivated members. However, before a GM gets to that part of their role, they have to deliver 'x' sales, ensuring their sales team is doing its job, that the marketing is in place and that attrition is not increasing. No matter how focused a GM is on delivering delight to his or her members, the company focus will always be on sales. This is what we

have created: GMs who are no longer generalists but sales managers.

Junior staff need to watch senior managers walk the floor, engaging with staff and members and delivering customer delight, so they can learn to do the same. Unfortunately that's not happening because the GM is in the office telling his manager that the 'target will come in'. Creating customer delight is not about answering the call in four rings or calling everybody by their first name: it's about creating relationships that are individual to those involved. This industry, and much of the service sector, insists on treating people 'as you would expect to be treated'. However, we should be treating people 'as they would like to be treated' – something we'll never find out unless we're better at interacting with them.

In the meantime, our focus remains on sales, with retention covered by little more than a contract. The irony is that, if we flipped this on its head to put the focus on retention, surely sales would follow.

**mark beamson**  
ceo, *fostering excellence*



**You need to be fit to excel at golf – but golf can also be a way to get fit**

### golf fitness is not just for the professionals

In your feature about sports conditioning for golf professionals (*HCM* June 10, p44) Shay Brennan's comment about people traditionally perceiving golf as a slow sport is absolutely true. However, not only do you need to be fit to play golf in the modern era, but golf can also be a way of getting fit.

At Sheffield International Venues (SIV), we're keen to actively promote golf as a means of exercise in itself and are encouraging people to take to the courses this summer to stay fit and healthy. Playing 36 holes a week burns around 2,900 calories; a round of golf can have the same health benefits as a full 45-minute workout.

One of the primary benefits of the sport is the fact that you actually walk several miles around the course. Playing 18 holes of golf can involve traversing three to five miles and most courses can have you climbing uphill and downhill, working several muscles in the process.

Golf also requires co-ordination, concentration and physical effort to play successfully so, as the feature explained, fitness is important for those who want to improve their game, addressing issues of strength, flexibility and balance and paying attention to detail.

**andy carnall**

*golf gm, siv, and class aa pga professional*



**Group exercise: The instructor's only responsibility is to deliver a great class**



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## in brief...

**£100,000 revamp for atherstone facility**

Plans for a £100,000 revamp of the Lifetimes Fitness Suite at Atherstone Leisure Complex have been given the green light by North Warwickshire Borough Council.

The venue is set to benefit from new equipment and technical advice from Matrix Fitness Systems as part of the work, which aims to improve facilities for users. IFI-accredited CV and strength equipment from Matrix is set to be offered at the fitness suite, which will also benefit from new flooring and décor.

**feedback sought for twentyten report**

The Fitness Industry Association (FIA) is inviting feedback from the industry as it seeks to draw up a comprehensive future strategy for the health and fitness sector.

The FIA has now published the findings of the TwentyTen Commission and is looking for people working in the industry to comment and add their views. David Stalker, FIA executive director, says: "In the 20-year history of the FIA, we've never undertaken anything as ambitious as this commission." To offer your views, email [TwentyTen@fia.org.uk](mailto:TwentyTen@fia.org.uk) or call Howard de Souza on +44 (0)7734 956 132. The report can be found at [www.fia.org.uk/2010-commission.html](http://www.fia.org.uk/2010-commission.html)

**new-look fitness facility for perth**

Perth and Kinross Leisure (PKL) has opened the new-look Rodney Fitness Centre in Perth, following the redevelopment of the Scottish facility.

Life Fitness has installed 28 pieces of equipment from its Elevation Series Engage CV range as part of the main fitness gym, which has also benefited from new lighting, paintwork and flooring.

The centre, which offers access to its facilities on both a 'pay and play' and a membership basis, also incorporates a resistance training area and a group exercise studio with more than 40 classes a week.

**anytime announces uk plans**

US-based health club franchise Anytime Fitness has revealed plans to open 50 sites in the UK and Ireland by the end of 2012 after it secured a master franchise agreement.

The company, which is looking to expand its international operations, currently operates 1,250 clubs in the US and has also opened nearly 100 facilities in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and India.

Potential sites are being considered in the Greater London area and across southern England, with locations including suburban areas near large cities and smaller towns that do not have a health club. Anytime Fitness' UK clubs will be 372sq m (4,000sq ft) in size, fitted with a range of CV and strength equipment and open 24 hours a day. Membership is likely to cost between £25 and £35 a month.

Justin McDonnell, Anytime Fitness master franchisee for Australia and New Zealand, has been appointed to lead the master franchise group for the UK and Ireland. He says: "We will not be making any significant changes to the Anytime Fitness model as it currently exists in the US, Australia and New Zealand.

"We believe the opportunity exists for smaller, neighbourhood clubs in the UK and Ireland, providing greater convenience and high service standards,

which will appeal to existing club users in those markets and also encourage new customers to participate."

Independent retail planning consultant Andy Thompson – also part of the group's UK and Ireland consortium – adds: "We hope to open the first Anytime Fitness club in the UK by the end of this summer.

"We're currently looking at sites in the Greater London area, the south-east and also the south-west of England. Our plan is to have 50 clubs operational by the end of 2012."



**Anytime Fitness currently operates 1,250 health clubs across the US**

**harlow leisurezone opens**

**Facilities include a 25m swimming pool with seating for 300 spectators**

Harlow Leisurezone – a new £25m leisure complex developed as part of the wider regeneration of the Essex town – opened its doors on 23 June.

Facilities at the new centre include a 25m swimming pool with seating for 300 spectators, a learner pool, an indoor tennis hall and a sports hall built to national club standards for badminton, basketball and trampolining.

A large health and fitness suite, three fitness studios, four squash courts and a health spa are also on offer at the Leisurezone, as well as a lounge bar/restaurant, a daycare nursery and a café.

Abingdon-based contractor Leadbitter had been due to hand the complex over to the Harlow Gateway Partnership by Christmas last year (2009), before an issue with the installation of fire dampers delayed the scheme.

edited by tom walker. email: [tomwalker@leisuremedia.com](mailto:tomwalker@leisuremedia.com)



Pure Gym plans an aggressive roll out – 24 sites will open over the next two years

## pure gym's expansion plans

Low-cost health club operator Pure Gym has confirmed plans to open 24 new sites across the UK over the next two years, following a £10m investment in the company.

A successful fundraising effort by Magenta Partners – led by principal investor and retail entrepreneur Tom Singh – will allow the operator to add to its existing five sites.

Pure Gym – which currently runs clubs in Sheffield, Manchester, Leeds, Edinburgh and Wolverhampton – offers monthly memberships starting at £9.99 and provides 24-hour access to its sites, seven days a week. Two new clubs – in

Birmingham and Glasgow – are set to open shortly, while a further six sites are in the pipeline, with Aberdeen, Belfast and Derby among prospective Pure Gym locations.

Pure Gym chief executive officer Peter Roberts says: "We saw a big gap in the market, targeting people who wanted to work out in a no-frills environment without sacrificing the quality of the equipment they use.

"To date our gyms have filled their memberships very successfully and we believe the time is right to roll out across the UK." For an interview with Roberts, see HCM June 2010, p26-28.

## the gym group secures new plymouth site

Budget operator The Gym Group (TGG) has further expanded its portfolio after securing a new site in Plymouth, Devon.

The new 175-station gym, which will be equipped by Matrix Fitness Systems, is one of five new sites to launch this year and adds to the company's existing six facilities across the country.

Launched by chief executive officer John Treharne in 2008, TGG is open 24 hours a day throughout the week

and offers a membership rate of £14.99 a month with no contracts.

The company has been supported by private equity group Bridges Ventures as part of efforts to provide new facilities for people of all abilities and ages to boost their health levels.

Treharne – formerly founder of Dragons Health Club Group – says: "The ongoing success of The Gym Group is most satisfying to see, with our 11th acquisition in Plymouth reinforcing our nationwide presence."

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## in brief...

**leisure centre plans for kensington**

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, in London, has asked residents for their views on plans for a new leisure centre.

The borough council is faced with the challenge of building a new secondary school and rebuilding Kensington Leisure Centre, now that it is nearing the end of its useful life. The council says it needs to work out whether the two new sites could be built on the land now occupied by the existing leisure centre.

Drop-in sessions were held on 1 and 3 June and a workshop held on 7 June, where residents and leisure centre users were able to identify the issues of concern and potential options for the redevelopment, which architects John McAslan and Partners will take into consideration when putting together their feasibility study.

**new fitness suite for sussex college**

Sussex Coast College Hastings has unveiled its new fitness suite – part of a wider £97m regeneration scheme in the centre of the East Sussex town. More than 40 stations of CV and strength equipment were installed by Life Fitness as part of a £125,000 investment in the new suite, which is set to be used as a teaching facility for sports and fitness students. However, it's also hoped the fitness suite may open up to the local community through GP referrals in the future.



**New personal training partnership has been deemed "a great success"**

**gosling unveils pt partnership**

A £4.7m fitness facility at Gosling Sports Park (GSP) in Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, has joined forces with Club Training to unveil a new personal training initiative for the summer.

Gosling Lifestyle Facility – which offers a 100-station gym, a wellness system and a weights area – will host the new partnership to provide a free trial personal training session for people of all ages and abilities.

A spokesperson for Gosling says: "Our new partnership with Club Training has been a great success so far, and we have already had a lot of interest in the new PT sessions."

Steve Plunkett, an instructor from Club Training, adds: "Good personal training is more than just an hour on the gym floor – it's about lifestyle management and a sensible diet."

GSP has also launched an Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence for tennis – a two-year course that will lead to an NVQ Level 3 qualification.

**bmf opens new training venue**

Outdoor fitness training provider British Military Fitness (BMF) unveiled its 100th venue at Abington Park in Northampton on 14 June.

Established in 1999 by Major Robin Cope, BMF operates at locations across the UK, allowing people of all abilities to take part in military-style workouts.

In addition to its UK sites – which include Leeds, Edinburgh, Cardiff and 24 locations in London – BMF has also expanded to South Africa and is currently planning to open new venues in Australia, North America and Europe.

Cope says: "The military background of all our instructors has ensured that the trainers provide our members with plenty of motivation to get the best from their workout. Our unique classes are always varied, challenging and fun, which is what our members want – and that's why they keep coming back for more."

*A full interview with Robin Cope will appear in the next issue of HCM*



**BMF's 100th site was unveiled at Abington Park, Northampton**

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## new gym for crystal palace

Crystal Palace National Sports Centre (CPNSC) has launched its new health and fitness suite, following a £1m investment by London-based sports trust Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL).

The scheme, which forms part of a wider £20m programme to upgrade the venue, was carried out in conjunction with the London Development Agency (LDA) and includes the creation of five new dedicated fitness zones.

The new zones include an Aerobikes studio – fitted with 15 bikes and virtual reality ‘simulators’ – and a 100-station CV and resistance area equipped by Technogym. There is also

a space for stretching and core work, and a free weights zone. The health and fitness suite is designed to provide facilities for CPNSC users of all abilities and complements the venue’s existing 50m swimming pool.

GLL partnership manager Tony Wallace says: “With the London Olympics and Paralympics on the horizon, our aim is for the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre to be a hub of excellence in sport both leading up to 2012 and beyond. Other improvements planned for CPNSC this year include the creation of a junior fitness zone and a new climbing wall.”

## flame 2010 finalists revealed

The finalists for the FIA’s 2010 FLAME Awards have been announced.

In total, 150 nominations were received for the 10 categories, which have been whittled down to 30 finalists.

All of the finalists will now be visited by a Leisure-net Solutions expert, who will carry out mystery consumer satisfaction surveys on unsuspecting members of the gym.

The winners will be announced at the FIA FLAME Conference 2010, taking place at Cheltenham Racecourse on 14 July.

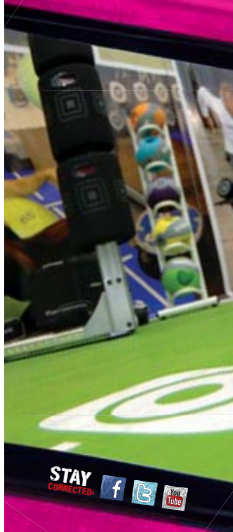
## working in fitness survey

SkillsActive has unveiled the seventh annual Working in Fitness survey, which is one of the largest studies of its kind in the UK.

The survey, which will be conducted online, is designed to monitor job satisfaction, training and salary trends within the UK’s health and fitness sector. The survey is open to every industry professional.

To take part in the survey, visit [www.skillsactive.com/wif10](http://www.skillsactive.com/wif10)

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## independent

INDEPENDENT  
OPERATOR FOCUS

### liw to host second iou event

This year's Leisure Industry Week (LIW) will play host to the largest ever gathering of independent operators, all attending the second annual IOU (Independent Operators Unite) forum, which takes place at the show.

"The numbers are set to triple from 2009, with 1,000 independent operators anticipated to attend the 2010 event," says Dave Wright, founder of IOU.

IOU will offer educational seminars, networking events and a dedicated lounge for independents, as well as access to hundreds of industry suppliers exhibiting at LIW; entry to the trade show is included in the package.

Seminars will cover topics including cost-effective marketing ideas, tips from independent clubs around the globe, retention strategies and sales-boosting suggestions. Entry to LIW, the IOU education programme and networking



**Attendees at last year's IOU party, held during the annual LIW event**

opportunities is free of charge for IOU members, membership of which is available through the FIA to all 2,500 independent operators across the UK.

LIW takes place at the NEC Birmingham from 21–23 September 2010.

### the third space to open second site

The owners of The Third Space health club in Piccadilly, London, will open a second Third Space site in the capital's Marylebone area in spring 2011.

The new 1,400sq m (15,000sq ft) club will cost around £2m to design and develop and will be located at the Marylebone Hotel.

Although exact details of services and facilities are yet to be confirmed, the club will include a full service spa and a large swimming pool.



The Third Space will gain a sister club in Marylebone early next year

### hatton's gym adds new classes



**Hatton (centre): Targeting the over-50s**

Hatton Health and Fitness Centre in Hyde, Greater Manchester, has added a range of new group classes to its offering.

The 1,000sq m (10,764sq ft) club, which is owned by champion boxer Ricky Hatton, has introduced Hi-Low Retro and Holistic Fusion classes, as well as Zumba classes.

According to club manager Nigel Wilkes, the new classes are being offered free of charge to members, as well as to non-members aged over 50 on a trial basis; it's part of the club's objectives to encourage older people into the facility, which includes a 'no joining fee' offer for the over-60s.

# training and supplier



The new qualifications address key health issues such as lifestyle management

## cyq adds to training framework

Central YMCA Qualifications (CYQ) has launched a new, more flexible suite of fitness instructing and personal training qualifications.

The updated qualifications are accredited on the new Qualifications and Credit Framework, which is replacing the National Qualifications Framework at the end of the year. CYQ has also developed new Level 1 qualifications which provide a foundation for those who are interested in exploring a career

within the health and fitness industry; they address key issues such as physical activity and lifestyle management.

The new framework gives learners the flexibility to build up credits at their own pace, fit study around their home and work lives, and avoid having to repeat prior learning. The changes are part of efforts to offer training providers the opportunity to better tailor learning, with access to a wider range of accredited courses.

### supplier news

#### technogym secures england world cup deal

Technogym has been named as the official equipment supplier for the England World Cup Squad. The supplier has kitted out the England squad's training camp in Rustenburg for the duration of the tournament.

Technogym has equipped a total of 18 training facilities in South Africa, including the base camps of 16 of the 32 participating teams, the International Media Centre and, for the first time in World Cup history, the referee base camp.

#### new fitness equipment for london club

Reebok Sports Club in Canary Wharf, London, has upgraded its fitness offering with 40 new pieces of CV equipment from Life Fitness' Elevation Series Engage range.

The 9,290sq m (100,000sq ft) facility has installed 14 treadmills, 10 cross-trainers and 16 Lifecycle bikes. The new kit includes iPod connectivity and USB facilities, so members can use Life Fitness' online services to create bespoke workouts and track their progress.



Last month Ambrose Adeturinno asked about Sports Nutrition research and interesting new articles.

Like all sciences, Sports Nutrition is constantly evolving and adapting to the needs and requirements of the environment and consumer. Consequently, for everyday that we work, there is someone conducting research on the nutritional requirements of athletes. This research spans a huge variety of areas including hydration and the heat, carbohydrate delivery during endurance exercise and protein requirements in recovery to name but a few.

The latter area is probably one of the most topical, particularly in light of the gruelling schedule seen during the World Cup. How many times do you hear people talking about the importance of recovery, whether related to football, rugby or athletics? The truth is, effective recovery is vital to getting the body back to a state of readiness to train again in addition to facilitating the adaptation process, the process that makes us fitter and stronger.

So where is the research at? Currently, we know protein is extremely important in recovery for endurance athletes and strength based athletes. However, the type of protein, how much and the timing of intake still causes so much debate. Current consensus indicates a high biological value protein such as whey, in the amount of 10-20g consumed as soon as possible in the recovery period is essential. To find out more visit [www.lucozade.com/sport](http://www.lucozade.com/sport), and watch this space as more insights are sure to follow!

#### Nick Morgan

Head of Sport Science for Lucozade Sport

Email questions to: [nickmorgan@leisuremedia.com](mailto:nickmorgan@leisuremedia.com)

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WRITE  
IN TO WIN

## in brief...

**fit 'n' fast launches in oz**

Fit 'n' Fast has opened its first club in the Sydney suburb of Penrith.

Founded by Tony de Leeuw, former CEO of Fitness First Australia, and Mark Smith, former CEO and chair of TSI New York, it offers 30-minute workouts as part of a "cheaper, better, faster" approach to fitness.

The 30-minute workouts cover a range of activities, from circuits to group cycling, 30-minute results-focused PT sessions to 'express zone' workouts. However, the club also accommodates those who want to do more.

A second site is due to open in central Sydney this month, with plans to open 100 clubs in Australia over the next seven to 10 years.

The non-contract memberships will cost less than AUS\$10 a week.

**jets fitness nz expansion**

Australia-based express fitness operator Jets Fitness has begun its expansion into New Zealand, with its first club opening in Auckland.

The group expects to open 25 clubs in the next 18 months, through a combination of direct entry and franchising with both New Zealand and Australian partners. Further clubs in Auckland, as well as sites in Christchurch and Wellington, are already in the pipeline.

The no-frills, low-cost chain already includes 61 clubs in Australia, with more than 50,000 members.

**ihrsa global report 2010**

The health club industry posted a solid performance in 2009, according to the *IHRSA 2010 Global Report*, launched last month.

Global industry revenue reached US\$67.2bn from a total of 128,500 health clubs and 119.5 million members. With more than 42 million members, the market in Europe alone brought in an estimated US\$31bn in revenue. In North America, 53.1 million members used 38,000 facilities. The Asia-Pacific region remained steady, with revenues of more than US\$10bn and nearly 16 million members.

**just move opens near sydney**

Just Move, an independent club owned by Steve and Lucia Kouma, opened on 1 June in Shellharbour City, just south of Sydney, Australia.

The 350sq m club has been created, says Steve, to target "people bored of the typical gym membership experience,



**Lucia and Steve Kouma: Owners of the new Just Move club near Sydney**

where they are one of very many members". He continues: "We're focused on service and delivering results for our members through interaction and integration into our classes or clubs. Our target membership is just 500 members."

Just Move specialises in group training, with classes programmed around the concept of "moving people faster, stronger or better". Equipped by Precor, Star Trac and Cybex, it offers group exercise classes, small group training clubs, PT and a gym floor comprising power, strength, core and cardio zones, a group training area and a group cycling studio. Membership starts at AUS\$36 a fortnight.

The Koumas plan to open up to 10 clubs over the next 10 years, all in the Illawarra coastal region of New South Wales and the south coast of Australia.

**refurbished gym for tel aviv uni**

The TLV University Sport Centre has officially re-opened in Tel Aviv, Israel, following a US\$200,000 gym refurb.

Owned by Elit Sport Center, TLV Uni's sister company, the 35,000sq m centre is the largest university sports facility in Israel, with more than 10,000 members: 70 per cent students, with the remainder from the local community.

Facilities include an Olympic-sized pool, two heated indoor pools, a 1,000sq m gym, free weights room, three fitness studios, a multi-sports hall, tennis and squash courts, and a group cycling studio.

The refurbished fitness suite offers seven AMTs from Precor, with other suppliers including Cybex and Star Trac.



**Fitness suite at the university has had a US\$200,000 refurbishment**

**australian music rights verdict**

Australia's fitness sector has been dealt a blow after the Copyright Tribunal decided to increase copyright fees for use of music in group exercise classes.

The verdict, delivered on 17 May, comes after a long battle with the Phonographic Performance Company of Australia (PPCA), the body representing major record labels, which had requested a 4,000 per cent increase in fees.

The current PPCA licence fee is 96.8 cents per fitness class, with a capped annual maximum of AUS\$2,654. This has

now been increased to either AUS\$15 per class or AUS\$1 per participant – a hike of 1,500 per cent in the cost of a PPCA licence for a typical fitness centre.

Fitness Australia, the national trade body, has criticised the move, which could see facilities paying more than AUS\$23,000 (£13,200) a year. However, as Fitness Australia CEO Lauretta Stace explains: "The fitness industry has access to high quality alternative music that gym-goers are perfectly happy with and that's not part of the PPCA repertoire."



DIR has spent more than €3m on upgrading its existing clubs, including new kit

## new yoga venture for dir

DIR, the chain of health clubs in Barcelona, will open its first specialist yoga studio – YogaOne – next month.

YogaOne will offer three studios that can also be combined into one 400sq m studio, to be used for masterclasses led by internationally renowned yoga gurus. Classes will be available in seven different styles of yoga, as well as specialist yoga for kids, partners and pregnant women.

In October, DIR will also open a new club, DIR Tuset, within the same building as YogaOne. Members of YogaOne will receive 10 per cent off membership of the club, and vice versa, but the companies will operate separately, with their own entrances, pricing structure and so on.

The new 4,000sq m club will include 2,000sq m of fitness encompassing CV, weights and group exercise. Also housed within the fitness area will be a medical centre focusing on core training and back problems. The club will also offer 2,000sq m of relaxation facilities – a spa, restaurant, water zone comprising hot and cold experiences, and a social area with sofas and WiFi internet access.

DIR has also invested more than €3m over the last few months in its existing 14 clubs and one pilates studio. Every club in the estate has had work done since 2009, including extensions to the clubs, new spas, new paddle courts, new kit and the installation of restaurants.

## shokk launches in qatar

Youth activity specialist SHOKK has launched its first site in Qatar.

Located in the capital, Doha, the centre will officially open in the third quarter of 2010. The SHOKK gym will occupy a 1,000sq m space within an existing énergie club, situated in the Villagio shopping mall in the Aspire Zone of the city.

The énergie club already includes a men-only and ladies-only gym, a boxing studio, three studios and a spa area. The addition of a full SHOKK concept youth gym will provide a fun, safe environment

in which young people can increase their levels of physical activity and meet friends.

Equipment will include SHOKK's IGNITION, X-ertain and FLT ranges – cardiovascular, interactive and resistance products designed to accommodate the growing bodies of young people.

Nad Miyan, operations director at énergie Qatar, says: "SHOKK understands the importance of increasing health and fitness levels for young people, which is what we want to promote here – it's vital for long-term health, self-expression and social interaction."

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Wattbike accurately monitors 29 parameters 100 times a second so there's plenty of data to keep an eye on. And thanks to the Expert software that's included free with every Wattbike, it's the ideal platform for group training. Simply connect the bikes together and to a screen and any one of 10 parameters can be displayed for all to see. If the mood takes you, you can even race up to 14 bikes with a visual display.

And outside of the group situation, because Wattbike doesn't have a fixed crank it's perfect for individual training as well.

So for less than the price of some other group training solutions, why not look instead at Wattbike. Visit [www.wattbike.com](http://www.wattbike.com) to find out how your gym could benefit.

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## from the board



## getting engaged

David Stalker • executive director • fia

'TwentyTen Commission' – this phrase will echo across the industry over the next few months. It is a radical new concept, not just for our sector, but for every other sector in this country.

It's a five-year strategy plan designed to help us plot our journey to take us from where we are, which is an industry with around 12 per cent market share which meets the 'fitness' needs of this country, to where we want to be: a sector which serves twice as many people; which helps the government, NHS and employers to improve the health of the nation; which improves the economic health of the country by reducing absenteeism and increasing productivity; and which helps adults and children lead healthier, happier, longer lives.

The five cornerstones of TwentyTen are covered on p10 of this magazine, but I have a big ask of you. The draft commission is now open for industry consultation. That means we want to know what you think about the priorities identified by more than 60 industry leaders, and the strategies they recommend.

You might agree with some of it or you might agree with none of it. Either way, tell us; this is your five-year wish list.

Please call us for your copy of the commission, or visit [www.fia.org.uk](http://www.fia.org.uk)  
Not engaging is not an option.

## the cmo – one year on

When the FIA invited me to become its chief medical officer (CMO), it was with a view to helping the industry engage with the health agenda. My part in this strategy is to work to establish exercise as a normal part of healthcare, both in the prevention and the treatment of the diseases of our affluent society.

This has meant working not only with the Department of Health, but also with doctors and other healthcare professionals, helping them to understand our industry and to work with instructors

and personal trainers. We now have a forum in which representatives from our sector and the Medical Royal Colleges can work together.

Drawing up new guidelines on best practice in exercise referral is a key piece of work that's being done by the FIA, SkillsActive, REPs and representatives of the training institutions, in conjunction with doctors. We're also working with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy to establish ways we can work together better, and to have clear guidelines about referral to physiotherapists and fitness instructors.

Equally exciting and stimulating has been working with the fitness industry itself, to explore what we need to do to make our facilities not just places where people 'look good and feel great', but where they also get sustainable health benefits whatever their age, be they children or octogenarians. There is still a huge amount to be done both fronts, but we have made a start. In one sense, whatever the question about health, in large part the answer is 'exercise'! There is nothing new about this: 2,400 years ago the Greek philosopher Plato wrote: "Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it."



John Searle has been busy during his first year as CMO of the FIA

## brussels sprouts new plan

The FIA, in partnership with the European Health and Fitness Association (EHFA), has won a European Commission grant to put the fitness sector on the European health and wellbeing map.

The commission has appointed the FIA and EHFA to research the health and fitness sector's ability to address the rising tide of obesity and relieve the pressure on healthcare budgets across the EU. The project is entitled 'Becoming the hub: the health and fitness sector and the future of health enhancing physical activity'.

Work has already started, with an analysis of EU government policy and campaigns across European national governments.

Working with FIA equivalents in France (the European Observatoire

for Sport Employment) and Germany (Verband Deutscher Fitness und Gesundheitsunternehmen), the team will consult with operators and suppliers from Sweden to Swindon and will produce a report at the end of the year.

"Any ambitious sector must look to the European markets for growth," comments David Stalker, FIA executive director. "We've gone from being ambassadors for the role of the health and fitness sector in an integrated public health strategy, to being a champion for all our European colleagues in just a matter of months. That's a wonderful testimony."

Anyone interested in reading more about the project, or in participating in the consultation, can visit [www.ehfa-programmes.eu/hub.aspx](http://www.ehfa-programmes.eu/hub.aspx)



## vpl licences and the fia



© STOCKHOTO/CONRICK SCHAKA

### The FIA has negotiated a 24 per cent discount in VPL fees for members

Created in 1984, Video Performance Limited (VPL) was established to collect licence fees for the use of music videos – videos which are now commonplace as a source of background music and entertainment in gyms, health clubs and leisure centres.

It is a legal requirement that all businesses using tailored music video services purchase a VPL licence.

For most organisations, this has been an unexpected cost and one that can have a profound impact on the bottom line. That's why the FIA has negotiated a 24 per cent discount for FIA members on an interim three-year deal and secured an undertaking that

they will not be liable for any backdated charges prior to January 2010, provided they take up a VPL licence through the FIA by 31 October 2010.

David Stalker, FIA executive director, says: "Negotiating a saving for FIA members is definitely an accomplishment we're all proud of. Not only that, but we can also save our members thousands of pounds by securing the authority's undertaking not to press for backdated charges."

FIA members can purchase an annual VPL licence at the discounted rate of £285 (+VAT) through the FIA until 31 December 2010. This price will be fixed for 2011 and 2012.

## fia fitness directory nets top prize

The FIA, working in partnership with Optimum Fitness Software (OFS), has won an 'outstanding achievement' accolade at this year's Interactive Media Awards for its work on 'The Fitness Directory'.

The award is the highest possible recognition for the 'highest standards of excellence in web design and development' category.

"Given the fact that consumers have become so reliant on the internet for researching, browsing (for services and products), product evaluation and deal-finding, one of our key strategies has been building our online presence as

a reference and referral expert," says David Stalker, FIA executive director.

"This is the reason why we went to so much trouble to find the best online consultancy – OFS – and together create a national shop window for operators. This award demonstrates that our industry now has a 'best of breed' site for our members."

Scott Hodson, managing director of OFS, comments: "It's an honour to have our work recognised. We feel strongly that our projects are world-class examples of how the internet can be used to enhance a company's message and branding in our industry."

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# irons in the fire

Steven Ward,  
the FIA's director  
of public affairs  
and policy, reports  
on the FIA's  
preparations for  
the future



The new policy landscape is taking shape. We have had the blood letting of 24 March when the first £6bn of cuts were announced. We await with bated breath the "emergency budget" on 22 June, which will give an even stronger indication of the coalition government's direction. The coup de grace will be the comprehensive spending review, which will draw to a close in the autumn.

The FIA is working hard to shape this new landscape for the benefit of the health and fitness sector.

## lasting legacy

We're working with a clear focus that our industry has the physical venues, staffing ability and capacity to absorb the increase in participation that's needed to create a lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games, and to make an impact on the health of the nation.

First, expect the workplace to be a major focus of the FIA's activities: 13 July will see the launch of a new initiative focused on the health of NHS employees. This ties closely in with some developmental work that the FIA has been running with Sport England and the Mayor of London, focused on supporting shift workers to play more sport and become physically active.

This will be an exciting development of major benefit to all FIA members, large and small, public and private.

Second, with the advent of the Olympics, expect a much greater emphasis from the FIA on how we can unlock the assets of the industry to create both health and sporting legacies from 2012. We have to understand better



PICTURE:WWW.STOCK.COM

The FIA will continue to support the development of the Inclusive Fitness Initiative

what our facilities can contribute from the heart of every community across the UK. This includes the Paralympics, where we will have to look not just at the continued emphasis on improving the accessibility of our facilities and the suitability of staff training to meet the needs of the disabled community, but also on increasing participation among this group in society.

The FIA will launch some developmental work in this area later in the year and will continue to support the growth of the Inclusive Fitness Initiative, working much more closely with its owner, the English Federation of Disability Sports.

Third, expect a reinforced vigour to our involvement in the Change4Life campaign. We will be encouraging FIA members to adopt the key messages into their own marketing materials, as well as continuing to support sub-brands such as Let's Dance with Change4Life, Walk4Life and our own MoreActive4Life.

Fourth, be ready for some exciting developments around the digitisation of

what we do. It's a real shame that, while you can book a bed and breakfast in Bognor, Bolton or Barcelona in the blink of an eye using an online booking system, we cannot provide the public with the opportunity to do the same when it comes to sport. Removing barriers and making things easier by introducing and encouraging the adoption of new technology will be crucial to making the best use of our assets and maximising commercial opportunities.

## partner up

Finally, expect the FIA to develop some exciting strategic partnerships with a greater variety of commercial partners, key government departments, agencies such as the Youth Sports Trust and Sport England, and other key stakeholders, especially national governing bodies and our colleagues across the entire physical activity sector.

The trigger has been pulled on the starting gun – and the FIA was the first out of the gate.

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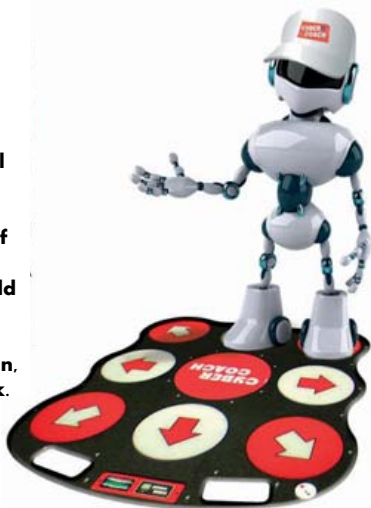


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Iain Watson, operations manager

## ops director for pure gym

Budget health club operator Pure Gym has named Iain Watson as its new group operations manager as it looks to expand its UK portfolio over the next two years.

Watson – former general manager at Total Fitness and JJB Sports – will be responsible for ensuring the smooth roll-out of 24 new clubs across the country.

A successful bid to raise £10m by Magenta Partners – led by Tom Singh, principal investor and retail entrepreneur – will enable Pure Gym to build on its existing portfolio.

Pure Gym chief executive Peter Roberts says: "Iain brings a wealth of experience from managing some of the biggest names in the industry. He will be a huge asset to the business."

### in brief...

#### tegelars retires from fia

Harm Tegelars, board director and treasurer of the Fitness Industry Association (FIA), has decided to retire from the association. Tegelars, who was one of the FIA's original founders and a former chair of the organisation, made the decision to concentrate on his duties as president of the European Health and Fitness Association (EHFA).

Tegelars set up the Cannons Group in 1980 and subsequently sold it, in 1996, to Vardon. Fred Turok, FIA chair, says that Tegelars' long and distinguished career in the industry had made him a valuable asset at the FIA.

## sehalic takes up nuyuu role

Health club chain nuyuu fitness has appointed Rangel Sehalic as group operations manager as it looks to continue expanding its UK portfolio.

The chain – launched in October 2009 by Ben Silcox and *Dragons' Den* entrepreneur James Caan – operates five sites acquired from LA Fitness, but aims to increase that number to more than 20 over the coming year.

Sehalic will be responsible for the operation of all nuyuu sites. He joins the group from Fitness First, where he was sales, marketing and operations director in Milan, Italy.

Silcox says: "We have an aggressive expansion programme and, as the portfolio grows, we needed to find someone with an impressive pedigree in the leisure sector. In Rangel we've found the right man and we look forward to him being an integral part of the team."



Sehalic joins nuyuu from Fitness First

In addition to its five sites – located in Slough, Stevenage, Newbury, East Grinstead and Livingston – nuyuu has also confirmed that it is to offer joint venture franchise opportunities.

## wellbeing chief for dc leisure

DC Leisure Management has appointed Richard Cowley as its new group health and wellbeing manager to help the management company push forward its efforts to tackle issues such as obesity and heart disease.

Cowley – former general manager at the Sam Jones Health Club in Sheffield – will develop programmes to assist DC Leisure and local authority clients to meet government health targets.

The new group health and wellbeing role has been created following the

success of initiatives delivered by DC Leisure on behalf of NHS Rotherham in South Yorkshire.

Cowley says: "I will be devising a strategy that addresses some of the bigger health issues, such as obesity and cardiovascular disease.

"This will include building relationships with primary care trusts, promoting workplace activity and looking at different funding opportunities."

DC Leisure currently employs more than 7,000 people.

#### sales director for la fitness

LA Fitness has appointed Peter Harrington as its new UK sales director, overseeing the chain's drive to boost membership as it continues to embark on its £30m investment programme. Harrington previously worked as UK national sales manager at rival chain Fitness First, and before that at Esporta. He started his career in the fitness industry by qualifying in Sports Science at Farnborough College.

Harrington says: "My job will be to ensure the performance of the UK sales team reflects the investment across the business."

#### leveque named as star trac president and coo

Fitness supplier Star Trac has named Mike Leveque as its president and chief operating officer (COO), following the resignation of Steve Nero.

Formerly managing director for Star Trac Europe and Africa, Leveque has been with the US-based company for 17 years and has also held positions in sales and finance.

Star Trac chair and chief executive officer Jim Doody says: "Mike has a long history of success at Star Trac and I look forward to working closely with him during this transition."

## PEOPLE PROFILE

## INDEPENDENT OPERATOR FOCUS



### kirstin ferrie

As a pilates instructor, Ferrie has travelled around the world, teaching athletes and celebrities including the Duchess of York. She opened her first studio in the UK last month

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

For 10 years full-time.

#### Could you describe your career path for our readers?

I started dancing from a young age and went to professional dance school, where I discovered a deep love for pilates and what it could do for our bodies.

My first job in the fitness sector was teaching dance classes and general fitness in a gym. That came straight after I finished dancing myself. I've since worked in community halls and gyms, right through to some of the leading studios in the world.

I've certainly been lucky that my work has taken me around the world, meeting amazing people and visiting beautiful, interesting places: from London to the Caribbean to the US, Asia, Australia and now to my favourite place – home – in West Yorkshire.

#### What were the motivations behind opening your own studio?

Opening my own studio was something I've wanted and worked towards for years – and I wanted to come home to Yorkshire.

#### What does the studio offer?

The studio – Pure Pilates – offers pilates at all levels, and is fully-equipped. I only

have a maximum of three people in each of my classes, which ensures each client has the best possible experience and my full attention each time they come.

The emphasis of the studio is on all-round wellness, whatever people's needs or reasons for coming. Whether it's to recover from an injury, to enhance sports performance, for pre- or post-natal care or for general fitness, pilates should make people strong and make other daily life activities easier.

#### What are your future plans for the studio and the brand?

I'm certainly considering growing the Pure Pilates brand, but will be revealing my plans later in the year.

#### What drives you?

Helping people. It's really as simple as that. I believe in what the Pilates Method can do.

#### What do you want to achieve?

My goals are for all my clients to enjoy themselves, as well as to reach their potential. My personal goal is to learn every day and to help people.

#### What do you think is the number one weakness of the fitness sector?

I would say there are two main challenges today: education and the need for fast qualifications. We should constantly strive for quality, not quantity, in our teachers and trainers. Meanwhile, we need to get through to potential clients just how essential this sort of approach is for their lifestyle and wellbeing.

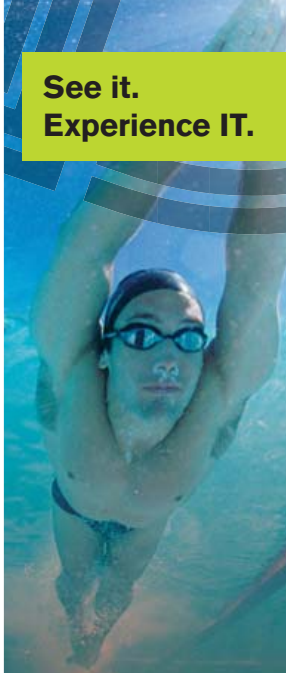
#### What's your favourite life motto or quote?

"Physical fitness is the first requisite of happiness: in order to achieve happiness, it is imperative to gain mastery of your body." Joseph Pilates



Ferrie at the newly opened Ilkley site

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## competitive edge

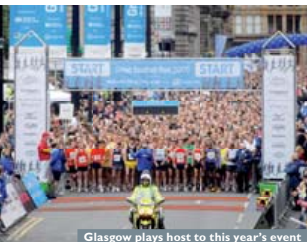
17 SEPTEMBER 10

### maggie's night hike 2010

Last year more than 2,000 people raised £689,000 for Maggie's cancer care centres by taking part in the 20-mile London Night Hike. This year, in addition to the 20-mile hike, 10-mile routes will also be available in both London and Glasgow. The shorter routes will take three to six hours to complete. Registration for the 10-mile routes costs £42.50 for individuals and £160 for teams of four to six. Minimum sponsorship is £300 per individual or £1,200 per team. Details: [www.maggiescentres.org](http://www.maggiescentres.org)



The shorter routes will take three to six hours to complete



Glasgow plays host to this year's event

4-5 SEPTEMBER 10

### bank of scotland great scottish run

This half-marathon (with a 10km run and junior route running alongside) has been hailed as one of Scotland's largest mass participation sporting events, with great personal best-breaking potential. 2010 routes have yet to be confirmed, but the setting is Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, home to architecture by Rennie Mackintosh and nearby Loch Lomond. Details: [www.runglasgow.org](http://www.runglasgow.org)

3, 9 AND 17 OCT 10

### men's health: survival of the fittest

Men's Health magazine is looking for the fittest man in the UK over a 10km course. However, the course is no flat road race. At every kilometre along the way, participants will face tough and engaging obstacles – such as the hay bale scramble and the army assault course – with other mini challenges thrown in here and there for good measure. There are three locations to choose from: Cardiff (3 October), Nottingham (9 October) and Edinburgh (17 October). Up to 10,000 participants are expected across the three venues. Entry costs £36. Details: [www.mhsurvival.co.uk](http://www.mhsurvival.co.uk)



Negotiate the hay bale scramble

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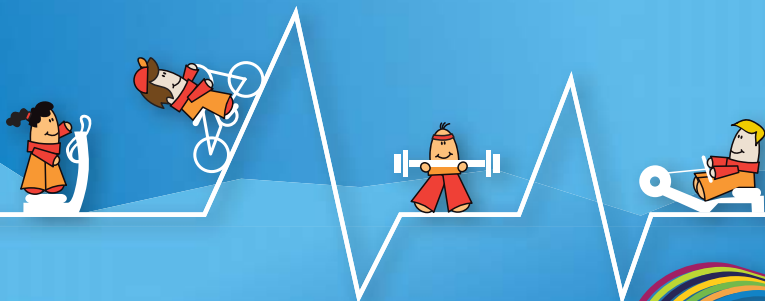
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**LEISURE INDUSTRY WEEK** 21-23 September 2010 · NEC Birmingham

**Health and Fitness at LIW is the exhibition for the UK's health and fitness sector and is supported by the FIA (Fitness Industry Association) and IOU (Independent Operators Unite).**

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For more information on LIW 2010 visit [www.liw.co.uk](http://www.liw.co.uk)

Associated with:



## JULY

**13 | International Council on Active Aging, UK**

**Venue** Woburn House Conference Centre, Tavistock Square, London

**Summary**

The US-based ICAA will hold its first ever event in the UK this month. Topics will include active ageing and wellness.

Tel +1 604 734 4466

Web [www.icaa.cc](http://www.icaa.cc)

**14 | The FIA FLAME Conference**

**Venue** Cheltenham Racecourse, Gloucestershire, UK

**Summary**

Also hosting the FLAME Awards, this conference will run alongside the FIA Industry Summit. Golf day on 13 July.

Tel +44 (0)20 7420 8578

Web [www.fia.org.uk](http://www.fia.org.uk)

## AUGUST

**4-8 | IDEA World Fitness Convention**

**Venue** Los Angeles, US

**Summary**

More than 5,000 international fitness professionals attend this event, which aims to "inspire the world to fitness".

Tel +1 858 535 8979 ext.7

Web [www.idealifeit.com](http://www.idealifeit.com)

**19-21 | 29th Annual National Fitness Trade Show**

**Venue** Reno-Tahoe, Nevada, US

**Summary**

An annual trade show for health club owners, managers, fitness directors and personal trainers.

Tel +1 541 830 0400

Web [www.nationalfitnesstradeshow.com](http://www.nationalfitnesstradeshow.com)



The FLAME Awards are part of the FIA FLAME Conference in July



©STOCKPHOTO.COM

ICAA will hold its first UK event, with topics including active ageing

**28 August – 2 September | World Leisure Congress**

**Venue** Kangwon National University, South Korea

**Summary**

The theme of this year's conference is exploring how leisure activities can help in finding our identity. The event will run alongside the international World Leisure Games. Encompassing around 15 different sports – including wakeboarding, paragliding and sport fishing – the games are expected to attract more than 15,000 competitors.

Web [www.worldleisure2010.org](http://www.worldleisure2010.org)

## SEPTEMBER

**6-8 | BASES Annual Conference**

**Venue** University of Glasgow, UK

**Summary**

This year's BASES conference programme will feature high-profile international speakers, with presentations of relevance to anyone with an interest in sport and exercise sciences.

Web [www.bases.org.uk/BASES-Annual-Conference](http://www.bases.org.uk/BASES-Annual-Conference)

**21-23 | Leisure Industry Week**

**Venue** NEC, Birmingham, UK

**Summary**

LIW is the UK's largest event for the out-of-home leisure sector: last year it attracted almost 13,000 delegates and more than 350 suppliers. The show is now sub-divided into seven sectors: Health & Fitness, Pool & Spa, Attractions Expo, Licensed Business Show, Eat & Drink, Leisure Facilities, and The Sport Show. IOU (Independent Operators Unite) also takes place at LIW.

Web [www.liw.co.uk](http://www.liw.co.uk)



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# everyone's talking about . . .

## is fitness still fun?

Are health clubs still jolly places to visit, or has the natural maturation of the fitness industry into a serious, preventative healthcare-focused business caused a change in atmosphere?

**T**wenty years ago the industry was young and spontaneous. If it had been a person, it would have been game for an impulsive drink after work, or popping away for the weekend. Now, in comparison, it's married with children, a mortgage and responsibilities. The industry has become smarter, it has weathered the recession and it knows about market segmentation – but has this come at the expense of the fun element? (see also *HCM* May 10, p3).

Club business models have also changed: budget chains, for example – many of which offer 100 per cent online

joining, no tours, automated entry and, essentially, a lack of the personal touch from the word go – are now gaining a prominent foothold. What they provide is a markedly different experience from the casual, personal welcome of the owner-operator who set up a gym as an extension of his or her hobby.

Generally, though, the industry is constantly coming up with new ways to engage its members, whether that be new classes or social events. Nevertheless, many members see clubs as a place to spend as little time in as possible: they dash in after work, but really want to be at home or at their next engagement. They don't want to get

involved in conversation, with staff or with other members, and they zone out while they exercise alone, contributing nothing to a convivial atmosphere.

That's one side of the coin. The other side is that the industry has evolved to the point where it can read its members and give them the experience they want, respecting those who want to exercise on their own but also offering the opportunity for a social experience. Aware that we now live in a society where most people are happy to talk to a stranger online, but are suspicious if someone talks to us on the bus, it has also adapted, making use of social media to emphasise the club aspect.

ARE HEALTH CLUBS AS MUCH FUN AS THEY SHOULD BE? EMAIL US: [HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM](mailto:HEALTHCLUB@LEISUREMEDIA.COM)

### david stalker

fia • executive director



**"I** think we have become more professional, strategic and serious about the business, but I think the industry still has the energy, dynamism and excitement of a young industry.

People come to our clubs for different reasons, so we can't have a 'one size fits all' approach – we need to understand their drivers. Many of our members are

time-starved, they want to get in and get out, and our role is to be supportive and give them counsel if they want it. Some people, perhaps those who come during the day, might want to be more sociable. And then there are the novices who don't understand what they need, so do require more support.

The challenge is to become a master of segmentation, and we can learn from other sectors here. Shops in airports change their window displays from the morning, when the flights go west to the US, to the evening when flights go east to Asia: those passing through the airport at different times want to buy different things. We have to think of the facility as more than a backdrop and, as the audience changes, we have to change the set – the music, the approach, the classes and possibly even the personnel – to reflect the needs and interests of the users."

### christina deguardi

crunch • vice president marketing



**"W**e've built our reputation on being fun and bringing entertainment into the workout space, and we're still as packed as ever with people enjoying themselves.

We continue to set the bar in the fitness group realm by launching classes with a twist. For example, we're teaming up with Broadway to offer dance routines

from shows, and running 80s prom nights where people come dressed up in leg warmers. There's also 'BOING with Kangoo', which uses bouncy boots so members can jump around like kids. We have a live DJ on Tuesday nights and we're always coming up with new ideas to stop the club from getting stale.

Social media also helps to create the fun element: you can post amusing things on Facebook and lots of our instructors have followings on Twitter. We work hard to get members to interact, so they aren't just coming in and working out with their iPods on – our instructors encourage members to talk to them and to each other. We run partner yoga classes and even did a popular speed dating yoga class, where members had to do a pose with the person to their right and then change round. There was a mixer after, but I don't know what happened later!"





PICTURE CLARE TORIUS

### Clubs such as Crunch in New York pride themselves on creating fun, engaging classes

#### jim elston

nuffield health • director of fitness



“Some members, especially in city clubs, do see clubs as functional places and want to get in and out as quickly as possible. They don’t want interaction and see the gym as a welcome break from communication.

However, there are others – for example, those who have insular jobs or who work at home – who want a

social experience and more fun. Consequently, we instil in our teams the importance of being social mediators who interact with members in a fun and friendly way and encourage social groups to form. We’ve also just introduced a new class called Wellbeing Workout, which includes a ‘socialise and mobilise’ section: the instructors initiate a discussion to include everyone, which breaks down barriers.

In addition to that, every month we run a ‘Meet the Expert’ event where we bring in experts from other parts of our business, such as a GP or nutritional experts, to engage with members. As part of this we set members a fun test or activity, assess the results and tell them how they can improve. This has proved a good way of getting people to chat to one another, because they have a shared experience.”

#### stephen aucott

odyssey health club • operations director



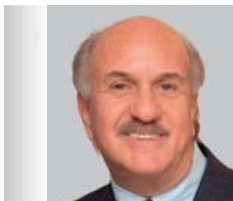
“I don’t think clubs are becoming more serious. I think we understand more and more that we need to facilitate more social interaction within the club, including catering for the different interest groups such as tennis, studios, gym and aqua. Fostering stronger bonds between members is the critical factor in making a club more than a place to train. The staff are key to creating the atmosphere, but you will also discover superstar members who are natural organisers and who are happy to get involved.

As well as member events, we’re starting to use social networks like Facebook to keep members up to date with events. We’re also about to launch a blog.

I think, if we don’t see social interaction as an integral part of running a ‘club’, we have kind of missed the point. A gym cannot be just a room full of equipment – training without some form of interaction is boring. People bring it to life, whether they’re staff or members. We always need to foster social interaction – we need to strengthen the bond the member has with the club and give them more reasons to use the facility, above and beyond simply exercising.”



# STEVE KASS &



The founder and CEO of American Leisure and his COO talk to Rhianon Howells about the evolution of the 43-year-old company from a New York-based pools and fitness operator into a global leader in the delivery of 'lifestyle' services

**T**he history of American Leisure is in many ways the American Dream made real. At the age of 18, Steve Kass was working as a lifeguard on Coney Island in Brooklyn, the gloriously kitsch seaside resort beloved of New Yorkers. But Kass wasn't interested in the amusement park, boardwalk or hot dog stands.

"Across from my post, there was a new luxury housing development with a swimming pool," he recalls. "I

found it so interesting that a residential development should be offering recreational facilities... that was the start of the business."

Fast-forward more than four decades and the leisure management company Kass set up in 1967 as a three-man operation now employs more than 500 people and operates 75 leisure facilities – including pools, fitness centres, spas and

lifestyle amenities – primarily within luxury housing developments, but also within hotels and resorts and as standalone sites.

Within the New York metropolitan area, where most of its managed facilities are based, the company is a byword for luxury lifestyle services in a residential setting, with big-name clients including the Trump Organisation and Tishman Speyer. But although the US, and New York in particular, remains its largest market, the company's horizons have broadened dramatically in recent years.

Having already garnered international experience through its design and consulting arm, the company signed a deal last year with Saudi Oger – a hugely influential Saudi Arabian company owned by Sheikh Ayman Hariri and employing more than 50,000 people – to deliver almost a million square feet of leisure facilities, plus ongoing management services, to the King Abdullah University



# TOM JOHNSTON

of Science and Technology (KAUST). An iconic new development on the eastern shore of the Red Sea at Thuwal, about 80km north of Saudi Arabia's second largest city, Jeddah, KAUST is the vision of King Abdullah himself. Covering 36sq km, this post-graduate research institute is not only Saudi Arabia's first co-ed university but is also the first to accept academics from around the world, with faculty and students from more than 60 nations already enrolled.

So how exactly did this once-small regional operator become the kind of company able to command so prestigious a project? And where do its founder and his new right-hand man – Tom Johnston was appointed as COO in November 2008 – see its future?

## FUN AND PARTICIPATION

Although American Leisure started out offering recreational management services to swimming pools and country clubs, it wasn't long before Kass had achieved his goal of working with residential property developers, designing and managing leisure

offerings that would help them market their real estate.

Then, in the 70s and 80s, the business diversified into tennis, racquetball and eventually fitness clubs. "We started to introduce the Nautilus line of equipment, which at that time was almost a generic name for exercise equipment, into our racquets clubs," says Kass. "That was, I think, the beginning of the trend towards fitness clubs as we know them today."

True to Kass's original vision, the design and operation of swimming pools, including several summer-only facilities, has also remained a high-profile part of the business.

But it's in the arena of lifestyle services within residential communities that American Leisure has perhaps the greatest claim to be a pioneer. While property developers have been incorporating pools and fitness centres into their offerings for decades, American Leisure was one of the first companies to take the idea of 'recreation at home' and run with it, delivering a complete lifestyle concept. In addition to gyms, pools and spas,



the company equips its communities with cinemas, libraries, communal saunas and demonstration kitchens, as well as extensive social programmes – covering everything from dance classes and sporting events to parties – and the people to run them.

In New York, the concept has been so successful that no self-respecting luxury development is now complete without some kind of lifestyle offering, but American Leisure remains at the vanguard of the trend. "I don't want to be immodest, but we did start ▶

► it," says Kass. "And we've come up with many innovative ideas that have gone on to become across-the-board offerings. For example, in one rental building aimed at young professionals, we created a breakfast club where people could stop off and get a healthy breakfast on their way to work."

While healthy living is central to the American Leisure philosophy, the emphasis is always on fun and participation, says Johnston. "We recognise that fitness is one of the cornerstones of a healthy lifestyle, but we know that [working out] isn't for everybody. So instead we're creating a different kind of model that allows us to meet people wherever they're at on the wellness continuum, through social programming that encourages individuals to adopt a more active lifestyle while getting to know their neighbours."

Giving the company another edge is the fact that it has its own, modest property management arm, comprising 15 residential communities in the New York suburbs, all of which have a significant lifestyle offering. "It's a small operation," says Johnston, "but it gives us an additional perspective on what's going on with the end user."

### HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Johnston started his career as a gym instructor in the early 80s before



**American Leisure: A new kind of fitness model based on social programming**

moving first into sales and then into management. In 1990 he became general manager of the Weymouth Club, one of the best-known fitness clubs on the east coast of the US, before joining the Saw Mill Sports Management chain – whose owner Curt Beusman was a founding member of IHRSA – as vice president of operations in 1997.

By the time he left that company to join American Leisure 18 months ago, he had amassed a huge wealth of experience in fitness industry operations – but, by his own admission, his knowledge of running lifestyle amenities in residential buildings was scant. "The opportunity to move into the lifestyle segment really intrigued me, but it was all new," he says. "So I really had to jump into the trenches, look around me and get to understand the business as best I could."

Having come on board just as the recession really began to bite, his first task was to assess the business from the ground up; make staffing changes, including cuts, where needed; and implement some new best practices. It's partly as a result of those measures, he says, that the company has "not only survived but is going to flourish as it comes out of this recession; we've actually taken this opportunity to strengthen our core

"We used the recession to strengthen our core competencies and now we're poised to grow"

competencies and we're now poised to really grow the brand."

Johnston hadn't been with American Leisure six months, however, before he had another very specific focus: the KAUST project. The opportunity was, he admits, more the result of serendipity than strategy. "One of our residents in New York recommended us to Saudi Oger," he says. "He'd had such a wonderful experience with American Leisure that, when they were looking for a company to develop a lifestyle offering at KAUST, they called us."

The goal is simple yet ambitious: to create the healthiest community in Saudi Arabia. Facilities include two large multi-sports clubs with segregated male and female fitness centres, as well as a climbing wall and a 16-lane bowling alley; a racquets club for tennis, squash, badminton and racquetball; a university fitness centre; and a recreational facility offering billiards, table tennis and Wii games. There are also 14 parks, open-air swimming pools, outdoor tennis courts, a 5,000-seat sports stadium, a public library, a cinema and a theatre. In addition to overseeing all these facilities, recreation manager Jay Francis leads a team generating events and activities to bring them to life – recent examples include World Health Day, Earth Day, a gift bazaar, kite-flying, go-kart racing,



**The Setai in New York is a luxury condo development in the city's financial district**



**“We’re able to run spas profitably, which is something many [real estate and hotel] operators find challenging,” says Kass**

youth football, swimming lessons and a summer camp for kids.

Since the university opened last September, 2,000 people have moved in, but with numbers expected to reach 15,000 over time, American Leisure is signed up for the long haul. “The project has been a massive undertaking and it has tested us, frankly,” admits Johnston. “But we’re proud of the accomplishment and we recognise [as a result] that we’re certainly capable of taking on some big challenges.”

### EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES

Inspired by the success of the KAUST project, American Leisure has forged a strategic alliance with Saudi Oger, with a view to offering similar services in real estate and academic developments across the Middle East – especially in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Lebanon. As the global economy recovers, Johnston also anticipates that American Leisure’s international consulting business, which all but disappeared during the recession, will start to come back.

Stateside, American Leisure already has several projects underway on both the east and west coasts. Although funding continues to be a challenge, says Kass, “we are seeing some signs of life”. But while he believes both the hotel/resort and real estate sectors will

recover well, he is less sanguine about standalone fitness clubs. “That’s been one of the most affected areas; we don’t see that coming back for at least another three years. Unfortunately, the financial institutions don’t understand that business as well as businesses [such as the hotel sector] that have been around longer. Also, businesses that address current trends and have an easy point of entry, such as fitness clubs, are often over-built and the banks have become very sensitive to that.”

Fitness within a real estate or hospitality setting, however, remains a primary focus for American Leisure, as does the spa sector. In February, the company opened a spa at The Setai, a luxury condo development in New York’s financial district, which it’s also managing. It’s since consulted on the concept and design for a second Setai Spa in New York – at The Setai Fifth Avenue, a condo/hotel development set to open in November – and also worked on the new spa at Manhattan’s Hotel Plaza Athenee, which opened in May. “We’re moving very strongly into the spa field because it’s an area where we’ve developed a great deal of expertise,” says Kass. “We’re able to run spas profitably, which is something many [real-estate and hotel] operators find challenging.”

### ONLY CONNECT

One of Johnston’s own areas of expertise, of course, remains the world of fitness. A registered yoga teacher, he is passionate about exercise and keeps abreast of what’s going on through industry contacts, events and

journals, as well as the general buzz in New York City, where he lives.

In line with the American Leisure philosophy of fun and participation, he believes there’s a growing demand for activities that bring people together: yoga, group exercise and small group personal training. “You need staff who understand that part of their job is to build relationships with people, and to connect those people with other people,” he adds. “It’s all about connecting.”

This emphasis on people is also the driving force in how the company chooses suppliers. “We look at the quality of the equipment, but it’s also about the quality of the relationships,” says Johnston, who names Precor, Life Fitness and Star Trac as current partners. “We’re all about the relationships.”

When it comes to building relationships with his own staff, Johnston looks to his yoga practice for inspiration. “I’m really interested in seeing how I can take what I learn on the mat and apply it to business,” he says. “Yoga is all about alignment, and one of my personal leadership philosophies is that my job is to create alignment within my team.

“We’re always going back and checking that alignment, and making adjustments to ensure we’re all on the same page internally. [As a result] we’re decisive about where we want to go and also, frankly, where we don’t want to go.”

From a Coney Island beach to a small regional operation to a global business to a partnership with one of the most influential companies in the Middle East, one thing’s for certain: American Leisure has already come a long way.

 **rhianon howells**  
healthclub@leisuremedia.com

**“You need staff who understand that part of their job is to build relationships with people”**

**Mike Hill visits the Sydney Olympic Aquatic Centre to look at the challenge of ensuring that a strong community legacy follows on from “the greatest show on earth”**

**A**rriving at the Sydney Olympic Aquatic Centre on a quiet, cloudy Tuesday morning by train from central Sydney, you might be forgiven for thinking you're about to visit another white elephant – great for the elite athletes of the world but dysfunctional for everyday community use. The train was empty and one of the oldest I travelled on in Australia, and walking through the Olympic Park, the shops, banks and hotels built to house thousands of athletes and spectators all looked rather quiet and forlorn.

However, that impression immediately and dramatically changed when Ross Coggon, general manager of the Sydney Olympic Aquatic Centre, greeted me and showed me through into the massive main pool area. Perhaps the full car park should have been a giveaway, but inside the still impressive swim hall, six different pool areas were all packed with people. The main 50m competition pool was hosting a local school gala, complete with

podium awards for winners. The 50m community pool had lane fitness swimming, aqua-aerobics and swimming lessons going on, while the leisure pool, beach area and spa complex were all jam-packed – and all this off-peak, in the mid-week daytime.

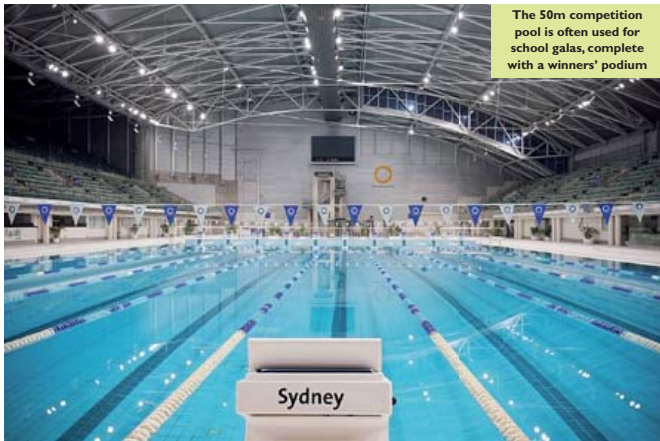
**community and elite**

The aquatic centre is run by the Sydney Olympic Park Authority – a statutory body owned by New South Wales Council – which also runs the archery centre, sports hall and hockey centre. Other leisure facilities owned by the council, but outside of the Olympic park, are either run directly in-house or outsourced to contractors such as the YMCA.

The aquatic centre employs around 300 staff, with 60 full-time employees, and has a turnover of more than AU\$12.5m. It runs on a subsidy of AU\$2.9m, provided by New South Wales Council, but has increased its revenue by AU\$3.5m over the last three or four years, so the subsidy has been steadily coming down.

Coggon explains: “Our aim is to provide world-class facilities with world-class service for all users, from elite athletes to the local community. By bringing a bit more discipline to decision-making and through better business planning, we've been able to improve the financial sustainability of the centre. Improvements to our health and fitness offering and development of the Learn to Swim programme have been crucial.”

The venue is in a community area, situated in suburbs of the city, so has an immediate catchment area on which to draw. Indeed, it's interesting to note that the centre opened in 1994, six years before the Olympics, so it was a community facility before it was an elite one;

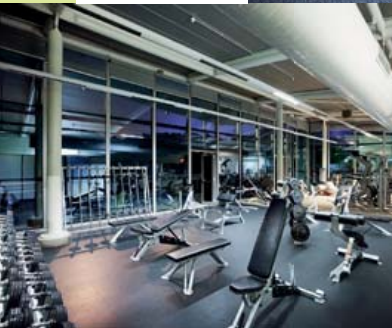


**The 50m competition pool is often used for school galas, complete with a winners' podium**





The 900sq m fitness area offers around 26 group exercises classes a week, as well as a fully-equipped gym



Sydney needed a world-class facility up and running as part of the bid, to demonstrate its capacity to build and operate the right class of facility for the Games.

The centre shut to the public for several months before the Olympics, and for three months during the event. However, because the community always knew this would happen, and because they were so heavily involved in the event itself, this didn't cause a problem.

Since the Games, a lot of companies have moved their corporate headquarters into the park, while the athletes' residences have been converted into hotels, only broadening the potential user base.

A Legacy Agreement was drawn up prior to 2000 with all the sports governing bodies, ensuring them a guaranteed level of usage of the facilities.

However, there's also a strong commitment to community: as Coggon explains, the facility is open to the public all day, 363 days a year. There are more than 4,000 kids enrolled in the swim school programme, for example, and this is complemented by annual swimming carnivals that take place every February–April. These carnivals are the

equivalent of our school sports days, but on a much bigger scale. All the schools in New South Wales take part and, during these months, the pool is used to capacity pretty much every day. Then, during the summer months, the athletics carnivals take place.

### fitness offering

But even though swimming is obviously the focus of the centre, the health and fitness offering has become more important over the last few years, with serious investment and a consequent uplift in income. The health and fitness offering is spread over four distinct areas – the main 60-station gym, a free weights zone and two cardio/circuit areas – totalling around 900sq m.

The main gym area has its own dedicated reception desk that leads into a well laid-out area with an even split between pin-loaded resistance machines and free weights. The cardio equipment is in a separate area downstairs: around 30 pieces with integrated screens. There's also a group exercise programme of around 26 classes a week. Plans are now in place to develop an old cardio room, currently used for circuits, into a dedicated personal training room for women, as this is a big growth area identified by the club. ▶



The centre employs different approaches to membership, including allowing non-members to use the facilities



In addition to the Sydney Olympic Aquatic Centre's other amenities, there's also a leisure pool, beach area and spa complex

► The approach to membership and pricing is very interesting. You don't have to be a member to use the facilities, and casual usage is consequently high. There's also no requirement for an induction, which again encourages casual drop-in usage. Meanwhile, where the average membership fee for local private sector clubs would be around AUS\$1,000 for 12 months (equivalent to around £650), the aquatic centre charges around AUS\$900 a year, or AUS\$60–80 a month. However, in sharp contrast to the UK, less than 10 per cent of members pay monthly, with operators typically offering a discount of one month on annual membership options. Another interesting pricing policy is to give a loyalty discount on renewal of three-, six- and 12-month memberships of up to 15 per cent.

Matt Hilder, health club and customer service manager, is keen to add value for those who do take up gym membership. "Every member gets a personal birthday card by post, and members also get discounts at the café, on personal training and in the sports shop," he says. "Then, every three months, there's a free seasonal breakfast, and just before Christmas we hold a member appreciation week. There's a Christmas party with lots of giveaways, and an award for the male and female members of the year. We really value the social side of our membership offering."

Every member is also entitled to a fitness assessment and programme, which is incorporated into the membership package – Gold or Silver, depending on how much support a member wants/needs. Silver members get reviews every six months, while Gold members are reviewed every three months.

### tapping new markets

The gym membership base is very family-focused, mainly thanks to the pools, which naturally attract this market – the majority of members are aged between 25 and 45. This in comparison to the local Fitness First, for example, where members are discernibly younger.

Hilder is also busy developing a schools programme for the gym, as childhood obesity is an even bigger issue in Australia than in the UK – in fact, surprisingly given our perceptions of the Australians as an active nation, it's only just behind America in the world obesity league. "Childhood obesity is a major problem and we're part of the lifelong solution. Even here in Australia, with our great climate and outdoor sporting environment, kids are spending more time on PCs and watching TV. Diet is also an issue. Participation levels might be higher, but obesity is an increasing problem," says Hilder.

Indeed, although the café at the centre was buzzing while I was there, it was interesting to note that Australian facility managers face the same challenge as UK operators in educating their customers about healthy eating. "We've tried on several occasions to promote healthy eating through a 'healthy eating pod', but still the best selling item is hot chips," says Hilder. Nevertheless, he reports a great reaction to the schools programme, with demand outstripping supply.

Meanwhile, the pool is a major regional destination, which has positive spin-offs for the rest of the facilities at the complex, as Coggan explains: "We're an 'icon venue' in terms of swimming and we use those facilities and our name to draw people in. Australia is famous for the number of outdoor pools, as well as its fabulous beaches, but many people like the controlled indoor environment. It's also easy to get here and we have free parking. The beaches aren't always easy to get to and then parking is a nightmare – they're really for people who want to spend four or five hours there, rather than just going for a swim."

### sharing expertise

In terms of lessons for London, with the 2012 Games and their Legacy very much on the agenda, there's much to be gained from sharing ideas with UK operators. Indeed, the Sydney Aquatic Centre has a very active exchange programme with our very own GLL (Greenwich Leisure Ltd), with staff of all levels spending time at the partner organisation.

"We have two primary aims," explains GLL's director of development Chris Symons. "Firstly, to grow internally the understanding and expertise required for Olympic aquatics competitions in preparation for our intended involvement in 2012; and secondly to train a managerial team conversant with international and televised aquatic events."

But the learning goes both ways, with the Sydney Aquatic Centre team emphasising the value of insights gained into GLL's member journey, wellness concept and retention strategies. Coggan explains: "The exchange programme has been one of the best learning tools over the last few years: GLL's experience in member retention has helped us improve our own retention over the last 12 months by around 8 per cent, from 47 per cent to 55 per cent."



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# MAKING IT

Laura McStay investigates the health and fitness sector's differing approaches to exercise prescription

**W**hen the government's 'Be Active, Be Healthy' campaign launched last year, its proposed outcomes borrowed from our industry's methods for assessment and intervention, such as our pre-activity questionnaires. Specifically, 'Be Active' encourages the use of the General Practice Physical Activity Questionnaire (GPPAQ), a Department of Health-validated tool to assess activity levels among adults aged 16–74 years, and subsequently to generate a physical activity index: Active, Moderately Active, Moderately Inactive and Inactive. In turn, NICE guidance recommends that patients scoring anything less than Active are offered an intervention – an "exercise prescription". Typically, this is a patient-led commitment to increased levels of activity and exercise, with re-assessment by the health professional at three, six and 12 months.

Understanding the needs, wants and motivations of the deconditioned and inactive who can be persuaded to progress from a 30-minute walk to entering the gym or studio is a specialist skill in its own right; retaining these clients is arguably as much about personal development as it is about programming. So the question is, once patients become clients – when they pass from the surgery to the studio – does the assessment provided by fitness professionals, as opposed to healthcare professionals, give these individuals what they need to move forward?

Recent research by customer insight specialists Leisure-net Solutions shows the importance of an ongoing induction process: 76 per cent of new members questioned cited it as 'important' or 'very important' when joining a new gym. And yet, when asked later to rate the first six months' of membership, satisfaction

levels had fallen below 50 per cent, in part due to our failure to follow through and continually assess and re-assess.

Our clients may be extremely motivated to lose weight or become fitter – and may even perceive that health clubs offer the solutions they need to achieve those things – but if we don't encounter them as individuals, and satisfy their needs as well as desires, we can't expect to retain their loyalty.

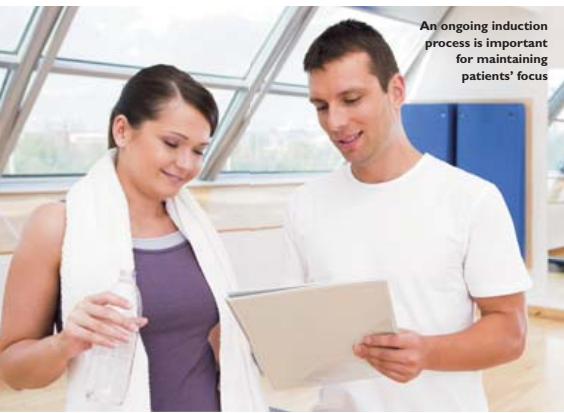
## personal touch

We know what it looks like when we're not quite hitting the mark – just ask your customers during their exit survey. A more useful question, as the 'Be Active' guidelines themselves ask, is: "What does success look like?" What does effective, empathetic exercise prescription look like, and what difference will it make in our gyms and for our clients?

Sports science and sports medicine consultant Tony Lycholat argues that client assessment should retain elements of that initial GP consultation. Rather than aiming to tick boxes and churn out an off-the-shelf exercise programme, we should be delivering bespoke prescriptions tailored to needs and context. "There are several stages to undertaking a client assessment correctly," he says. "The first is to understand your client's needs and, ideally, their past exercise and injury record. Secondly, there needs to be a self-checking element. What is the evidence for my diagnosis? Is it based in sound science and sound fitness practice? If it isn't, then you need to go back and revisit your findings."

Further, argues Lycholat, the fitness professional needs to be aware of the context in which the GP has referred the client. "There's a distinction between physical activity and exercise, and the GP will be very clear on what this distinction is. If a patient has been given an 'exercise prescription' by their GP, it's because they [the GP] believe a structured exercise programme will be beneficial, in addition to any physical activity undertaken outside of the gym. For example, the patient may have been

An ongoing induction process is important for maintaining patients' focus



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# PERSONAL

referred because they report specific physical problems, such as a bad back or neck pain, that a specific exercise programme can help with."

In all cases, the need for intense personalisation cannot be overstated. Not only should there be familiarity with a client's injury record but, when assessing performance, the trainer should also be able to separate symptoms from idiosyncrasies. "Look at Paula Radcliffe," Lychoat explains. "How many personal trainers would watch her on a treadmill and expend time and effort coaching her to keep her head still – a complete waste of time, and probably not an effective way of coaching that individual. If you look at the bigger picture – in Paula's case, at the steady movement below the waist – you'll see how what appears to be an anomaly masks a very efficient runner."

## assessing the assessors

Coaching to the individual, then, is the benchmark – but what happens when our trainers and educators hold differing, and at times conflicting, views? This was a question probed at the Meeting of the Minds symposium – a gathering of the industry's thought-leaders and practitioners hosted by PTontheNet in San Diego earlier this year – through an experiment that was set up to 'assess the assessors'.

Lisa Ziegler – a lean, disciplined, highly motivated and hard-working instructor who reported lower-leg discomfort and muscle pain – was chosen as the 'client' and was examined by five very different instructors prior to, and over the course of, the event.

The approach and outcome in each case seemed markedly different – even oppositional at times – but each left the typical gym-floor assessment looking crude in comparison to the comprehensive, tailored assessments that resulted. ▶

**Paul Chek adopts a holistic approach, working from the inside out to help clients affect their own change**





**Lycholat: "Look at Paula Radcliffe. How many PTs would waste time telling her to keep her head still!"**

► These ranged from Dr John Berardi's staggering 26-page report, three-day dietary log and full blood work analysis to Greg Roskopf's hands-on Muscle Activation Technique assessment, which had improved Ziegler's stability by the end of the on-stage session itself. Lenny Parracino also favoured manual manipulation, while Mark Verstegen looked at how to instill programmes with a sense of fun and enjoyment.

Holistic therapist Paul Chek had the most eclectic approach, working from the inside out with the aim of allowing Ziegler to affect her own change programme. Says Chek: "I find out what you want to do and then I give you a diet and exercise programme that provides the tools to do it. That way you go into it knowing you can [achieve your goals], because you're confident in yourself."

## empowering the individual

For Ziegler, the tangible results of hands-on work by Roskopf and Parracino were reportedly the most valuable, but the framework of nutritional advice and holistic thinking was "helpful and interesting, if not life-changing". So for Ziegler – a motivated fitness professional – it was specific, relevant biomechanical advice that proved most desirable.

However, although most clients will never encounter multiple assessments as experienced by Ziegler at Meeting of the Minds, clients from a background of severe inactivity or obesity may find holistic tools as crucial to success with their training as the instruction itself.

Yet even this is only suitable in the context of sound science and safe practice – something we have a care of duty to offer first and foremost. Note that specialist instructors – including those qualified to work with clients referred from GPs, with expertise in areas such as cardiac disease, falls prevention, lower back pain, stroke, mental health, obesity and diabetes, and accelerated rehabilitation (military only) – sit at Level 4 on the REPs framework.

Where the multitude of approaches can strengthen the client offering lies in being able to draw on the knowledge of trusted colleagues, and in creating an intense level of personalisation that starts at the pre-



PHOTO: ©ACTIONPLUS

activity assessment and continues for the lifetime of the relationship. Says Lycholat: "There's little value in spending time developing a personalised prescription if it's delivered and communicated in a fashion that doesn't fit with the client's preferred learning style."

The need to genuinely understand the client is key to creating programmes of worth – asking more than a few rudimentary questions and, furthermore, not only asking "what do you want?", but also hearing the answer rather than simply prescribing "what you need".

As Meeting of the Minds host Robert Cappuccio explains: "As fitness professionals we can't change anyone. Every change in our client's outer world is preceded by a self-determined change in their inner world. What we can do is facilitate the process by which each client can crystallise what they want, and then guide them to that end result."

## food for thought

There are some simple, but nonetheless valuable, lessons to be learned from the Meeting of the Minds experiment:

- Information without specific programme solutions means nothing. Our clients need directives they can implement that day

- It's not just the education we impart to our clients, but what the communication process draws out of them that creates meaningful impact
- The more personalised the solution, the greater the commitment to its execution
- No one assessment or training methodology is the answer. Our clients are emotionally, physically and emotionally an indivisible whole – our solutions must also be holistic

There's a reason why gym floor assessments can be cursory and programming far from bespoke: our time is often limited. However, our clients' success is not just a matter of what's given to them, but also what's going on within them. Start with what is most compelling – with the story of why they want what they want, whether that's wedding weight loss or enhanced competitive performance. You can give them what you think they need: that's your professional gift after all. However, crucially, you must package it around what they want, with measurements that take into account their own reasons for change.

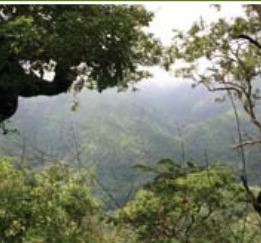


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## LIVESTRONG® by Matrix is unveiled

The result of a partnership with LIVESTRONG®, Johnson Health Tech North America (JHTNA) is pleased to unveil the LIVESTRONG® by Matrix commercial line.

Endorsed by seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, the LIVESTRONG by Matrix cardio line was developed specifically for the light commercial market. It includes recumbent and upright bikes (the R1x and U1x) as well as two treadmills (T1x and T1xe) and an elliptical trainer (E1x). There are also two Livestrong-branded indoor cycles.

"The partnership between JHTNA and LIVESTRONG has allowed us to harness the shared belief that everyone can make a difference in the fight against cancer by leading an active lifestyle," says Kent Stevens, executive vice president of Matrix Fitness sales. "We're proud to offer the tools fundamental to supporting health and fitness, while at the same time supporting such a tremendous movement."

LIVESTRONG® by Matrix made its commercial debut at IHRSA this year.

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## XLarge version of AIREX® Balance-pad

Global gymnastic mat producer AIREX® has created a new, extra-large version of its Balance-pad.

The multi-functional piece of kit is 98cm (38.5in) in length and is said to be particularly suitable for lateral position exercises. However, it's also suitable for endurance and therapeutic training.

The pad has many applications, including promoting inter-muscular co-ordination as a part of strength training. Usable on both sides, the waffle pattern on the top and the underside of the pad ensures that the product is non-slip, while also massaging and stimulating the



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soles of the feet. By promoting blood circulation in this way, stimulating receptors in the feet, a user's wellbeing is also enhanced.



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## 20th anniversary Reebok step launched

A pink step has been launched to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the original Reebok step.

The compact step is only available for a limited time and can be adjusted to three training heights. It also features non-slip floor blocks and a rubber moulded platform – all finished off with a splash of eye-catching pink.

Perfect for low impact aerobic training, each pink step comes with a two-year warranty when purchased from Escape Fitness.

# viva españa



Karen Maxwell reports on the life-changing approach of RFH Fitness boot camps

**M**

ost people associate a few days' break in southern Spain with relaxing in the sunshine and enjoying the local cuisine.

They certainly wouldn't expect a daily itinerary that might start with a pre-breakfast pilates class, followed by a 25km bike ride and an afternoon spent circuit training in the hotel gym. However, this is a typical daily routine for RFH Fitness clients when they sign

up for a fully-inclusive four- to 28-day weight loss and fitness boot camp.

Priced at €891–€5,539 and based at a four-star resort hotel on the edge of the historic city of Antequera, in the heart of Andalucia, there's certainly no hardship involved. Nevertheless, guests are encouraged to stick to their daily programme of activities and healthy meal selections (mostly fruit and vegetables and no, or very little, alcohol) to help them reach their individual goals.

"Often people – particularly those in stressful jobs – go on holiday to rest and relax, but then revert to bad habits once they get back home," RFH Fitness founder Mel Richards explains. "Our focus is to offer a fitness holiday that helps motivate them towards positive change by giving them the confidence to turn their lives around. Here people don't have to make decisions – they just need to fit into the programme's structure and address what's important to them in their lives back home."

## military know-how

Having served in the British military for 25 years, Richards re-trained as a personal trainer (PT) with Premier Training, moved to Spain and set up activity-focused Rio Frio Holidays (RFH) in 2004. A year later, after reading about a similar outfit in Brazil and realising he was already giving many of his activity clients free advice on fitness and nutrition, he then extended his offering to encompass a weight loss and fitness concept.

**Mel Richards (pictured left) started RFH Fitness after spending 25 years in the military and training as a PT with Premier Training**



The company adopts a nurturing, educational approach, rather than the shouting and bullying that people may associate with boot camps

Richards set up a partnership with the 32-room Finca Eslava resort hotel in Antequera. The hotel provides the accommodation, restaurant facilities and access to a fully-equipped gym, exercise and group cycling studios, as well as its spa, 25m indoor pool and outdoor leisure pool and gardens. Richards and his team provide the fitness programming and the wellness know-how.

Senior co-ordinator to a team of three full-time and three part-time multi-lingual personal fitness and lifestyle instructors and guides, Richards is the first point of contact for clients, who are predominantly English and Irish. He assesses their levels of health and fitness – such as CV fitness, strength and flexibility – and then designs bespoke exercise programmes and offers lifestyle advice during their stay.

To complement this service, he brings in expertise from a number of specially selected, locally-based professionals who provide cognitive therapy, physiotherapy, sports massage, nutritional advice, pilates and yoga classes and rock climbing – as well as bringing to the table in-depth knowledge of the surrounding area.

### Keeping it simple

Once the client has been assessed, Richards says he tries to keep the exercise programme simple and avoids baffling the client with science or fitness fads – unless, of course, he's dealing with an experienced exerciser who's looking to up their game. "The boot camp system allows people to work together for social and motivational support, even though people work at their own set pace towards their own goals," he explains.

"From day one, we fit a heart monitor to each client and show them how to use it. This helps us keep an eye on the appropriate exercise intensity for the individual and helps them learn about themselves through effective methods of exercise. Once a comfortable routine has been set, we aim to increase the client's levels of flexibility, strength and stamina throughout their stay, and educate them at meal times and during their walks and bike rides to help them plan their own goals for the future."



### outdoor fitness

Just one hour's drive from Malaga airport, with a 90-minute drive taking you to the city of Seville in one direction or Granada in another, sightseeing excursions can add flavour to the weekly itinerary. In fact, Richards encourages his clients to explore the surrounding area by incorporating early morning city walks through Antequera, hiking tours that wind through the limestone structures of El Torcal Nature Park and bike rides through Europe's largest flamingo reserve into the activity programme.

Alternative activities include horse riding, quad biking, rock climbing and yoga retreats, as well as visits to a wolf conservation park in the mountains or the Finca las Navillas adventure park, with its zip wires and rope bridge. "Some people have a real aversion to the gym environment, which is often linked to their perceived body image," Richards explains. "A mixed timetable helps them understand that there are many other ways to keep fit and healthy."

The diversity of activities on offer encourages people to stick to the programme and allows them to step out of their comfort zone to develop their physical confidence, says Richards: "Most people are keen to work hard, to realise the benefits of potential lifestyle change, and are exhilarated when they

try things that they previously thought were impossible – learning to ride a bike, for example, or taking the plunge with a zip ride across a mountain gorge."

Plans are afoot to further develop the outdoor element, basing people in purpose-built log cabins that overlook the spectacular mountains and rivers in the adventure park. Richards says, from this location, the programme could include hiking, biking and fitness training with sandbags and kettlebells.

### structured approach

Catering for an average of six to nine clients a day, Richards says most people find out about RFH Fitness through word of mouth or via the company website, which was updated earlier this year. "Some people come to us because they need help with breaking bad habits, such as smoking, excessive drinking or eating disorders. Some need a break from a stressful work environment and a kickstart into a better fitness habit, while others use us as a training camp to prepare for elite sports events.

"Although I'm a very structured person and like people to arrive in time for communal meals and activities, we don't use a shouting and bullying boot camp mentality here, as people would find that completely intimidating. We concentrate on a nurturing, educational approach to help people develop their



own personal standards and discipline to help themselves."

For the client, the journey starts before they set off for Spain, by filling in an extensive questionnaire. This covers previous experience in, or an interest in trying, a variety of indoor and outdoor exercises and activities, as well as a personal assessment of general wellbeing. It asks about fitness and weight-loss goals, diet history, current activity levels at work and at home, and addresses perceived levels of motivation and confidence.

"We've found that we get a more honest account of issues related to food fads, inactivity, or a family history of bad habits or role models when it's written down on paper, rather than in a one-to-one interview," Richards explains.

"This gives a truer indication of clients' general wellbeing, helping us to prescribe the correct programming to get them on the right track to develop a long-term health and fitness habit that they can continue once they return home. If there's a doubt about their general level of health, we organise a visit to the local doctor, physiotherapist or chiropractor – we can even organise a heart scan if necessary."

Included in the five-day plus package is an hour's consultation with cognitive therapist Dr Lissa Dells (additional sessions can be arranged on request).

Dells specialises in developing long-term motivation to achieve fitness and weight management goals and also addresses issues related to stress, in order to reduce chronic fatigue or work overload.

"Cognitive therapy can help people to get a balance back in their lives," she explains. "This means more time for friends, family and interests outside the workplace for overworked people, and a lifestyle change for those who did not do sport or regular activity in their earlier years."

"Meanwhile, people who want to get over cravings for food, cigarettes or alcohol are helped to break one craving while they're here and are encouraged to apply the same principles to other cravings once they get home. This is done via a confidential chat rather than intensive therapy, which allows them to self-analyse and self-express to help themselves overcome temptation, letting go of the feeling that something is missing."

Guests also get the chance to de-stress and unwind through massage sessions performed in the privacy of their hotel room by a physiotherapist or sports massage therapist; the first treatment is included in the price of the stay.

#### aftercare

During their stay, all clients receive a comprehensive fitness test which measures their weight, body fat, basal

**The diversity of activities helps people stick to the programme and allows them to step out of their comfort zone, says Richards**

metabolic rate, body water level, muscle mass, bone mass, hip to waist ratio, blood pressure, and resting and predicted maximum heart rate. It also includes initial cardiovascular, strength and flexibility tests.

Within 48 hours of the client returning home, Richards sends them a report on their 'before and after' measurements, what they've accomplished during their time at the camp, and what they need to focus on to improve. He also sends them a personal programme to follow at home and details of how to get hold of some of the smaller equipment used at the camp.

"I often trade emails for about two to six weeks after people return home, after which time they may have gained the services of a personal trainer," he adds. "I certainly don't push for testimonials, but I often get an email out of the blue that says: 'Thanks, I've just run the marathon' or 'I've just bought my first bike'. For me, these life-changing sentiments are what it's all about."



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# in the groove

Maryrose Fison talks to the founder of Zumba, the highly popular, Latin dance-based group exercise concept

**W**alk into any gym this summer and you'll be hard-pressed to find a timetable that doesn't offer Zumba classes. The Latin-American dance-based programme has galvanised gym-goers across the globe and transformed couch potatoes into overnight converts in recent months. Today, more than seven million followers take the classes and the media has been awash with news of the workout's health benefits. So what is it that makes Zumba so appealing? We speak to Alberto "Beto" Perez, celebrity dance choreographer and inventor of Zumba, to find out.

## a passion for dance

These days it's rare to secure an interview with Perez. He's a busy man. When he isn't teaching four Zumba classes a week in Zumba's Miami headquarters, he's travelling the world introducing the class to countries as far afield as South Korea and Indonesia. Yet in spite of his gruelling schedule, he exudes energy and warmth.

Perez's inspiration to dance stems, he says, from a childhood removed from material wealth and immersed in a culture of celebration. "I'm from Cali [in Colombia]," he explains in a heavily-accented voice. "Cali is the capital of the salsa world – it's a hot city full of very

happy people. People don't have money, but they celebrate everything."

He describes a youth spent hanging out with friends, going to parties and soaking up the myriad cultural influences that surrounded him. But it

was a trip to the cinema on a sweltering summer's day in 1978 that he credits, with putting him on his chosen path.

"When I was eight years old, I went with my friends to see the movie *Grease* with John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John and I loved the rock and roll. It opened my mind and I discovered that I loved to dance."

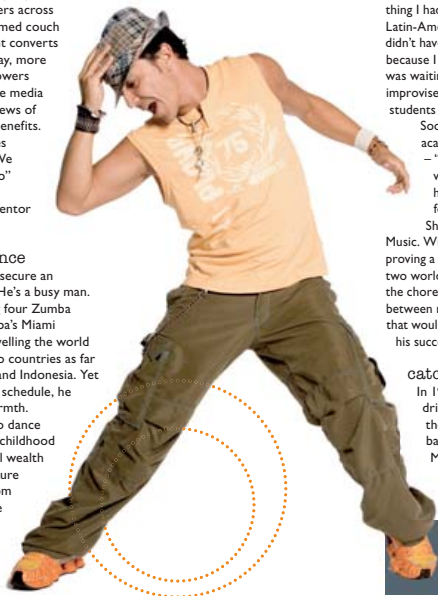
In the years that followed, Perez acquired something of a reputation as a formidable performer. Known affectionately by locals as "the Latin John Travolta", he routinely stunned those around him with his dance repertoire. By the age of 16, he had won a place at the prestigious Maria Sanford Dance Academy and began teaching aerobics classes to help subsidise his tuition fees. It was while teaching one of these classes that unexpected circumstances produced the burst of creativity that gave birth to Zumba.

"One day I forgot my music and the only thing I had in my bag were cassettes of Latin-American music," he explains. "I didn't have the option of going home, because I needed the work and the class was waiting for me, so I went in and improvised for an hour without any of the students knowing – and they loved it!"

Soon after graduating from the academy, he moved to Bogota – "the New York of Colombia" – where he made a name for himself choreographing routines for A-list pop stars such as Shakira and working for Sony Music. With his Zumba classes also proving a hit he was, as he puts it, "in two worlds – the fitness world and the choreography world", transitioning between multiple jobs with an adaptability that would become a defining feature of his success in years to come.

## catching a break

In 1999, still only 29 years old and driven by an "obsession to go to the United States", he packed his bags and boarded a plane for Miami. But far from being the effortless journey to recognition he had hoped



Alberto "Beto" Perez is a celebrity dance choreographer and the founder of Zumba





Zumba has more than seven million followers globally, taught by 12,000 instructors in 105 countries

for, Perez faced multiple setbacks. With next to no English and few contacts, finding work proved difficult.

"I came here [to Miami] four times to find an opportunity, but nobody paid me any attention," he recalls. It was only on his fifth visit that he struck lucky with a successful audition that landed him a position at one of the city's health clubs. But in spite of its early popularity, the Zumba classes – then still known by their original moniker "Rumbacize" (a combination of the Spanish word 'rumba' and the English word 'exercise') – remained ostensibly a niche class.

The turning point came in 2001 after a surprise phone call from a former student. "The mother of my now business partner [Alberto Perlman] took classes with me in Colombia, and she called and said: 'Why don't you meet my son? He has an idea you might be interested in!'"

Tired of being dogged by businessmen out to make a quick buck from him, he decided to give the former student's son a chance and the pair arranged to meet in a nearby Starbucks, where a meeting



of minds ensued. It wasn't long before they were bouncing ideas off one another and had set the wheels in motion to bring the classes to a wider audience.

First on the to-do list was branding. Both felt 'Rumbacize' was ill-suited to a largely English-speaking audience and began brainstorming for an alternative. "We thought of everything – Binga, Tanga, Bonga, Mango, Hakuna Matata," laughs Perez. "In one of the meetings we

came up with Zumba and that was it. It sounded cool, easy and catchy."

Next, they hatched a plan to capture the essence of Zumba, so that people who had never been to a class could understand its appeal. "We started with no money at all, so we organised some classes in South Beach [a popular neighbourhood in Miami]. People paid US\$10 for the class and we made about US\$2,000, which we used to pay for ▶

The instructors at Maloca Dance Studios in London, including (third from right) Catalina Vitolo



a video camera and editing equipment. We then filmed a class and edited it down to a three-minute video clip."

Perlman's business nous then came to the fore, securing a meeting with Fitness Quest – one of America's biggest distributors of fitness videos – and presenting the video to its executives, branding Perez as the "new Latin-American Billy Blanks" (the creator of Tae Bo). It was a successful pitch, stoking enough interest for the executives to meet Perez.

"I didn't speak English at this time," Perez recalls. "But they were interested in doing an infomercial and videos, so I said: 'Send me the script and I'll take classes with an English tutor.'"

### popularity boom

Within one year, the DVDs had sold more than a million copies and interest among fitness instructors began to grow. In 2003, Perez ran the first accreditation workshop, attended by 160 instructors; three years later, several thousand had qualified, and today the classes are taught by 12,000 instructors in 105 countries.

Meanwhile Orlando, Florida, will play host to the world's first Zumba Convention next month. Perez's excitement is palpable as he describes what's in the pipeline. "The opening of

the convention is the Zumbathon, which will be like a big concert experience – a huge space full of lights, artists and live musicians and, at the same time, we will teach massive classes – very cool!"

Yet for all its commercial success, Perez still faces resistance. "People always think Zumba will be around for a year or two, like a fashion. But it's not – I've been teaching my Zumba class for 25 years and I love it, people love it and it's addictive. We have three generations in the same class – grandmother, mother and daughter."

A trip to the Maloca Dance Studios in London, the UK's first Zumba Academy run by contemporaries of Perez – the husband and wife team Catalina and Giuseppe Vitolo – confirms the appeal Perez is talking about. As someone not famed for her co-ordination skills, I was pleasantly surprised to find a mixture of abilities in the class I joined. Unlike conventional aerobics workouts, the

class was less about perfectly imitating our instructor and more about having a good time. I found myself woefully off-beat at times but having a ball, spurred on by the boundless enthusiasm of our instructor and the infectious music.

Meanwhile one 57-year-old participant told me afterwards that she'd been taking the classes for five weeks and had already seen a change, explaining: "I've felt more energised since coming. I'm sleeping better, eating less and I don't feel as hungry after I've finished. I've even lost three quarters of a stone."

### MEASURE OF SUCCESS

With his legacy now firmly established in the fitness world, is Perez ready to sit back and take stock? It would seem not. "I'm so ambitious, and at Zumba we don't stop," he says.

A number of different types of Zumba are already available: a generic class for all levels of fitness, Zumbatomic for children, Zumba Gold for the elderly and the wheelchair-bound, a water-based version known as Aqua Zumba, and Zumba Toning (75 per cent toning and 25 per cent dancing). An interactive version of the class is expected to go out on Xbox and Wii later this year, and Perez has already begun planning a second convention in Europe for 2011.

Yet for all its commercial success, perhaps the most striking feature of Zumba is Perez's attitude. The biggest gauge of success for him is, he says, an intangible one: "For me, the best prize is for the people to smile."

Zumba classes at Maloca Dance Studios cater for all abilities and focus on having a good time



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# money talks

The many member payment options now available mean clubs can focus on helping their members achieve their training goals, while avoiding the sensitive subject of money. Kath Hudson reports

# D

oes anyone really enjoy asking somebody else for money? And if the payment is late, the embarrassment is multiplied. The great thing about direct debit (DD)

is that it all happens seamlessly behind the scenes, allowing club managers to get on with what they're good at while the cash keeps coming in.

Getting to this point, however, can be an uphill struggle if clubs attempt to go it alone: DD is highly regulated and has a rigorous approval process. Also, many small organisations can't get DD status, as banks are sensitive about allowing companies the power to take money from people's accounts. The cost of administration and the necessary investment in hardware and software can also be off-putting.

However, by using a member payments company, clubs can bypass these issues and free up management time, which can be put to much better use servicing members. Not only can the companies that offer DD management make sure the monthly memberships are delivered on time each month, but there are also a number of other related services now on offer, including fast-track joining, debt recovery, and the tracking and tracing of defaulting members.



**With Clubwise, members can be offered a discount for referring another member**

"When it comes to membership management, health clubs need to be focused on the core business of selling memberships and maintaining their equipment, and not be hindered by inefficient back-office systems or procedures," says Georgia Leybourne, sales and marketing director at Albany Software. "We clearly understand the intricacies of DD and can assist our customers in streamlining their systems and processes to support the entire DD collection process. Albany aims to save health clubs from the anguish of collecting monthly

membership fees, saving them both time and money and substantially reducing their debtors' days."

## preventing delays

One of the major benefits of using the services of a member payments company is that members' banking details can be validated at point of entry, so clubs know immediately whether or not the bank details are correct, preventing any delays.

Joining and inputting bank details online is an option now offered by most member payments companies. Debit ▶



# HEALTH CLUB MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK 2010



The 6th edition of the Health Club Management Handbook, published in association with the Fitness Industry Association (FIA), is being distributed in January 2010. The handbook is a comprehensive guide and reference tool distributed to industry suppliers and operators, FIA members and to industry buyers at events such as LIW, SIBEC and IHRSA..

AVAILABLE IN  
PRINT AND  
ONLINE

member  
payments

**"IF A DIRECT DEBIT CAN'T BE COLLECTED, THE OUTSOURCED COMPANY WILL CHASE IT UP ON THE CLUB'S BEHALF - THE CLUB DOESN'T NEED TO GET INVOLVED"**

► Finance Company (DFC) has an online joining portal called FASTDD, while Harlands was the first company to introduce this facility with its SNAP system, identifying the need to make joining a facility as simple as buying groceries or booking a flight.

"Many budget chains – such as The Gym Group, Pure Gym and Gym4all – have a 100 per cent online joining policy," explains Kevin Scott, Harlands director.

"We launched the SNAP system for this purpose: people can either join at home or via a kiosk in the club's reception. All the details are taken online and the club member just has to walk into the club and say they've joined – all their details will automatically appear there. Clubs don't have to worry about the paperwork or doing a tour."

Meanwhile, Clubwise prides itself on offering a one-stop shop when it comes to taking payments, encompassing services that might normally be offered by three separate companies: its offering includes a managed DD collection service, club management software and interactive CRM, plus referral and web-based retention services. The Clubwise system also covers payments for anything else within the club, whether it be beauty treatments, personal training, or food and drinks. All transactions are automatically updated on the member's payment record, allowing clubs to analyse spending patterns.

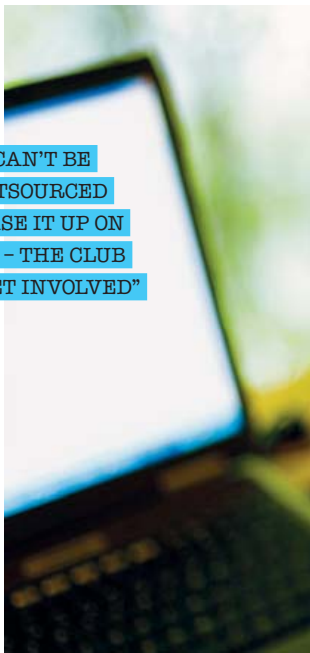
"Member enrollment, member management and member check-in are all offered as part of the direct debit package," explains Guy Foster, sales and marketing manager for Clubwise. "Added to this are a number of optional services, including prospect management, diary management, a KPI dashboard, point of sale [tracking everything that's been bought by the

member], stock management and a demographic mapping tool."

One unique feature of the Clubwise system is that members can be offered a discount on their membership for referring another member. "This is fully automated," says Foster. "The existing member and the referred member are linked on the system, and as long as the new member keeps paying their membership, the old member will keep receiving an agreed discount on their monthly DD. We have found this to have a number of benefits, because you're encouraging your members to be your marketers. This gives members a chance to get their memberships down to zero. It's a very sophisticated and cost-effective form of marketing and the club doesn't have to worry about any of it, because it's all automated."

#### chasing debtors

Another advantage of outsourcing is that, if a DD can't be collected, then the





# HEALTH CLUB MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK 2010



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Many budget chains have a 100 per cent online joining policy, with details automatically sent to the club

STUDIO/GETTY IMAGES

company will chase it up on the club's behalf, contacting the member without the club being involved.

"If a DD is returned unpaid, it can be resubmitted up to three times without the club knowing it has been rejected," says Leybourne. "After the third failure, a report is sent to the health club, at which point they can then decide on the next course of action."

Harlands works closely with Experian on credit checking. It also provides a customer call centre so members can call them and not the club, and in some circumstances Harlands can even take the call as the club. "If a member cancels their membership, we can track and trace them," adds Scott. "Some say they've moved away from the area, but we often find out they've just moved around the corner. We then consult with the club, so we can act according to the philosophy of the organisation."

Harlands and DFC also offer a data retrieval facility that keeps clients informed about members 24/7. "Clients

can track their members easily and gain up-to-date information regarding their accounts," says DFC director Ivan Stevenson. "A facility can easily check up on bad debtors, cancelled members in a month and, more importantly, check on DFC's performance regarding their defaulting members."

"We've also invested heavily in disaster recovery, which adds security for clients – they won't lose their money in the event of a technical fault or the failure of an in-house system."

Outsourcing to a member payments company would certainly seem to be beneficial to a club's operations, relieving managers of the burden of IT systems and freeing them up to focus on looking after their members. Perhaps even more importantly, it makes financial sense: as Foster points out, selling one more membership a month could pay for the implementation of the system.



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# safe not sorry

Craig Baylis, a partner at law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner and an expert in health and safety, explores the lessons highlighted by the recent Holmes Place prosecution

**a** recent health and safety prosecution involving Holmes Place in central London has once more highlighted the crucial health and safety message of dealing with problems as and when they arise, and not simply ignoring problems that could have potentially lethal consequences.

In May this year, Holmes Place Health Club Limited and Thyssen Krupp Elevator Limited were each fined £233,000 at Southwark Crown Court after pleading guilty to a number of health and safety offences. In addition, costs of £170,000 and £205,000 were awarded against the two parties respectively.

## track record

The case concerned a fatal accident at the Holmes Place Health Club in the Broadgate complex, when a member of the club was crushed to death between the lift car and the lift shaft after becoming trapped in the doorway of the lift as it inexplicably descended while she was still exiting it.

It was established by the prosecution that, for months before the tragic accident, the lift was well known by gym staff and users to be unreliable. It malfunctioned far more often than it should have done. In fact, it malfunctioned so often that gym staff had given up calling out Thyssen to repair the lift when it stopped working.

Following the investigation, it had not been possible to determine exactly why the lift malfunctioned in the way that it did.

However, whatever the cause was, the accident did not come without warning. There had been numerous

## best practice guidelines

- Continually review health and safety management practices
- Ensure that external contractors are fulfilling their obligations
- Don't expose staff or customers to obvious risks
- Don't operate equipment that's obviously faulty
- In extreme circumstances, close the premises until they are rendered safe

incidents with the lift in the months and weeks before the fatal accident. Indeed, the picture that builds up from the prosecution case is that, in the weeks leading up to the fatal accident, the lift was notoriously unreliable and would regularly get stuck. There had also been several occasions on which the lift had suddenly dropped or fallen without warning when passengers were inside it. It should have been obvious to everyone that something was seriously wrong with the lift, requiring it to be taken out of service.

Meanwhile, Holmes Place had a maintenance contract with Thyssen which required the latter to visit every month for planned and preventative maintenance, and also to provide a 24-hour callout service in the event of significant problems. Thyssen's own records show that it did not visit the lift every month to carry out preventative maintenance.

The faulty lift was not, however, the only means of accessing the club's premises: the club was served by several lifts, including one that was used for taking down towels and a goods lift. In addition, there were stairs down to the club from street level, as well as stairs inside the club which were used to get to the fitness studios and changing rooms.

## duty of care

From a legal perspective, the law does not expect Holmes Place to be expert in understanding technical difficulties

**“the accident did not come without warning  
– there had been numerous incidents in the  
months and weeks before the fatal event”**



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Simply instructing experts to deal with the issue doesn't mean it's no longer your problem. It's your problem until it's resolved

with the lifts on its premises. However, the basic duty of care which Holmes Place owed to its employees and to its customers was to ensure that every aspect of its operation was as reasonably safe as it could be made.

In sentencing Holmes Place and Thyssen, the judge said that there had been a "systematic failure in management" and "no proper system of work for highlighting failures".

What was clear was that, because of the continued poor operating history of the lift, it should have been taken out of service until the fault was identified. It seems quite clear that what happened was a failure to recognise a potentially lethal problem that was just waiting to happen. One important thing to remember is that it simply isn't good enough to think that, because you have instructed experts to deal with the issue, it is no longer your problem. The fact is, it remains your problem until it is resolved.

Whenever external advisors/contractors are involved, some sort of regular meeting with

management should always be set up as a matter of course, to ensure that the external advisors are progressing with whatever remedies are appropriate, and to understand how the situation should be managed internally.



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#### about the author

Craig Baylis is a partner at law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner and head of the firm's Regulatory Practice Group. He is widely experienced in health and safety and food safety, and has significant expertise in successfully defending clients in proceedings brought by enforcement agencies. As a leading practitioner in the licensing field, Craig regularly appears before tribunals all over England and Wales, including advocacy in the Crown Courts on licensing appeals. Craig is recognised as an expert in the area by Legal Business Legal Experts and regularly speaks on licensing law at national conferences.



# DATA MINING

**E**xercise management systems date back to the mid-90s, around the time that exergaming and virtual reality also emerged in the fitness market, providing interaction and feedback to members.

Many operators will already be familiar with, and implementing, systems such as Pulse Smart Centre, FitLinxx, SHOKK Tactics, Star Trac's fitness, Technogym Wellness System, and solutions from SCIFIT and gym80 – but are they exploiting these systems' full potential?

## A HELPING HAND

An exercise management system essentially connects members,

Exercise management systems are one of the most useful tools available to fitness clubs, so why aren't more managers using the data they collect?

Luke Tuchscherer investigates

equipment and exercise professionals through a central computer system.

However, it would seem that, in many cases, the systems are simply installed and then all but ignored. Members may use them to help with their individual fitness goals, but many clubs fail to regularly mine the data themselves. What if facilities were to use the data to see how well a member is performing against targets, to see if they need more help (therefore helping retention) or even used the data to assess the options for selling extra services to a member, such as personal training (thereby boosting club revenues)?

Guy Griffiths at GGFit, a company that specialises in analysing exercise management data, says: "The main advantage of using an exercise management system is the ability to know more about your members – their compliance with their programme, exercises completed and so on. A member who is regularly completing less than 80 per cent or more than 120 per cent of their exercise programme is likely to be less motivated, and should be contacted for a programme review."

Griffiths also points out that, for new members, an exercise management system can act as a guide for the first few months – not replacing, but supplementing, the instructor. Meanwhile, more experienced users are helped with progression, whether based around weight lifted, calories burned or improvement in average heart rate. And personal trainers and gym instructors can keep tabs on members at all times, feeding back with encouragement or praise on members' performance.

Exercise management systems are also useful when dealing with members who've come in through GP referral, as it's easier to keep an eye on exercises and equipment used, as well as monitoring heart rates and performance. In line with the drive towards more accountability and measurable outcomes in the fitness sector, feeding back patient exercise information to the GP or PCT is also considerably more valuable than simply providing number of visits.

**Exercise management systems serve to connect members, equipment and staff**

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## CLEAR GOALS

With all the benefits they bring, it's hard to understand why clubs aren't using exercise management systems properly. However, as Griffiths explains: "The two main issues with exercise management systems are understanding and buy-in, which go hand-in-hand. The reasons for purchasing a system in the first place should be clear, whether it's for GP referrals, to improve retention, to provide better member service or to run member competitions."

"Selling the system throughout the club is paramount, from club management to gym managers, fitness professionals and members. All must understand how the system will help them personally. When management knows what reports they want and why, their knowledge filters down to the staff – staff who need to know how to operate the system day-to-day."

The risk is that clubs may feel swamped with data, particularly when using more of the value-added modules on their system. However, as Griffiths explains, focusing on what the club/staff/members want to achieve and filtering out the noise will help. Graphical representations can also make it easier to analyse the data – looking at pictures or trends is much easier than looking at tables of figures.

Ultimately, he says, exercise management systems help you to know more about your members, boosting retention, but: "Any system is only as good as the people (including members) using it, so understanding the system and using it properly is vital to success."

We talk to a selection of operators to understand their best practice use of exercise management data.

## ANDY BOURNE

Managing director, Xpect Health and Fitness, Braintree  
System: FITLINXX

"We've always recognised that, if members are achieving their goals, they're receiving value for money from their membership fees and will therefore be less likely to leave. To do this, they need guidance.

FitLinxx has allowed us to set KPIs for our gym team. We've tried to paint the picture of an instructor acting as a shepherd to a flock of members. By splitting the membership base across a team of shepherds, the flock has been broken down into smaller, more manageable flocks of customers and, for the first time, we're now truly able to measure the effectiveness of a fitness instructor.

When I was first introduced to FitLinxx, it occurred to me that we could really use this product to implement customer relationship management techniques in the gym.

Our 10 years of working with FitLinxx has highlighted that the first priority is ensuring that all new customers are thoroughly inducted on, and signed up to, the FitLinxx system. This may appear an obvious statement but, if we fall at this first hurdle, then all the other systems become irrelevant. For me, this figure – the percentage of new joiners we induct on to FitLinxx – is possibly the most important statistic generated by the software each month.

CASE STUDY



Xpect has been working with FitLinxx for 10 years

But FitLinxx isn't a panacea for all ills: without creating the right customer-centric culture and framework, it will fail. Our team understands, however, that the system is central to our club's ethos and that discipline is needed to enforce it – otherwise it can become a tick-box system with instructors only paying lip service to resolving the triggers and following the required interaction processes. The real challenge is ensuring we are utilising FitLinxx in every hour of every day of operation."



Xpect: Each member has an instructor who's responsible for developing a relationship with them

## ▶ ANTHONY PEYNADO

Physical activity and health co-ordinator, Fusion, Carmarthenshire

System: **TECHNOGYM WELLNESS SYSTEM**

“I’m responsible for the management and performance of Fusion health and fitness clubs in the county of Carmarthenshire, Wales, where we have three clubs that use Technogym’s Wellness System.

The Wellness System means I’m able to generate data to produce an accurate report of club performance in terms of member visit frequency, club usage, active membership, and exercise programme compliance for all or selected membership categories.

The data for instructors’ contact frequency with members is also recorded on a monthly basis, allowing for a direct measurement of staff performance. As well as face-to-face, instructors actively communicate with members via an easy to use internal messaging system.

In addition, the Wellness System is programmed to generate live tasks that prompt the instructor to liaise with the member. An example of a task would be to engage with a member with a low visit frequency trend. All tasks generated emulate our service plan, designed to maximum member contact. They also allow for the identification of, and intervention with, members who may potentially be losing motivation, and who in other circumstances might cancel

## CASE STUDY 2



Technogym’s Wellness system has helped boost Fusion’s financial performance

their membership. In a club where the member-to-instructor ratio is 200 to one, to monitor and measure this without an effective management system would be extremely time-consuming and difficult to say the least.

As a manager, data based on staff targets also forms part of the appraisal process, ensuring that staff are clearly aware of what’s expected of them.

Using the system, I regularly survey members to determine what motivates our customers and understand what’s important to them. This helps me to gain a deeper insight into the clubs’ problems and shed light on topics related to the sites’ performances

within a broader context. This has allowed me to prioritise management actions based on objective data rather than relying on subjective gut feelings, which has resulted in sound, data-driven decisions.

Our clubs’ membership base and financial performance has consistently improved over the last two years. This is attributable, in part, to the effective use of our exercise management system. It allows for an efficient target-based working culture, as well as providing the member with frequent contact and the ability to keep a detailed log of their physical activity without the hassle of pen and paper.”

## JON WILLIAMS

General manager, The Marlow Club, Buckinghamshire

System: **MILON**

“We installed milon kit in June 09 and, since then, have seen a dramatic improvement in our retention levels.



The circuit bridges the gap between gym usage and personal training, with a maximum of 12 people using it at any one time and an instructor always present. Meanwhile the exercise management system, built into the equipment, allows us to ensure members are training correctly: personal settings are stored on a card which, when inserted into each machine, automatically adjusts the seat position, weight level and range of movement.

For the members, the system also pulls off some very informative graphs and figures. These show them how well they’re doing on each piece of equipment – for example, how many reps they performed and what weight

they lifted. Crucially, it also shows them where they need to improve, which is key to ongoing progression.

Meanwhile, the reporting figures we generate from the system give us the opportunity to make sure members are using the circuit often enough; if not, we’re able to easily communicate with them to ensure their usage increases.

In addition to this, one of the most important reports allows us to ensure members are making a positive change to their weights so they see an improvement in their performance; this is vital to keeping members on the system and driving retention levels.”

## CASE STUDY 3

The milon circuit has led to an improvement in retention levels



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# MENDING MEMBERS

Prehabilitation and cardiac rehabilitation is where the health club industry should be heading. London-based osteopath Nick Potter explains why

**T**he NHS is buckling under the pressure of acute illnesses: the combination of an ageing population with increasing orthopaedic problems, and private health insurance companies abandoning the cover of chronic conditions, will soon make people realise they will have to pay for their care. At this point, they will be motivated to seek a different

approach and the focus of healthcare will start to shift – from reactive to proactive, from cure to prevention.

#### preventative prehab

Prehabilitation is part of this model, which is what we offer at the London Spine Clinic and at my two busy private practices in London. The clinics are multi-disciplinary: neurosurgeons, osteopaths, physiotherapists, podiatrists and pain specialists work together to provide a 'recipe' of care to fit individual needs, focused around treatments, exercise programmes and pain relief.

Broadly defined, prehab is pre-op preparation to improve the post-op recovery, allowing people to exercise within the parameters of what they can do. In some cases it can remove the need for operations altogether; indeed, the surgeons at the London Spine Clinic are known as the surgeons who don't operate, because we've reduced the need for operations among our clients by 85 per cent. We've also shown that, with prehab, stays in hospital are drastically reduced: from 10 days down to three for a lumbar spinal fusion (fusing two vertebrae together so there's no motion). Surgeons have also commented on the improvement in muscle tone among these patients.

As an example, 80 per cent of slipped discs will get better on their own – if you do nothing at all – but with treatment the results can be much quicker. However, the NHS generally operates too early, as its physio programmes are often ineffective and compliance is low. Compliance in my

patients is 100 per cent better than among NHS patients, since they have made a financial commitment to their treatment – a real motivating factor. One also gets longer with patients to explain, educate and involve them in their care.

Pain management also plays a key role in ensuring compliance: just because something hurts, doesn't mean you should avoid it. That is, however, very different from 'no pain, no gain'. Pain is heavily tied up with mood, and people can avoid doing their exercises because they feel low and bad about themselves. We can help them with pain blocks and injections and do clever things with medication, including the use of anti-depressants.

#### opportunities for operators

If one takes a macro view of the current health and fitness market, there's a major opportunity for gym operators to become involved, not just in general health and fitness, nutrition and weight loss, but also in playing a key role in the provision of more medically-based programmes of prehab and rehab. As a starting point, clubs can approach us, as we're in the process of launching an in-house training programme for instructors.

I regularly liaise with personal trainers in patients' gyms, either to set up programmes or to establish avoidance strategies: getting around the fact that people sometimes avoid doing something because it hurts, or simply because they think it will hurt. Good communication is key, as patients need to be reassured and encouraged to understand the benefits. Nevertheless, compliance is often still a problem: sometimes it does require some straight-talking to motivate people.

Health clubs with pools are particularly well placed to offer prehab; exercising in water is ideal, as it offers



**There's an opportunity for GPs specialising in sports injuries to spend time in gyms, referring members to PTs**



Cardiac rehab:  
What patients  
desperately need  
is graded exercise

### Health clubs could offer short-term 'rehab memberships'

resistance and is off-load bearing, allowing people to immediately do things they couldn't do on land. Swimming itself is not generally recommended, however, since this involves trunk torsion, which can compound injuries. After a while, they can progress to land training, with exercise options including pilates.

Staff don't need any special training to oversee this, as it's a set protocol and a set plan which patients need to follow. There is, however, an opportunity for personal trainers to get involved, especially when patients progress to exercising out of the water.

Yet in spite of this obvious opportunity, hydrotherapy is still effectively non-existent in this country. Traditionally it takes place in a few depressing physiotherapy departments, in ancient pools built in the 1960s, and with mind-numbing regimes. Certainly generalised aquarobics and swimming are widespread, but off-weight-bearing programmes of rehab are scarce. But it's both inexpensive and vital in the early recovery of patients with a wide variety of orthopaedic and spinal problems. It can be the therapeutic bridge to the beginnings of recovery and mobilisation, rather than patients foundering in pain because their 'land-based' programmes are too advanced for their level of recovery. The Germans have made an art of it, with equipment such as under-water steppers and resistance jets. But we can use fairly simple equipment, including children's swimming aids and Aqajogger float belts that allow people to walk and run in the water.

#### integrated approach

I feel the future heralds combined medico-fitness facilities, staffed by allied medical and exercise prescription professionals working together.

Saying that, in my experience, having GP clinics in health clubs doesn't tend to work, because people don't think of going to their gym if they're ill.

It's also not good to bring germs into that environment. However, it could be really beneficial to have specialist GPs – those with expertise in, for example, sports injuries – spending a day a week at the club, with members referred to them as appropriate; Nuffield Health is already starting to bring this in. GPs could then use the health club facilities instead of referring to ageing physio departments, while PTs – many of whom have sports science degrees – would be provided with an exciting new challenge. It would also homogenise the whole process, as everyone involved in an individual's rehab would be able to easily communicate.

This leads into another area: clubs offering 'rehab memberships'. Nuffield already offers rehabilitation memberships to people who just need its services for a short while. However, people are then more likely to stay as members if going to the gym has helped fix their knee, and they've lost three stone into the bargain.

#### cardiac rehab

Though it's a step up and conceptually more frightening, cardiac rehab is also a massive market for gym operators to tap into. There are many cardiac, diabetic or hypertensive patients out there with very little knowledge of what they're able to do exercise-wise. They fear climbing stairs and even making love. These are scared people, so retention is high. Graded exercise is what they desperately need and yet, in a ▶



**Kur: Combining elements such as exercise and soft tissue manipulation to 'fix' clients**

## A WELLNESS DESTINATION

My current project is to establish a standalone residential, spinal, sports and orthopaedic clinic. It will be unique in that patients will be able to embark on intensive treatment and rehabilitation programmes in a conducive environment, based on the Austro-German principle of the Kur (see below). A good example is the Medicalpark chain in southern Germany: bright, perky places with functional rather than luxurious rooms, as they consider people are there to get fixed as opposed to relaxing.

The traditional spa hotel concept involves clients being handed a menu of treatments, most of which they do not understand, and after which they leave relaxed but probably no better. Under the Kur regime, the patient is given a consultation on arrival, after which they're provided with a bespoke programme using all the treatment modalities they most

need, including physical therapy and soft tissue manipulation, followed by hydrotherapy and exercise. They leave with vast improvements to their health, some of them 'fixed'.

Some conditions will need an ongoing programme, meaning that patient retention is high. However, not everyone will have a chronic condition: it might be someone who's just had a baby and needs realigning, with deep tissue work and specific exercises for a core damaged by a caesarian. People will stay for as long as they need, from a weekend to two weeks, and could come for prehab, rehab or any other condition.

We're talking to private health insurance companies, and certainly the physio aspect will be redeemable – if not all of it, as in the long term it will fix the patient. We're also continually monitoring our patients and providing outcome studies to justify the benefits of our approach.

▶ small study I did some years ago, the biggest obstacle to these patients getting good rehab was that doctors and even cardiologists did not refer for it – this despite reams of research done in the US supporting its benefits. Indeed, although most heart attacks are a result of bad lifestyle, few sufferers are given post-event rehab, and many go back to poor diets and smoking within weeks.

Introducing a cardiac rehab programme is relatively simple. The British Heart Foundation provides guidelines on exercises and there's now a REPS Level 4 qualification in cardiac rehab. You have to have a first aider on the premises and a defibrillator. There is, of course, a chance someone will arrest in the centre but, if proper care has been shown, this is nothing to worry about: the patient was probably going to arrest anyway, and is at least in an environment where good first line, immediate care can be administered.

Dr Hugh Bethell, a GP in Hampshire, has won awards for his ground-breaking centre – the Basingstoke and Alton Cardiac Rehab Centre – which is attached to a gym complex. The programmes are studio-based and led by personal trainers, not medically qualified personnel. He has also shown the value of so-called 'cardiac clubs', where spouses and family are involved in the recovery, getting physically involved together to overcome the poor lifestyle habits they often share.

### future-proofing

There's certainly a market out there that needs the facilities, expertise and motivation of the health club sector. For clubs already running GP referrals, now is the time to build even greater links with the NHS to ensure all those who could benefit are being referred, including those waiting for operations and those with heart conditions. For those not yet

offering these services, now might be the time to assess the facilities and skillsets at your disposal and look at ways to tap in to this increasingly important market.



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### about the author

Nick Potter is an osteopath who regularly consults for clinics and healthcare companies on set-up and strategy. He has worked in the US, Germany, France and the Middle East. A former human performance advisor to two F1 teams – Jaguar Probst and Jordan – he has also worked with elite tennis and golf professionals. He lectures widely on his speciality – cervical spine disorders – and runs a head, neck and facial pain clinic in London.

# REHAB ROUND-UP



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More GPs than ever are prescribing exercise as a form of recovery from illness and injury. Health clubs recognise that, to maximise this opportunity, they need the right equipment and knowledge in place to support it – and equipment suppliers are improving their offering to meet the new demand

**S**tar Trac has recently developed the HumanSport range of cable-based equipment to reflect the mechanics of the human body. The range works in harmony with the natural movements of the body, making it the perfect addition to a rehabilitation programme. The range comprises six machines which effectively act as 12 workout stations thanks to their dual-function weight stacks. HumanSport can help target specific areas of the body, developing strength, core stability and dynamic movement.

Sarah Morelli, Star Trac biomechanics coach, explains: "The HumanSport range works with the body instead of against it, making injury prevention and rehabilitation easy to achieve. The range has been developed to give health clubs not only the best quality fitness equipment but also to cater for the growing trend of rehabilitative exercise."

## training movement

Another equipment supplier that recognises the need to provide health clubs with the tools to deliver rehab is BeaverFit, which designs, manufactures and distributes training equipment for strength and endurance development. BeaverFit says its resistance bands and sleds are the perfect addition to a rehabilitation workout.

BeaverFit director Tom Beaver says: "Resistance bands are extremely adaptable – you can perform a number of exercises using just these bands, including targeting smaller muscle groups that are hard to train with more traditional free weight exercises."



**PTontheNet provides the knowledge needed to deliver rehabilitation programmes**

The bands are, he continues, particularly relevant to athletic conditioning: "Sports-specific conditioning involves training movements rather than individual muscle groups; the versatility of our resistance band exercises allows the athlete to mirror very closely the movement patterns in their sport, with varying degrees of resistance." This ensures not only that people can be rehabilitated following injury, but also helps avoid such problems occurring in the first place.

BeaverFit's range of weighted sleds can also help with recovery. Users can increase endurance and strength in the arms, shoulders, hips and legs by pulling and pushing them. They come in a range of sizes so people at different levels of their rehabilitation can still benefit from their use, whether pulling them while walking or using them for lat pulls or backwards ankle dragging.

## equipment and beyond

Aside from equipment suppliers, health clubs are also turning to other businesses to support their rehab offering. PTontheNet is an online resource where personal trainers can access a host of support materials and tutorials. There are 1,500 exercises and

stretches available, with 3,000 articles about functional and sports training and corrective exercise. The service is currently used by health and fitness centres, chains, local authorities and independent operators and is viewed as a cost-effective way to improve the service of facilities' staff.

Andy Jackson, global commercial director at FitPro, which owns PTontheNet, says: "We aim to give trainers the tools, knowledge and confidence to create quality exercise programmes for all their rehab clients."

## find out more at liw

**H**ealth clubs interested in improving their rehabilitation services can explore the latest innovations and seek advice from leading suppliers at Leisure Industry Week (LIW), which takes place from 21-23 September 2010 at Birmingham's NEC. PTontheNet will sponsor LIW's Small Group Functional Training Zone, while Star Trac and BeaverFit will be exhibiting within the show's Health & Fitness Zone. For further information on the event and details of how to exhibit, please visit [www.liw.co.uk](http://www.liw.co.uk)

# research round-up

## mind over matter

Practising yoga is more likely to lead to mindful eating than other forms of physical activity, according to research from the US

**E**ncouraging more people to take part in yoga classes could be one key approach to tackling high obesity levels in the UK, if findings from a study<sup>1</sup> carried out at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, US, are to be taken into account.

The study, which was published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, showed that mindful eaters – people more aware of what they were eating and who stopped when they felt full – didn't weigh as much as those who ate mindlessly (when they didn't feel hungry) or in response to depression or anxiety.

Not surprising you may think – but what was interesting was the association between mindful eating and yoga practice.

### getting data

Information was gathered via a Mindful Eating Questionnaire (MEQ) devised by Alan Kristal, associate head of the Cancer Prevention Program in the Public Health Sciences Division at the Hutchinson Center. The survey consisted of 28 questions which measured factors such as:

- Disinhibition – eating even when full
- Awareness – being aware of how food looks, tastes and smells
- External cues – eating in response to environmental cues such as advertising
- Emotional response – eating in response to sadness or stress
- Distraction – focusing on other things when eating

Each question was graded on a scale of one to four, with the higher scores relating to more mindful eating. The MEQ was distributed to just over 500 people in the Seattle area, including members of a yoga studio, fitness facility and weight-loss centre. It was also distributed at non-fitness related businesses such as a



Yoga's mindfulness skills may enable people to make better diet choices

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software company and a school. Just over 300 people completed the questionnaire: mostly women (81 per cent), white (90 per cent) and well educated (86 per cent had 16 years or more of schooling), with an average age of 42.

### results

Around 40 per cent of respondents practised yoga more than one hour a week, 46 per cent walked for at least 90 minutes a week and 52 per cent engaged in more than 90 minutes of moderate/strenuous physical activity per week.

The average BMI of respondents was around 25.8, within the normal range, which is not surprising considering that there was a bias towards physically active people in the sample.

BMI was lower on average among yoga practitioners (23.1) and those with higher MEQ scores, which in itself was found to be connected: the number of years of yoga practice and the number of minutes' practice each week were associated with higher MEQ scores. Other forms

of exercise were not found to have a statistically significant impact on the MEQ.

The results seem to support Kristal's hypothesis that mindfulness – a skill learned either directly or indirectly through yoga – can impact on eating behaviour, and that yoga practitioners gain less weight over time thanks to improved body awareness rather than the physical activity aspect of yoga.

He explains: "Yoga encourages practitioners to adopt challenging physical poses with an accepting, calm mind and focus on the breath. This teaches mindfulness skills and may enable individuals to successfully navigate difficult food environments and more accurately judge their motivations for eating."

Kristal concludes that the MEQ is the first tool of its kind to characterise and measure mindful eating and suggests that it could be used in weight-loss clinics to promote healthy behaviour. He also suggests that "adding yoga practice to a standard weight-loss program may make it more effective".

<sup>1</sup> Fransson C et al. Development and Validation of the Mindful Eating Questionnaire. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, Vol 109, Issue 8, p1439-1444, August 2009.



# CREATING BONDS

JULIE CRAMER INVESTIGATES WAYS IN WHICH CLUBS AND LEISURE CENTRES CAN ENHANCE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR MEMBERS

## THE PANEL

RICHARD APPS: Corporate health and fitness manager, Sheffield International Venues (SIV)  
JOSH BICKNELL: Director, Time Fitness  
THIERRY DELSOL: CEO, The Club Company  
NIC JARVIS: Industry consultant  
MATT SANDERSON: Director, Woodlands Fitness Centres  
MARTIN VAN ASSENDELFT: CEO, M Point health club, the Netherlands  
NIGEL WALLACE: Director of training, Lifetime

'Sell, sell, sell' has been the buzzword of the past decade in terms of memberships, as the industry has experienced a prolonged period of growth. But as the UK crawls slowly out of recession, new members are thinner on the ground. Clubs are now having to work harder to keep existing members happy and develop bonds with them. We ask a panel of experts for their advice on how to build all-important member relations.

Should clubs now be paying more attention to member relations and retention?

**MATT SANDERSON:** In the current economic climate, we cannot be reliant on signing up new members. Shifting your focus to member retention has its own set of challenges, but this is the path the industry should now be on.  
**NIGEL WALLACE:** As an industry issue, member retention has never been hotter. Many clubs have passively rather than actively engaged in retention strategies over the years, and never enough to embed the practice in the culture of the organisation.  
**NIC JARVIS:** Membership sales have plateaued in the past 18 months and it's now imperative to bring about a shift towards hanging on to existing customers. What attracts people to a business and what retains them are two different things. New customers are attracted by the facilities and price – but what retains them is the performance of the product and the people who deliver it.

New memberships have plateaued, so the focus must now be on retention

### At a basic level, where should clubs start?

**RICHARD APPS:** Building up member relations can at times be difficult and it will never be just one initiative that leads to success. However, in any club, customer relationships will be improved if all the basics are done well. These include cleanliness, customer service, equipment and policies.

**MARTIN VAN ASSENDELFT:** The club needs to be a place where people want to come not just to exercise, but to use as a meeting point for friends and business relations – a genuine home away from home.

**NIGEL WALLACE:** Strong foundations relate to how a member enters and moves through your club – from the greeting they get at reception to their interaction with trainers on the floor. All around the facility there are touchpoints; most clubs understand this and, at least on this level, are getting it right.

### So where do staff fit into your member relations objectives?

**RICHARD APPS:** Once the basics are in place, a great team of staff is vital, with continual investment in them to develop their excellence. Every employee at SIV must follow our customer service standards and engage in our training programme. Only then can you progress to the social and interactive phase of your strategy.

**THIERRY DELSOL:** Staff are encouraged to participate in member activities such as the running or walking club, water polo, golf, quiz night etc. Our group fitness instructors are also encouraged to join class participants for a coffee after the class. By increasing the level of interaction, we've improved our understanding of our members.

**NIGEL WALLACE:** There are skills you can teach staff to ensure they're interacting with customers in an optimum way – in a manner that empowers the

member to want to return. These skills need to be embedded, understood, monitored and measured. We're in the business of changing habits and it's generally believed that it takes around six months to arrive at a new habit. We need to give instructors the skills – and our training includes elements of NLP, cognitive behavioural therapy and motivational interviewing – to help customers arrive at that habit, so they can come back time and time again.

**NIC JARVIS:** Many members join clubs in a negative frame of mind – they're moving away from something they don't want to have, whether that's extra weight, tiredness, stress and so on. We can teach fitness consultants to know what their customers want, as the customer will normally not get it straight away – a process of education and goal-setting is fundamental in this process of change.

THE CLUB NEEDS TO BE A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO COME, NOT JUST TO EXERCISE, BUT ALSO AS A MEETING POINT

### Which of your member relationship initiatives are working well?

**THIERRY DELSOL:** We proactively seek members' feedback. Our members' forum is a quarterly meeting with eight to 10 people from our membership and club management, and it offers an opportunity for views and expectations to be expressed. We also have new members' evenings every other month and carry out an annual survey, which helps us monitor customer satisfaction.

**MATT SANDERSON:** Our online mentor programme is relatively new for us. It's especially useful for new members, who can email a question and hear back from a mentor within 24 hours. We'll look to automatically assign all members with an online mentor via the database in the future.

We have our 'Focused Member' scheme too, which gives two of our 500 members a full fitness assessment followed by access to five personal training sessions each week for a month;

their results are then publicised online and around the club. This is not only a fantastic offer for those chosen each month, but it's also a great motivator for others in the club, who are able to follow their progress.

Also, our business really took a leap forward when we installed a new database last year. It alerts us when a member's attendance starts to drop off, for example, which prompts us to get in contact – whether by email, text or postcard. The system has helped us to communicate with our members as much as possible, and at the right time.

**RICHARD APPS:** We have an 'Options' scheme – a type of personal training offered free as part of the membership package. Following a two-part induction, customers are encouraged to book in for as many one-to-one Options appointments as they wish. The customer gets a great personal service

and is able to learn more about making each visit far more effective.

**JOSH BICKNELL:** We're currently launching an overall strategy that we picked up from one of the global leaders, Les Mills in New Zealand. Our goal is 21 visits in 84 days. To encourage this we use inductions, re-programmes, follow-up calls, texting, email updates with a call to action, seminar evenings and so on.

**MARTIN VAN ASSENDELFT:** I create absolutely bespoke programmes for my members. These get them the results they want, so they remain a member.

Also, every two to three weeks, we organise an activity that people can join either for free or for a very small fee. I see this not only as a working tool for retention but also an income generator. For example, we may offer a free running course for 20 members. They come eight times, perhaps drink 16 cappuccinos each over the duration of the course – that's €32 x 20 = €640, which covers the cost of the course.



**M Point in the Netherlands aims to act as a 'home away from home'**



**Offering activities such as free running clubs can help build member relations**

**Where do you see the focus of member relations and retention heading in the future?**

**NIGEL WALLACE:** Clubs that focus more on the health angle rather than purely on the fitness angle will achieve better success – less a case of rigid exercise prescription and more a case of simply encouraging members to be active in some way three times a week. This is more positive and helps keep them motivated.

**NIC JARVIS:** Boosting membership retention will always be a much harder activity within a business than sales, because it's about fundamentally changing people's lifestyles. The industry has never properly monitored customer results – we're good at measuring attendance, but not results. We must look at customers' end goals and work back from that, as this is the only way we can deliver what they want.

**What about the social side of things?**

**NIC JARVIS:** The social element is lacking in a lot of clubs. In many, we have turned the experience into functional training. Those clubs that have a wider range of social facilities will always have better retention. **NIGEL WALLACE:** Clubs within clubs are a great way of building retention and creating a sense of identity. Group exercise and group activities will always be good areas to focus on for member relations.

**MARTIN VAN ASSEDELFT:** M Point is the sort of place where you're happy to spend time – it's built in an old farmhouse with a living room/café area, an outdoor terrace, a lake and so on. So members feel very at home here – it's definitely not just a place to come for a workout and then leave. I also run a lot of member events such as BBQs

and high teas, card game evenings, trips away with members, Easter bunny hunts for kids and so on. There's a strong social aspect. **MATT SANDERSON:** We've worked hard to develop our running and triathlon offering. It gives people goals and something to train for both in and out of the club, and it develops a social element. It also has a ripple effect throughout the club. For instance, we had three people attending the half Ironman event in Devon last year, including one woman in her 50s who qualified there for the World Championships. This inspired others and, as a result, we're taking 15 members to the event this year.



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# CORPORATE OUTREACH

**T**hink of corporate health and, for many, images of in-house company gyms spring to mind. In fact, corporate wellbeing takes a variety of forms and, despite the ongoing tough economic climate, more companies than ever are investing in the health of their staff. According to a 2009 survey of more than 1.9 million employees by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, a third of employers have an employee wellbeing strategy in place – a slight increase from the previous year's figure of 30 per cent.

## EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

The most commonly provided employee wellbeing benefit is access to counselling services, with subsidised gym memberships and support for stopping smoking also among the most frequently offered options.

"I don't think there are many organisations left that don't appreciate the value of wellbeing initiatives; more and more, companies are now making this area a priority," says Jeff Archer, director of The Tonic, which designs bespoke corporate wellness initiatives.

Archer says the companies that adopt wellbeing programmes are those that understand how demanding work and life can be,

Vicky Kiernander takes a look at the world of corporate wellness and asks if it's a market more health club operators should be tapping into

and that want to give their employees access to simple and effective healthy living strategies that can be easily incorporated into their daily routines.

"Some companies tie wellness initiatives in with statistics such as staff absence or productivity," he adds. "Others use wellbeing initiatives to improve ratings in staff and customer satisfaction questionnaires. Many companies also set up wellness initiatives to improve relations with staff, and as a way of developing their reputation as a great place to work."

Oliver Gray, founder of *energiseYou* – a provider of workplace health and wellbeing services – says there's a real business case for corporate wellness. The company

sponsors the wellbeing award for *The Sunday Times* 'Best Companies to Work For' list. "The companies that make this list really understand the business case for employee wellbeing: they have low rates of absenteeism, good employee retention and generally healthy, energised staff," says Gray.

By contrast, Gray says he has worked with companies where staff are unhealthy. "Morale is low and they have horrendous levels of absenteeism and staff turnover," he adds.

The 2009 CIPD study found that minor illnesses such as colds, flu and stomach upsets are the main cause of short-term absence for workers, followed by stress, musculoskeletal conditions and back pain – most of which can be prevented to some degree by improving the health and wellbeing of workers. A holistic approach is therefore key, believes Gray, and this was one of the reasons he left his job at a national health club



**Just The Tonic** Corporate wellness can help reduce absenteeism, boost morale and increase employee retention



**Not a drill** People get a thrill out of being treated like Army recruits by actual serving soldiers

## NEW YOU BOOT CAMP

**N**ew You Boot Camp offers a range of outdoor weight loss and fitness boot camps including women-only camps, extreme fitness camps for males and military fitness days. The company is currently expanding its corporate fitness days service after a successful launch last year.

People are grouped according to their ability and the day includes a variety of sessions including log runs, boxing, skipping, team games, scramble net obstacle courses, circuit training and core training.

Sunny Moran, co-founder of the company, says its USP is that the sessions are led by serving members of the British Services whose leadership, communication and team-building skills are among the best in the world. There's also something oddly thrilling to be treated like an army recruit for the day, she says: "Everyone is a number. You have to call the instructors 'staff' [rather than by their name]. You have to be on time or else your team gets corrective training. It's a very different experience from the gym and people love it, especially the men."



chain, where he was managing 14 central London clubs, to set up energiseYou in 2004. "Health clubs only focus on fitness, but there's much more to health – such as stress management, nutrition and sleeping problems – and I wanted to offer all of these different elements in one company," says Gray.

Today, his work includes workstation and posture assessments, office massage and yoga, health and wellbeing days as well as workshops on nutrition, sleep, meditation, exercise and stress management.

The Tonic offers a similarly broad range of services, from presentations, workshops and health fairs to corporate challenges, on-site fitness sessions and individual lifestyle coaching. "The work we do is designed to complement initiatives such as company health insurance and corporate gym memberships and to ensure that each of our clients ultimately has some kind of wellbeing initiative for every employee," explains Archer.

### ON THE RUN

It's questionable whether health club operators could provide such a wide range of services as those offered by the likes of

The Tonic and energiseYou, but some corporate health providers have a more focused offering.

LGN Wellbeing, for example, is a specialist running company that offers in-house corporate running clubs. Founded by Ben Pochee, a self-confessed hard-core runner who has competed for England, the company's first job was to train 50 women over three months to prepare for a 5km Race for Life event. "For a non-runner, a 5km race can be a daunting prospect," says Pochee. The programme was such a success that it was integrated into the client's wellbeing package and today LGN Wellbeing counts BP, M&C Saatchi, ABN AMRO and CitiBank among its list of clients.

The running clubs typically take place twice a week, either during the lunch hour or after work. The routes start and finish at each client's office and Pochee estimates that 95 per cent of members are not traditional runners. "They're not interested in running a marathon – they just want to lose weight and get fit. We help by showing them how they can use running to achieve that," he explains.

The sessions include interval training and time trials to measure success and are supported by regular emails from ▶





**Born to run** Running clubs, such as those offered by LGN Wellbeing, might be a way for health clubs to venture into corporate fitness

▶ the instructor, who gives training tips and answers any questions the members may have.

While running clubs are at the core of LGN Wellbeing, its portfolio of services has expanded to include corporate seminars on the entire spectrum of running-related areas, from training and nutrition to mental preparation and injury prevention. It also organises running events. More than 600 people took part in its Inter Advertising Industry 5km Challenge in 2008, which pitted creative agencies against media agencies in London's Regents Park. The advertising industry charity patron, NABS, subsequently added the LGN 5km run as an annual event to the industry calendar.

#### MISSING SKILLS?

Pochee believes health clubs could also deliver corporate running programmes, but says there are issues to consider. "The hard bit is finding very qualified personal trainers who have a real passion for running and can empathise with clients. We're not about punishing people; we take a slow and steady approach. Everyone should finish our sessions wanting more, and that comes down to the skill of the trainer," he explains.

The success of any corporate health programme is the ability to develop lasting relationships with clients, adds Pochee: "It's all about retention. If we get churn, the club just dies. It has to be about keeping people and chasing them up if they don't attend. The instructor has to build real rapport with the clients."

Like LGN Wellbeing, The Tonic and energiseYou also rely on repeat business. Archer credits The Tonic's success in retaining clients to his team, who are not only experts in fitness, nutrition, lifestyle coaching, relaxation and stress management, but who are also skilled in coaching and who have a background in the corporate world, so they understand the challenges faced by their clients. "This helps us focus on achieving quick behaviour changes and lasting results for every individual and group we work with," he adds.

"Corporate health is a business within itself, so could require far more time and attention than club managers have spare"

Creating customised programmes to suit each client also helps, he says. "We avoid a 'one size fits all' approach. Contracts can then last for years as we develop ongoing wellbeing initiatives as part of a business's long-term strategy."

Gray, however, questions whether many health clubs would have either the skills or the time needed to offer the range of services required for corporate health. "It's a business within itself, so would require far more time and attention than club managers have spare," he explains.

"Not only that, but many clubs also still struggle to get the basics right: ensuring clients are greeted on arrival and acknowledged by instructors on the gym floor, for example, and ensuring members use the club regularly and achieve their goals.

"I thought setting up energiseYou would be simple, but it's actually a far more complex business than that of health club operation; running 14 health clubs was easy compared to what I'm doing now. The sales timeline is much longer and more complex, for example, while the design and delivery of health and wellbeing services and workshops requires specific skills that most operators would struggle to find within their clubs."

Specific skills are definitely required to deliver corporate health programmes, agrees Archer. "Companies look for our ability to understand their people, the experience to design and deliver programmes that will get fast and ongoing results, and the depth of knowledge across all areas of wellbeing to help staff make improvements to their health, wellbeing and personal performance – no matter what their individual situation," he says.

That's certainly a tall order for any health and fitness provider, and health club operators will have to take a long, hard look at their skills and expertise before considering a move into corporate wellness.



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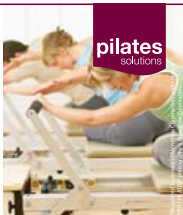


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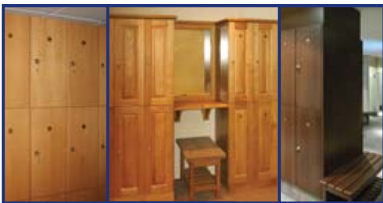
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Health Club Management is published 11 times a year by The Leisure Media Company Limited, Portmill House, Portmill Lane, Hitchin, Herts, SG5 1DJ, UK, and is distributed in the USA by SPP, 75 Aberdeen Road, Emigsville, PA 17318-0437. Periodicals postage paid @ Manchester, PA. POSTMASTER Send US address changes to Health Club Management, c/o PO Box 437, Emigsville, PA 17318-0437.

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# lightweights

## FIGHTING THE FLAB LIKE A WARRIOR

Samurai swords, once the weapon of choice for Japanese warriors, are now being used by women to fight the flab in a new fitness craze in Tokyo.

The Samurai Camp classes, which are set to techno music, feature dance moves that were apparently performed by Samurai warriors after battles – although for obvious safety reasons, the swords are only made from wood and urethane foam. A one-hour session costs JPY2,000 (about £15) and the aim is to lose 11 pounds in a month.

The class was invented by Takafuji Ukon, a choreographer, dancer and fitness expert. Ukon designed the moves with men in mind, but was instead an instant hit with women – he told newspapers that more than 100 signed up for the classes in his studio. Samurai Camp night classes are also now said to be reaching their maximum capacity, with new instructors being quickly trained for a rollout to other cities.



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## SCOTS GET A CEILIDH CLASS WORKOUT

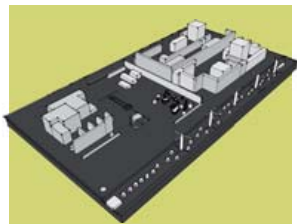
Move over the Diski Dance and Bollywood fitness classes – a new source of inspiration for dance-based gym sessions can be found much closer to home: Scotland.

The ceilidh, the traditional dance of Scotland, is a set routine performed by groups of couples who swap position and partners in a series of steps, in time to traditional music which gradually speeds up.

People taking part in a ceilidh can apparently burn up to 400 calories in an hour, and now it's becoming a popular alternative to aerobic classes in Scotland, with venues such as pubs hosting the sessions.



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Parkour, a form of free-running where you try to get from one point to another as quickly as possible, used to be something most people only watched others do on TV.

However, this alternative urban sport is becoming more mainstream and now Westminster City Council has confirmed plans for the creation of the UK's latest purpose-built outdoor parkour facility.

Located at Westminster Academy – in Westbourne Green, central London – the new site will incorporate obstacles such as walls, rails and stairs and will be open to participants of all abilities. Work is due to start in October, for completion in early 2011.

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A US study has found that people who keep fit and healthy still show interest in sex at 80. In comparison, those who don't exercise ditched action in the bedroom up to 20 years earlier. In addition, healthy

people have sex one or more times a week and report a better quality of love-making.

The study looked at the sex lives of more than 6,000 people in the age groups of 25–74 and 57–85. The difference between genders was most significant in the older age group, where 39 per cent of men, compared to 17 per cent of women, were sexually active.



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